

# *Pathways to Possibilities*

*Summer 2009 Edition*

## The Office of Disability Services (ODS) Newsletter


Missouri Western State University

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\* A note from the author, editor, publisher, Mike Ritter...Okay, so I am pretty aware that this newsletter is not very attractive. You may have noticed that it is basically a Word doc with a few colors and fancy, shmancy fonts thrown in for good measure. All I can say is that I am extremely busy this summer and I thought it was more important to get the information out in a timely manner rather than spending time learning how to make it pretty! I hope you find the following articles informative and maybe even a tad bit entertaining. Happy Reading,



(Hey, there's some of that fancy shmancy stuff right there!)

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### *Agenstein/Remington Accessible Parking –*

You may have noticed that the Agenstein/Remington (A/R) construction and renovation project is moving right along. What you may not have noticed is the new semi-circular driveway/parking lot that is being constructed on the north side.

For many years, people with disabilities have had very few options for accessible parking at Agenstein. There were only 3 parking spaces on the west side of the building near the loading dock. This was less than optimal to say the least. It was quite a trek from the west side of Agenstein to the accessible entrance on the north side of the building. Not to mention that having parking spaces for people with disabilities right next to a loading dock is never a good idea!

When the new parking lot for A/R is completed it will be fully accessible and will be directly connected to the accessible entrance on the north side. The entire parking lot, which will include 16 fully accessible parking spaces, will be designated as “accessible parking” for people with disabilities. This will greatly improve access to our math and science facilities for our students, staff, faculty, and visitors with disabilities. The parking lot is also being constructed in such a way that buses will be able to pull up to the front door to load and unload passengers. This will be especially nice when we have high school math and science classes visit our campus. This is a great example of how improving access for people with disabilities, improves access for everyone!

Needless to say, I am very proud that we were able to persuade the *powers that be* of the importance of this component of the A/R project. Most of the credit goes to Ellen Kisker who came to work in the middle of the ice storm last year to make sure the accessible parking lot was not dropped from the original plans. Thanks Ellen!

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### *Missouri Department of Conservation Project –*

Last November I submitted a proposal on behalf of the ADA committee to the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) requesting accessibility improvements for their facilities and grounds located on McCarthy Drive. The MDC classrooms, labs, and pond are used every semester by our Biology Department for the purposes of hands-on, experiential learning. Having these facilities within a stone’s throw of the rest of Western’s campus is a huge asset but the MDC property does present some challenges to students with physical disabilities.

The first challenge is that there is no accessible route connecting our campus to the MDC property which means that some students with mobility impairments are forced to navigate McCarthy Drive using their wheelchair or scooter in order to access the MDC property. (I know of several students who have had to do this and it is just the sort of thing that is graying and thinning my hair!) I digress. This is not only an accessibility issue but a risk management and liability issue as well. My philosophy is that wheelchairs, scooters and automobile traffic should never share the same route.

The second challenge is that the pond which is located to the east of the MDC Regional Office building, is not accessible for people with mobility impairments. The steep, grassy slopes which create a natural watershed and are perfect for filling the pond with water, are not so great for

some of our students, staff, faculty and visitors with various physical disabilities.

The proposal I submitted called for the construction of a paved path that would connect the MDC parking lot with our Commons area located behind the residence halls. This would create a safe passageway for our students to access the MDC property. The proposal also called for the construction of a fully accessible, paved path that would provide access to and around the pond.

Harold Kerns, Site Administrator for the MDC facility submitted the proposal on my behalf to the budgetary committee for review and approval for the 2009 fiscal year. Earlier this month, I received word from Mr. Kerns that, while the project has been approved, it will likely not be funded until 2010 or 2011. Obviously, I am glad that the proposal was approved but I am discouraged that it was not funded.

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### *Changes to Note Taking Services –*

Over the past few years it has become increasingly clear that my Note Taker program is no longer working the way it should. There are too many issues to discuss in the context of this article, so I will highlight just a couple.

