

# **Standing Committee on Disability**

## **Universally Designed**

### **Summer 2009**

Quarterly Newsletter for the Standing Committee on Disability

Volume 1, Issue 2

Editors: Melanie Thompson and Matthew Gilsbach

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Many of us are preparing for students to come back to campus. Some of us have already been inundated with returning students, staff and faculty. Whether your knee deep in problem solving or you are heading in that direction, we would encourage you to take a moment out of your hectic schedules to read the articles in our second edition of Universally Designed. Contributing writer, Marcus Engel, tells a compelling story in “Individualize This.” Katie Stolz, shares myriad updates “From the Chair” in her timely contribution about possible changes within ACPA and NASPA. There is information about the upcoming deadline for proposals for the ACPA conference, as well as Melanie’s editorial on “Lessons Learned.”

If you ran out of time to contribute to this edition, you have plenty of time for the fall edition. The next deadline for submission is October 30th, 2009. You can email your submissions to Melanie at [mvthompson@semo.edu](mailto:mvthompson@semo.edu) or Matthew at [mgilsbach@gmail.com](mailto:mgilsbach@gmail.com).

Thank you and enjoy reading,  
Melanie and Matthew

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# ***From the Chair***

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**Katie Stolz**  
**Standing Committee for Disability: President**

Hello SCD!

I hope that your summer has gone well, and that you have been able to enjoy some quieter times on campus before fall semester is upon us! I recently returned back from the ACPA Summer Leadership Meeting (SLM) in Louisville, Kentucky, where I had the opportunity to meet with leaders from other standing committees, commissions, state and international divisions, the Governing Board, and the International Office. We have much exciting news in the association.

First, plans are in full swing for the 2010 Annual Convention in Boston March 20-24! (Check them out at <http://convention.myacpa.org/>). Concern has been voiced regarding the marketing tool, *What's Brewing in Boston?*, referring to the Boston Tea Party when colonists dressed as Native Americans. The standing committee chairs spent time together at SLM discussing ways in which we could provide effective learning opportunities surrounding historical misrepresentation of identity in our country. The convention planning team shared updates about the annual convention, including that the prices for registration will not increase this year, a one-day registration pass will be offered at a cost lower than that for the entire convention, and they are working hard to provide \$5.00 lunch options! In addition, placement services are going to be revamped to be bigger and better—which includes improvements that will extend before and after the convention itself.

Perhaps even bigger news is the work of the Taskforce on the Future of Student Affairs. Discussion is taking place around the possible unification of ACPA and NASPA. Historically, the two student affairs associations have differed in several major ways; however, more recently we have become more and more similar in who we are and what we do. In light of fiscal stewardship, it is being recognized that coming together may allow individuals, and the associations, to combine some processes and efforts in order to spend less money. Furthermore, unifying available resources may allow us to better address the needs of our profession and have a common voice. The executive directors of both organizations have looked at the structure of ACPA and NASPA and have agreed that a unification would be feasible if that is the wish of both memberships.

This is a big conversation, and nothing will happen right away with this! Please know that in order for our associations to unify, it would be taken to a membership vote, and both ACPA and NASPA would need to be in favor. Right now we have a lot of questions that cannot be answered including: (1) Should we unify? and (2) What would that look like? If you have thoughts or concerns, please share them with me.

Sincerely,  
Katie Stolz

# ***Individualize This!***

Marcus Engel

[www.marcusengel.com](http://www.marcusengel.com)

[www.marcusengel.blogspot.com](http://www.marcusengel.blogspot.com)

During the first week of the fall semester, most colleges hold a fair to promote different student organizations. Members of these organizations show up to run their booths, pass out literature, and make students aware of the group's presence.

At such an event, you'd expect to see the typical college organizations: fraternities, sororities, academic clubs, etc. But as a small town white boy from rural Missouri, these initial experiences on campus felt more like a circus sideshow than a college experience!

It seemed that every time I turned a corner, there was some new freaky-deaky thing in front of my face. There were tables promoting marijuana, anything and everything sexual, and a few touting religions which, from what I could tell, revolved around one's hairstyle. It was my first revelation of just how much colleges and universities value individualism.

No matter one's viewpoint, style, faith, orientation, race, sex – there are others just like you. And these individuals weren't just comfortable with who they were, but were, in fact, promoting their lifestyle! They seemed to revel in their uniqueness – something that was completely foreign to me. I walked home from the fair with a handful of pamphlets and an awareness that the world (well, at least college) is full of people who are different.

