# National Disability Awareness Celebration:

Embracing Inclusion and Innovation

A Conversation with Haben Girma

This program features a welcome by

Catherine Johnson, Director of the ADA

Resource Center for Equity and

Accessibility at the University of

Kansas, with opening remarks by Neeli Bendapudi,

Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor of

the University of Kansas, and with the

keynote address and question-and-answer

section being presented by disability

rights lawyer Haben Girma.

>> Catherine: Good evening everyone.

Welcome to our Disability

Rights Employment Awareness Month

Celebration. I am very fortunate to have

Haben Girma here to help us celebrate

this important night. Before we get started, with the festivities today, I want to talk a little bit

about the purpose of this important night.

First off, I want everyone in the room to know

this was not a single effort. This was a multicampus-wide effort and initiative to bring Haben here to our

campus. We had 15 very active partners

that helped plan this program and

make sure that we brought Haben here

today. I would like to thank all of those

15 partners for their active engagement.

I would also like to thank Kim Bates and

her team for providing American Sign

Language to us today. I'd like to thank

Caption Solutions providing CART for us

today. I'd also like to thank my team to

help make this possible: Jennifer

Silvey, Abbey King, Kit Cole, the best

boss a person could ever have, Associate

VP for Campus Operations Michael Rounds.

I'd like to give a special thanks to the

School of Business, Dean Fields,

Angela Freeze and her entire team. Without their efforts, this would not have become the

elite event that you see before you

today. So with the thank yous behind us,

let's set the stage a little bit. 72

years ago Congress decided it was time

to celebrate the achievements,

accomplishments of individuals with

disabilities in the employment setting.

Congress acted first to set one week

aside for this important occasion in

celebration. Over time, that was expanded

to a month. If you think about the

significance of employment in your own

life, probably the first thing that comes

to you is money, right? Money and benefits.

I would ask you to dig a little deeper.

There's so much more that comes with a

job. There comes with talent and skill

and expertise, your own self-worth for

that position, what you contribute back

to your organization, and the sense of

community that you build every single

day when you're in that job. That's what

we're celebrating here in October, the

importance of employment of individuals

with disabilities and what individuals

with disabilities bring to us and

bring to our culture and make us richer

for their involvement. Every year, there's

a different theme for this important

month. This year, the theme is "Inclusion

Drives Innovation." We said about thinking

"How do we want to celebrate this event?"

We were looking for someone who could

come and address both of those issues

equally passionately. We were lucky to

find Haben. She has by her career and her

legal practice and now her advocacy

demonstrated innovation and inclusivity

and I'm excited about what she's going

to share with us today. After Haben's

keynote, we will have time for question

and answers. We'll have a variety of

options for questions and answers. If

you're interested and

want to come up to the front of the room

and ask Haben a question directly on

the keyboard, you may do so. We also have

notecards. If you've written out a note,

please, we'll have ushers in the

audience. Feel free to give it to them. We

also have microphones that you can use

to ask a question. So with that, we're

gonna turn to the more important people

of the evening. It's my great, great

pleasure to have with us this evening

Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor

Neeli Bendapudi.

We're very grateful for your continued commitment

to making tonight happen.

[applause]

>> Neeli: I disagree with the

"more important people title,"

but I can tell you that more excited people would

be appropriate. I'm so grateful, Catherine,

to you and to everybody who participated

in bringing Haben here today. But first

of all, what I want to do is thank you

all for being here today, you the audience. And there's three reasons why I am so happy

to see here you today. First, by being here, you're

demonstrating that education is not just

for students. You have faculty, staff, and

students in attendance, and you

demonstrate that education is not just

in the classroom. Anais Nin I believe

said, "The greater the island of knowledge,

the greater the shorelines of wonder." In

other words, the more you know, the more

you know what you don't know. So all of

you being here shows that curiosity to

learn. The second reason I'm delighted to

have you here today is that by being

here you're showing that you want to

learn from thought leaders who may not

necessarily mirror your own experience. A

friend and colleague of mine says, "Boy, I

wish we would look through windows a

little more than we do at mirrors,"

