

## Hello from the [Rutgers Health Office of Disability Services!](#)

Would you like additional information or a presentation in your course? Let us know: [odsrbhs@ca.rutgers.edu](mailto:odsrbhs@ca.rutgers.edu)

We invite your feedback [https://rutgers.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_5tcPBj4uh1vpwqi](https://rutgers.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5tcPBj4uh1vpwqi)

The RU (formerly RBHS) Office of Disability Services (RUODS) provides the necessary tools, resources and support for disabled students to become responsible decision-makers and self-advocates in charge of their own future.

### [Lost on Campus? Need Help Reading a Textbook? It's Aira to the Rescue](#)

**[Aira](#) (pronounced Ira) a Visual Interpreting Service, provides on-demand visual information for many populations, including the blind and low vision community.**

From: <https://rutgershealth.org/news/lost-campus-need-help-reading-textbook-its-aira-rescue>

Much like a video relay interpreter for members of the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing community, Aira's team of expertly-trained Visual Interpreters provide on-demand visual information. Because we believe that **access to information is a human right**. The app provides free around-the-clock, person-to-person visual interpreting services to anyone at Rutgers' campuses. Navigating Rutgers University might prove an arduous task for those who are blind, have low vision or are struggling with directions. Enter Aira, which provides free visual interpreting services to anyone on campus. Aira – available 24/7 wherever there is an internet connection – initially was created to provide on-demand visual interpreting for people who are blind or with low vision, but the services can be used by anyone seeking access to visual information, said Carlie Andrews, Senior Director of the [Office of Disability Services](#) at Rutgers–New Brunswick. The [Aria app](#), available on smartphones, tablets and computers, offers around-the-clock, person-to-person visual interpreting services – from reading textbooks or prescription labels to guiding students taking the bus from [one Rutgers location to another]. The services are free to anyone (students, faculty, staff and visitors) on Rutgers' campuses.

#### **What is the partnership between Rutgers and Aira? How did it come about?**

Rutgers is an Aira access partner, which means that anyone who sets foot within its physical space is able to use Aira services for free. I learned about the program at a conference where I met a woman who is blind and an Aira user. She was telling me about the service and how she uses Aira and finds it tremendously helpful. I reached out to some other folks who are Aira access partners, which includes some other institutions in the Big Ten to learn more about it and folks for the most part only had positive things to say.

#### **Who might benefit from using the Aira app?**

The app's primary customer base is individuals who are blind or low vision, but I personally see that Aira has a lot of uses that go well beyond that. We work with several students who either have traumatic brain injury or something else that inhibits or prohibits their ability to use a screen for too long. And there's software out there that will help with that, but that software can sometimes take a very long time to learn how to use. With the Aira app, if you're not able to spend a lot of time on the computer but you've got to get your assignment done or you've got to get through these readings, you can call an Aira agent and they will read to you whatever you need to read.

The app may be potentially helpful for individuals on the autism spectrum. One of the aspects that is nice about Aira is that because you are using a personal electronic device, they're able to locate where you are within a given space. And because we're an Aira access partner, they have maps of our campus. So, if someone [on campus] were to contact Aira and were lost, for instance, the agent would be able to help them figure out where they are and how to get to where they need to go. Aira representatives have access to our bus schedules, so if someone was on a bus and not sure where they were going or where they were going to end up, an Aira agent would be able to pull up a schedule and help them.

#### **What's an example of how the Aira app might aid Rutgers' students?**

I think what's fascinating is that Aira really focuses on the ways the service could help somebody in their personal life, whether sorting laundry, reading a label on a bottle or making sure that they can tell the difference between a \$5 or \$10 bill.

I think there are a lot of ways that Aira can assist in an academic sense as well. We do have students who are blind and utilizing different types of assistive technology, which is great, and we make sure that their books are provided to them in an electronic format that's accessible for them. But let's say the instructor at the last minute decides to hand out something in class that's not accessible to them. Aira is able to give that student instant access to that material versus waiting for someone to convert it into an accessible format.

## Seeing AI iOS App: Recognizing People, Objects and Scenes

"Turning the visual world into an audible experience." By Diane Brauner

*Seeing AI is similar to AIRA, but uses AI instead of live person*

Microsoft has just released the FREE [Seeing AI iOS app](#). This amazing AI – Artificial Intelligence – app narrates the world for users with visual impairments and blindness by describing people, objects, scenes and text. This app is fully accessible with VoiceOver.

