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Invisible Disabilities

"I don't know if she really even has a disability"

"Everyone has anxiety in college. Why is he any different?"

"She just needs to try harder"

"If she would just focus, she would be fine"

These are all comments I have heard over the past six months in regard to students with invisible disabilities. When people think of disabilities, they often describe a person in a wheelchair, a guide dog or someone who is deaf. On the contrary, disabilities can span across all areas. Many of these disabilities are apparent in some situations, while not in

others. It is because of this inconsistency that people make statements such as those in the beginning of this story. People with invisible disabilities often face more discrimination because of lack of understanding.

In this issue, we will try to help our readers understand the validity of invisible disabilities (ID) and how some of them are characterized.

The Federation of Invisible Disabilities define ID as a condition that is not readily visible to the eye but does affect the individuals' ability to learn, interact with others, be a contributing member of society and otherwise participate fully

in life. Behavioral and emotional difficulties often follow and may become the focus of attention. Some of these disabilities include but are not limited to ADD/HD, Learning Disabilities, Psychiatric Disabilities, Aspergers Syndrome, Tourette's Syndrome and Chronic Pain. Although Invisible Disabilities range in classification, they all have one thing in common. They are very real to the people trying to live with them.



Breaking Down Barriers:

- 7-10% of all incoming college freshmen have a qualified disability of some kind
- Only 20% of those students with disabilities disclose them and seek accommodations due to their fear of discrimination

Campus Improvements

There are so many things going on around campus that it is difficult to highlight just one for this issue. Several people from a variety of departments have joined the campus wide initiative to increase disability awareness at UTC. One of these collaborative projects that focuses primarily on students with invisible disabilities is the Academic Coaching partnership. Academic coaching is a service similar to tutoring, but not based on content areas. While tutoring focuses on math, writing or science; academic coaching focuses on learning how to learn. Some topics covered by coaches might include time management, note taking skills, test preparation and reading comprehension. This is the first semester we have attempted this program in partnership with another department. Dr. Janetta Bradley from the Teacher Prep. Academy teaches a 400 level Education course and was gracious in welcoming this challenge. In the beginning of

the course, the staff from the Office for Students with Disabilities spoke to her students and explained, in somewhat overwhelming terms, what academic coaching entails. Dr. Bradley then made coaching hours a requirement for the course. Students from the ED 400 course were paired up with students registered with our office who volunteered for this project. Other than telling the ED 400 students the required number of hours and writing expectations, we left the expectations open. We have been so pleasantly surprised at the level of professionalism and commitment shown by these students. After the initial hesitation of having so much freedom, they took this challenge and made it a huge success.

Both parts of the partnership realized how individualized academic coaching needs to

be. There is not a cookie-cutter approach to this which made this project an incredible learning experience for everyone involved.

The coaches took an active interest in the lives of some students living with disabilities in their college community. They did not only meet with them once a week, but also voiced concerns about academic progress, mental health issues and accessibility problems. These students developed their own curriculum based on their students' needs, reflected on their sessions and made changes when needed.

This project had a positive impact on all people involved. If you would be interested in taking part in this program in the future, please contact us at 4006.

The Myths Of Mental Illness

Dr. Nancy Badger

In her text on disability studies, Dr. Julie Smart states that those with mental illness experience the greatest amount of stigmatization of any disability group. People with mental illness have difficulty in society due to several factors. First, mental illness is considered an "invisible disability." This means that many times the person looks "normal" or "typical". Therefore society expects that individual to react, perform, and communicate in the same ways as people without disabilities. The second reason why people with mental illness are stigmatized is because of the old fables and misguided perceptions about mental illness. Here are just a few of the myths that people hold regarding mental illness.

-MYTH: Mental illness can be stopped by the individual if he/she has enough will power, guts, gumption or any other strong characteristic. **FACT:** Many types of mental illness are caused by biological imbalances that occur and have

nothing to do with the person's character. **FACT:** If a person grows up in a depressed or anxious home, that person's body may "learn" to be depressed or anxious. Both of these types of people need professional help to adjust to or regulate their mental illness.

