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History of Disability Services for Students (DSS): 1971-2007

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University of North Dakota

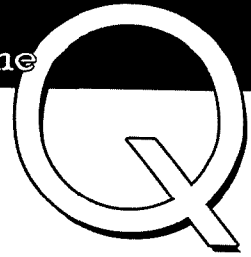
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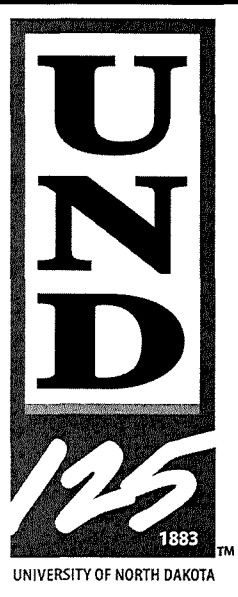
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UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA
1883-2008
CELEBRATING 125 YEARS

HISTORY OF
DISABILITY SERVICES FOR
STUDENTS (DSS)
1971-2007

Judy Sannes, Assistant Director, DSS



**HISTORY OF
DISABILITY SERVICES FOR STUDENTS
1971 - 2007
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA**

Prior to the passage of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which mandated non-discrimination for people with disabilities in any educational institution receiving federal money, people with disabilities did not typically enroll in college and universities. They were often institutionalized, remained in the family home, sent to residential schools or educated in segregated classrooms in the public schools. In Grand Forks, elementary children went to school in classrooms at the Rehabilitation Hospital, or lived in residential facilities such as the N.D. School for the Blind, the School for the Deaf in Devils Lake or the Ann Carlson School for Crippled Children in Jamestown. Colleges and universities had little or no knowledge of how to serve students with disabilities, and many of their facilities and programs were not accessible. Few colleges in North Dakota had students with disabilities on their campuses, with the exception of the University of North Dakota.

In the late 1960's and early 70's, UND was awarded two federal grant programs, one of which laid the foundation for the University to become a national leader in accessible higher education. The first grant created Upward Bound, a program for educationally disadvantaged, low income and minority high school students. The second established Student Opportunity Programs or SOP, which had three components. One served educationally disadvantaged, low income, first generation and minority college students, the second students with disabilities and the third served veterans. The programs were housed in Chandler Hall, which had previously been occupied by the Art Department and was then a little worse for wear. The building was very old and had not been upgraded in years. The roof leaked in one office; the thermostats seemed to set themselves, without regard to the season, and some offices had brick walls and looked more like root cellars than office space. Staff and students were not the only occupants in Chandler. Mice ran up the bookshelves and under the coffee pot, and the secretaries soon learned it was a waste of time to get alarmed. The mice were quicker than the people and wiler than the traps.

One counselor was hired to work with each distinct population along with three secretaries, the Director Duane Lawrence and the assistant director. Nineteen students received disability related services at that time. In 1974,

Dr. Beulah Hedahl, Director of the Counseling Center and a SOP Advisory Board member, was instrumental in securing a second counselor. Kaye Becker, acting Vocational Rehabilitation Regional Administrator in Devils Lake, joined Darrell Farland, the first disability counselor hired. Darrell was a graduate of UND and knew first hand what going to college was like without accommodations and physical access. He recalled borrowing lecture notes from students and waiting in his wheelchair at curbs for students to help him down and across the street, so he could get to class.

Most of the students at UND had physical disabilities, e.g., cerebral palsy, spinal cord injuries, amputations or visual impairments. They came primarily from residential settings or transferred from Devils Lake Junior College, now Lake Region State College. The students had been educated adequately, but often lacked the breadth of social experience high school students without disabilities have. In addition to the educational supports and accommodations the students needed, the grant required SOP to sponsor cultural/social activities each semester, in order to give all three student populations opportunities to enhance their social skills, as well as participate in college social functions. In the 1970's the social trends in the U.S. did not encourage minority students and those with disabilities to mix with the majority white student population. Diversity programming was not yet a priority at the University. SOP's social activities afforded students with disabilities a comfortable and accepting group with whom to relax, as well as build a social network.

Accommodations and services provided to students included adapted testing, readers, taped textbooks, note takers, adapted testing, accessible transportation both on and off campus, arrangements for attendant care, priority status for housing and assistance with physical barriers. Students on work study funding were hired as "wheelchair pushers." They pushed students to class, helped them over curbs and carried them up steps when classes could not be moved to ground floor rooms. It's inconceivable today that the University would put employees and students in such precarious positions. However, those were the days of "Do What Works, While We Find a Better Solution."

