

Disability Resource Center — Summer/Fall 2008 Newsletter

Coordinator Retires: A Farewell - Reflections and Fond Memories



Suzanne Tucker, Retiring Coordinator of the Disability Resource Center

It is hard to believe that most of the students currently served by the DRC were not even born when I was first hired to develop Southern's new disability services program in August 1980. In the beginning, the office was called the "Office for Services for the Disabled" ...quite a mouthful. A short time later,

we became the DSS, "Disabled Student Services." Next, we were the DRO, "Disability Resource Office," and now, in our latest permutation, we go by the DRC, "Disability Resource Center." All of these name changes are inconsequential when

compared with the virtual sea change that occurred on this campus, and the larger community, in how we now view and respond to disability matters.

As I reflect on these past twenty-eight years, this campus has indeed come a long way in its collective understanding of the role and rightful place of all persons with disabilities. Over these years, there have been four major milestones worth noting. First, the growth in the number of students with disabilities attending and graduating from Southern, the increasing use of technology, both in and out of the classroom, the greater awareness and understanding of disability from a social vs. medical model of viewing disability, and finally the application of universal design principles to the built environment and in facilitating learning.

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This amalgam of influences created the critical mass that has earned Southern's reputation as a leader in the area of disability services in higher education.

Recently, I came across my very first annual report from 1981. At that time, 113 students with documented disabilities had enrolled that academic year. Today, that number is well over 675 students – a six-fold increase in the number of students with disabilities attending Southern. As more students with disabilities across the country and at Southern sought and gained admission to higher education because of civil rights laws such

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as Section 504 of the 1978 Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, institutions of higher education had to put in place the required changes to ensure equal access. Fortunately, Southern embraced this challenge by responding not only to the letter of the law, but we embraced the spirit of these new civil rights laws that intended to, as President Bush stated when signing the ADA, “Let the shameful wall of exclusion finally come tumbling down. “

Over the years, the proportion of students with invisible disabilities such as students with psychological or emotional disabilities, learning disabilities and attention disabilities increased substantially. Some categories of disabilities that are commonplace today were not even on our radar in 1980, such as students with autism-spectrum disorders. Awareness of invisible disabilities, and the myths or stereotypes that often accompany them, requires greater effort to break down attitudinal barriers.

A second major development on campus was our growing reliance on computer technology for learning and for all of the major functions of the university such as registration, e-mail, billing, etc. Once again, Southern proved to be a leader by establishing the Center for Adaptive Technology in 1988 for persons with a range of disabilities. Now students and staff with disabilities have access to adaptive technology that promotes greater independence.

As Southern increasingly engaged with the process of ensuring educational equity for students with disabilities, this has led to the greater inclusion of persons with disabilities who study, work, and visit this campus and to furthering understanding of diversity. The university has actively embraced the sentiment expressed by disability activist, Dan Wilkins in his quote, “A community that excludes even one of its members is no community at all.”

In 1980, the primary focus of “access” was the removal of architectural and programmatic barriers. Soon we discovered that in place of bar-

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Freshman Year Advice!

My name is Brian Junious, and I’m finishing my freshman year here at Southern. I have been diagnosed with a learning disability since I was in third grade. In high school, I was exempt from a language, had special classes for skills and also modifications on tests. In my high school career, I was not so focused on academics, but on athletics. I played football, basketball and ran track from my sophomore year until graduation. While playing sports, schoolwork always came secondary to me and sports were my main focus. I got by with C’s and was more than happy with that. At my high school, if you were a successful athlete you were not only respected by the students, but also by the teachers. I did the minimal work I had to in all of my classes and got the grades I needed to pass the class. I liked to blame sports for my mediocre grades, but sports were more of a crutch than a reason.

“The advice I give to all incoming freshman who have a disability is that it’s better to accept your disability and use it to your advantage, than to neglect it and have it bring you down.”

