

Director's Digressions

By Sheryl Burgstahler

One of the pleasures of my job is reading messages in our many Internet-based discussion forums. Recently, I posted a question asking for advice on how to make social connections in college. Here are some of the insights shared by young people with disabilities engaged in DO-IT activities, as well as their parents and mentors. Responses have been edited for length and to ensure anonymity.

From students with disabilities:

Having a positive, easy-going attitude helps potential friends relax around you and enjoy their time with you.

Do things you love to do, and friends of any age will find you, or you will find them.

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To reduce printing costs and yet still share exciting news from DO-IT, the online version of DO-IT News is available at www.uw.edu/doit/Newsletters/Mar13/.



DO-IT Scholars *get a head start on making connections at Summer Study.*

The way I made friends in college was going to clubs that interested me and getting to know people in my dorms those first couple weeks of school during residence hall meetings.

I now have bilateral Cochlear implants, so hearing in a social setting is easier, but it is still up to me to step out there. One thing that helps me make social connections is to not be afraid to share my story. I often go out of my way to make others feel comfortable around me, even joking about advantages of being hearing impaired sometimes. I'm very open about my implants. People are usually curious and ask questions about being hearing impaired. Once their questions are answered, the conversation moves on to typical stuff and then the social connections are made. Some people are never one hundred percent comfortable around me. I have learned that is not my issue and I let it go.

Go to the extracurricular office to browse information about clubs to join.

Most people don't have an issue with my disability. I don't either. That is the key!

First, I thought about what I was looking for in my friendships. Then I introduced myself to people who I thought met or exceeded my expectations regarding their interests. Once introductions went well, I invited groups of friends to various fun outings, events, or meals that would be easy for their schedules, would not require a tremendous time commitment, and would be things they may need to do anyway. I soon learned who enjoyed spending time with me, as well as with whom I enjoyed spending time.

From parents:

Highly structured groups and activities are the ones our son is most comfortable in, so he can know his role/job and concentrate on doing it well, rather than wondering what's going to happen next. He also enjoys being in professional societies with adults—this helps him connect what he's learning in school to how it's used in real jobs and provide contacts for future internships.



Study groups bring together people with shared interests.

It's important to build on strengths and interests, not on commonality of disability. Ever since elementary school, people have attempted to put my son in groups of other kids with the same disability. He hates this. He often has nothing to talk about with them. Honestly, we have found that the individuals with the most passion

on the topics he enjoys—and thus the most to say in return—are typically adults, sometimes even senior citizens, who genuinely value his enthusiasm and the piles of facts he has amassed. Older “friends” often have more patience and social skills which teens may lack, and they are not looking to only hang with the cool crowd. The main point is that friends do not have to be peers in age.

For our son with autism, making friends has always been an effort. He does not see friendship as evolving from sitting around doing nothing with pals—he needs the structure of an activity and then builds trusting relationships from there.

My daughter is in her second year at college. She is active in dorm activities and was voted dorm leader. She has made a lot of friends.

Our child joined social clubs with specific interests—such as human rights and environmental groups—and showed up for campus events with classmates he met.

Parents should avoid being pressured into “letting go and seeing what happens,” in other words, feeling they must drop him at the dorm door and drive off with fingers crossed. For our son, while he is academically fine in college-level work, he is not socially ready to be left to his own devices one hundred percent of the time. The university understands this and values ongoing family involvement. They facilitate parent-to-parent connections.

One of the most effective things we have done to continue offering support while also backing away as much as we can is to hire a peer mentor. Volunteers are often very helpful, but a student who works for the family is much more focused and reliable—crucial for a sense of stability and trust. We have found a fantastic young man who enjoys working with our son. The guy is amazing—he has already spent a year in England supporting a masters student with cerebral palsy, and has provided care and companionship for another young person with Down syndrome. We've figured out a workable schedule of five to six hours a week for him to focus with our son on specific social tasks. It's all couched in fun (going to the campus gym and working out,

attending a concert together, etc.), but we have goals for him to work on, sort-of like an IEP. A peer introduced as “my friend, Joe” can fit into situations in which parents cannot, and yet he can also partner with parents for good follow-up at home. He engages in social activities with his peer tutor that he would not do alone.

