

# DO-IT

# NEWS

Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology • June 2014

Volume 22, Number 3

## Meet the 2014 *Scholars!*

by Sheryl Burgstahler, DO-IT Director

This summer DO-IT will host its twenty-second annual Summer Study program for *DO-IT Scholars*, providing participants the opportunity to experience life on a college campus and explore challenging academic and career fields such as those in science, engineering, and computing. Primary funding for the *Scholars* program is provided by the State of Washington. For more information, visit [www.uw.edu/doit/Brochures/Programs/scholars.html](http://www.uw.edu/doit/Brochures/Programs/scholars.html).

I am pleased to introduce you to the new *Scholars*:

**Aja** likes studying math and science at Glacier Peak High School in Everett. She has cerebral palsy. She participates in Future Farmers of America competitions and plans to study neurobiology in college.

**Alex** attends the International School in Bellevue. He enjoys math and science and is interested in securing a career in these skills. He has an autism spectrum disorder.

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*2013 Scholars Kayla and McKenna examine plants in a botany lab during Summer Study 2013.*

**Anita's** two favorite classes are math and biology at Seattle Academy of Arts and Sciences. She aspires to be a teacher or psychologist. Swimming is her sport of choice.

**Calleese** enjoys her science and English classes at Vancouver iTech Preparatory. She will be taking classes with Running Start in September. She is in the orchestra, belongs to the Key Club, and is a member of the yearbook staff. In her free time, she likes to volunteer. Her disability affects her reading and writing.

**Carl** would like to study business or law after graduating from Woodinville High School. His favorite classes are history and math. He hopes to join the Future Business Leaders of America. Carl has Duchenne muscular dystrophy.



*2011 Scholar Kim and 2012 Scholars Lucas and Allison ride accessible bikes during Summer Study 2013.*

**Eric**, who has a visual impairment, keeps busy outside of school with soccer, drums, and volunteer work. At Skyline High School, he enjoys classes in math and science. In college, he thinks he will major in computer engineering or business.

**Jason**, who is busy with cross country, swimming, and track, saves time for his academic interests in math and science. He would like to pursue engineering. Jason attends Mountlake Terrace High School and is legally blind.

**Jin Ning's** favorite classes are math and reading. He is on the honor roll at Roosevelt High School in Seattle. He wants to attend a college where being hard of hearing will be appropriately accommodated.

**Kennedy** attends Wilson High School in Tacoma. He has cerebral palsy. His favorite classes are science and English, and he would like to be a psychologist.

**Lindsey** has spinal muscular atrophy type 2. She enjoys her classes in English and digital graphic arts at Graham-Kapowsin High School. She plans on study literary arts in college.

**Mike** is an advisory representative in student government at Tonasket High School. He is also active in a youth group. He is visually impaired with right-sided weakness. He enjoys using technology.

**Mikaela** would like to go in to the medical field. Her favorite classes are health science and technology. She attends Running Start classes at Columbia Basin College.

**Matthew** likes studying engineering and science. He attends high school in Spokane. He would like to study mechanical engineering in college.

**Sangha** has an autism spectrum disorder. He would like to be a computer programmer. He enjoys his classes in math and music at Bellevue High School. He likes to play video games in his spare time.

**Sean** enjoys engineering and math classes at South Kitsap High School. With his experiences in auto shop, he helps his family save gas and diagnose issues. He looks forward to going to college.

**Teo**, who has a learning disability, wants to be a computer engineer. His favorite classes are science and math at Granite Falls High School. He is an active member of the Associated Student Body.

**Thor** was 10th grade homecoming royalty at Burlington-Edison High School. He likes history and English. He plans on studying accounting, forensic science, and ranching in college. He recently built a website for his family ranch. Thor has desmin myopathy muscular dystrophy.

**Vanessa** likes math and computing classes and enjoys photography. Her ideal job is food critic. Vanessa has Ollier's disease and Maffucci syndrome. She lives in Clinton.

## Scholar Profile: Melissa



My name is Melissa Niklason. I started out as a *DO-IT Scholar* in 2009. The people I've met through this program and opportunities I have been given are more than I could have ever hoped for!

My road through education has been long, but it is also one that I would not change. After graduating from Woodinville High School in 2009, it took me a little over two years to complete my associates degree from Cascadia Community College. In March 2012, I started at Central Washington University in Ellensburg, Washington as an English/language arts teaching major, and I am set to graduate with my bachelor's degree in December 2014. It is my goal to one day teach English or language arts at the 6th or 7th grade level.