I never told any of my friends or teammates about my disability because I felt they wouldn’t understand what it meant to be learning disabled and would take it more as being in “special ed” or possibly even intellectually challenged. I didn’t realize until I was in college that my learning disability was the real reason for my grades being the way they were. When I was in high school I didn’t take advantage of anything that was offered to me to help me compensate for my learning disability. Instead, I was in denial with myself and said I was fine. Fortunately, I graduated and went to college, but it wasn’t until then that I began to use my resources.

Initially, I didn’t even want to register with the Disability Resource Center because I felt that

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My Journey at Southern Connecticut State University!

It was four years ago that I began my journey here at Southern. I had just graduated high school and was very unsure of myself. I remember being determined to work to the best of my ability and achieve the best grades possible. I was quiet around people and lacked the confidence to introduce myself when speaking to others. I have gained more than a quality education from Southern. I have gained important life skills that will be with me for the rest of my life.

As a freshman, I remember being very quiet and avoiding people unless I had to. I feared others may view me as being different and thought it would be best to seclude myself from socializing.

Over time, I became comfortable with students in my classes as well as advocating for myself in classes. I never advocated for myself prior to college since my parents were school personnel and always took care of everything. One of the most important lessons I am taking with me as I leave Southern is the ability to advocate for myself.

I decided to major in Psychology, as I thought the subject would match my interest and give me an opportunity to choose from several fields in graduate school. Each semester I have learned so much from the great professors in the Psychology department. I joined the Psychology club and attended meetings for most of my freshman and sophomore year and had an opportunity to travel to Philadelphia with them for an annual conference in 2007. I also traveled to Orlando, Florida on my own for the first time- which previously I thought would have been impossible. I was never aware of how accommodating people are when they see others who may need additional support.

One of the things that helped me to open up more and develop confidence was holding a campus job. At first I did not want to work on

campus, but I was encouraged to do this by the DRC. As my time progressed on the job, I learned skills and developed competencies that built up my self esteem. I began to feel like a part of the office where I worked and this helped me to not feel as isolated on campus.

I have participated in many workshops the DRC has had in my time at Southern and have learned and helped others learn essential life skills that are important to success regardless of abilities or disabilities. I never thought I would have been so involved with the DRC, but the terrific people affiliated with the office made the decision an easy one.



Eric Berman at commencement, May 23, 2008.

Above all else, I have learned that I am capable of doing anything that I set my mind to. I have been determined to do my best for most of my life, but would have never thought I would have made it this far. I know I would not have made it to where I am without the strong social support of my parents.

They have truly blessed me in so many ways and I owe them so many thanks. As I leave Southern, I will be starting my graduate work at the University of Connecticut in Hartford studying Social Work. The lessons I have taken from Southern have prepared me well, and I will always look back at all the lessons I learned while attending Southern very positively.

-Eric Berman, SCSU graduate



Learn The Facts: The Truth About Anxiety Disorders.

During the spring semester, I collaborated with Denise Zack of the Counseling Center to present a workshop about Anxiety Disorders in Women to the SCSU community as part of Women's History Month. Dr. Amenta brought her class from WMS 100 to attend. The presentation focused on dispelling common misconceptions about anxiety, discussing the prevalence of anxiety in women and ways to handle increased stress and anxiety. The presentation included a small student panel of SCSU students who have struggled with anxiety. Anxiety disorders are common and affect both men and women. However, several anxiety disorders affect women at a higher rate. For the general population, there is a twenty five percent chance of developing an anxiety disorder in one's lifetime. While this number may seem alarmingly high, the good news is that most anxiety disorders are fully treatable with either therapy, medication or a combination of both. Below are quick facts about anxiety disorders and their prevalence from the National Institute of Mental Health.