Try new approaches. Take one day at a time.



*Susan
Gjolmesli*

Governor Honors Bellevue College’s Susan Gjolmesli for Empowering Persons with Disabilities

By Scott Bellman, DO-IT Staff

In a ceremony held in Olympia on January 23, *DO-IT Mentor* and *AccessSTEM* partner Susan Gjolmesli received a Governor’s Trophy in Memory of Carolyn Blair Brown from the Washington State Governor’s Committee on Disability Issues and Employment (GCDE). This prestigious award from the Governor’s office is given to an individual who has significantly enhanced the empowerment of persons with disabilities in the community and workforce.

The Trophy is part of the Governor’s Employer Awards Program, which honors employers that have demonstrated exemplary practices to recruit, retain and promote individuals with disabilities. While most awards honor an employer, the Governor’s Trophy in Memory of Carolyn Blair Brown is presented to an individual. The GCDE selected Gjolmesli to receive the award

because of her well-known reputation as a bold, fierce advocate who can articulate current research and represent the disability community with grace and poise.

“Susan has simply refused to see herself or any of the people for whom she advocates as being unqualified to live a full life. It has been this single-minded focus on what each human being has to offer that has made her one of the premier advocates for persons living with differences in the state of Washington,” shares Michael McDermott, a friend and colleague. “Susan knows and has taught others that a disability is an attribute, but need not be an identity. She leads us to become our best selves and to understand that a person’s point of view is not driven solely by where you stand. It is also shaped by the extent to which you understand the interconnectivity between all of us.”

Gjolmesli has acquired over thirty years in her field of expertise. She is currently director of the Disability Resource Center at Bellevue College, and a partner of DO-IT’s *AccessSTEM* project.

AccessSTEM Student Learning Community Tackles the College Application Process

By Penny Hinke, DO-IT Staff

Fred Wang has a dream. He wants to transfer to the University of Washington and graduate with a major in computer science. Fred is not alone. The University of Washington Admissions Office expects to receive over 26,000 applications this year. But Fred, who is a student at Bellevue College and a member of DO-IT’s *AccessSTEM* project, is determined to turn his dream into reality, which is why he jumped at the opportunity to participate in the *AccessSTEM* Student Learning Community (SLC), Conquering the College Application Process, offered by DO-IT at Bellevue College this past fall.

An SLC is a collection of activities organized by common goals that a group of students complete together. Six *AccessSTEM* members from Bellevue College took part in DO-IT's SLC, which met weekly from October 17th to November 14th.

The SLC, which Tami Tidwell and I co-taught, was designed to help students planning on transferring to a four-year institution better understand the college application process and develop strategies for making a successful application to their chosen university. We focused on five key areas: getting started, getting organized, narrowing the choice, writing a strong personal statement and finding the funding. Students were given strategies, resources, and tools to help them navigate and track what can be an overwhelming process. They were also required to attend at least one event at Bellevue College's Fall Transfer Fair Week.

Some of the things students said they'd learned as a result of the SLC included:

- knowing myself better (from taking the Myers-Briggs Personality Indicator Assessment)
- looking up the projected future for the job I want
- knowing what my priorities are
- admission deadlines for colleges that I am interested in
- learning how to apply to different colleges
- looking for scholarships
- writing a better personal statement

For many of the students, writing a personal statement was a daunting hurdle to overcome. Justin Mays, who will be receiving his transfer Associate in Science Track 2 degree from Bellevue College in June, was motivated by the SLC to tackle the task. By early February, he had written a strong personal statement and applied to two universities, including the UW. He said, "having someone else go over my personal statement was a big help. Thank you!"



DO-IT attended two conferences in snowy Colorado.

