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ON THE ROAD TO ACCESS

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Through the eyes of the Access Coordinator (Karen Myers) . . .

Equal access to goods and services is essential, and access to every aspect of a national convention is no exception. ACPA takes a proactive approach to equal access by appointing an Access Coordinator to its national convention planning team, and it was my pleasure this year to accept that appointment. As Access Coordinator for the 1998 convention in St. Louis, I enjoyed communicating with each participant and presenter who requested accommodations, working with them and the planning committee weeks and even months prior to the convention to ensure them equal access.

As a person with a visual disability, I know firsthand that communication is the key to accessibility. Based on comments by convention attendees, our one-to-one communication with participants early-on helped make a smoother accessible convention. After speaking to persons with and without disabilities before, during and after the convention, we have even better ideas for next year's convention regarding access, accommodations, and disability awareness. The ACPA Task Force on Disability (a potential future standing committee) suggests that early communication with presenters on how to make their programs accessible to all audience members is vital; therefore, I am including in this article some accommodation tips that might be useful to you not only for next year's programs, but for programs, presentations, and classes throughout the year. Thanks, ACPA, for your proactive approach to access!

Through the eyes of a convention participant and presenter (Nancy Badger) . . .

As a person with a vision impairment who both participated in and presented at the recently held national ACPA convention, I was very impressed with the accessibility of the conference. Very shortly after I identified myself as a person with a disability, I received e-mail from the Access Coordinator. At that point we were able to determine collaboratively what issues I might encounter at the convention. This was a very different approach from what I had experienced at other national conventions, and it worked very well. Because of early communication, I was able to plan my schedule in advance, and anticipate problems such as transportation, mobility, and alternative media.

As a presenter, I received tips for making my presentation accessible to people with a variety of disabilities well in advance of attending the convention. Because of this I was reminded to obtain materials in alternative media, design my presentation room so that those who used wheelchairs had

access, and provide ample visual information for those who are deaf or hard of hearing.

As I attended the convention I noticed the Access Coordinator and volunteers were doing a wonderful job of trouble shooting. As I negotiated the construction outside of the Holiday Inn, a volunteer was there to provide assistance. When I needed a brief lesson on the locations of some convention events, volunteers at the registration desk knew exactly who they needed to contact.

As the number of professionals with disabilities increases, and the nature of disabilities becomes more varied, access will become an even more important issue. As professionals of institutions of higher education, we have a responsibility to set the standard. Our ideas concerning equality and diversity should be extended to include attitudinal, program, and physical access for professionals and students with disabilities. In the future, the ACPA Task Force on Disability will be writing more articles to educate and raise awareness of issues relevant to those with disabilities on our college campuses.

TIPS FOR EQUAL ACCESS PRESENTATIONS

A few suggestions for making your presentation accessible to each member of your audience . . .

- Allow access to front row seats for persons with disabilities.
- If possible, adjust lighting for persons with visual disabilities. Ask what works best for them.
- Make aisles accessible so participants using wheelchairs/scooters do not have to sit in the back of the room.
- Clear aisles of obstacles for persons with visual and mobility disabilities.
- Control background noise to the greatest possible extent.
- Speak in well-paced, well-modulated tones. Monitor rate and volume.
- Avoid turning your back to the audience when speaking. People may be depending on lip-reading.
- Repeat questions aloud before answering them.
- Accompany overhead transparencies, posters, power-point presentations, etc., with verbal description. Be sure to read what is on the screen.
- Avoid relying solely on oral presentations and gestures to illustrate a point, or using visual points of reference (e.g., "this" and "that" or "here" and "there.") Read or describe what you are pointing/referring to.
- Having your handouts available on disk and/or having a large-print version of your handouts available will be helpful to persons with low vision. (Enlarging font to 18 pt bold or enlarging each page 130-150x on 14x17 sheets of paper would be ideal.)
- Have transparencies available in hard copy for close examination.
- Use clear, vivid, legible, sharp, high-contrast handouts, transparencies, etc. Avoid using dark ink on dark paper, fancy fonts, and extremely small print.

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