

# STANDING COMMITTEE ON DISABILITY NEWSLETTER

QUARTERLY  
NEWSLETTER

WINTER  
2011

## Letter from the Chair...

Many of us are more than half way through our fall semesters, and I imagine that like me, you are looking forward to the upcoming semester break as a time to relax, regroup, and rejuvenate yourselves for the spring semester. The fall has been a busy time for the Standing Committee on Disability as well, and on behalf of the SCD Directorate, I did want to share a few updates with you.

Four programs have been selected for sponsorship by the SCD for the 2012 Convention. Registration for the Convention is open through ACPA and accessibility information is readily available online. Additionally, the SCD will be co-sponsoring the Ability Exhibit at the 2012 Convention. We will be looking for volunteers to provide assistance with the Exhibit. Volunteer opportunities are anticipated to be advertised through the ACPA website in the near future, however, feel free to contact Karen

Myers at [kmyers11@slu.edu](mailto:kmyers11@slu.edu) or me [mthompson3@niu.edu](mailto:mthompson3@niu.edu) if you'd like to volunteer specifically with the Ability Exhibit.

The SCD will be holding elections for several Directorate positions for the first time in January 2012. The positions that will be up for election include: Convention Awards, Convention Program Selection, Marketing and Outreach, Newsletter, Research, Webmaster, and DCI Liaison. Elections are currently scheduled to be held between January 10 and January 17. Any interested ACPA members are eligible to run for election. The Directorate voted to include elected positions in an effort to increase the strength and size of the SCD, and I encourage any of you that are interested to consider running. If you have questions about the election process, or want to talk through any one of the positions and the position requirements, please feel free to contact

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**NEWSLETTER**

**CO-CHAIRS:**

**SARAH LAUX &  
DALE O'NEILL**

## Letter from the Chair...

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me or our former Chair, Katie Madden at [katiestolz@yahoo.com](mailto:katiestolz@yahoo.com).

Lastly, you should have received some information from me over the past few weeks regarding ACPA Awards and updates on the dialogue going on in Higher Education regarding perceived threat of danger to self as addressed through the recent ADA Amendments. If you did not receive these emails, you are most likely not listed as an active member with the SCD through ACPA. Please check your membership page and review your listed activities to verify that you are listed as current with the SCD. There have been some upgrades and updates made to the ACPA system, and your review of your information will help us ensure

that you continue to be included with SCD updates and activities. Please do consider nominating peers and colleagues for any or all of the ACPA awards, as well as for the SCD awards. Imagine how fantastic it would be to see individuals with disabilities, disability advocates, and disability allies applauded and represented across the entire ACPA organization.

Sincerely,

Melanie Thompson

Chair, ACPA Standing Committee on Disability

Director, Center for Access-Ability Resources at Northern Illinois University

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## A response to “Why Is Disability Missing from the Discourse on Diversity” (Davis, 2011)

**Michael Kavulic, Northern Illinois University**

I have rarely, if ever, heard or engaged in a conversation around disability within the realm of diversity dialogue. Disability instead is usually listed mantra style with other identities. In his recent piece in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Professor Lennard J. Davis addressed the lack of consideration given to disability as a concept within diversity (Davis, 2011). As I considered Davis' argument, I am struck by the question: Should inclusion in the discourse on diversity be the goal for those looking to advocate for the rights and lives of those with disabilities?

Davis asks, “Is [the exclusion of disability from the diversity conversation] simply neglect, or is there something inherent in the way diversity is considered that makes it impossible to recognize disability as a valid human identity?” (Davis, 2011). I would argue that the second option is true. As Davis points out, much of the conversation around diversity relies on the premise that diversity is something to be celebrated. I contend that while

our differences drive creativity, imagination, invention, and love, they also have and continue to be used to promote hate, fear, oppression, and stigma. Thus, while “diversity” should be celebrated, it also needs to be engaged on a critical level which promotes dialogue around why diversity is not easy. Diversity programming, with rare exceptions, misses this mark. More often do conversations around diversity end with feelings of guilt, frustration, anger, and hardened resolve to avoid this type of discussion.

Diversity discourse is further limited when the conversation only focuses on “othered” identities. Sexual orientation means gay. Race means non-white and often Black. Class means poor. Religion means non-Christian. My experience would lead me to believe that “diversity” is still discussed in comparison to a norm. Davis, however, adds a different perspective. In addressing underlying assumptions of “diversity studies,” Davis (2011) says:

[t]here is no “normal” human being anymore, as there was in the period of eugenics.