First and foremost, I do not have the funds to hire Note Takers so I have been relying on student volunteers to fill these positions. While many of our volunteers have proven to be outstanding Note Takers, some have failed to meet their obligations and the students who needed the service suffered the consequences.

The second issue is that MWSU is mandated by the ADA to insure that students with disabilities have equal access to **all** of the information given during the course of a class lecture. Note Takers are only able to provide a copy of what *they* wrote down and what *they* believed was important. In essence, we were providing access to a classmate's notes rather than access to the entire class lecture. If the Note Taker missed the information, then the student needing the notes missed the information as well. If the Note Taker was absent, then in effect, the student needing the notes was absent as well.

So what can you do as an instructor to help resolve this dilemma? There are several things that may be helpful:

- 1) Allow students to record lectures.

2) Use Power Point presentations and allow students to have access to those files prior to the next class or print off copies of the slides for the students who need them.

3) Allow students to utilize technologies such as a personal laptop, Alpha Smart, or Smart Pen to capture the lecture materials.

\* Remember, whatever you do to improve the classroom experience for a student with a disability, will very likely improve the classroom experience for every student in your class.

There will always be instances where a Note Taker is still the best option. When this happens, the ODS will be responsible for hiring and training a student to serve in this capacity. However, Note Takers will become an exceptional rather than normative means of fulfilling the accommodation of access to lecture materials.

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### *ADA Honor Society –*

The *Alpha Delta Alpha (ADA) Honor Society for Students with Disabilities* finally became a reality during the spring semester. Over twenty students met the criteria for membership and 16 of those students chose to become members. To be eligible for membership, students must be in good academic standing, must have earned a minimum of 60 credit hours toward their degree, and must have amassed a minimum cumulative grade point average of 2.9. Inductees received a membership certificate and lapel pin at the ADA Honor Society Reception in April. I hope to hold several fundraising events throughout the year to raise the necessary funds to sustain this program.

*Financial donations to support this program are always welcome ☺*

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### *Where in the World is Don Winkie?*

If you are extremely observant, you may have noticed that our Adaptive Technology Specialist, Don Winkie has relocated from the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor to the ground floor of the Hearnes Learning Center. Not only did Don change the physical location of his office, he is something of a division hopper as well. Previously, Don worked in Student Services under the

direction of Ellen Kisker and Judy Grimes. As of July 1<sup>st</sup>, he now works in the Instructional Media Center under the direction of Cori Criger and Gordon Mapley.

Don needed to relocate his base of operations because he had simply run out of space. Over the years he has really expanded the services he provides which also meant that he would eventually outgrow his tiny cramped office on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of the library. When I noticed that Don and his work/study students were literally bumping into and tripping over each other, I knew the time for him to move had arrived.

I also thought that it made sense for Don to work in a division that is technology-based so that he could be surrounded with like-minded, creative thinkers and problem solvers. Don would frequently visit my office bursting at the seams with information and enthusiasm about some new product that was going to revolutionize his ability to help students. I never had the heart to tell him that I had no idea what he was talking about (but I think he really knew). I would just sit quietly and politely grin and nod as he explained the benefits of the latest and greatest software package. Needless to say, Don is now in the right place surrounded by the right people who speak the same language and I am really happy for him.

Congratulations Don!

\* For those of you who may not know, Don's primary function is to convert printed text to electronic text for students who have print-related disabilities such as dyslexia, visual impairments, and reading-related learning disabilities.

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*Mike on the Mic*



*Mike on the Mic is an op/ed section of the newsletter that was designed by my former student intern to allow me the space to rant about a particular topic. The topic for this edition is...*

### *Optional Accommodations?*

The following scenario plays out every semester so I can predict with reasonable accuracy that it will happen again during the fall semester of 2009. I will have a handful of students stop by my office to discuss a situation they are having with one of their instructors. Usually the crux of

the situation is a misunderstanding by an instructor that accommodations are optional. The most frequent comments I hear from students are:

“My instructor won’t allow me to record lectures.”