Meaning we're always seeking

to learn from others whose paths are

similar to ours, whose stories are

similar to ours, whose voices and accents

are similar to ours. By being here today,

you're demonstrating that you realize

your life is richer if you learn from

anybody who has achieved as much and who

has demonstrated such wisdom and

compassion at such a young age. So

thought leaders are to be celebrated

whoever, wherever they are. The third and

purely selfish reason that I am glad you

are here today is that our speaker, Haben

Girma, actually is the literal embodiment

of what I have talked about as my goals

for this university as Provost and

Executive Vice Chancellor. When I was

dean here in the business school, some of

you remember I used to say we need to

make it a great place to learn for

everybody, a great place to work for

everybody, and a great place to invest

for everybody. Then, when I became Provost

and Executive Vice Chancellor a little

over a year ago, I told you all that I

had four goals that I wanted to make

sure I was committed to achieving.

The first one is student success. Any student, every student, irrespective of their

abilities, different abilities,

disabilities, however you qualify it,

every single student should be able to

be successful. The second thing is

faculty and staff engagement. Every

faculty member, every staff member.

The third was to be able to tell our

academic story, and the fourth, I told you

that it's not a priority, it's a

foundational value, but I say it at every

public forum that we need to create a

culture that doesn't just tolerate

diversity, that celebrates diversity. A

culture that actively fosters equity and

always, always works towards that elusive goal of true

inclusion. Not inclusion as dictated from

above—"I declare you all included"—but an

inclusion that says from each of you to

say this is my university as much as

anyone else's.

And this is a university that's here and

will be invested in my own success. What

Haben's message—and Haben I've been

learning as much about you as I can, I am

truly honored that you are here today—is

that innovation happens when you make an

effort to bring different voices to the

table, when you don't shut out a portion

of the population just because it's not

convenient for you. So she shows us

—really and I'm so eager, I wish, I will

actually close right away, because I want

to hear from her—she shows us that

higher education institutions are here

to live up to the highest ideals of a

society. So thank you on behalf of

Chancellor Girod, on behalf of me, and

every one of our faculty, staff, and students,

thank you Haben for being here.

You grace us with your presence,

and we are delighted, and students in

particular, please take advantage of the

opportunity to learn from this bright,

shining star. Thank you very much.

[applause]

>> Haben: Good evening.

>> Audience: Good evening.

>> Haben: Thanks for responding.

[laughter]

I want to thank Neeli for introducing me.

That was beautiful. I'm really honored to

be here. This is my first time in Kansas,

so I've been learning a lot about the

history, about Jayhawks, about the chants,

so it's it's great to be here and

finally connect and meet with everyone.

As Neeli mentioned, I'm deaf-blind so I can't see

the audience and I can't hear audience

feedback, so if people are on their

phones not paying attention, I won't

see that. Before you pull out your phones,

there's always an alternative strategy

for something and I figured out an

alternative strategy for getting

audience feedback. What I do is I'm using

a Braille display. I'm holding it up. It's a

small computer with dots on the bottom

and I run my fingers over the dots to

feel the Braille. I read the letters with

the Braille and Gordon, my interpreter, is

sitting on the side at a table. He's

typing on a wireless keyboard that's

connected to the Braille display, and he

types descriptions of what's going on, so

he's watching you.

[laughter]

If people are laughing, if people are

engaged, if people are bored, he sends me

that information, so this is an example

of how there's always an alternative

technique. When you're thoughtful and

creative, you could always find a

solution. Gordon, do we have the

presentations, the powerpoints, out?

Excellent. The first slide is up. My name

is Haben Girma. The name Haben comes from

Eritrea. It's a small African country.

Ethiopia borders to the south and to the

north is the Red Sea. My mother grew up

during the war between Eritrea and

Ethiopia. There was a lot of violence in

the streets, fighter jets overhead, and

schools were a safe place for people, and

stories were a form of maintaing hope.