The DO-IT community has helped me both personally and professionally. Last year, around March 2013, Tami Tidwell sent me an email about available summer school teaching assistant positions through the Robinson Center for Young Scholars at the UW. I immediately jumped at the chance and was accepted as a teaching assistant for the 7th grade essay writing class. Mike, the teacher I worked with, had me teaching weekly lessons. I had never done it before, and I realized it was a skill that I was not particularly good at yet. I'm the type of person who overthinks and is constantly afraid that I will mess up, and that showed in my teaching. Mike said that the more nervous I felt, the more I should project that as excitement to my students. If it looks like I'm having fun then the students will

have more fun. Working with everyone at the Robinson Center made me realize that I still have a lot to learn, and it reignited my passion to do just that.

If it wasn't for all the supportive people in my life, the DO-IT community included, I might not have gone on the biggest adventure of my life. I spent Fall quarter 2013 studying abroad in Dundee, Scotland, and it was one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences ever. For one thing, Dundee is not the most wheelchair-friendly city; the sidewalks are a mix of flat concrete and cobblestones. During my first full day there, I hit a crack in the sidewalk and tipped over in my chair. One of the many people who came over to help told me that I was now a true Dundonian. What a way to be welcomed to this wonderful city! Over the next three months, I met wonderful people from all around the world, saw the home of Mary, Queen of Scots, and even envisioned myself on a quest with King Arthur and his knights. I learned a lot about myself as well as about the people and the culture around me. I always knew that I wanted to teach, but now I would love to combine my passion for teaching with my newfound love of travel. Who knows? Someday I could be back in Dundee, teaching at the school I passed by countless times. The opportunities that I have before me are endless; the hard part is going to be choosing which one will be right for me.

If there is one thing that I have learned in all of my experiences, it's that the reward is so much greater than the risk. If I had let fear of new places rule my decisions, I would not have a more definitive vision on what I want to do in my life. I might have given up as soon as I found out that I needed to improve my teaching style. The hardest things in life are always the most worthwhile, and I can't wait to see where I will go next!

More information about the *DO-IT Scholars* program can be found at [www.uw.edu/doi/Programs/scholar.html](http://www.uw.edu/doi/Programs/scholar.html).

## Disability and the Media: Part Three

By Kayla Brown, DO-IT Staff

In my last article ([www.uw.edu/doi/Newsletters/Jan14/06.html](http://www.uw.edu/doi/Newsletters/Jan14/06.html)), I talked about the importance of having people with disabilities both in front of the camera and in the writers' room. It is one way to avoid some common crimes of representation, such as "inspirational" characters with disabilities who are actually meant to be pitied and patronized; or disabled characters whose only purpose is to inspire a non-disabled character to be a "better person." This is objectifying and therefore dehumanizing. Portraying characters with disabilities as multi-dimensional, where the disability is not the character, but an aspect of the character, better represents the experience of having a disability.

Media can either oppress or empower. I've personally experienced both, so I see the influence that media images have in shaping the public's understanding of disabled people and their perspectives. Audiences will internalize images of disability and attribute them to disabled people as a whole. When portrayals oppress, they bolster stereotypes and misconceptions within society. When portrayals are empowering, they can change the way society thinks about disability for the better.

Take portrayals of mental illness. I've heard it said, "For every villain, there's a mental illness diagnosis." Mental illness is often used as a crutch (pun intended) for writers when creating a villain's motives and backstory. In *Batman*, the Joker is described as being schizophrenic. Norman Bates: Dissociative identity disorder (DID). Hannibal Lecter: Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Jack Torrance (*the Shining*): PTSD (and the whole being possessed by a demon thing). The Riddler: Obsessive compulsive disorder. James Moriarty: Narcissistic personality disorder. And the list goes on.



*Silver Linings Playbook* focuses on a character with bipolar disorder, with mixed results. Image provided by The Weinstein Company.

More subtle stereotypes in the media also contribute to the stigma of mental illness. People with mental illness are presented as being violent, unpredictable, able to be "cured," and a risk to themselves or others. Why is this harmful? These images and stereotypes have real-world consequences on how the public perceives mental illness. Research has shown that people get most of their information of mental illness from the media (Wahl, 2004). "What they see can color their perspective, leading them to fear, avoid, and discriminate against individuals with mental illness" (Tartakovsky, 2009). Furthermore, fear of stigma can prevent people with mental illnesses from getting treatment if it is something they need.

The movie *Silver Linings Playbook* (2012) has been called both a positive and negative representation of a person living with bipolar disorder. While most movies portray mental illness as slowly descending deeper and deeper into despair, *Silver Linings Playbook* shows a more realistic up, down, then up again pattern that many with bipolar disorder can relate to. However, *The New Yorker* movie critic Richard Brody believes "the movie will be a hit with those who think that hyperactivity is just a failure of discipline and depression merely a bad attitude."

Another seemingly mixed bag is the television show *United States of Tara*, which tells a story of a woman living with DID and her family. Tara has four “alters,” each of whom have distinct personalities, identities, style, and priorities. There is no doubt that the show is over the top, and only representative of about 5% of individuals with DID (according to the International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation), but it also balances fiction with reality. There are two main reasons why I love the show and why it does a better job at representing mental illness than most.