DO-IT Goes to Colorado: New DO-IT Video Released

by Terrill Thompson, DO-IT Technology Specialist

There's nothing quite like Colorado in November. Snow blankets the nearby Rocky Mountains, but skies tend to be bright blue and temperatures warm. In 2012, I traveled to Colorado for two consecutive conferences, the EDUCAUSE Annual Conference (www.educause.edu/annual-conference) in Denver, immediately followed by Accessing Higher Ground (accessinghigherground.org) in Westminster.

EDUCAUSE is a nonprofit association of information technology (IT) leaders and professionals in higher education. Its membership includes staff and faculty from over 1,800 colleges and universities, and the national conference attracts thousands of people (the 2012 conference had 4,528 attendees). DO-IT has been active at EDUCAUSE for more than twenty years, during which several IT leaders have emerged as outspoken champions for accessibility, talking publicly about the need for more accessible IT and for higher education institutions to take a stronger position in demanding that IT be usable by everyone.

In 2012, the *AccessComputing* project, a partnership between DO-IT and the UW Department of Computer Science and Engineering, produced a video in which several of these outspoken IT leaders were joined by university presidents and chancellors in sharing their thoughts and perspectives regarding IT accessibility. The video's premiere was one of the highlights of the 2012 EDUCAUSE conference.

The video, *IT Accessibility: What Campus Leaders Have to Say*, features a dozen campus leaders, including University of Washington President Michael Young. According to President Young, "What the university offers and makes available has to be offered to everybody. We cannot afford to waste the talents or the brilliance or the minds of anybody, and making things accessible allows everybody to engage in the university."

Some of the video's participants were on hand for the EDUCAUSE premiere. They offered remarks and answered questions about the importance of building and buying accessible technology. The video and event were covered in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (chronicle.com/blogs/wiredcampus/campus-leaders-speak-out-on-value-of-keeping-tech-accessible/40852) and provided the stimulus for EDUCAUSE president Diana Oblinger to issue a call for senior higher education leaders to "begin a dialogue on how their institutions can more effectively achieve IT accessibility" (www.educause.edu/blogs/diana/role-campus-leadership-ensuring-it-accessibility).

After an exciting week at EDUCAUSE, I traveled a few miles north to Westminster, Colorado for Accessing Higher Ground (AHG), the "Accessible Media, Web and Technology Conference." This was the 15th Anniversary of AHG, and DO-IT has been attending since the beginning. AHG is a much smaller conference than EDUCAUSE, attracting hundreds of attendees rather than

thousands, but its focus is a perfect fit for the work that DO-IT does. Most attendees play some role in assuring that higher education institutions are accessible, particularly when it comes to technology access.

At AHG, the new *Campus Leaders* video once again took center stage. It was featured during a keynote luncheon, after which I facilitated a panel discussion regarding some of the ideas that were raised by campus leaders in the video. In particular, Dr. Gerry Hanley, Senior Director of Academic Technology Services in the California State University Chancellor's Office, says this in the video: "Making accessibility a priority in [vendors'] development roadmap is going to be driven by the market demand. And if an institution never says a word, the vendor isn't going to do anything about it. So if we begin to communicate our demands collectively, then the vendor will recognize the market value of accessibility." The panelists, representing five higher education institutions plus the nonprofit organization ATHEN (Access Technology Higher Education Network), discussed Dr. Hanley's quote and shared their own ideas and strategies that conference attendees could apply moving forward.



A still from the video, IT Accessibility: What Campus Leaders Have to Say.

Everyone has a role to play in making technology accessible. It's important to have higher education leaders supporting that goal and the effort required to reach it. But it's also important for everyone else—staff, faculty, students, vendors, advocates, elected officials, and countless others—to consider ways that they can help to improve technology accessibility. One of the simplest things we all can do is always ask, “is this accessible?” any time we encounter a new website, software application, device, or product. The more often we all ask that question, especially if we ask it aloud, the more likely it is to finally make a difference. After DO-IT's two weeks in Colorado, more and more people are asking that question.