Diversity seems to say that there is no race, gender, or ethnicity that defines the norm, as, for example, the white, European male used to.

Davis contends that “diversity studies” holds at its core a dismissal of normalcy. My experience with “diversity” programs, however, is that diversity is still considered in terms of different and not standard or not normal. Attempts by proponents and advocates of disability rights to “normalize” disability by pointing out that it cuts across differences may be further excluding disability from the diversity conversation.

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## A response to “Why Is Disability Missing from the Discourse on Diversity” (Davis, 2011)

Michael Kavulic, Northern Illinois University

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With that argument, disability is a medical issue which relegates individuals with disabilities to “patients,” as Davis points out, and is something that ceases to be unique. In a way, it is the perceived “uniqueness” of identities like sexual orientation and race that “others” them and then that allows them a place in the conversation around diversity.

Regardless, I believe that instead of trying to jam disability and other identities into “diversity,” we either need to revisit “diversity” or re-conceptualize the ways we approach conversation about all identities. The increasingly popular concept of Universal Design (UD) offers a new perspective which seems to move beyond difference/diversity to a broader approach that takes all identities into account. While

this approach seems promising, it is not without its pitfalls. If it becomes an approach that works to catch all perspectives and needs, one must wonder what perspectives may be missed. Further, this sort of all inclusive approach may not be that far from the idea of sameness in diversity that Davis references, which in itself is limited by its lack of critical understanding. The challenge of broadening the discussion while recognizing the many complexities of multiple identities is not easy. Where it goes though is left up to all of us who work to enhance understanding.

### References

Davis, L. (2011). Why is disability missing from the discourse on diversity. *The Chronicle of Higher Education: Diversity in Academe*, Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/article/Why-Is-Disability-Missing-From/129088/>

## SCD Annual Awards Announcement:

Nominations for the Standing Committee’s Annual Awards are due **December 9<sup>th</sup>**. The Awards are for:

- Disability Ally
- Disability Service Provider
- Disability Leadership Award
- Ability Fellowship.

The Ability Fellowship comes with a scholarship for registration to conference for a graduate student or new professional. For more information contact Val Erwin at [verwin@smu.edu](mailto:verwin@smu.edu).

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## Ally Corner

### Reflections of a “Disabled” College Athlete

Paul Artale, Michigan State University

Athletics has always been in my blood. From the first time I watched Hulk Hogan bodyslam Andre the Giant to watching the San Francisco 49ers dominate the NFL during the 80's, I knew I wanted to compete on the biggest scale possible. On the surface, this was an unrealistic goal. I was missing fingers and had shortened forearms, who was I to compete with “able-bodied” athletes in anything other than soccer? I remember my surgeon trying to push me to compete in the Special Olympics as a swimmer but my fear of the deep end quickly killed that dream.

Someone born into my situation tends to fall into a weird No Mans Land at times. My “disability” allows me to function in society without any serious need for accommodation but some things can be tougher for me than say those five fingered folks out there. I always felt like I was not “disabled” enough to compete in things like the Special Olympics or amputee sports but different enough that playing against the “able bodied” in many sports was challenging. As a result I spent much of my childhood with no involvement in formal athletics. It would have stayed that way until I turned on the tv and saw a one-handed pitcher on the California Angels by the name of Jim Abbott. He was awesome. I remember buying his biography through the school book club and reading it several times. I posted his pictures in my locker; a tradition that exists in some form today. If

Jim could do it, I could do it and that's all that I needed to persist.

Choosing to play football was especially challenging for me but I loved every minute of it. I was the victim of many snide remarks from people I thought were my friends but by then I had grown pretty tough skin. I was cut from the team in my senior year of high school but found myself playing for the University of Toronto six years later. It was a road filled with bumps and challenges. From the men's league coach who was resistant to me playing because this wasn't the “Special Olympics” to mangling my elbow during training camp to former best friends telling some nasty jokes about me playing football. It was tough but I am stronger for having gone through it. It really was the most surreal experience of my life and taught me a lot about myself and the people around me. The life lessons I learned during my journey in football were priceless and I spend much of my free time promoting those lessons to anybody who will listen. So on that note, here are some random reflections and pieces of advice.

