

Episode 8: Michael Bailey of the Office of Accessibility Services

Speaker 1:

Saint Leo 360, a 360 degree overview of the Saint Leo University community.

Greg Lindberg:

Welcome to another episode of the Saint Leo 360 Podcast. This is your host Greg Lindbergh. And on this episode, it's a pleasure to be joined by Michael Bailey, who is the Director of Accessibility Services here at Saint Leo University. Michael, thanks so much for joining us.

Michael Bailey:

Thanks for having me.

Greg Lindberg:

Definitely. So I have several things I'd like to discuss today. Just a little bit about your background and then delving into what exactly your role is with the university and what your team and office does. So first off, talk to me about just your background, where you're from, a little quick bio for us.

Michael Bailey:

Yeah, so I was born and raised in New Jersey, just outside of Atlantic City. And when I was looking at colleges, Florida seemed a lot warmer and nicer than South Jersey. So I came down here and I was sold, went to University of Tampa, and I've stayed here for almost 20 years now.

Greg Lindberg:

Wow. Nice. And then as far as your educational background, talk to me about that.

Michael Bailey:

Well, like I said, I came down to go to University of Tampa and I did my first bachelor's degree there in music. Thought I was going to go into entertainment or entertainment law at the time but wound up changing paths a little bit. Got a second bachelor's in psychology from the University of South Florida. From there, I got a master's in special education, also from USF. A master's in ed leadership from American College of Education. And I'm wrapping up my PhD in ed leadership at USF now.

Greg Lindberg:

Interesting. And then as far as your professional background, talk a little bit about that.

Michael Bailey:

So I spent 12 years as a special education professional before coming to Saint Leo. I started working with students with significant cognitive and developmental disabilities. Got to do a little bit of compliance, some resolution, and before coming to Saint Leo, I oversaw all special education and ESOL programs for our local school district.

Greg Lindberg:

Very nice. So definitely seems like a natural fit to move up into this role.

Michael Bailey:

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Yeah. It really was a good transition.

Greg Lindberg:

Right. And let's talk a little bit about that. What appealed to you about this role? And how did that all happen as far as you coming to Saint Leo?

Michael Bailey:

So I knew I wanted to continue my career development at post-secondary and I was kind of exploring what options were there and available for me. And when I saw the position posted on the Saint Leo website, it seemed like a real natural fit given what I was doing and what my goals were. I knew a little bit about Saint Leo. We were good rivals when I was at UT playing soccer against one another and basketball against one another. But as I researched the university more and I got to dig into the core values of the university, I really knew that it was a good fit. And then as I got to meet some of the staff, especially during my interviews, I knew halfway through that this was the place I wanted to be.

Greg Lindberg:

Right. Very nice. So then, as far as your specific job duties, talk to me about what you're actually responsible for, and maybe even kind of what a typical day in the life of a director of accessibility services looks like.

Michael Bailey:

So we've got a few big functions that we fill for the university. The biggest and most obvious is for students who need accommodations. We're the office that reviews the documentation and works interactively with the student to figure out which accommodations make the most sense. Beyond that though we provide a lot of professional development. I've been working with Ocala this week and I went down to Tampa. I'm going up to Jacksonville next week for some professional development. Lots of on-campus ones coming up so that takes up a good portion of my week, but a really important portion of my week.

Michael Bailey:

There's, of course, the less fun parts, when we think about compliance and making sure that the university is doing what it should do. But then one of the parts that I enjoy most is really the advocacy and outreach that goes along with the role. Some of that is meeting with local organizations like Card, Division of Blind Services, vocational rehabilitation, some of that is doing things like when we find something that could be worded better in our publications, or that we can put out to the university to improve access, to make sure we're doing those things to improve services for our students.

Greg Lindberg:

Oh, I see. And then let's get into what's the process involved as far as a student coming to Saint Leo, whether they're a campus student, whether they're online or at one of our education centers, what's the process involved for them to actually receive services from your office?

Michael Bailey:

So regardless of modality, the first thing a student needs to do is register with our office. Luckily it's a really easy process. Students go online to our website and they can access accessibility no matter where

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they are in Saint Leo's website. The link is at the bottom, and it's always there for students to get right to that need because it's super important that they don't have to jump through hoops. They don't have to go through extra steps to find those supports and services they need.

Greg Lindberg:

Right.

Michael Bailey:

Application usually takes five to 10 minutes and students can attach their documentation right with the application. They can also email it to us. They can send it to us via mail, via fax. They can drop it off in my office, if they're on campus. Once we get all of that documentation, I review it and I set up an intake appointment with the student. And that's where that interactive process really comes into play. I use the information from the documentation to probe and ask questions that hopefully get to the root of what a student thinks they need to be successful at Saint Leo. From there, we determine those appropriate accommodations and students are able to request their letter of accommodation every semester via the profile they set up with their application. Other more unique accommodations, like housing or dining, sometimes we have to go through a couple of extra steps just to make sure the right people are there to help them make the decisions that they need to make for their future at Saint Leo, but that's the big picture at least.