Stories are powerful. Stories influence

the products we build, the organizations

we design, and the futures we imagined

for ourselves. My mother heard stories

that America's the land of opportunity.

America is the land of civil rights.

And inspired by those stories, she took the

dangerous journey walking from Eritrea

to Sudan. It took her about two weeks,

walking only at night to try to avoid

the soldiers and fighting, and in Sudan

she spent ten months as a refugee in

Sudan, and a refugee organization helped

her come to the United States. Several

years later, older, wiser, my mother

realized it's not geography that creates

justice. It's people that create justice.

It's communities that create justice.

All of us face the choice to accept

oppression or advocate for justice.

As the daughter of refugees, a black woman,

disabled, lots of stories suggest that my

life doesn't matter.

I choose to create my own stories.

I choose to define what disability means.

The dominant story of disability is

negative, and it's based on a lot of

myths and stereotypes. When we share

positive stories about disability, we

change the stereotype, we change the

dominant story. So the dominant story

says people with disabilities can't do

things, but we actually can do things and

we're thoughtful and creative. And

society changes and society chooses to be

inclusive. For example, I can't read with

my eyes, but I can read Braille with my

fingers. To travel around, I can use a weighted cane or I can use a guide dog. I have

a guide dog. Her name is Maxine. She's a

small German Shepherd and she's trained

to go around obstacles. She doesn't know

where I'm going. I had to know where I'm

going, so we work as a team. I give her

instructions, left, right, forward, and

she goes around obstacles, stops at

street corners,

doesn't go forward if there are cars

coming, so it's a partnership and there

are hundreds and hundreds of other

examples of people with disabilities

finding creative new ways to do things.

When I was in college I asked myself,

"What can I do to be more inclusive? How

can I teach communities to choose

inclusion?" I went to school at Lewis &

Clark in Portland, Oregon. And Lewis &

Clark in Portland, Oregon is near the end

of the Lewis and Clark trail, and I hear

that at the start of the trail is

actually near here, so there's a lot of

shared history. The school Lewis &

Clark is really proud of their history,

really proud of their Pioneers. Their

football team is called the Pioneers,

their newspaper is called the Pioneer

Log, their shuttle that goes downtown is

called the Pioneer Express, and the

destination of the shuttle is Pioneer

Square, so they really love their

Pioneers. The cafeteria on campus served

as a central place for students to hang

out, relax between classes. When you enter

the building, along three of the walls

are large windows showcasing Portland's

rain. Along the fourth wall are food

stations and sighted students would walk

in, browse a print menu, and go to their

station of choice. I couldn't read the

menu. My blindness wasn't the problem.

Disability is never the problem. The

obstacles are created by society and its

communities, schools that choose whether

or not they want to remove the barriers.

I went to the cafeteria manager and I

explained, "I can't read the menu. Can you

provide it in an alternative format? Like

Braille or digital? Like they could email

the menu to me and I could read it using

my assistive devices like

the Braille computer." They told me

they're very busy, I should stop

complaining and be more appreciative. But

if there's chocolate cake at Station 4 no one tells me,

I'm not feeling appreciative. Back then, I

was a vegetarian and it's hard to eat

vegetarian if you don't know what the

food choices are. Sometimes I wait

in line for 20 minutes,

get food, find a table, try the food, and

discover an unpleasant surprise. It was

frustrating. At first, I tolerated the

situation. I told myself at least I have

food, who am I to complain? My mother, when

she was my age back then, was struggling

as a refugee in Sudan. At least I get to

get an education in the United States.

Who was I to complain?

Lots of people struggle for access to

food. Why should I complain? I talked to

my friends and they reminded me it's my

choice. It's our choice whether we

tolerate oppression or advocate for

justice. I did some research and I

learned about the Americans with

Disabilities Act. Congress passed the ADA

in 1990. The ADA prohibits discrimination

against people with disabilities. I went

back to the cafeteria manager and I

explained the ADA to him, and I told him that

if they don't start serving accessible

formatted menus, I would sue. I had no

idea how I would do that. I was just 19, I

couldn't afford a lawyer. Now I know that

there are disability rights lawyers that

will do cases for free. There are lots of

nonprofit law firms all around the

country, but back then I didn't know that.