- **6.6%** of women will develop Generalized Anxiety Disorder vs. **3.6%** of men
- **10-14%** of women will develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) vs. **5-6%** men
- Women are twice as likely as men to develop a panic disorder
- **6.8 %** of adults have social phobia (equally common in men and women)
- Pregnancy can effect the impact of an anxiety disorder
 - **25%** of women with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder will see an increase in symptoms during pregnancy
 - **20%** of women have an anxiety or mood disorder during pregnancy

There are many misconceptions and

stereotypes about why anxiety disorders effect women more than men. The truth is, the higher rate of anxiety in women has nothing to do with men being "tougher" or "stronger" or more "stable". However, some of the reasons may be biological in nature. It is a fact that women have different hormones than men. New research is indicating that estrogen, a steroid produced by ovaries, may interact in unique ways with serotonin (a neurotransmitter) and thus may affect feelings of anxiety. More research needs to be done, but this certainly validates that feelings of anxiety are as real as any other medical diagnosis and not simply a state of mind.

Other reasons for higher rates of PTSD and other disorders may be related to the fact that women are more likely to be the victims of both sexual and physical abuse. Women and men may also be raised with different expectations and it is often more culturally appropriate in America for women to express feelings and emotions openly while it may be discouraged in men.

If you are struggling with feelings of anxiety, it is important to seek a proper diagnosis from a qualified professional. If you have mild feelings of anxiety or stress, you may find relief by a few simple changes you can make in your life. Consider finding balance in your daily schedule. Are you allowing for enough downtime in which you do activities that are relaxing and renewing for you? Learn effective time management skills, which will help you avoid situations that create stress, such as overbooking yourself. Learn relaxation techniques, such as meditation, deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, yoga, and mindfulness training. Consider going to counseling sessions with a therapist to help you manage your stress and anxiety. Remember, SCSU offers short-term counseling free of charge to matriculated students. If your anxiety disorder is to the point where you feel it is disabling,

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Learning How to Cope: A Student's Candid Look at Anxiety.

My name is Jennifer Katz and I have just finished my freshman year at SCSU and I suffer with very bad anxiety. My anxiety first began after a car accident that I was involved in when I was ten years old. That day changed my life forever. Each day I now suffer with at least one or more panic attacks. I have received help to be able to control them, but I still have some major attacks on occasion and they are scary big or small.

My anxiety can get in the way of my learning sometimes. I get very anxious when it



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comes to tests, sitting in the front row of the classroom, participating, and presentations. Sometimes panic attacks can come about for no reason. Most of these are very common in people with anxiety. I have overcome my presentation anxiety, but I still get very anxious just before I have one. The only way to overcome it is if you just keep doing them. I have a huge fear about the front row of the classroom; I feel everyone is watching me. That is the worst feeling you can ever feel with anxiety. I can’t focus on what’s going on in class if I am focusing and panicking about everyone watching me. I like to sit in the back by the door incase I have an attack so that I can get up and leave so nobody will notice.

Participation and tests are another common anxiety. I hate to participate, especially when the teacher calls on me when I don’t expect it . I get so embarrassed because I have no idea how to answer the question he’s asked because I don’t have time to process an answer. I start to panic when teachers do this because I feel like I’m being humiliated in front of my classmates for not knowing the answer. Lastly, I get anxious when taking tests and as a result, I take my tests in the DRC with extended time. That

way I feel like I’m not being pressured and I have no one looking at me because I’m the last person to take the test. The DRC has been very helpful to help me relax and not feel anxious about my tests.

The one thing that scares me with my anxiety disorder is that I’m afraid that if I start having a panic attack that people will think I’m weird. Most people don’t even know I have anxiety because I have been taught how to control it so well. The only people who really do know are my family, my boyfriend, and my close friends, who have experienced panic attacks with me. You might think it’s embarrassing, but it’s who you are, and there are people to help and get you through it. It’s actually even more comforting to know that someone is there with you during one because it almost makes you feel better hearing “are you okay”?

