

INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES ADVISORY COUNCIL TO THE CHANCELLOR

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Prepared by Carol K. Oyster, Chair

Membership: Carol Oyster, Faculty Representing CLS, Chair; David Annino, Faculty Representing CBA; David Howard, Faculty Representing SAH; Nizam Arain, Representing Affirmative Action; Chris Coppess, Representing Disability Resource Services; Deanna Kabliska, Representing Human Resources; Ed Scholl, Representing Physical Plant/Facilities; Rob Thoen, Student Representing Student Veterans Association; Chantel Banks, Student Representing Students Advocating Potential Ability; Jake Speer, At Large Representing Web Team; and Kristin Koepke, At Large Representing CATL, Recorder.

Background: The Individuals with Disabilities Advisory Council (IDAC) was originally convened in 1977 to conform with System Policy that stated. "Each Chancellor shall appoint an advisory committee, including students, to provide information and recommendations responsive to the needs and concerns of individuals with disabilities." After a lapse of several years, the council was reconvened in December, 2013.

According to IDAC's bylaws (a revision of which was approved on December 11, 2013):

The mission of IDAC is:

- to advocate for individuals with disabilities at UW-La Crosse;
- to help the university maintain compliance with the letter and spirit of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act and other relevant laws and guidelines;
- to provide information about the needs and concerns of individuals with disabilities to the university community; and
- to examine and evaluate the university's efforts to meet the needs and address the concerns of individuals with disabilities.

Progress: The council's first actions were to choose leadership, with Carol Oyster serving as Chair and Kristin Koepke serving as recorder, and to revise the bylaws (Appendix A).

The council then decided that two tasks were important as starting points for their work. The first was to begin an inventory of where the campus stands in terms of three areas of accessibility: 1) physical barriers; 2) barriers to curricular access; and 3) attitudes that stigmatize and create barriers for individuals with disabilities on campus. Rather than focus on individuals with disabilities specifically, however, it was decided that a more comprehensive focus that would benefit all students, faculty, and staff – universal design – should be adopted. This approach minimizes perceived favoritism toward any campus group and also recognizes that members of all campus groups may experience temporary disabilities or acquire a disability at some point in their campus residence.

In January a unique opportunity was presented when Elizabeth Watson from UW Whitewater visited the campus to confer with the Library on accessibility issues and present to the Campus Climate Council on

Universal Design. A number of members of IDAC attended Watson's general presentation and the council determined that it would be extremely useful for IDAC members to make a visit to Whitewater to meet with Watson to identify and understand the policies and physical changes that make Whitewater the campus of choice for individuals with both physical disabilities and individuals on the autism spectrum. The Campus Climate and Diversity Office financial contributed in bring Elizabeth Watson to campus and has offered to sponsor a field trip to the UW-Whitewater. Chris Coppess of DRS agreed to coordinate the trip.

As the campus embarks on several construction projects, identifying any current problems as a way to provide potential guidelines for proactive changes on the project should be a priority. Larry Ringgenberg presented information on the new Student Center. The Council made several suggestions that Ringgenberg agreed to follow up: 1) using Elizabeth Watson as a consultant on the project; 2) adding a 'loop' system for hearing impaired students in the multipurpose room, the theatre, and the entertainment café; and 3) investigate the possibilities of including taller toilets in the building. Other important data collection possibilities included:

- Laurie Cooper Stoll attended a Council meeting and presented on the results of the 2013 Campus Climate Survey. It was clear from the findings presented that individuals with disabilities are very likely to report feeling uncomfortable on the campus and to report feeling bullied.
- Scheduling difficulties precluded Doug Pearson's attendance at the council, but Chris Coppess was able to take Mr. Pearson on a campus tour to examine any physical accessibility difficulties on campus.

During the semester, there were a number of successes to report. When the new parking ramp was constructed, no modification was made to the path of travel from the parking ramp to Carl Wimberly building, but in the spring a push button door was added to the north side of the building. There is still no curb cut that would allow students to easily access these doors, however.

Accessibility issues were identified in a number of areas:

Physical Accessibility Issues– These are conditions that make access to and navigation in campus buildings problematic.

- There is no curb cut between the new parking ramp and Carl Wimberly Hall (CWH). (During the semester, however, a push button door was installed to the north-facing doors on CWH so that students could have more direct access.)
- Despite the fact that there is apparently a limited (and seldom used) option by which individuals with disabilities that do not rise to the level of acquiring a state-issued disability permit can be given flexibility to move their vehicles during the day, in fact this option is very difficult to obtain. This option would allow not only students, faculty, and staff with temporary mobility issues better access to the campus, it would also benefit aging members of the campus community.
- It is currently difficult to report immediate needs for accessibility assistance on campus. An example of this sort of difficulty was reported by Chantel Banks who was thrown from her wheelchair when a campus curb cut was blocked with ice, trapping one of the wheels.
- Signage may not be appropriate in all buildings for individuals with sensory disabilities

- Restrooms in campus buildings may conform with the minimum building standards of ADAAG, but in actuality may be extremely difficult to negotiate. Council members reported that some students with disabilities report simply doing everything they can to avoid needing a restroom on campus. We would like to see at least one men's and women's accessible bathroom in every academic building to have a push button door.
- A cursory examination of movable furniture in Cartwright Center showed that there are other types of furniture that put less physical stress on staff responsible for set up and break down of meeting facilities.

In addition to the above issues, IDAC discussed the possibility of improving the protocol for people on campus to report accessibility issues, in conjunction with an awareness campaign to publicize the ways that members of the campus community can report accessibility issues.

Curricular Issues -- These conditions make it difficult for individuals with disabilities to engage with learning materials in ways available to others.

- There is currently no captioning or use of the screens at the La Crosse Center during commencement ceremonies
- Many of the videos shown in classes at UW-L do not have any captioning
- There may be accessibility issues concerning course content on D2L and other campus websites
- The televisions employed to communicate campus activities may be problematic in several areas – the height may be problematic for individuals in wheelchairs, the speed with which messages cycle may be too fast for many to be able to read the information, and the density of information on the slides may also be problematic
- Faculty members may be unaware of difficulties their choices of curricular presentation may create for some students.

Attitudinal concerns – It is clear from the results of the 2013 Campus Climate Survey that individuals with disabilities feel marginalized and uncomfortable on campus.

- Research on campus veterans has found that dropping the use of the word 'disability' in the title of an office such as UW-L's 'Disability Resources Services' dramatically increases their probability of making use of such a center. There may be many other students who find the current title stigmatizing.
- Supervisors of staff and faculty need to be made more aware of universal design issues on campus

Recommendations: For the 2014-2015 academic year the Council recommends the following:

- Elect new leadership. Dr. Oyster has resigned from the committee.
- Collect more information about the current situation in regards to the three identified areas of concern.

- The committee recognizes the need that UW-L showed strive to go above the Minimum Standard of the ADAAG building standards and to build and renovate space to meet Universal Design principles.
- The IDAC committee should stay current with all new construction and renovation to all the academic buildings so that the committee can make recommendations on build accessibility.
- Follow up with Elizabeth Watson to confer on changes that will move UW-L from being minimally compliant with ADA to providing a higher quality of life for individuals – students faculty, and staff
- Clarify reporting channels on individuals with disabilities clearer and more efficient. For example, any subcommittee dealing with these issues (such as the subcommittee on the Campus Climate Survey results) should report to IDAC as the central advisory body for the Chancellor.
- Collaborate with councils, committees, and student groups that make recommendations to improve accessibility and the quality of life for individuals with disabilities on campus. This collaboration and communication is vital so that work is not replicated by multiple, councils, committees, and student groups.