All I knew is that I had to try.

I had to try to make our community more

inclusive because if I didn't try,

then who would? The following day, the

cafeteria manager came to me and he

apologized and promised that going

forward they would make the menus

accessible. Framing the issue as a

civil rights issue changed the cafeteria

culture. They realized I wasn't asking

for a favor, I was asking them to comply

with the law. The following year another

blind student came to the college and he

didn't have to fight for access. The

cafeteria already had a system down. So

for the sighted students they would type

up a menu and print it out and post it

on the wall, and for the blind students

they would copy and paste that into an

email and send it to the students.

Nowadays, a lot of menus are posted

online and that becomes easier for

everyone if the formatting is accessible,

which can be done when you train web

developers how to do that.

So more options are being created, more

access is being offered, and that

experience at the cafeteria taught me

that when I advocate it affects other people

and creates more opportunities. It

inspired me to go to law school and

become a lawyer. In 2010 I entered

Harvard Law as their first deafblind

student. Harvard told me, "We've never had

a deafblind student before," and I

told Harvard, "I've never been to Harvard

Law School before."

We didn't have all the answers, we

didn't know how we were gonna do it, but

we tried. It's really more about the

attitude: your intentions to try to make

something inclusive, even if you don't

know exactly how. So we tried different

techniques, different accommodations

until we found systems that worked, and in

2013 I graduated from Harvard Law School.

So we have a photo with the Dean Minow,

the Dean of Harvard Law School at the

time, handing me my diploma. Dean Minow

and I are both wearing academic regalia.

Maxine, my dog, is wearing a fancy fur

coat. What I just did is called image

descriptions and image descriptions make

photos more accessible to individuals

who are blind. When you post photos

online on websites or on social media,

Facebook, Instagram, include image

descriptions because we want everything

to be accessible, even photos. Access is a

choice, it's all about our choices:

whether we're gonna choose to make

photos accessible. I want to share

another photo that demonstrates what

inclusion looks like. So we have a photo

with President Obama standing at a table

and he's typing on a keyboard, and I'm on

the table at the other side reading from

the digital Braille display.

President Obama usually communicates by

voice. I hear he has a beautiful voice. When I met him we explained that I'm

deafblind, and in order to communicate we

need him to type on a keyboard so I can

read his words and connect and

communicate with him. Some people say,

"That's different, that's weird

I'm not going to do that," but President

Obama chose to be inclusive.

He gracefully switched from voicing to typing so

that I can access his words. Access: it's

a choice. All of us need to make this

choice to make our communities more

inclusive. Everything from our

laboratories to our photos needs to be

accessible, access takes multiple forums

we have a video with sign language and

sign language is a form of innovation.

Deaf individuals can't access spoken

languages so they created visual

languages and hundreds of deaf

communities all over the world have

developed different sign languages. The

dominant sign language in the United

States is American Sign Language. In

France it's French sign language and

across the pond they have a

completely different language that makes

no sense to me,

they call it British sign language. It's

a form of innovation when you have a

challenge a barrier you can use that as

a design challenge to create something

new and that's what the deaf community

did. The deaf blind community is also

innovative. For deaf blind communication

one form of communication is tactile

sign language, so a person like we're

doing in the video can sign and another

person can feel their signs and signing

with a young man in the video and he is

allowing me to feel his hands so I can

feel the different signs and he's

sighted so I'm visually signing back to

him and that's another form of

communication. There are lots of

different forms of communication when

we're thoughtful and creative and wanna

connect, next slide, another form of

communication is dance.

We have a salsa dance video and salsa

dancing consists of lots of different

physical signals there are some visual

signals and salsa dancing and when

people want to dance with me they have

to choose to convert some of those

visual signals and to tactile signals.

