

10/6/09

Dear Western family,

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month, and this year's theme is "Expectation + Opportunity = Full Participation." This theme captures Western's commitment to continually work toward an accessible and inclusive environment for students, faculty, staff, and visitors with disabilities.

Western shares the expectation that people with disabilities will be full participants in the educational, cultural, recreational, and social life of the university, the same expectation we have for all of our students, faculty, and staff. Western also works to provide the opportunity for people with disabilities to fully participate, through classroom and testing accommodations, adaptive technologies, counseling, and other means. We strive to assure that a person's disability is not an insurmountable barrier to getting the most out of their time at Western, whether that time is four years pursuing an undergraduate degree, a decades-long career as a member of our staff or faculty, or an afternoon workshop in one of our conference rooms.

We're proud of those who have taken advantage of the opportunities provided and met the expectation of full participation. Students with disabilities have succeeded in the classroom, participated in extracurricular activities, served in leadership roles, and otherwise embraced their roles as Western students. Twenty students were sworn into the new Alpha Delta Alpha Honorary Society for academic excellence among students with disabilities this past spring. We applaud those people with disabilities who have found success at Western.

Western's Office of Disability Services (ODS), led by Michael Ritter, is where much of the hard work is done to provide these expectations and opportunities. ODS works with students, staff, faculty, and visitors to determine and implement appropriate and reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities. They advise faculty members on working with those students. They advocate for those with disabilities while encouraging them to develop a sense of independence and responsibility.

We're grateful to the work of ODS, but Western's commitment must go beyond a small office. A truly accessible and inclusive environment requires the cooperation of every faculty member, every staff member, and every student who encounters a person with a disability. I hope all of us will take time this month to celebrate the successes of those who have overcome adversity while reflecting on ways that we can ensure the full participation of all on our campus.

Sincerely,

Bob Vartabedian