**AI** is when a computer system is able to perform tasks that normally require human intelligence, such as visual perception, speech recognition, decision-making and translation between languages. AI is being used to enhance our daily lives; examples of AI include personal assistants (such as Siri and Google Assistant), real-time traffic movement for GPS routes, ridesharing apps, self-driving cars, plagiarism checkers, spam filters, online shopping, and so much more!



**The Seeing AI app** is divided into the following categories, located at the bottom of the app's home screen:

**Short Text** speaks text as soon as it appears in front of the camera. I have used this to quickly find and read things such as a return address on a letter, quick note, etc. FYI: Seeing AI did read my husband's neat handwritten note but was unable to decipher my personal sloppy writing!

**The Document** feature is basically an OCR [optical character recognition] app that provides audio guidance to capture a printed document and reads the text – in its original format – outloud. I tested this feature on several pieces of mail, including an invoice and a flier. Like most OCR apps, normal text is easily captured. Seeing AI correctly read an invoice that was set up like a table with multiple lines and boxes.

**Products** reads the barcodes to identify products. Audio beeping enables the user to know if a bar code is detected and the faster beeping sound provides additional information to enable the user to fully locate the bar code. For example: When searching for a bar code on a box, there are 6 sides to box. Hold the iPhone away from the box in order for the entire side of the box to appear in the camera lens. If there is a bar code on this side of the box, the app will beep and the bar code will be recognized – I did not have to adjust the camera to focus only on the bar code! I tried the Seeing AI app with a variety of food products from my kitchen pantry. When holding a jar of salsa, I simply held the iPhone in front of the jar and slowly turned the jar. The app beeped when the bar code was located and beeped faster when the full bar code was in the camera lens. This bar code scanner worked well – the image did not need to be focused and seemed to work from various distances. With the jar, I held the iPhone approximately 6" inches from the jar. With the cereal box, I held the iPhone about a foot away.

**Person** uses facial recognition AI to recognize family and friends; it will describe the person and their emotions. Users do have to initially identify the person before the app will recognize the person independently. To add a person, select the Menu button in the top left corner then select Face Recognition. This screen will display the people that you have already identified. To identify a new person, select the Add button. The reverse camera will turn on and the app will ask you to take three pictures of the person you would like to identify. Have the person hold the iPhone (as the reverse camera is activated) or use the Switch to Back Camera button to take a picture of a person in front of you. When I tried the Person feature, the app typically announced the gender, age, hair color or characteristic of the person and emotion of the person. If the person's name was previously added to the app, then the app would also announce the name of the person. To assist visually impaired users to take a picture, the app provides directional guidance you so that you can center the people in the picture and it tells you how many people are in the picture.

**Scene** will describe the scene around you. Microsoft states that this is an experimental feature as they continue to fine tune the AI's scene identification skills. I tried a variety of scenes that were identified correctly, including a family room scene, a pool scene, a parking lot, etc. I did try one scene that included a mini Australian shepherd (small dog) that the app identified as a "black cat laying on a wooden floor". Overall, the scene feature worked better than I expected!

## Faculty and Staff Requesting Accommodations

The Office of Disability Services only processes accommodation requests for students, but many faculty and staff often have questions about requesting disability-related workplace accommodations. The Office of Employment Equity (OEE) is responsible for coordinating accommodation requests from faculty and staff related to disability, religion, and pregnancy.

Disabled faculty and staff are protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the New Jersey Law Against Discrimination (NJLAD). The purpose of providing workplace accommodations is to remove disability-related barriers. Like academic accommodations for students, workplace accommodations cannot modify the essential functions of the employee's role. All accommodations are reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

The request process begins by the employee completing an accommodation application form via OneSource. Next, the employee meets with a disability specialist from OEE to discuss their accommodation requests. In most cases, faculty and staff requesting disability related accommodations must also provide documentation from a licensed clinician. OEE does not disclose an employee's specific medical diagnosis but may share information related to the request with the employee's department or college leadership to determine if the request can be implemented without modifying the role's essential functions. An accommodation approval is shared with relevant staff so the accommodation can be implemented.

Laura Latorre, Institutional Compliance Officer for Disability at Rutgers University, shared that the most common disability-related accommodations made by faculty and staff are for assistive technology, physical accommodations, and changes to work schedules. The employee's department is responsible for purchasing and providing the approved equipment. Another common accommodation request from faculty and staff is parking. Employees with an ADA placard already approved by the state can connect directly with Parking and Transportation Services for the appropriate permit. More specific parking requests, such as being approved to park in a different lot, are processed through OEE.