Some people might assume that people

with disabilities can't dance but we can

always find ways to dance. Someone who's

deaf and can see can watch other dancers

and see the beat or they can watch the

hands of the musicians and see the beat.

Someone who's blind and can hear can

hear the music and respond to the beat

they hear in the music, since I'm

deafblind

I feel the music through the people I

dance with, so that's why I enjoy partner

dancing like salsa, swing, and other

dances and it's when those communities

choose to be inclusive then I can gain

access to those communities. There are

dance communities in the u.s. that won't

want to be inclusive, I've been turned

away from salsa clubs for various

reasons, one place saw my guide dog and

said no dogs allowed and I explained to

them the Americans with Disabilities Act

prohibits discrimination against people

with disabilities

you can't deny access to guide dogs to

public places. So there are a lot of

places that don't know about the law

that don't choose to be inclusive and we

need to teach people about access and

inclusion. Why bother, why take the

trouble to be inclusive? /there are lots

of different reasons, one reason is you

reach more people there are 57 million

Americans with disabilities and around

the world

there are over 1.3 billion people with

disabilities. So when you make your

content accessible you reach more people,

you increase content discoverability.

When you have image descriptions there's

more text associated with your image so

then more people can find your work. It

allows for powerful keyword searches.

Similarly if you add captions to your

videos or add transcripts to your videos

there's more text associated with your

videos which facilitates powerful

keyword searches. So when you choose

inclusion you choose for your online

content to be accessible, you increase

your audience and these days everybody

wants a larger audience. For businesses

and means more revenue in the long run

and means more business. Another reason

is innovation

disability drives innovation, it's an

opportunity to take a challenge and

build a new solution for that challenge.

A lot of people don't know the stories

of how disability drives innovation, I'm

going to share some of those stories. One

story

it's from 1808, there were two friends in

Italy when sighted went blind. They lived

a bit far from each other and they

wanted to be able to send each other

letters but back then if a blind person

wanted to send a letter

they'd have to dictate their letter to

someone else who would write it down for

them. These friends couldn't do that

their letters had to stay private they

were love letters. So they use this as a

design opportunity what can they do so

that someone can write letters without

using sight? They built the first working

typewriter.

A typewriter can produce print through

touch through the touch of a key

analogies lots of people rate letters

through keyboards

and some of the fastest typist s-- are

touch typists. That's a story a lot of

people don't hear about, we need to teach

people and remind people that disability

drives innovation. Another story is more

recent one of the fathers of the

Internet, his name is Vinton Cerf, he's

deaf hearing impaired and before the

internet existed as we know it today

deaf individuals would struggle to

communicate long distance. Finding

alternatives to telephones Vint Cerf

developed the earliest email protocol.

Through email he could communicate with

people long distance without straining

to hear, and nowadays lots of people use

email. Tons of people use touch and text

to communicate long distance. Gordon have

you seen any people typing emails during

my talk? No, just taking photos. So these

are some of the stories of how

disability drives innovation you can

share it with your colleagues because a

lot of people don't know and once we

change this dominant story about

disability people begin to realize that

there are a lot of benefits to being

inclusive. Such as reaching a larger

audience, increasing content

discoverability, driving innovation. If

you're not persuaded there's one more

reason needing legal requirements.

The other week in The New York Times

there was an article about eight

different schools in New York being sued

for lack of access. Online access is a

big deal. I actually worked on a court

case against an online library called

script, the National Federation of the

blind sued script because their books on

the library on the digital library were

not readable by blind individuals and

the National Federation of the blind

enemy wanted their members to be able to

access books on the script library. Script tried to argue that the ADA, the

Americans with Disabilities Act, doesn't

apply to online businesses. I worked on

that case

with several other lawyers and we argued

that the ADA does apply to online

businesses. The case went before a judge

the judge looked at the various

arguments and he agreed with me, he

decided yes the ADA does apply to online

businesses and after that script settled

the case and agreed to work to make

their website and apps accessible so

that blind individuals can read books

online. It's really really important to

make services online accessible because

you reach more people, you increase

content discoverability, you drive

innovation, and you save yourself the

trouble of going to court and dealing

with litigation. So please choose

inclusion. What does digital access look

like? Digital access takes multiple

forms. I'm going to share a short video

that highlights one form of digital

access. Next slide.