First, the producers of the show did their research. They included both those with DID and experts in the field in the process of writing the script. Second, the show covers many real-life issues that affect people with mental illnesses that are not often talked about. For example, Tara is constantly told by her sister that her DID isn’t real; that Tara is in control but just wants attention, saying “It’s not a disorder, it’s a weakness.” Often times people with mental illnesses are invalidated by loved ones because their disorder is not seen as real or legitimate. The relationship between Tara and her therapist delves into the causes and treatment of her DID. Tara eventually comes to terms that she is suffering from PTSD, and therefore can begin accepting and learning to cope with her DID.

The sad fact is that the occasional TV show with a balanced, multi-dimensional portrayal of disability still is not enough. Many times it is the harmful and untrue portrayals that contribute to how society perceives and reacts to mental illness. People in the media have the power to create positive change in portrayals of mental illnesses, and we should encourage them to use that power to legitimize the real world experiences of people who live with them.

*The next installment of Ms. Brown’s multi-part series will appear in the next issue of DO-IT News.*

## **DO-IT Scholars Featured in Upcoming Closing the Gap Article**

Multiple *DO-IT Scholars* are making an appearance in the upcoming issue of *Closing the Gap Solutions*, an online magazine offering resources and discussions on assistive technology. The article highlights the *DO-IT Scholars* program and specifically shares responses from the Intern Success Panel, an event each year where third-year participants discuss their own experiences with school, life, and their disabilities.

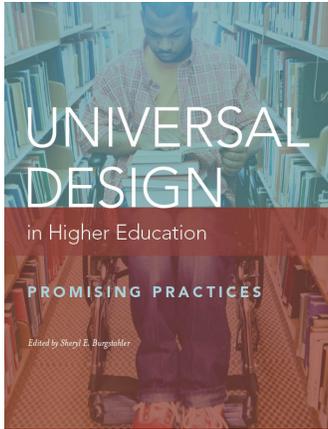
One of the students on the panel talked about DO-IT’s Summer Study program, which takes place on the University of Washington campus, as an empowering experience; “camp is two weeks and that was something I have never done before . . . it really helped me learn how to be more independent—how to be more self-reliant.” Other students discussed things they have learned in life, one student saying “I will have to deal with the situation myself and [learn to] see the problem positively, not negatively.”

Closing the Gap works to provide resources and share information on assistive technology through webinars, an annual conference, and its online magazine, *Solutions*. Be sure to check out the full article and more great resources from Closing the Gap at [www.closingthegap.com/solutions/](http://www.closingthegap.com/solutions/).



*DO-IT Scholars present their ideas to the rest of the group while an interpreter signs during Summer Study 2013.*

## Call For Articles



In DO-IT's online publication, *Universal Design in Higher Education: Promising Practices*, practitioners share promising practices related to the application of universal design in postsecondary education

settings. This collection of promising practices complements the more general content in the printed book, *Universal Design in Higher Education: From Principles to Practice*, published by Harvard Education Press (<http://hepg.org/hep-home/books/universal-design-in-higher-education>).

The new publication is available freely online at [www.uw.edu/doit/UDHE-promising-practices/](http://www.uw.edu/doit/UDHE-promising-practices/). It can be freely copied and distributed as a book or in part for noncommercial, educational purposes. The collection will continue to grow as more articles are submitted.

Articles may be submitted at any time to [udbecop@uw.edu](mailto:udbecop@uw.edu). Submitted articles should include specific ways practitioners and researchers have applied universal design in postsecondary settings along with evidence of success. They are peer-reviewed by members of the Universal Design in Higher Education Community of Practice ([udbecop@uw.edu](mailto:udbecop@uw.edu)), and if accepted, edited by DO-IT. Articles selected for the online resource are freely available on our website. Authors must agree to these conditions while retaining copyrights to their individual contributions. For author guidelines, consult the preface of the book at [www.uw.edu/doit/UDHE-promising-practices/preface.html](http://www.uw.edu/doit/UDHE-promising-practices/preface.html).

## About DO-IT

DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology) serves to increase the successful participation of individuals with disabilities in challenging academic programs and careers, such as those in science, engineering, mathematics, and technology. Primary funding for DO-IT is provided by the National Science Foundation, the State of Washington, and the U.S. Department of Education.

For further information, to be placed on the DO-IT mailing list, request this newsletter or other materials in an alternate format, or make comments or suggestions about DO-IT publications or web pages, contact:



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### The Browser: Calendar of Events

For a schedule of conferences, visit  
[www.uw.edu/doit/  
Newsletters/calendar.html](http://www.uw.edu/doit/Newsletters/calendar.html)