**Lesson #1:** This is specifically to the “disabled” athletes out there. Compete at the highest level you can. Don't let people tell you to settle for less or play sports that would be “easier” for you to do.

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## Reflections of a “Disabled” College Athlete

Paul Artale, Michigan State University

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Follow your heart and go after it. You know your limitations and capabilities more than anyone else. Pardon the cliché but: go for the gold.

**Lesson #2:** Faith is such a huge part of this whole process. Faith in yourself. Faith in the journey. Faith that it will all work out; and trust me it does.

**Lesson #3:** Naysayers will be naysayers so don't listen to them. There are certain people out there who will try to bring you down for simply trying to do something you love. Ignore them. They will only get in the way of success. Also, don't try and please them because they can't be pleased. Nothing you can do will silence their criticism so it is best to cut them from your life.

**Lesson #4:** Don't let your critics take your pride. A few years ago I competed in my first karate tournament just for the fun of it. As I was prepping for my next match I overheard my first opponent saying to another competitor that he felt sorry for me and went too easy. His tune changed later that day when I took the gold medal in sparring. If I believed the naysayers and all the other critics out there my accomplishments would have been because people felt sorry for me. I would have never earned it. I was just a mascot. That's a load of you know what. Be proud of what you accomplish and know that you

ACCOMPLISHED it. Nothing on that field, rink, or ring is ever given to you so don't let people tell you otherwise.

**Lesson #5:** This one may reflect my own personal bias more than anything else but I think it is important to note this. This may be useful for some of the student-affairs administrators out there as well. A “disabled” student athlete is often going to identify as an athlete first and disabled second. Athletic identity often supercedes other identities in college athletes and those with “disabilities” are no different. For me personally, “disability” probably ranks fifth on my identity chart behind being an athlete, Italian, Canadian, a member of a fraternity, and then as someone who was born looking different than the rest. Just be aware of that in your dealings and in some of the assumptions you may make.

These days my athletic exploits are limited to my Xbox 360 and the occasional karate tournament. I recount my football and disability journey in several forms to different crowds. If I had to boil all my talks down to one simple lesson it would be this: disability is a state of mind and not a diagnosis. The biggest obstacle to our success is our attitude and the way we react to adversity. I always put the word *disability* in quotation marks when referring to myself or others. It's just a word and like many things in life, that word only has as much power and influence over our own lives as we allow it to.



## **Contributors to the Winter 2011 Edition of the Standing Committee on Disability Newsletter:**

### **Melanie Thompson**

#### **Chair of the Standing Committee on Disability**

Melanie Thompson is the 2011-2013 Chair of the Standing Committee on Disability with ACPA and Director of the Center for Access-Ability Resources at Northern Illinois University. Ms. Thompson's areas of interest include diversity, social justice, universal design, and educational leadership. In addition to ACPA, Ms. Thompson is active involved with AHEAD and NASPA. Questions and comments may be addressed to Melanie at [mthompson3@niu.edu](mailto:mthompson3@niu.edu).

### **Michael Kavulic**

#### **Author of A response to “Why Is Disability Missing from the Discourse on Diversity” (Davis, 2011)**

Michael Kavulic currently works at Northern Illinois University as the Coordinator of Residential Facilities. He joined the Standing Committee on Disability at the 2011 ACPA Conference in Baltimore and is a co-chair for the Research sub-committee.

### **Paul Artale**

#### **Author of “Reflections of a ‘Disabled’ College Athlete”**

Paul Artale is a keynote and motivational speaker dealing with among other things, the topic of overcoming adversity and “disability.” He is a PhD student in the Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Education program at Michigan State University. For more information please visit [www.paulartale.com](http://www.paulartale.com) or follow him on twitter @PaulArtale.

## **SCD NEWSLETTER CALENDAR:**

**SPRING ARTICLE SUBMISSION DUE DATE: FEBRUARY 15, 2012**

### **COMMENTS CONCERNING THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON DISABILITY’S NEWSLETTER?**

**PLEASE CONTACT NEWSLETTER CO-CHAIRS: SARAH LAUX AT [SARAH.LAUX@GMAIL.COM](mailto:SARAH.LAUX@GMAIL.COM) OR  
DALE O’NEILL AT [DMONEILL@UNO.EDU](mailto:DMONEILL@UNO.EDU)**