There are lots of different

examples, this one was for voiceover,

which is used on Apple products. There's

similar screen readers that work on

Windows and Android and when web

developers and app developers design

their content to be accessible then

they're compatible with screen readers

and screen readers are what you just saw.

Another accessibility feature is called

captioning, the video that just played

had captions, its text that appears

on-screen so that deaf individuals can

have access to the audio content. I've

heard that hearing people also use

captions, sometimes a hearing individual

wants to be sneaky and not let anyone

know that they're watching a video, so

they'll turn on captions. Facebook

actually reports that adding captions

increases view time on average of about

12%. So a lot of people are using

captions and you reach more people when

you include captions on your videos.

Access also means support for assistive

devices for example the Braille computer

that I'm using, this is just one model

there are also other different models of

Braille computers.

Another form of assistive device is

switch control, individuals who are with

who have limited mobility may use switch

control to to operate their computers

and smartphones. So when you make your

content accessible online, when you make

your digital content accessible you

design with access in mind supporting

these accessibility features, screen

readers, captioning, assistive devices,

keep innovating. Universities are a great

place for people to develop new devices

new ways for people to share and connect.

So don't stop with these accessibility

features keep thinking about other

different ways that people can connect

and use digital information. Our goal is

to have all information accessible, every

single website, every single app, don't

assume what people with disabilities can

or can't do. A few years ago I went to

China for the first time and when I

arrived in Beijing I was exhausted and I

went straight to my hotel room to take a

nap. Before I took a nap I decided to

explore my space and while looking

around I found a strange new object, I

wasn't quite sure what it was I was

turning it over trying to figure it out,

it almost felt like a piece of fruit and

I thought hmmm should I taste it?

I was really curious to find out what it

was but not curious enough to bite into

an unknown object. So instead I took a

picture of it and texted it to a friend

asking what is this.

It was dragon fruit and I realized I

liked dragon fruit. There are a lot of

people who would assume the people who

are blind wouldn't take pictures and

therefore why bother making a camera app

accessible? Don't assume what people with

disabilities can or can't do instead

strive to make everything accessible.

we'll often surprise you and come up with

new ways, different ways to use devices

use cameras and other things. So the goal

is for everything to be accessible. There

are people who are developing smart cars

self-driving cars and I'm worried that

some of the designers of the

self-driving cars aren't thinking about

people with disabilities. It would be

very disappointing if they built a

self-driving car that blind people can't

use or that someone in a wheelchair

can't independently enter an exit and

operate. We need everyone thinking about

accessibility especially for new

technologies, new devices. I had some

action steps for everyone I'd like

everyone to look around their community

look around the school the buildings the

digital services the web sites and look

for potential barriers, help to

identify barriers and work to remove

those barriers. We all need to be

advocates access is a choice and it's up

to all of us to make sure we remove

these barriers. For digital barriers the

web content accessibility guidelines and

Apple and Android accessibility

guidelines for mobile apps will help

developers ensure their content is

accessible. Increase hiring of people

with disabilities. When we have

professors with disabilities, lecturers

with disabilities, more mentors are

available for students. So make sure we

increase these opportunities for

everyone: for employees, for students.

Lastly, teach your colleagues about

inclusion. Share these messages with your

friends, family members, so that everyone

can be an advocate and help remove

barriers. So this is an unusual video. So

I'm exploring the city museum, it's an

unusual museum: there are tactile

obstacle courses. There is an obstacle

course that's about four stories

high that goes up into a dome and as I

moved through it I can't use my guide

dog, I can't use my weight cane, I don't

really know where the path is going.