Six weeks after wandering through the student activities fair, the car in which I was riding was struck broadside by a drunk driver. This crash not only left me blind, but also crushed every bone in my face. For the next two years, I endured hundreds of hours of facial reconstruction, months of rehab and a multitude of life changes. All the while, I stayed focused on two goals: return to Missouri State University and recapture life.

When I finally stepped foot back onto campus, everything was different. I had never wanted to be the alternative guy with the three foot long hair, or the guy riding a unicycle to try to impress people – I just wanted to be myself, get my education and draw no attention. Now? I stood out as the blind guy on campus. Not just the blind guy, but the blind guy WITH a disfigured face. Throw in the presence of my 80 lb. black lab Seeing Eye dog and anonymity was a complete impossibility.

I stood out like the proverbial sore thumb... just like those students at the campus fair. The difference is, they proudly hoisted their freak flag. Me? I had no choice. I was different - and I hated it. Even though there was nothing typical about me (from all outward appearances), my professors, directors and friends seemed to know that normalcy and anonymity is what I craved. Blindness made that impossible.

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I quickly realized that I couldn't be just like every other student, but I was determined to think of my blindness as a character trait more than a disability.

I never shared this desire – everyone just seemed to know. That instinctual knowledge of how I wanted to be viewed bled over into some phenomenal experiences as an undergrad. Since graduating, I've used some of these experiences to work with others, and thought that these situations might be applicable to your work with students as well.

## **Quiet Assistance**

There's nothing more useless to a person with a visual impairment than a foreign film with subtitles (Think about it!). In my sociology 101 class, the professor, Dr. Michael Carlie, required the class to watch just such a film. Knowing this wouldn't work for yours truly, he pulled up a seat next to mine. From there, he quietly described the pertinent information from the film. Key word being: quietly. No announcement to the class, no discussion about how we'd do this, no big deal. Even more than making the accommodation to give me the necessary info, Dr. Carlie fulfilled a bigger need – that of helping me minimize the embarrassment of having my disability highlighted to the whole class. For a guy less than two years into blindness, this wasn't just important from an educational standpoint, it also helped me retain a bit of my fragile dignity.

## **“What's Best For You?”**

If every corporation could adopt this motto, the business world would be a lot better off. For me, the question came from my religion teacher. He'd had other blind students in class, but didn't assume their way of learning would be my way of learning. Knowing my professors wanted me to learn by the methods that worked best for me was, in a word, priceless. That religion professor went into my education without a set agenda, instead letting me take the reins of my own course work. He allowed me to take tests the way I wanted, do interviews over the phone and have meetings in his office as often as necessary. Because I didn't know where his office was in the labyrinth of halls and offices, it meant so much to me that he'd meet me at the buildings front door, without ever acting put out. This display was kindness and compassion, above and beyond obligation.

## **Get Involved - Not Just Educated**

My stepson, Jordan, is a sophomore at the University of Florida. When we attended his freshman orientation, they made a fantastic suggestion: get involved, not just educated. This means finding at least two organizations on campus with which the student shares a passion. Preferably, one that is academic and related to the student's major, and one the student simply enjoys.

As an undergrad, I lived this advice... but had never heard it specifically stated until I was in my 30s'. I was involved in the honors fraternity of my major, and also a social fraternity, Kappa Sigma. When I had thoughts of quitting college, one anchor which kept me in school was my social life. My friendships, organizations and relationships would all dry up if I were to drop out.

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The Disability Support Services director, Jana, helped me see the benefits of being involved, and encouraged me as a student first, a student with a disability second. Two weeks after my fraternity pledgship began, Jana spotted me on campus wearing a Kappa Sigma tee shirt. “You’re a Kappa Sig, Marcus?” she asked, genuinely curious. “Yep. Well, I will be when I’m initiated in a few months.” “That’s cool – Kappa Sig is a great fraternity.”

The fact I was an atypical fraternity member never came up. It was just treated as one of my individual choices, one my disability support services director reinforced just by saying, “Cool!”

In the nine years since I tossed my mortarboard with my graduating class, I’ve had a lot of time to reflect on why I was able to accomplish so much in such a short time. Determination? Diligence? Commitment? Yes, yes and yes. But I had a lot of assistance along the way. Some academic, some physical, some tutorial, some through technology... but the thing which benefitted me the most was being treated in the way I wanted to be treated. No matter how many other students with disabilities the college professionals had encountered, there was this notion of “This is Marcus – no one else.” For that, I’m eternally grateful. I hope these experiences may inspire others to see the unique gifts, talents and personalities of the students they serve, too.