For graduate students who hold research or teaching assistant positions, knowing which office to request accommodations from can be confusing. Accommodations related to their coursework are processed through ODS while requests related to their employment are processed through OEE. Sometimes determining the two can be blurry, but both ODS and OEE would collaborate with the student and their department to route requests to the appropriate office.

Any questions regarding requesting accommodations can be directed to Laura Latorre, [lk134@uec.rutgers.edu](mailto:lk134@uec.rutgers.edu). For more information, visit the OEE website: <https://uhr.rutgers.edu/oeo/home>. A future newsletter article will cover the process for faculty and staff requesting accommodations related to pregnancy. Stay tuned for more information!

### Medical students with disabilities are at higher risk of burnout than peers

Medical students with disabilities are at higher risk of burnout than their peers, a new study finds. That risk increases if they're from marginalized groups. Medical students with co-occurring disabilities are more likely than their peers to experience burnout, a new Yale study finds. That risk increases if the student identifies as Asian or in a racial or ethnic group typically underrepresented in the medical fields. The findings, say the researchers, highlight the importance of reducing stigma and addressing the needs of students with disabilities.

The [study was published](#) Jan. 10 in JAMA Network Open. Previous research has uncovered that Asian, Black, and Hispanic medical students and students with disabilities are at greater risk of experiencing burnout than white students or students without disabilities. But little is known about how race, ethnicity, and disability status intersect.

For the new study, researchers used data from the 2019 and 2020 Year 2 Questionnaire distributed by the Association of American Medical Colleges, which included self-reported information from 27,009 medical students in the United States. The survey assessed burnout using the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory for Medical Students, a 16-item scale that evaluates exhaustion and disengagement.

The researchers found that 12.6% of students who did not report a disability were at high risk for burnout, while that same risk was described as high for over 21% of students with one disability and 31.3% of students with multiple disabilities, whether they be physical or psychological, related to hearing, vision, or learning, or stem from a chronic illness.

“Students with a disability and students with multiple disabilities were 70% and 254%, respectively, more likely to report burnout than their peers,” said Mytien Nguyen, an M.D.-Ph.D. student at Yale School of Medicine and lead author of the study.

Additionally, students identifying as Asian or as a race or ethnicity underrepresented in medicine — a category that includes Black, Hispanic, Hawaiian Native, Alaskan Native, and Pacific Islander students — were at higher risk of burnout than their white peers with the same disability status.

“It’s interesting that when we look at the intersectionality, there’s a clear association with disability and burnout overall as well as a disparate impact on underrepresented students,” said senior author Dowin Boatright, vice chair of research in the Department of Emergency Medicine at New York University Grossman School of Medicine and formerly of Yale School of Medicine.

To address burnout, medical schools should provide adequate accommodations for students with disabilities, which has been shown to improve burnout, and make sure their institutional processes for obtaining accommodations are clear, said Nguyen. Further, the medical field needs to work to combat stigma around disability, which can prevent students from seeking accommodations they need.

This would not only benefit students, explained Nguyen, it would allow for a more diverse and accessible medical workforce, which is a benefit to patients as well.

“Particularly when treating patients with disabilities or chronic illnesses, physicians with disabilities display more empathy and provide more thorough treatment,” said Nguyen. “A more diverse workforce leads to better care.”



[Look out for \[ableist\] gaslighting](#) from Better Allies by Karen Catlin

While this article addresses racial gaslighting, these tips are also relevant to disability gaslighting

February is Black History Month. In gathering some ideas for allies, I [Karen Catlin] came across a post about racial gaslighting on Instagram by Jacquelyn Ogorchukwu, author of *Racial Wellness*.

Ogorchukwu wrote, “Gaslighting is when someone manipulates information to make a victim question their own experience, memory or reality. **Folks who gaslight often do this to avoid having to take accountability or avoid having to feel guilty for the fact that they benefit from something that harms you.**”

She also shared some phrases that signal racial gaslighting, including:

- “If you said it peacefully, more people would listen to you.”
- “What I said/did is not racist.”
- “Racism doesn’t exist anymore.”
- “It was just a joke, calm down.”
- “In my opinion, I don’t think that they were being racist, I think...”



Allies, let’s look out for racial [disability] gaslighting and not let someone refute another’s lived experience.

To respond to and interrupt [Ableism], one can clarify or offer a new perspective. Here are some approaches to consider:

- Seek clarity: “Tell me more about \_\_\_.”
- Offer an alternative perspective: “Have you ever considered \_\_\_.”
- Speak your truth: “I don’t see it the way you do. I see it as \_\_\_.”
- Find common ground: “We don’t agree on \_\_ but we can agree on \_\_\_.”
- Give yourself the time and space you need: “Could we revisit the conversation about \_\_\_ tomorrow.”

