



Invisible Leashes: Service Dogs, Institutional Barriers, and the Fight for Authentic Access in Higher Education

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COLLECTION EDITED BY Damian Mellifont

COLLECTION
Disability Studies

EDITION
1st edition

MARKET
College/higher education
and Professional and
scholarly

This course reading...

- Blends narrative and critique, combining personal testimony with sharp analysis of disability, disclosure, and advocacy in higher education.
- Exposes systemic barriers in classrooms, HR offices, research labs, and field placements, showing how institutions often prioritize compliance over inclusion.
- Centers lived experience of navigating a dynamic, non-apparent disability, highlighting the emotional labor of self-advocacy.
- Features the role of a service dog as both a support aid and a visible challenge to hidden biases and institutional ableism.
- Ideal for students, scholars, and practitioners in Disability Studies, Higher Education, Social Work, Counseling, Human Resources, Law, and Public Policy, as well as disability advocates.

What does it mean to be disabled in a place that claims inclusion but prioritizes compliance over true community?

Invisible Leashes offers a powerful narrative that blends lived experience, institutional critique, and practical insights. Through the lens of a university staff member and Ed.D. student with a dynamic, non-apparent disability, Gainer reveals how classrooms, HR offices, research labs, and field placements become sites of both struggle and advocacy.

At the center of this story is a service dog, whose presence not only provides support but also disrupts hidden barriers and biases, symbolizing the visibility of disability in spaces designed for conformity rather than inclusion. With candor and urgency, Allison Christina Gainer interrogates the politics of disclosure, the emotional labor of self-advocacy, and the structural limitations of performative inclusivity in higher education.

A call for authentic accessibility and systemic change, this book highlights the need for policy reform and disability leadership rooted in lived experience.

Ideal for students, scholars, and practitioners in Disability Studies, Higher Education Administration, Educational Leadership, Social Work, Counseling, Human Resources, Organizational Leadership, Law, and Public Policy, as well as disability advocates committed to creating more inclusive institutions.

Allison Christina Gainer, M.A., LAC, is an Ed.D. candidate, mental health counselor, higher education professional, and disability rights advocate whose research and lived experience center on service dog accessibility, inclusive education, and systemic change in higher education.

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