When I start to feel anxious the first couple of signs are: my heart starts to race, I start feeling claustrophobic, sick to my stomach, and I feel like I’m having a heat flash and my face gets red like I’m embarrassed. When I start to feel them come on, I immediately start to talk to myself and tell myself that I’m going to be okay and try to get my mind off of it and imagine something I enjoy doing. Sometimes that works, and sometimes it can be really bad and it can get to the point when I start screaming and feel like I can’t breathe and have to breathe into a bag. I only have these kinds of attacks maybe 4 times a year. It’s very scary though, but they don’t last long, and I do come out of them. The worst fear while I am having an attack is I feel like I am going to die. Each time I get one I have told myself that I can control this by myself, and it’s not going to control me and take over because I won’t let it.

The best advice I can give people who suffer with an anxiety disorder is you’re not the only one, and even though it’s very scary you have to just say to yourself that you will be okay because you will. You have to take control of yourself so that you can fight the anxiety.

- Jennifer Katz, SCSU Student

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it didn't do anything for me in high school, and I didn't want any of my new friends to think I was different then they were. Yet my parents pushed me into it and said if it doesn't work out I can simply just drop it at the end of the semester with no questions asked. This turned out to be a solid decision by my parents. I scheduled weekly appointments in the DRC and followed through with the meetings. At each weekly meeting, I would simply tell what I was doing in my classes and what problems I was having. My advisor would help me by giving me different resources or strategies I could use to help with a problem I was having. Through the DRC, I learned about the CAT lab (Center for Adaptive Technology) where I learned about one of my most helpful tools, Kurzweil 3000. This is a program that scans books and reads them back to you while you're following along on the screen. Since my disability impacts my reading, this truly did help. This was shown by my grades for the first semester. I went from being a C average student in high school to getting a 3.2 GPA, Dean's list recognition, and even a \$5000 scholarship grant from the school.

This spring semester, I decided to take CSP 100, a class to help me further develop my study skills. There I was able to learn about the type of learner I am and develop effective strategies and skills to help me learn more effectively with the style that I have. This spring semester my grades are looking even better than those from the fall because I am using the different resources and strategies that I have learned through the DRC. The advice I give to all incoming freshman who have a disability is that it's better to accept your disability and use it to your advantage, than to neglect it and have it bring you down. I regret in high school neglecting it after seeing what I was capable of doing with it. The positive aspect is that I realized it and now have my college career to make it up.



- Brian Junious

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make an appointment with the Disability Resource Center to see if you qualify for services. All services are confidential. Lastly, remember that anxiety disorders are common, yet many people with anxiety disorders are afraid to share their feelings with others for fear of judgment. Let's all help the SCSU community be one of acceptance and understanding!

- Kelly O'Brien Mann

For additional information and resources about anxiety disorders, check out the following websites:

National Institute of Mental Health:

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/>

National Alliance on Mental Illness:

<http://www.nami.org/>

Anxiety Disorders Association of America:

<http://www.adaa.org/>

SCSU Counseling Center:

<http://www.southernct.edu/counseling>

SCSU Disability Resource Center:

<http://www.southernct.edu/drc>

Interested in Mental Health Topics?

Join Active Minds, a new student organization to promote awareness of mental health topics in order to break down the stigma associated with mental illness. Meetings will resume in the fall 2008 semester. If you'd like more information, please contact either faculty advisor and/or check out information on the SCSU Active Minds Facebook page!

Faculty Advisor: Kelly Mann, Disability Resource Center 203-392-6828, Mannk1@southernct.edu

Faculty Advisor: Kate Walsh, Counseling Center, 203-392-5474, Walshk11@southernct.edu

Why Travel?

On April 4th, in conjunction with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, Board of Education and Services for the Blind, the City of New Haven Disability Services, Enterprise Car Rental, SCSU Career Center, and the SCSU Center for Adaptive Technology, the Disability Resource Center sponsored a workshop for students with disabilities and their parents on the reasons to travel. The workshop demonstrated the importance of learning to travel independently, as being willing to travel increases students' career opportunities. Travel for work related activities, as well as for social activities enhances one's experiences, increases independence and enhances self esteem. The workshop consisted of a welcome, an overview, and two break-out sessions; one for parents and one for students. It concluded with students reporting back to parents what they learned from their workshop experience.