Set boundaries: “Please do not say \_\_\_ again to me or around me.”

The next time you witness [ableism], which phrase will you use?

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[Labor Shortages, Remote Work Fuel Job Gains for Workers With Disabilities](#)

“For 30 years, the disability community has been saying, ‘Hey, can I work remotely?’”

— Thomas Foley, executive director of the National Disability Institute on Labor Shortages, on how the share of adults with disabilities in the labor force hit a record this summer thanks to remote work and labor shortages

## Shabbat, Chronic Illness, & Radical Rest

[Sophie Hulet](#) • February 15, 2024 • [Fresh Torah](#)

*This essay is part of **Gufim: Our Jewish Bodies**, a 2024 series by New Voices writers that explores embodiment, physicality, and our relationships to our bodies through a Jewish lens. Gufim focuses on disability & chronic illness, eating disorders and body liberation, queer/trans experiences, race/racism, and more. Our writers explore these issues through writing, art, and Torah. To submit to Gufim, please send your pitch or piece to [editor@newvoices.org](mailto:editor@newvoices.org) with the subject "Gufim Submission."*

I remember lighting Shabbat candles for the first time.

I sat on the floor, hunched over my family's glass coffee table, as my mom looked on from the kitchen. We had found these little purple candle holders at a local café, paired with matching candles. I broke a few matches before finally managing to strike one. Holding it to the taper candles, flames melted the wax along with the week's anxieties over classes. I flipped to the "Shabbat" section of my copy of *Living a Jewish Life* by Anita Diamant, and recited the blessing, trying to remember how my rabbi pronounced all the words. I felt like a child again, stepping into much larger footprints, cementing the path I was walking on the map of my life. My soul heaved a sigh of relief as I basked in the candles' warm glow. Shabbat was the first step of my journey into Jewish practice. It was certainly the most accessible, since this was during the COVID-19 pandemic and I could perform the rituals at home. Months later, I told the rabbis on my *beit din* council that Shabbat was my "first and favorite" Jewish ritual. I felt a particularly strong connection to the idea of intentional rest, especially after being diagnosed with a chronic illness. Jewish thought and practice provided a revolutionary new paradigm – it not only *allowed* for the practice of rest and recuperation but *encouraged* it, on both a physical and spiritual level.

My chronic illness is characterized by draining fatigue and chronic pain, which leave me unable to participate in public life to the extent to which I am expected. Before my diagnosis, I felt incredibly worthless – I couldn't explain the sudden lack of energy for all of the activities I used to engage in with ease. I fell into depression and despair, and my first attempt at coping was to push myself even harder than before. This is the solution encouraged by a society that associates a person's worth with their productivity, and their ability to function, work, and socialize in a way that is seen as "typical."

The roots of this norm can be found in what sociologist Max Weber describes as the "[Protestant Ethic](#)." During the Protestant Reformation, the idea that a productive life on Earth would lead to the promise of heaven gained prominence. This new ethical and religious framework saw hard work and self-denial as the path to salvation. Financial success garnered from "noble" labor was no longer a mark of greed; rather, it signified religious favor. During the Industrial Revolution, Protestant Christians were encouraged to engage with the secular economy and adapt to industrial capitalism, which measured each worker's value as a productive unit. The Protestant Ethic has left an indelible imprint on American society, now divorced from its original religious context. It informs the popular notion that anyone can succeed if they simply try hard enough, and that a lack of success is, therefore, the fault of the individual.

As a student of sociology, I understood the flaws in this hyper-individualistic framework. However, I still found it difficult to detach *myself* from it. These ideas had influenced my parents' upbringing, and therefore my own. They crushed me under a mountain of guilt from which it felt impossible to escape. I realized that the comfort I needed was not going to come from my studies or the validation of a medical diagnosis.

I had been interested in Judaism long before the pandemic, and was just beginning to discover that my family had a Jewish background. I had made some close Jewish friends online during the pandemic, and learned much from them about the expansiveness and diversity of Jewish philosophy and theology. I was captivated by the idea of *pikuach nefesh*: the idea that the preservation of one's life and health takes paramount importance when considering the ability to participate in Jewish rituals (such as fasting). That idea made perfect sense to me, but seemed revolutionary in the context of a larger society in which health and wellbeing are not prioritized.