-MYTH: people with mental illness are violent and should be feared. **FACT:** We believe that people with mental illness are violent because we have been shown a small percentage of people who are mentally ill, and also happen to be violent. The media routinely does an excellent job at perpetuating this myth. If someone with a mental illness does a good thing like graduate from college, keep a job, pay taxes, etc. we never hear about it. However, if someone with a mental illness does something wrong, it is in all the news. Because of our court system we routinely hear about use of the insanity defense. We never hear about the thousands of people with mental illness who, through the

use of medication and counseling, maintain productive and satisfying lives.

-MYTH: People who use counseling or medication to help them are weak and cannot handle their own problems. **FACT:** Those who have come to counseling or used medication to maintain their mental health are insightful, strong individuals. They have sought out resources to help themselves recover from an illness in the same way people would go to the doctor for cancer, diabetes etc. They are more insightful than many because they have come through the denial that their lives are just fine, and have been honest with themselves in admitting that they have difficulties.

If you or someone you know is struggling in silence with a mental illness, please contact the Counseling and Career Planning Center at 425-4438. We are located in the University Center, room 338.

AT Corner

Welcome to the Adaptive Technology Corner! The Office for Students with Disabilities has recently launched a campus-wide initiative to not only raise awareness about people with disabilities, but also to heighten the accessibility of our campus in general. As the Adaptive Technology Coordinator, my central objective is to implement an accessible computer lab within the Office for Students with Disabilities. This lab will be universally accessible, meaning all students will be able to access the computers, regardless of

physical, mental or learning disabilities.

After completing our own lab, we plan to take that initiative across campus. Our goal is to have at least one universal workstation in each and every computer lab at UTC. The major components of such a workstation include text to speech (screen-reading) software, screen-magnifying software, and software that assists with grammar and language for students writing papers as well as other hardware components to make them more

physically accessible.

I am enthusiastic about helping to create a learning environment that is conducive for all students, regardless of disability. If you are interested in learning more about adaptive technology and the vital role it plays for so many of our students, please feel free to contact me at 4006.

-Christie Parris

Adaptive Technology Coordinator



Living with an Invisible Disability

Michelle Rigler

The following interview was conducted with a student registered with the Office for Students with Disabilities. This student has an acquired invisible disability and is currently a junior at UTC. We would like to thank him for taking part in this interview and for being so candid. This interview was conducted on March 14, 2005.

What type of disability are you living with?

I have a traumatic brain injury. I was showing off for a girl and was driving recklessly. I drove head on into two trees. I broke my skull on the steering wheel and the windshield. I lost the entire left frontal lobe of my brain. That is the part that controls speech. The accident happened about 1/4 mile from the girl's house.

At what age did you acquire the disability?

The accident happened on October 19, 2001. I was 18 years old.

What type of negativity have you had to overcome since the accident?

The biggest thing I have had to overcome is looking down on myself. I was very smart before the accident and now I struggle a lot. My mom had to stop working for six months to take care of me and my dad lost a lot of business while I was in the hospital. Everything pretty much came to a stop when I got into my accident. My

family lost almost everything. They are still paying for it.

What did you have to go through to get to where you are now?

I was in a coma for 29 days. I was partially paralyzed for about two months. The entire right side of my body was paralyzed. After I woke up out of the coma, I had to go through Rehabilitation for six months. I had to learn to talk, walk and write left handed. I had to learn to do most things with my left side. The most difficult part was Occupational Therapy. The main focus of my therapy was on memory. I still have a very hard time with short term memory.

What parts of your life have changed since acquiring your disability?

Just about everything has changed. My personal life has changed dramatically. I struggled with depression for a long time. I questioned why I was still alive and why my life was worth living. I didn't really want to live anymore. I also still struggle with depth perception, so sometimes I walk into walls. I also am deaf in my left ear now.

What has helped you overcome the impact of your disability?

Personally, I have a good support system. My girlfriend has been a lot of help. I was on Zoloft for awhile to help with my depression, and time is slowly healing my memory problems. As far as school goes, I have been able to ask for and accept help more easily.

"I was showing off for a girl and driving recklessly ... the accident happened about 1/4 mile from the girl's house"

The Office for Students with Disabilities has given me a lot of opportunities. They have offered me help with studying, books on tape, tutors and technology. It was really hard to ask for help at first, but once I did, things got better.

What advice do you have for other students in similar situations?