The first van SOP used to transport students on campus and into the community was on loan from a student. Two planks were secured from Plant Services (now called Facilities), and accessible transportation or "para transit" was established at UND. The second van was purchased in part with coupons. Students who waited to see their counselors were asked if they would cut coupons and count them into packets of 50. Those students in the early days of the program had a special interest in seeing the program continue and grow. The disability services had a Student Advisory Board, and staff took students' input

and suggestions for improving the program very seriously. Most of the students had contributed in some way to the operation of the program, and they were “stakeholders” in every sense of the word.

The programs moved from Chandler to the first floor of McCannel Hall, which had been converted from a rehabilitation hospital to the campus student services building. The disability services was now located with other student service programs, which was a boon to DSS. It was much easier to collaborate and cooperate with other programs when housed in the same building. DSS also had the opportunity to help other departments become more accessible and more comfortable working with students with disabilities. The staff consisted of the Director Ron Gibbens, two counselors and an education specialist. The number of students increased and the kinds of disabilities expanded to include hearing impairments, deaf and learning disabilities.

In 1976, the disabilities component was awarded a Regional Educational Program for the Handicapped (REPH) grant. UND was one of only 14 colleges nationwide to receive this award, and recipients were seen as model programs demonstrating various ways students with disabilities could be effectively served on college campuses. The REPH grant placed UND’s disability services in an elite group of colleges, which included the University of Illinois at Urbana and Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio, both pioneers in serving college students with disabilities.

During that time, the disability services separated from SOP and took the name “Disabled Student Services” or “DSS.” The program remained co-located with Upward Bound and the minority/low income component of SOP, named Student Support Services. Ron Gibbens resigned as director to work full time with North Dakota Association for the Disabled (NDAD), which he and his wife founded. Kaye Becker was hired as director, and the staff grew to three counselors, a half time deaf education specialist/interpreter, a learning disability specialist who evaluated students for learning disabilities and provided one to one strategy instruction, a coordinator of adapted testing, taped texts and paratransit, a full time van driver, a part time driver/wheelchair athletics director and a career counselor who worked half time with DSS students and half time with the Counseling Center managing their career counseling program. DSS’s goal under the REPH grant was to recruit 80 physically disabled students from northwest Minnesota and North Dakota. By the end of the two year grant in 1978, DSS was serving 328 students with a 95% retention rate.

In 1977, the DSS staff began a major campaign to secure state funding. They contacted legislators and secured their assistance in conducting research and drafting bills for the 1979 legislative session. Their efforts paid off and in 1979, the North Dakota legislature approved state funding for DSS in the amount of \$252,700 bi-annually. To date, UND is the only NDUS college with a state budget. For years, UND was perceived as the four year college in North Dakota for “handicapped students.”

This turn of events had both positive and negative effects. DSS had a solid financial base and no longer relied on unpredictable grant funding. However, designating UND as the school for students with disabilities appeared to lessen the obligation of the other state colleges to become accessible. By default, rather than design, most of the students with disabilities enrolled at UND, whether or not they were prepared for or wanted a university level education. Vocational Rehabilitation, a federal and state funded program established to help people with disabilities receive job training and employment, funded many of the college students with disabilities, and advised many to attend UND. It would be years before students with disabilities had the same choices in programs and colleges as N.D. students without disabilities.

DSS had grown from a federally funded program serving nineteen students to a state funded program providing accommodations and disability related services to 300-350 students with a wide variety of disabilities. They had been ranked one of the ten best programs in the country by the U.S. Department of Education and had a national reputation for excellence. Students from all over the U.S. enrolled at UND because of their outstanding reputation. Student Support Services and Upward Bound moved to a separate location in McCannel Hall, and DSS took over all the space originally occupied by SOP.

The program’s mission had changed from one in which DSS was solely responsible for providing services to students with disabilities to one of assisting UND in carrying out its federally mandated responsibility to provide equal access to students with disabilities. More and more students were also being served by other student services offices. For example, during one round of budget cuts, DSS eliminated their tutoring program. From that time on, students with

disabilities have received tutoring at the Learning Center along with the general population. DSS gave their lift equipped van to the UND Transportation Department who provided both para transit and campus shuttle services. These were positive changes for the students with disabilities who are first and foremost University students. Moreover, as University students, they should be served by the same departments serving all other students.

On November 19, 1991, Kaye Becker, Director, died of cancer. By that time, the program had been providing accommodations for approximately 20 years. This was the first time a national search for the director had been conducted. Judy Sannes, program counselors, served as Interim Director until Ann Yurcisin, Director of disability services at the University of Wisconsin-Stout, was hired in August 1992.