You can see the *Campus Leaders* video on YouTube as well as the DO-IT Video website at www.uw.edu/doit/video/itaccess.

Scholar Profile: Sara Teshome

I was a *DO-IT Scholar* from 2007-2009. I was an Intern with DO-IT in 2009, and it was actually my very first internship. From then on, internships became very important and served me as a useful way to get necessary skills I wanted to have for my career goals. I continued my undergrad learning at Evergreen State College in Olympia, WA, and during the summers I looked for and applied for internships.

First, I got some experience as a student of Braille Literacy by interning at the Washington Talking Books and Braille Library (www.wtbbl.org) here in Seattle. I spent ten weeks working on projects at the library, and completed work to satisfy an Independent Learning Contract I had constructed for Evergreen to give me credits for the internship.

After that, I found a wonderful Internship and Academic Seminar opportunity program at The Washington Center in D.C. (www.twc.edu). Applying to the program took months



Sara in front of the White House in Washington D.C.

of planning and multitasking, as I had to fit in the application process with the heavy load of classes I was taking. I got accepted with a scholarship for students with disabilities.

I spent two months of this past summer interning at a non-profit organization, the International Fund for China's Environment (IFCE), where I did environmental and energy-related work to strengthen China's clean environment act and educate the public as well as the government. I also took a weekly, three-hour class that focused on the types of issues the internships gave us to work on.

Now that I am back in Washington State, I am going back to school to pursue a science education, as well as develop skills and knowledge about social work, public health, and environmental safety.

DO-IT's Winter Pizza Gathering

By Tami Tidwell, DO-IT Staff

The DO-IT family is still growing, and four times a year we have a good old-fashioned reunion. The most recent Pizza Gathering took place in Seattle and Spokane on February 8, 2013. We had over eighty attendees, including *Scholars*, *Ambassadors*, *Mentors*, *AccessSTEM* and *AccessComputing* Team Members, Parents, Volunteers, and Staff.

Participants from Spokane and Seattle were connected through our PolyCom video system. Two *Scholars* visiting home from Central Washington University even paid us a visit. Through the Seattle icebreaker, planned by A-Team members Kayla and Noah, participants learned interesting facts about each other such as hobbies, favorite subjects in school, quirks, aspirations, and more.



DO-IT participants socialize at the February 8th Pizza Gathering.

More than twenty parents attended in Seattle. The parent support network stays connected throughout the year via a discussion list. If you are the parent of a DO-IT participant and are interested in joining, please email doit@uw.edu.

Mark your calendars for the upcoming Spring Pizza Gathering. We will welcome our new 2013 *Scholars* to the fold. It will take place on Friday, May 17, from 6:00-9:00pm in Seattle and Spokane. If you would like to have a location closer to you, please email Tami Tidwell at tamitha@uw.edu.

Call For Articles

DO-IT is pleased to announce the development of a new online resource: a place to cumulate emerging examples of universal design applied in postsecondary education as complement to the book, *Universal Design in*

Higher Education: From Principles to Practice, published by Harvard Education Press (www.hepg.org/hep/Book/83).

Articles should include specific ways practitioners and researchers have applied universal design in postsecondary settings along with evidence of success. Areas of interest include:

- UD applied to online learning
- UD applied to on-site classes
- UD as a topic of instruction
- UD and faculty training
- UD applied to student services
- UD and information technology
- institutionalization of UD efforts

Articles will be peer-reviewed by members of the Universal Design in Higher Education Community of Practice (udbecop@uw.edu), and if accepted, edited by DO-IT Founder and Director Sheryl Burgstahler. Articles selected for the online resource will be available free on our website. Authors will agree to these conditions while retaining copyrights to their individual contributions.

Articles may be submitted at any time to udbecop@uw.edu. For author guidelines, contact doit@uw.edu.

The Browser: Calendar of Events

For a schedule of conferences, visit
[www.uw.edu/doit/
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