Greg Lindberg:

I see. So it sounds like it's obviously based on the student's needs you tailor that even that initial process to fit their needs as well.

Michael Bailey:

100% and the range of disabilities that can impact our students is so broad that trying to do anything without working individually and interactively just wouldn't make sense.

Greg Lindberg:

Right. Right. And then let's talk about specifically the types of students that your office would serve.

Michael Bailey:

So ADA talks about disabilities very widely. So there's a lot of things that people think of when they think about disabilities. And they may think of a student with a learning disability, a mobility impairment, a visual impairment, deaf or hard of hearing. But then there's a lot of other things that people might not think of right away, such as students with mental health disorders, students with food allergies. So really anybody that has a functional limitation to a major life activity could be eligible for services through our office. Sometimes that's even temporary accommodations like an injury in a car accident or complications with a pregnancy.

Greg Lindberg:

Yeah. So there is a lot that the average person probably wouldn't even think of that you potentially could assist and serve.

Michael Bailey:

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Right. And I always encourage people to think about, is there something unique going on with me that's getting in the way of my learning? And if so, I'd rather have that conversation and help the student access the right resources, whether it's through us or somebody else then for somebody to just assume there's nothing out there that can help them.

Greg Lindberg:

Yeah. That's a good way of looking at it. Now I know your office is located here at university campus in Kirk Hall, but you definitely serve students that are online and at one of our many education centers and talk to me about how you can serve someone remotely.

Michael Bailey:

Yeah. So it's really, really important to us thinking about how wide our reach is with Saint Leo that we don't just focus on the students here on the university campus, because that's actually not where the majority of our students are.

Greg Lindberg:

Right.

Michael Bailey:

So that outreach to our centers, to our online students, those are students that need the support equally as much as a student on campus. So we have to make sure that information is available. Some of the ways we do that is just to make sure that they have information physically present at their centers, that their staff know who we are and can point them in the right direction. As far as giving them the services, sometimes that looks just like it would look for a student on campus. So extended time, for example, extended time on an assessment can happen anywhere, and it's relatively easy to implement.

Michael Bailey:

Other accommodations can be a little bit trickier. Sometimes we might have to put a book into a large print or braille print, or we might have to convert a digital book to a physical book. So we'll actually do that on the university campus and then ship it where the student is. Last week, I actually shipped some software to a student up in Georgia who needed some voice to text software. So we ordered it and then we shipped it right to them. So no matter where a student is, we're to find a way to make those accommodations work. Sometimes we need to get really creative, but that's part of that interactive process. And that's part of individualizing supports for students.

Greg Lindberg:

Right. No, I see. And then as far as say, online students go, I would imagine you would deal directly with them, or would it be say an academic advisor? What's kind of that process for an online student who isn't actually going to a location?

Michael Bailey:

Typically we deal directly with the student. Sometimes advisors are that connection, that person that introduces the student to the services, which is why, like I was mentioning earlier that professional development for staff is really, really important. But when a student is online or at a center, when we need to do meetings, when we need to do intakes, often that happens via phone or happens via email,

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but we'll do it however a student needs. I've had video conferences with students via FaceTime and Skype. We've used 711 telecommunication relay services for students that are deaf and hard of hearing. We'll make whatever modality a student needs work, because it's important that we don't put any barriers in place that would make it more difficult for them to get services. So I'll bend over backwards to find a way to communicate with you to the point that you might get tired of hearing from me.

Greg Lindberg:

Right. But obviously that's a good thing. Just communication in general, I know, is important, and especially with certain students that need those accommodations, it's such a wonderful thing to really stress and work on. I understand that you guys also have a center here on campus that students can actually come to take tests in. Can you kind of elaborate on that?

Michael Bailey:

Yeah. So testing accommodations are one of the ones that can really look unique depending on where you are. For students that are online, they can take it in their home. For students at centers, there are specific things at the centers where students might be able to go. Here on the university campus, we have a great relationship with the CAVE and the CAVE is our testing center where students are able to come, whether they need extended time, or they need a distraction reduced testing room.

Michael Bailey:

Some students even need a private testing room. We also have things sometimes like headphones to block out noises or white noise machines to cancel out anything that might be distracting. So what students will typically do is they'll schedule via their profile. They usually take about five days to a week in advance to make sure their professor has time to get the test over. We have time to prep it. And then they'll have a room where they're able to take that exam and turn it in. They'll take it the same time typically that their peers are taking it in class, except they'll get the accommodations they need so that they can demonstrate their knowledge.