I can't see the path going forward or

hear instructions from my friend who's

just down on the ground filming this, but

I'm not afraid of the unknown. There's a

lot in the world that's unknown, and if

we leave it as an unknown it stays scary

but as we get to know it, as we conquer

the unknown, it becomes familiar and

we've developed more tools in the

process. Everybody here needs to become

more of a pioneer, more of an explorer.

Don't be afraid of what you don't know.

Instead seek to learn about it, seek to

expand your horizons. When all of us

choose to be explorers, we can help make

our communities more inclusive.

My name is Haben Girma

and I hope you'll all join me in making

our communities more inclusive. Thank you.

[applause]

So the final slide has my contact

information on it. My website is habengirma.com

and I'm on social media at

@HabenGirma. We're gonna have Q&A so that

you can have the opportunity to come and

ask your questions or share your

comments. For Q&A we have the keyboard.

There's a table to my left with an extra

chair and a keyboard, and people can type

their questions and I'm reading it in

digital Braille. So if you have questions

feel free to come down here and type

your questions. "Were you scared when

entering Harvard?" and who's

asking? "My name is Paige." Thanks for the

question, Paige. Harvard I knew was gonna

be a huge adventure. I actually chose

to enjoy the process.

So rather than stressing myself out, I

decided I would balance out all my

different obligations. So while I was at

Harvard I was also part of the ballroom

dance team because exercise is important and

connecting with other people is also

important. Friends are really, really

important. So I made sure I had fun and

I was able to enjoy my time at Harvard

Law School. "Haben this is Kathleen Gordon,

if you would assist in typing, I would be

curious if you could give us one or two

pointers that people can leave here

today with and take back with them to

the spaces where they spend their time

that will make a difference in making

that space more inclusive and

proactively accessible?"

If you could give us one to two pointers

that people can leave here today with

and take back to their spaces

where they spend their time that

will make a difference in making that

space more inclusive and accessible. So

one thing is to remind developers of

websites and mobile apps to make their

content accessible. There are legal

requirements for this and it helps

the people behind the content to

increase their audience. So if that's the

school, it helps the school increase the

audience for the content. So that's one

thing. Also look around for physical

barriers. Is a room wheelchair

accessible? Is there a way for someone

who uses a wheelchair to enter all the

different spaces that are used on campus?

Take note of those situations and then

share them with the disability resource

center. What format is this question

coming through? Were people able to hear that?

This was a typed question. Okay, good.

So the question is, and what's your name?

"Emma." So Emma has a sister who's

blind and had to go to a school for the

blind before graduate school. Did I have

to go to a school for the blind before

graduate school? School for the blind. So

historically, schools were

segregated and people with disabilities

went to separate schools.

I grew up after the ADA and by that

point more schools were inclusive, though

segregation is still a problem today.

So I went to mainstream schools

alongside non-disabled individuals, and

then after that I went to college: Lewis

and Clark, and after that I went to

Harvard Law School. So I didn't go to a

school for the blind.

There are training centers for blind

adults and youth to go for a short time

to develop blindness skills. Maybe

someone just wants to learn Braille, or

they want to know how to cook without

using their sight, or how to make sure

they can live independently and do stuff

around the house:

laundry, dishes, that sort of thing. They

can go to a training center for a short

time, it's often six to nine months, build

up those skills, get that training and

then after that go back to their

mainstream communities. So that's also an

option out there for some people. Thank

you, Emma. For the next question can

you tell me a little bit about yourself?

"Hello Haben, my name is Jasmine Fillmore

and I am a deafblind individual. I am

sitting across from you to your right.