# ***Activist, Advocate, Ally***

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**Melanie Thompson, Ed.S., LPC, LMHC, NCC**  
**Director - Learning Assistance Programs & Disability Support Services**  
**Southeast Missouri State University**

Have you noticed on many standardized applications, when asked about what your career or employment status is, there is no spot for disability service provider? Nor a spot for one who cares about human rights? Or “helper?” At social gatherings, when new people ask what I do, stating that I’m a “Director” doesn’t really project the picture I’d like them to have. Stating the office I work in helps students with disabilities doesn’t accurately say much either.

Have you ever seen what happens when you say you are an activist? People flee to the other side of the room. Visions of protest signs and human barrier walls come to mind for some. What about when you say you are an advocate? People wonder, an advocate for what, right? Often they make an assumption about what you are an advocate for based on what you look like, or what you are wearing, or where you are at, or who you are with... And an ally? That’s a term that does not seem to be used as much, when compared to activist or advocate, perhaps because allies are often quiet, seen but not heard, counted on but not accounted for. Have you used the word ally to describe or define a part of what or who you are?

I’ve been searching for the right terminology to express that I’m an advocate for human rights, that I actively want to contribute to the world in some way, that I’m an ally of people who are underrepresented, disregarded, discriminated against. That doesn’t quite flow off my tongue, though, either. So, I’m wondering, what do you all say? The SCD is made up of lots of different people. Not all members are disability service providers, but presumably all members consider disability related issues to be important. Why is that? What about disability services is important to you? When you talk about it, what words do you use? Are you an activist? An advocate? An ally? I’m asking because I see value in the terminology we use.

Recently at a training with 25 amazing disability service providers from across the country, I was able to participate in a conversation about the use of the term disability. Some folks thought that offices working with students with disabilities should not use the word disability in their office title. Others thought it was better to use the word disAbled. The conversation kept coming back to the concept that society often perceives the word disabled to have a negative connotation to it. If those that work with students with disabilities are uneasy with the use of word disabled, then how will society come to grips with the concept that disabled does not mean “less than” or “deficit” or “bad”? How will society understand that the opposite of disabled is not able-bodied as disAbled may imply?

I was recently challenged to reframe how I look and talk about disabilities, and one of the key components of that challenge for me was shifting the use of terminology in my day to day activities. For those of you that consider yourself an activist, advocate, or ally for people with disabilities, I wanted to share that challenge with you. Determine if the words you use each day reduce the barriers that people with disabilities encounter or if they reinforce the concept that disabled is less than....

# ***Proposals for ACPA 2010 Convention***

**Program submissions for the 2010 Convention are due Friday, September 11, 2009.**

General Convention Programs, 75 minutes each, are chosen in large part because of their relevance to - and incorporation of - the Professional Competencies and/or the critical issues identified by the 2010 Convention Program Committee.

Convention Institutes are a series of linked programs (typically 2 to 5) that provide Convention attendees with an intensive learning experience designed to promote a level of competence in a specific area. By linking consecutive or multiple program sessions (2½ to 6 hours total) with a common theme, presenters can explore a topic in more depth. Institute submissions should include a theme, conceptual framework, and individual program titles and abstracts. Program proposals must be clear how many sessions are proposed, the focus of each one, and the connections between them.

Sponsored Programs are those directly supported by the ACPA Commissions that represent functional areas of issues pertinent to student affairs work and by the ACPA Standing Committees that represent specific constituencies. Should a program be directly related to the work of one of the sponsoring groups, this should be indicated in the program proposal. If a proposal is not selected as a Sponsored Program, it will be considered for a General Program slot. Programs can be co-sponsored. Commissions and Standing Committees will have 5 sponsored program slots.

Round Tables (60-minutes) allow for in-depth discussion related to current events, developing trends, association matters, or topics related to functional areas or constituency issues. Round Table programs are not eligible to receive any audiovisual support, as these are meant to be discussions, not formal presentations. Each Commission and Standing Committee will be able to sponsor a Round Table.

Promising Practices programs allow presenters to share programs, strategies, and interventions that have been successful on campuses. These programs (60 minutes) will be of special interest to interest to colleagues interested in gathering information about institutional practices. Research Paper proposals may be submitted. Those selected will occupy a program slot with two other presentation (15-20 minutes per presentation), followed by discussion (75 minutes total length). Research Poster Sessions provide a forum for presenters to engage in active discussion about a completed research project or a project in process. Poster presenters will display their research on a large bulletin board (provided at the convention) and interact with those circulating in the room.

**ACPA-SCD committee members should consider submitting a proposal in one or more of the areas indicated above, and seek sponsorship through the SCD. Members not submitting proposals are encouraged to volunteer to review proposals seeking SCD sponsorship.**

THANKS TO ALL THAT SUBMITTED ARTICLES.

MORE TO COME IN NOVEMBER.

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS -

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