

Office for Students with Disabilities

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Student Interest Group is Born

By: Michelle Rigler

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As a part of the growth plan for the Office for Students with Disabilities last year, it became clear to me that one area that we were still weak, was developing ways for our students to become very involved with the university. We had students that were in fraternities and sororities, students that were in plays and played music, but there was nothing developed for the students to be involved with our office other than the classroom accommodations.

We knew we wanted to develop a student alliance group, we wanted to develop some mentoring possibilities, we wanted to have a safe environment for students to discuss emotional issues that happen on campus

and we wanted a forum for students to meet with other groups on campus to increase the involvement of students with disabilities. In this beginning stage, we have combined all the things we are working towards into one group that meets monthly.

The Student interest Group meets each month in Frist Hall to discuss internship possibilities, problems with specific courses and solutions to those problems, leadership possibilities and trainings on Adaptive Technology. Recently, we have begun hosting visitors from other groups on campus to discuss the involvement levels of students with disabilities. Most recently, Miles Ledford

came to our meeting to discuss the possibilities of involving students with disabilities in outdoor adventure recreation types of activities.

Out of the most recent meeting, the students became very excited about writing articles for our newsletter. They have things to say and felt that this is the best way to have their voices heard. The remaining articles in this issue of the OSD Newsletter have been written by students registered with OSD.

If you are interested in meeting with our student interest group, please feel free to contact OSD or Michelle Rigler directly to find out the date of the next meeting.

The Washington Center

By: Jonathan Hixson

Last spring, I went to Washington, D.C. on an internship program, and worked in Congress through the Cooperative Education program here at UTC. The experience was amazing. The program I went through placed all of its students in apartments in and around D.C, all of which were one two three blocks from a subway station, all of which were handicap accessible. Everywhere in D.C. had sidewalks, and with the subway it made everywhere reachable by foot – a complete liberation in comparison to Chattanooga. I felt completely independent.

The internship program allowed me to get some job experience; I've had limited experience on the job, and this gave me the opportunity to learn various skills in addition to discovering the necessary aspects of professional attitude and behavior. Not to mention that having an internship with a government office, or something the equivalent, looks excellent on your resume or Grad school application. Being a student with a disability, internships and other possibilities are not always the first thing students think of because of accessibility issues. This program has an entire portion developed primarily for ensuring equal access for the participants that have disabilities.

The program itself is called the Washington Center, an organization that helps students gain internships in government and non-profit organizations. I managed to get in easily and received a \$7,400

scholarship due to disabilities. This opportunity is not limited to people with disabilities and there are an amazing number of possibilities of internship placements. If interested, contact Hugh Prevost in the Cooperative Education office at 425-4735, or go to www.twc.edu to get information directly from the program.



The Misunderstanding of Mental Illness

By: James Cartee

Many people in today's society do not acknowledge the existence of mental illnesses. They are unaware and uneducated to the circumstances that might cause someone to act in a different behavior or suddenly be out of the ordinary. Normal patrons of everyday life may randomly show extreme acts of irritability, sluggishness, sadness, or personal withdrawal. This is seen as normal adjustments to normal changes in life. When people judge those who change quickly, ignorance on their part is the cause for the assumptions that form.

Mental illnesses are defined as "diseases that cause mild to severe disturbances in thinking, perception and behavior." One would think common sense would be that the brain becomes sick just like the rest of the body. Headlines in the news about a murder or serious crime often mention the act as a result of a mental disorder. When those who are mentally balanced with medication do charitable works for the community, nothing of their illness is ever mentioned. Media in society only depicts negativities

of mental sickness, thus causing people to be afraid of what they do not know or of what they do not understand.

Distorted information leads to discrimination for many who have no control on their changes of behavior. The answer to this universal problem is education. Even seminars for one or two hours can greatly increase the amount of awareness people have for the mentally ill. Marriages may be saved. Suicide and school dropout rates may lower. Instead of going to jail with no attempts at rehabilitation, the accused can get the medical attention they need. Education leads to a better understanding of psychological abnormalities, and thus creates a better life for those who have them.