“My instructor won’t allow me to use the Testing Center.”

“My instructor said she does not believe in learning disabilities.”

“My instructor said he did not have to provide accommodations.”

“This is college; I am not going to baby you or hold your hand.”

“You are an adult now; it is time to grow up.”

“My instructor discussed my disability out in the open for the whole class to hear.”

Admittedly I am only hearing one side of the story but I do hear these comments often enough that I feel that I need to address them. So, here is my attempt to respond to some of these comments.

- Accommodations that have been formally approved by the ODS **are not** optional unless the student makes that decision.
- Accommodations **are not** merely requests, suggestions or recommendations.
- Accommodations **are not** things we do because we are nice people or because we feel sorry for a student.
- Accommodations **are** required by federal law as a provision of equal opportunity and equal access under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA).
- Accommodations **should not** be negotiated between faculty and students. Students have already gone through a negotiating process in the ODS. Please keep in mind that the ODS is the gatekeeper for approving accommodations. It is the responsibility of the Disability Services Coordinator to determine the reasonableness legitimacy of each a request.
- Any refusal to provide accommodations must first be discussed with the Disability Services Coordinator and/or the ADA Coordinator. Ellen Kisker currently serves as the ADA Coordinator.
- Failing to provide reasonable accommodations can result in an investigation by the Office of Civil Rights and/or legal action against an institution.
- For students whose disability prohibits them from taking their own notes, they should be allowed to use a digital recorder or tape recorder in the classroom to capture the lecture materials.

- If a student has been approved to use the Testing Center, it is his or her choice to take advantage of this accommodation. Students should not be discouraged or prohibited from using the Testing Center.
- Learning disabilities are no less real than having a broken bone. They are just harder to accept as real because we cannot see them. If we could peel back the layers of the brain, we would find a physical place where the learning disability resides.
- Last but certainly not least, a student's disability is never to be discussed out in the open where others are present. This information is confidential and should be treated with respect and discretion.

I understand the whole notion of providing accommodations may be a tad bit confusing. I work with accommodation requests everyday and it is still pretty confusing to me. So, please feel free to contact me if you have any questions regarding the accommodations that have been approved by my office.

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### *On the Horizon – 5K Run, Walk and Roll*

I am in the beginning stages of organizing a 5K fundraiser to help offset some of the expenses related to the ADA Honor Society as well as other disability-related programs that I would like to bring to our campus. I am shooting for the first Saturday in October. I would like to host the event on campus if I can map out a scenic 5K route that is reasonably accessible.

I need your help. I will not be able to pull this off by myself. If you have any interest in helping organize a 5K for a very worthy cause, please contact me ASAP. Or if you just want to donate a big ole pile o' cash and save me the trouble, that's even better ☺. Seriously, I am looking for volunteer time keepers, people to hand out refreshments, people to direct traffic, people to manage registrations, etc.

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### *A Little Shot of Inspiration –*

*“Deep within man dwell those slumbering powers; powers that would astonish him, that he never dreamed of possessing; forces that would revolutionize his life if aroused and put into action.” ~Orison Swett Marden*

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**Just a FRIENDLY reminder...** If you have not already done so, please click on the link below to access the ACCESS survey. The results of this survey will help me improve services for students with disabilities. Here is the link: <http://www.ahead.org/survey/access/mwsu/index.php>  
The user name is MWSU and the password is "Disability". Please note that the password is case sensitive. Thank you for participating in this research.

I hope you have found something in this newsletter that was interesting and informative. If you have story ideas or article submissions, please send them my way. If you have any questions or comments about any of the information in the newsletter, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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Enjoy the Rest of Your Summer and Keep Pursuing *Your* Pathway to Possibilities,



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