As I learned more about Judaism, I marveled at how many of its core tenets aligned with my personal philosophy. I began to set aside time during Shabbat to take care of my chronically ill body, and for the first time, I did not feel hounded by guilt over that decision. Reorienting my life around Shabbat led me to plan my days with intention, allowing for all the rest I needed. I went back to school with a lighter class load and scheduled rest days in between class days, which helped me to rebuild my academic confidence. I reordered my priorities, telling myself: *my health is most important, and if I feel unable to attend class, I am allowed to stay home and take care of myself*. Shabbat continues to serve as a grounding reminder that rest is sacred. I am still working on being at peace with my unique position in the tapestry of the universe, but Judaism has been a guiding light towards understanding myself as a valuable part of this world, *just as I am*.

While there is growing dialogue around the importance of "self-care," people are still shamed and punished for devoting time to the practice of rest, recovery, and care for the body and mind. But I have seen Jewish wisdom anchor chronically ill and disabled people amidst a society that is built, in many ways, to exclude us. It can also provide a lens through which our abled community members can better understand our struggles and perspectives, as well as discover the healing potential of intentional rest in their own lives. Rabbi Elliot Kukla, a chronically ill rabbi at the forefront of the conversation of the value of rest, [believes that](#) "taking the present moment slowly and gently... napping, dreaming, nurturing relationships and loving fiercely" could benefit everyone living under the never-ending pressure to work harder and move faster.

Shabbat can be difficult to keep under financial and social pressures that demand increasing amounts of our waking lives. The current reality of society and its inequities means that not everyone is able to carve out deliberate rest time of their own accord. It is up to us to encourage those who have control over the structures of others' lives to build in this time. Tricia Hersey, creator of the blog "[The Nap Ministry](#)," describes rest as beyond naps and pillows – it is "a deep unraveling from white supremacy and capitalism." Part of this unraveling is recognizing that when poor, Black, brown, disabled, and otherwise marginalized people work to their breaking points and are forced to rest, they are considered lazy. But, as Rabbi Kukla points out, "we rarely hear about lazy billionaires, no matter how much of their fortune is inherited." Recognizing the inequity associated with rest involves challenging the capitalist system of exploitation as a whole. Adopting the [radical politics of rest](#) is a form of *tikkun olam* – repairing our world necessitates challenging the status quo. It is important to use our privilege where we have it to make rest more accessible for everyone.

I work toward a time when the needs of chronically ill and all disabled people are respected and their unique contributions and perspectives are appreciated. I work toward a time when fewer people feel overcome by the guilt associated with taking the necessary time to recover. I work toward a time when our worth is not defined by our productivity. Judaism opened the door for a new way of thinking about rest, and I am dedicated to helping others walk through it. Every week, I remind myself in the candlelight: *This time is for you. You did not have to earn it. You are beyond enough – as*

The author, Sophie Hulet, is a sociology student with a focus in Queer Studies and Disability Studies at the University of Washington.

## RH Office of Disability Services

### Mission

The Office of Disability Services is dedicated to the philosophy that all Rutgers University students are assured equal opportunity, access and participation in the University's courses, programs, activities, services and facilities. We recognize that diverse abilities are a source of strength, empowerment, and enrichment for the entire university community and we are committed to the elimination of physical, instructional, and attitudinal barriers by promoting awareness and understanding throughout the university community.

### Our Vision

The Office of Disability Services at Rutgers strives to become a model program for students with disabilities in higher education. We are committed to developing a comprehensively accessible and universally designed University that nurtures the full participation and contribution of every individual. Our team strives to provide the necessary tools, resources and supports for individuals with disabilities to become responsible decision-makers and self-advocates in charge of their own future. We envision a campus community where all individuals are welcomed, valued, and encouraged to be contributing members.

### Steps to Request Accommodations:

#### 1. Complete and submit the Registration Form:

Upon completion of this form, you will receive a confirmation email of your submission



#### 2. Schedule an initial meeting:

Upon receipt of the registration form, a representative from ODS will contact you to schedule an intake meeting. This meeting can be conducted in person, by video call, or by phone.

#### 3. Submit appropriate documentation:

On or before your intake meeting, please submit the [appropriate documentation](#) that meets ODS guidelines for your disability



#### 4. Upon completion of your intake, ODS will review your documentation.

Students will receive a response in a timely manner with one of the following application statuses:

- A. Reasonable accommodation request approved
- B. More information needed
- C. Accommodation not approved and why

#### 5. Once approved, you must request your Letters of Accommodations to alert your faculty or program of your accommodations.

Complete the [Letter of Accommodation Request Form](#)



Cindy Poore-Pariseau, ODS Director



Jenna Rose,  
ODS Coordinator