In one year, more than 54 million Americans are affected by a mental illness each year. Statistically speaking, every single person will deal with a mental disorder during that person's lifetime. In today's world, life is already hard for most people. If people in society will simply educate themselves about mental disabilities, the struggle

of those who become psychologically sick will become less. Ignorance about the matter will diminish, and life will become better for those who are suddenly diagnosed with a disease of the brain.

Please take some time to educate yourself about mental illnesses. You can greatly affect those around you in the quest to learn more about how our brains work. Please visit the following websites:

www.nami.org www.acap.org

www.DBSAlliance.org

www.nmha.org

If you have specific questions about working with a student with a mental illness in your class, please contact Michelle Rigler at the Office for Students with Disabilities at 425-4008.

If you have concerns about mental illness in general, know of someone who needs support or feel that you need support, please contact Dr. Nancy Badger at The Counseling and Career Planning Center at 425-4438.



Have no Fear-Science Lab is Here

By: Jillian Shelton

It is very scary for students with disabilities to enter a Lab Science Class. It is very frustrating and hard for us to get involved and interested in a lab. For an example, students who are blind or legally blind cannot see what is happening in the lab, and those students who are unable to have hands on experience can look but not touch the experiments. So, it is clear why students with disabilities are so scared of lab Sciences.

I know that my first experience with a lab was very unnerving. It was a Chemistry lab, and it had to be the hardest class for me. I am legally blind so Chemistry was not a walk in the park to begin with. As hard as it is for people who can see to pass a chemistry lab, it seemed impossible for me. I eventually had to withdraw from that class.

My second attempt to a lab science was General Science 111 and the lab General Science 181. Because I had already tried a lab and did not do very well, I was not looking for-

ward to this class. I knew that the subject matter was going to be a little easier for me to understand without sight. But I still had to find a way to measure with a ruler and use beakers. At first my lab professor was not very helpful. I believe that he was just as frustrated as I was. Neither of us knew how to make a legally blind student able to access the information needed in the lab. It took some creative approaches, the involvement of OSD, my lecture professor and the lab teachers all working together to figure out that it is not only possible, but I could get the exact same information, just in a different way.

All the problems did not stop at measuring; I also needed to find a lab partner. This is not as easy as it seems, especially for a student with a disability. Finally, after two labs with no partner and no way to read the measurements, I had to get my courage up and ask two strangers to be my partner. To my surprise they agreed. After that my labs were smooth sailing. My partners would read me the measurements and measure the water

beakers, while I did all the formulas and calculations. Towards the end of the semester I even had to help my partners to understand different formulas. The General Science lab turned out to be a success, and I came out of it with a B.

The moral of my story is no class is impossible, not even lab classes. A student with a disability can pass any lab they just need courage. They need courage to ask for help, and courage to move on even though assignments might be difficult. Sometimes, professors and lab teachers need to have the courage to ask for help, too. All students with disabilities should get rid of their fears of lab science classes because they can be passed. Everyone can pass them and that includes those in a wheelchair or those with vision problems. You just might need to ask for a little help and that is OK!

Living and Working with a Guide Dog

By: Amanda Jones

A wet nose presses in to my hand and I jerk awake. This is the wake up call that I get every morning from my new found friend, seeing eye dog Angus. Thus begins our working day. I get up, take him out, and feed him then I do what I need to do. When we are both ready I put his harness on and we take off to wherever we have to go that day.

I would like to explain some of the commands that I use during the day, as well as explain why it is so important to let a working dog still be a dog. When I first went in to class to get Angus I had absolutely no idea what was ahead of me in class. I had heard about other dog handlers and what it was like for them in class, but I didn't want to go in there already knowing what to expect. The waiting was the most exciting and the longest part of the process. When I was finally presented Angus I knew it was just the beginning of the process.

As Angus and I get ready to go out I pick up his harness and tell him forward. He steps forward with an air of confidence that makes me smile. As we reach the end of the street I say Angus left and he smoothly turns around the corner guiding me around the pole at the corner. We continue on and we begin to settle in to our usual rhythm both knowing what the other needs and wants even before the other

has to voice it in commands.