Greg Lindberg:

I see. I know with test taking in general, I mean the average person probably has some anxiety when it comes to taking a test or midterm or final or whatnot.

Michael Bailey:

Yeah. I think just about all of us have at least a little bit of that. Right?

Greg Lindberg:

Oh yeah.

Michael Bailey:

Especially big tests like finals.

Greg Lindberg:

Exactly.

Michael Bailey:

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You have this big test at the end and it's going to make you nervous. So then you have students with certain disabilities. That just compounds what's going on. So if we can do some things to minimize that stress, to make sure they feel like they can show their knowledge, then that's really important because what we want is our students to be successful. And one of the ways to do that is to make sure that their ways of demonstrating knowledge is exactly what they need.

Greg Lindberg:

Right. That's wonderful that you really, like you said, bend over backwards and in so many ways. Now I know one subject that you are pretty familiar with is emotional support animals versus service animals. And obviously there are a lot of individuals with disabilities that do utilize these animals and rightfully so are supported by them. Can you explain the difference between those two categories?

Michael Bailey:

Yeah. There's a lot of misconception and confusion around emotional support animals and service animals. And I think the more confusion there is, the more people are actually feeding into that sense that they're the same, and they're really not. And that's a really important distinction. So service animals are protected under the ADA or the Americans with Disabilities Act. And what service animals do for people with disabilities is they're trained to provide a specific task. So those could be a wide range of things. Sometimes somebody with diabetes may need a service animal that can tell when their blood glucose levels are changing. Somebody in a wheelchair may need a service animal who can help position their legs appropriately. A veteran with PTSD may need a service animal that helps to keep some distance between the veteran and other people who may be around him or her. So the service animal performs a task.

Michael Bailey:

Emotional support animals, on the other hand, aren't covered under the ADA. They're covered under the Fair Housing Act and emotional support animals provide comfort and relief for individuals with disabilities. So those animals could be anything. Whereas the service animals always either a dog or a miniature horse, emotional support animal could be a hamster, could be a rabbit, could be a dog, or a cat. We've even seen new stories of people's emotional support alligators up in Pennsylvania, not too long ago.

Greg Lindberg:

Right.

Michael Bailey:

So an emotional support animal does have different regulations as far as where they can be on campus and how they can be utilized though. So a service animal can go wherever a student can go. It can go to the dining hall with the student. It can go to class with the student. It can attend a sporting event with the student. An emotional support animal is going to stay in that student's room. So it gets to go outside, of course, if it's a dog and it needs to go get some exercise, go use the restroom, those are appropriate things, but it can't come to class with the student. It can't go to activities with the student. So that emotional support animal stays confined to the student's living area.

Greg Lindberg:

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I see. And then let's talk about if a perspective student listening to this podcast is interested in Saint Leo and perhaps it's someone that may need certain accommodations in order to complete their higher education. Just what would you say, in general, does Saint Leo offer as far as being a very inclusive and supportive academic and educational environment for someone like that?

Michael Bailey:

So I'd say the first thing about Saint Leo, in general, is we really live our core values. And that's really, really important to us that we recognize the dignity of all of our students and the value that diversity brings to our campus. And because of that, we're building great partnerships with a lot of agencies in this area that are going to help expand our services that are going to help us provide better, more holistic supports for our students. If a student's interested in finding out more, we've just revamped our webpage and put a ton of resources up that we're going to continue to update and continue to build for students. So whether it's, I need to know about my emotional support animal request and what that looks like, or I have questions about how these accommodations are applied in class. We've got all that information up there for students to go through.

Michael Bailey:

So spend some time looking, but if you're not sure, or you're not even sure where to begin looking, give us a call. We love talking to our students. If you're on campus, stop by. We're in Kirk Hall. Stop by and visit anytime. One of us is almost always in the office and available to talk, but if you're not on campus, give us a call, send us an email and ask us to set up a time to meet with you, and we'll figure out exactly what your needs are and how we can help support you best.

Greg Lindberg:

Yeah. Very well said. And then to wrap up here, let's give some contact information. I believe there's an email address for the office that students can actually contact.

Michael Bailey:

Sure. So if somebody needs to contact us, they can call us on our line at 352-588-8464 or they can email us at ADAOffice@SaintLeo.edu. There's a link at the bottom for accessibility. We're super easy to find.

Greg Lindberg:

Right. Hey, I definitely appreciate your time, Michael. And we definitely appreciate, you know, what your office does. And obviously anyone listening out there interested in Saint Leo that might need maybe some accommodations should absolutely feel confident and comfortable coming to our university.

Michael Bailey:

Absolutely. We're here to serve.

Greg Lindberg:

Alrighty. I appreciate your time, Michael.

Michael Bailey:

Thank you, Greg.

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Greg Lindberg:

Thank you.

Speaker 1:

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