As part of the overview, several upper-classmen shared their own experiences with travel. This was a powerful and motivating part of the workshop. Students shared their fears about travel, what steps they have taken to overcome their fears, and pertinent travel experiences. One upper classman shared that not traveling impacted her socially and now is limiting her ability to choose an internship because she is afraid to take the bus on her own. She shared that she recognizes this is a problem and realizes she wants more choices and independence in her life.

During the student portion of the workshop, students were broken into groups and given a scenario of where they needed to travel and the purpose of the trip. For example, one group went to Boston to a Career Fair. Students first brainstormed concerns and issues they had in regards to travel. As a group they needed to find solutions to these concerns, and then were required to book a hotel, transportation, meals and entertainment. Students used the internet, telephone, resource books, each other and staff as resources to help them negotiate the activity. For many this was the first time they actually called a hotel, airline, or train to ask about availability, as well as accessibility. Students experienced what preplan-

ning does as a way to prepare for the trip, but also to help insure preparation for the unexpected, for example, having a list of your doctors' contact information, medical conditions, and medication you currently take, in the event you should become sick while traveling. There were resources that were handed out to students including a take-home packet they could use when planning a trip.

Parents had the opportunity to address their concerns and listen to a panel of professionals who had learned to travel with disabilities, as well as hear other parent's experiences. Parents were given resources and also learned about campus opportunities for travel such as social events, leadership conferences, study abroad opportunities and club activities.

The end result of the workshop was positive. Students felt more prepared and willing to travel and parents agreed it was important to support independent travel for their children. Since the workshop, several students have begun to travel on their own and others have set travel related goals.

- Deborah Fairchild



Spotlight on dis-ABLED athletes *(Continued from page 2)*

The May 17th issue of the New York Times featured a detailed article on Oscar Pistorius, an athlete who was born without the fibula in his lower legs and defects in both his feet. His legs were amputated below the knee when he was 11 months old. Since then, this talented young athlete has gone on to set Paralympic world records in the 100, 200 and 400 meters. However, it was not until he began competing and winning against able-bodied athletes in South Africa that Pistorius began to gain world recognition in 2004. Based on his successes in the track arena, Pistorius had set his sites on competing in this year's 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics

Due to concerns that Oscar's prosthetics might give him an unfair advantage, he was originally told he would not be allowed to compete in the 2008 Olympics. Oscar has refused to give into this decision and give up his dream of competing in the Olympics, and thus felt he had no other recourse than to appeal this decision to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS). Lawyers for Pistorius set out to prove that the testing results used to make the decision were subjective and fell short of the high standards the international sporting community is entitled to expect. After a 5 month legal battle, the CAS ruled that Pistorius would be granted the chance to compete. While his training has suffered due to the time spent in the courtroom instead of on the track, Pistorius stated in an interview, "It's not just about me, it's about the extra opportunity for amputee athletes"

Unfortunately, Pistorius did not qualify to compete in the Beijing Olympics, but his triumph is a landmark decision that gives inspiration to disabled athletes everywhere. To read the full article that appeared in the May 17th edition of the New York Times, please visit the following link: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/17/sports/olympics/>

- Eileen Hawkins

rier removal, application of the principles of universal design of the built or designed environment, held benefits for everyone and not just individuals with physical disabilities or sensory impairments. Who among us has not taken advantage of universal design features such as elevators, ramps, enlarged bathrooms, automatic doors, closed-captioning class notes posted on a website and other design features once viewed as for persons with disabilities?

As my retirement from Southern approaches, I feel a sense of wonder and pride in having worked with so many others, both students and staff, who played a pivotal part in shaping Southern's exemplary efforts to ensure access. I leave knowing that there are still challenges ahead and know the university in general, and my DRC colleagues in particular, will continue to ensure access and success for persons with disabilities who study, work, or visit our campus.

- Suzanne Tucker

Hellos and Goodbyes at the DRC!