Give yourself some healing time, then when you come back, seek out help right away. Get a psychological test done to see if you have any kind of chemical imbalance that meds could help you with. Come to OSD to see what they have to offer. They can help ease the educational process. Education is so important. You don't have to give it up because you have an injury. Take advantage of every opportunity is presented and see what works best for you.

*This student will be providing support to students with newly acquired brain injuries.

Just For Fun

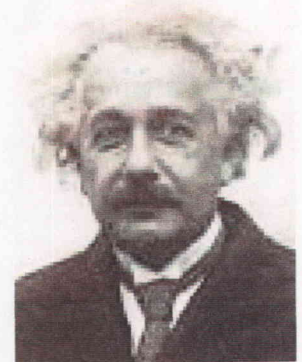
Trying to decipher the meaning of a textbook chapter in a timely manner is never fun for a person with dyslexia. For the sake of understanding what a person goes through, the following is an excerpt from a widely used textbook as it might appear to someone with dyslexia. Try to read this sec-

tion and name what department uses this book.

"We stubby the arts aud their historg decanse they teach ns agont onr owu creative exyres-sious aub those of onr gast. Uu the west, the major visnal arts pall into three progd cote-pories: qictnes, scnlgtre, aud

architectnr."

Dyslexia presents in many forms. To represent these, many have been combined in this example. Dyslexia, just as any learning disability, is highly individualized and would need to be approached with that in mind.



Einstein was both a genius and a dyslexic. Intelligence has very little to do with dyslexia

Office for Students with Disabilities

615 McCallie Avenue
Dept 2953
Chattanooga, TN 37403

Phone: 423-425-4006
Fax: 423-425-2288

For any questions regarding invisible disabilities or to schedule a training to help your department become more embracing of individual's difference, please call 425-4006 to schedule a meeting time.

Learning Opportunities

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| <i>*Georgia AHEAD</i> | <i>Savannah, GA</i> | <i>March 21-25</i> |
| <i>Spring Conference</i> | | |
| <i>*TN AHEAD</i> | <i>Nashville, TN</i> | <i>April 6-8</i> |
| <i>*PSI</i> | <i>Portland, ME</i> | <i>June 7-11</i> |
| <i>*SALT Conference</i> | <i>Tucson, AZ</i> | <i>September 22-24</i> |
| <i>*Dyslexia International</i> | <i>Denver, CO</i> | <i>November 9-12</i> |



Legal Corner



One of the most talked about cases dealing with a student with an invisible disability is the Guckenberger vs. Boston University case, a case that was first filed with the United States District Court for the District of Massachusetts in 1996 and, after two years of deliberation and appeals, was ultimately decided in 1998. This case became nationally recognized because of some of the comments made by the president of the university. These comments denounced the legitimacy of a group of students with learning disabilities. His comments were in conflict with university policy, which had established policies to accommodate students with all disabilities, including learning disabilities. The university did fail however, in developing a clear policy regarding the limits of the accommodations.

The case involved Elizabeth Guckenberger, a student with a documented learning disability. Ms. Guckenberger was denied a waiver from the foreign language requirement that was part of her program. Her attorneys alleged that not being allowed a course substitution violated the "reasonable accommoda-

tion" stipulation of federal and state anti-discrimination laws. After a 10-day bench trial presided over by Judge Patti Saris, the Court concluded that "neither the ADA nor the Rehabilitation Act requires a university to provide course substitutions that the university rationally concludes would alter an essential part of its academic program."

Although the decision did not go in the plaintiff's direction, it led to the conclusion that a course substitution could be a reasonable means of providing an accommodation. The plaintiff's argument was partially successful due, in large part, to the Court's conclusion that Jon Westling, the President of BU, did not engage in any form of "reasoned deliberation as to whether modifications would change the essential academic standards of the liberal arts curriculum."

Following this decision, the faculty of Boston University were required to

deliberate and prove to the court system that the foreign language element was an **essential** to the academic standards of the liberal arts program. After long and arduous meetings, the university responded as to why the foreign language requirement was essential. This reasoning was supported by the courts because the task force developed a well defined policy that dealt with course substitutions/waivers.

This case reiterates the processes an institution of higher education must have in place in order to create an environment that supports learning for all otherwise qualified students with disabilities.

Information for this article was gathered from:

<http://www.portals.emory.edu/act/cases.html>