Sitting next to me is Chris Hallmark,

and I think you might know who he is, but

he's running for Congress for Kansas

district number three. My question

for you is:

How are you able to make it successfully through

math and complicated subjects like

that? Because I know that I'm struggling

a bit myself and that is all." >>Haben: Math is hard,

that's true. Some of the sciences can be

tricky. When I was in law school, taxation

was very difficult to go through. [laughter] So I

did math in Braille. There's a Braille

form of math called Nemeth. It's a

slight variation on the codes to make it

easier to use in Braille and I did

advanced math, I did calculus, and

originally I was going to be a math and

computer science major. So when I went to

college I took courses in math and

computer science, but the teachers were

not inclusive. They did not want me there

and it was incredibly frustrating. I did

well in the classes, I still got As, but

it was exhausting emotionally to

constantly struggle and argue with

professors who were not welcoming. At the

same time I was also taking classes in

sociology and anthropology and those

professors were very welcoming, and I

decided technically I can do math and I

can do a career in the mathematics but

there's so many barriers I have to deal

with. I don't want to, on top of those

barriers, deal with difficult

professors. So I switched my major and

did sociology, anthropology and that's

what I did.

In the end, I realized I wanted to go

to law school and become a lawyer and

after college I went to law school. So to

answer your question: math is difficult

but there are tactile ways to access math,

such as through Braille.

>>"My name is Glen White and I'm a professor here at the Faculty Research and Training Center on

Independent Living. My question is

more of a global nature as you know

during this current administration

there's been a lot of changes at the

State Department. The Office of Disability at that department is scheduled not to be sustained in that role

but to be absorbed by, perhaps,

other structures within at the Department of

State. The question is: as the United

States reaches out to other countries

with our policy, what recommendations

would you have considered for U.S.

policy in terms of not only thinking

about that country but the people

with disabilities in that country as well? Making sure that they get consideration."

>>Haben: That's a great question! So I want to assure everyone that there

are disability rights lawyers all across

the country who are ready and eager to

protect the rights of people with

disabilities, and will always be working

towards inclusion, greater inclusion. We

do need more advocates. We do need more

help. Right now in Congress, Congress is

considering a bill, HR 620, and it's

called the ADA Education and Reform Act.

The name is misleading. The act tries to

shift the burden of responsibility for

access from companies, places of public

accommodation, to people with

disabilities and that's not fair, that's

not right. For gender, for race,

the responsibility is on the place of

public accommodation and it should be

that for disability as well. So when you

have an opportunity after this, please

contact your representatives and tell

them to oppose the ADA Education and

Reform Act because that act, that bill if

passed would reduce the

rights of people with disabilities and

and we don't want that. We want greater

inclusion, full protection of civil

rights. So in this administration there's a lot

of work to do to protect our civil

rights on multiple levels, and I

strongly recommend that everybody become

an advocate. Make sure that we're all

working together to make our country

more inclusive. >>"Haben this is Catherine I

have the final question in my

hand and do not fear, everyone else that

has not had a chance to Haben questions,

she will be with us for the reception

that will follow this keynote

immediately. So the question is from

Brittany. Brittany would like to know how

you make friends initially with people

who are sighted but do not use ASL when

you do not have your assistive

technology present with you." >>Haben: I always

have my assistive technology with me, personally.

I have a purse deliberately chosen so that my

technology will fit in the purse and I

always carry it with me. So if someone

notices me while I'm walking down the

street, they can come over and touch my

arm and we can find a spot to set up the

keyboard and Braille display, or they can

tweet and say, "Hi Haben and I just saw you,

do you want to meet up for coffee?" or

send me a text message, an email. I have

a lot of conversations online: Twitter,

Facebook, Instagram. In the real world I

could never eavesdrop on conversations

but online [laughter] I can listen in on lots of conversations.

Some people complain about social media

but it also creates lots of

opportunities for people to connect. It's

a tool and it's about how we use it that

matters. So there are lots of different ways for

people to connect and the reception is

another opportunity for people to

connect and I hope to see everyone at

the reception later today. Thank you everyone.

[applause]

>>Before we leave here, I want to say: Haben

challenged us today to be better, to do

better, to leave here and become the

culture that we know we're creating at KU

of being proactively inclusive,

proactively accessible. Haben promised me

last night that she would contact me in

six months to see what her message has

brought to our campus. So I challenge all

of you to leave here, make the world a

better place, and let me know what you've

done so I could report back to Haben