Although Suzanne Tucker, longtime Coordinator of the DRC, has retired, rest assured that the mission of the DRC will carry on through the dedicated staff that continue in the office. Deborah Fairchild, an Assistant Coordinator at the DRC and professional in the field of Disability Services for three decades will assume the role of Interim Coordinator. We are lucky to have her leadership during this time of transition. The DRC would like to welcome Bridget Stepeck-Holt as our newest staff member. We all look forward to working with her as part of the DRC team. The DRC also welcomes Steve Kinane from Central Connecticut State University and Christie Roche from Southern as our graduate interns.

- Kelly O'Brien Mann

Self Determination: The True Key to Success

People measure success in many different ways. Self-determination is a critical component to achieving success. "Self-determination is the ability of individuals to make choices that allow them to exercise control over their lives, to achieve the goals to which they aspire and to acquire the skills and resources necessary to participate fully and meaningfully in society" (Adopted from National Center on Self-Determination).

From kindergarten through twelfth grade, many students with disabilities do not feel in control of their education. There are PPTs and IEPs where a team of professionals say what the student needs and what educational goals are appropriate. It is the team that notifies the student's teachers about what modifications, accommodations and goals the student has. Very rarely do students have input into this process. When a student gets to college, there is no more special education and no team telling the student and professors what they need to do. Now it is up to the student to determine what he/she wants out of life. Students need to figure out how to use this new freedom to take control of their lives. While a student is figuring out what is right for them and making a plan for how to reach the goals that they are setting, it is appropriate to seek support.

At Southern, there are many places students can go to seek support to achieve their goals. The Disability Resource Center is a great support and also a place to get referrals to other supports on campus such as Counseling, Career Services, the Office of Study Skills and Enrichment, Tutoring and the Writing Center. These supports are useful should a student recognize a need for support and sees the support as a valuable tool in reaching a personal goal.

When setting personal goals students need to be clear on what they want. Students need to take responsibility for their actions. Goals need to be realistic, concrete and measurable. Students also need to constantly assess if they are moving in the direction of achieving the goal. If they are not, students should analyze if they need to change what they are doing or if the goal they have set is

not really what they want. People are motivated towards success when they are working on achieving something that is important and meaningful to them.

Self-determination is the true key to success. As a student, you should be in college because it is where you want to be. You need to research a major and determine what you need to do to be successful in that major/field. You need to determine what supports you need to seek out and you need to determine what you are willing to give up to achieve your goals. Once you recognize that you have control over your decisions and your life you become powerful. This power and sense of control coupled with organization and effective study strategies is what will help you to become successful.

- Deborah Fairchild

Reminders and Announcements

Fall is both an exciting and busy time of year as new students enter college for the first time and returning students settle into their new routines and courses. The following are helpful reminders to ensure a smooth transition into or back to school!

- ✧ The DRC is open 8:30-4:30 Monday through Friday.
- ✧ The DRC encourages all students who feel they may benefit to schedule weekly half-hour appointments with a DRC Specialist to develop compensatory strategies, explore strengths and weaknesses, understand your disability and discuss other disability related needs.
- ✧ For students who will be taking exams in the DRC, please be mindful that space fills up quickly. As a result, we ask students to sign up one week in advance of their scheduled exam to reserve space in the DRC testing room.

For questions, please stop by the front desk or call 203-392-6828.

Welcome Incoming Students and Welcome Back Returning Students!

Please remember to contact the DRC early on to schedule both your weekly appointment time and an accommodation appointment if you'll be using either of these services. Also, for students using adaptive technology and scanned text, be sure to deliver your text books to the Center for Adaptive Technology before the start of the semester so that your material will be in an accessible format before classes begin. We look forward to another great semester of working with you!

- The staff of the DRC

To Contact the DRC

Engleman Hall C105

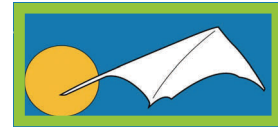
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The DRC Update is available in alternate formats upon request, including Braille, e-text, large print or audio-tape. Contact the DRC for details.



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