Now, this isn't always a day in the park. I have to correct him when he makes a mistake. His most notorious mistake is to try and say hello to people without me knowing. When I notice him trying to get attention from other people, somebody is with me to let me know, I give him a sharp Phooey (or no) and a sharp correction with the leash. The scolding usually does the trick better, but sometimes a correction is the only thing that will get his attention. When the mistake is corrected praise is lavishly given letting Angus know that he has done what I wanted him to do.

When we have completed our task or returned home I let him off both harness and leash in the house. This gives him the chance to be a dog. Though he is not a pet he has to have his play time. If this isn't given he will burn out easier or will become lazy (actually he doesn't like to work if I don't let him play). Play time usually involves tossing a ball, playing with his bone, or just lying on the floor so I can rub his belly. The last is his favorite and he will let me scratch him for hours if I wish.

This is just a small window in to what I do to make my dog team work. It isn't always easy, but the good times overrule the rest for it is always a rewarding experience in the end.

Helpful manners when you see Angus and myself

- Please don't pet Angus when he is on harness
- If I am walking right toward you, please step aside. I can't see you and Angus is still learning
- Please don't try to sneak a pet with him. I may not be able to see you, but next time, Angus will take us way out of our way to find you again.
- If you have questions about Angus, my name is Amanda just ask me.



Student Interest Meetings

Office for Students with Disabilities
University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

615 McCallie Ave
Dept 2953
Chattanooga, TN 37403

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

Our next Student Interest Group is scheduled for March 29

At 2:00 PM in the conference room in Frist Hall (Rm 101)

If you are interested in presenting something to the group, please contact Michelle Rigler at 425-4008 to get on the agenda. If you are interested in visiting the group, please feel free to drop in.

Upcoming Events

3/25/2006	Day Long	Canoeing Trip	Contact Miles Ledford
3/29/2006	2:00 PM	Student Interest Group Meeting	Special guest includes Mrs. Wheelchair Tennessee
4/10/006	6:00 PM	Walt Disney World Summer Internship Presentation	Contact Elizabeth Bell
4/24/2006		Last Day of Classes	
4/25/2006		Assisted Study Groups	
4/26-5/2/2006		Finals	
5/5-5/8/2006		PEPNET Conference	
5/16/2006		“ Understanding Persons with Asperger’s Syndrome” Conference	

Living with CP

By: Matt St. Charles

CP or Cerebral Palsy is a condition where you muscles do not work as well as they should. Some cases may be severe where you cannot stand or walk. There are other cases like mine that are milder and only one side or part of your body is affected.

When people come up to me they are hesitant to ask me about my condition. I tell them that they can ask me anything that they want, and I will answer it truthfully. The reason that I tell people this is because I believe that it is part of my responsibility to educate them about my condition. They do not want to hurt my feelings so that is why I think most people are afraid to talk to me or anyone else that has a physical disability. If I don't educate you about my condition, then no one else will.

I have mild cerebral palsy on my left side only. The activities

that cause me the most trouble are simple physical activities. For instance, I may or may not be able to get in a building depending on if there are stairs, and how steep might they be, I can walk, but it sometimes takes me a little longer to get from place to place. In order to compensate for this I have to get to campus earlier than most of the other students. It also takes me a little longer to write, and I also have a hard time doing two things and once. If my phone rings and I answer it, I cannot talk on the phone and write down what the person is telling me on the other end. The reason that I have difficulty doing this is because I have to answer the phone with my right hand and write with my right hand at the same time.

You might be wondering why I am in school at UTC, if I have some difficulty doing simple activities. The reason that I am at UTC is because I want to change the way disabled students and adults are perceived. I want all my professors and

fellow students to know that we can do something just as well as anyone else. We just might need extra time on tests, or be able to take a tape recorder to class. I would also like to be a roll model for the next generation of disabled adults, and if I could give them one piece of advice, it would be to follow your dreams because anything is possible. It just might take you a little bit longer to get there.