DSS had a tradition of involvement in the disability services' national professional organization AHEAD (Association of Higher Education and Disability). Kaye Becker and Ron Gibbens were founding members of the organization, and Ron had been one of the early presidents. Ann Yurcisin was running for president of AHEAD when she interviewed with DSS and won the election about one month before starting at UND. DSS not only distinguished itself as a model program of services but was also instrumental in starting the professional organization which continues to set the standards for program services and professional ethics nationwide.

One of Ann's goals was to expand the DSS assistive technology (AT) services. Under her leadership, DSS put together an AT lab where students could try out and use software such as screen readers and print enlargers. The program also changed its name from Disabled Student Services to Disability Support Services. The new name took the emphasis off of "disabled" and focused on the kind of services provided.

Ann Yurcisin resigned in 1997 to take a position at The Ohio State University, and Deb Glennen, program counselor, now called disability specialist, was appointed Interim Director. In September 1997, she was hired and continues to serve as director. The staff consists of one full time disability specialist, an assistant director/90% time disability specialist, a half time learning disability/ADD specialist and half time assistive technology technician, a full time deaf education specialist/interpreter coordinator and two clerical staff. New accommodations have been added

as the technology became available. In the new millennium, DSS now provides textbooks in E Text (electronic format) rather than audio tape, Realtime captioning in the classroom, closed captioning on videos and DVD's for instructional use and consults and demonstrates assistive technology, including voice recognition and speech output, to faculty and students. DSS in collaboration with the Student Success Center offers a section of the Introduction to Effective Study class specifically for students with learning disabilities and attention disorders.

In 1997, Grand Forks made international news as the "500 Year Flood" inundated the community, including most of the University buildings. In 1995, DSS had been relocated to O'Kelly Hall while McCannel was remodeled and a new section added. McCannel's basement flooded, which ruined the newly installed heating and cooling systems. Fortunately, the main floor was untouched by flood waters, and DSS moved back into their new offices on the first floor in time for summer session. At first there was no ventilation or air conditioning, but the staff was willing to put up with the discomfort in order to settle in to their permanent office space and work with the students. It felt good to do "normal" things after being consumed with the massive clean up and loss caused by the flood.

Disability Support Services believes they have a responsibility to be of service to the State, particularly to the other colleges' disability services programs. In 1998, DSS was instrumental in establishing the N.D. Colleges and Universities Disability Services Council or DSC in collaboration with the State Department of Special Education. One of the Special Education Transition Coordinators is the Council's permanent co-chair and the other is elected from the membership. The Council is made up of the 11 public institutions of higher education, the tribal colleges and two private colleges in the state. The Council's mission is "...to support and promote the efforts of North Dakota colleges and universities to provide full participation for students with disabilities in higher education." Its goals focus on supporting secondary schools' efforts to provide quality transition services to high school students with disabilities who will be enrolling in postsecondary education in N.D. The Council meets three times a year, communicates year round on a listserv and has a website, both managed by DSS. These forums offer the disability services members opportunities to share information, consult and problem solve, all of which enhance the quality of accommodation services and degree of access provided at the colleges throughout the state. This communication between

college programs also helps students with disabilities make a smoother transition into college and seamless transfers between colleges.

DSS has also taken the initiative to get involved with transition services in the Region IV high schools. A DSS staff member chairs the Region's Transition Services Committee and is active in providing training to secondary educators on preparing high school students with disabilities to compete in college.

In 2006, DSS started an initiative to provide information to the faculty on universal design in instruction or UDI. When curriculum is designed to be accessible to students with various disabilities, the instruction is also more effective for international students and those with different learning styles. Learning is more inclusive of all students, and fewer, if any, accommodations are needed. The UDI principles reflect Disability Support Services' vision of the future:

A University community where a disability is neutral; a community where services are integrated throughout the University, and only unique and uncommon accommodations are provided through DSS.

We envision a University where the enrollment of students with disabilities is comparable to the occurrence of disability in the general population.

Disability Support Services, renamed Disability Services for Students in 2007, has changed in many ways and also remained the same. The foundational principles of equal access to the instruction, programs and facilities at UND and protection from discrimination for people with disabilities remain the same as they were almost forty years ago. There have been changes in the means of achieving these goals but not in the integrity of the program's purpose. It is the staff's hope that the program will eventually outlive its usefulness. However in the meantime, they will continue providing the University with guidance and support leading to the full inclusion of students with disabilities.