

The History of San José State University: The Disability Resource Center

Student activism set the stage for the establishment of the first program to serve students with disabilities at the California State University (CSU) System, on the San Jose State University (SJSU) campus in 1972. By today's standards, there were only a handful of students with disabilities, most of whom had physical disabilities and used wheelchairs. But they had the determination to ensure that the campus listened to their needs, and SJSU did just that.

When the Disabled Students Office (DSO) was first established in 1972, it was headed up by Mary Rogers and one administrative support staff. They served 64 students with disabilities, which seemed like a lot at the time. Mary served for nine years and worked to develop services and improve physical access across the campus. When Mary retired in 1981, the number of SJSU students with disabilities had swelled to 277, and the DSO was still under the Student Activities Office. In 1977, the DSO started the annual "Awards Program."

In **1982**, Martin B. Schulter joined the San Jose State University campus to become the first Director of the DSO. In 1985, on the program's 13th birthday, the University made the DSO an independent department within the Division of Student Affairs. The DSO served 307 students.

In **1987**, Dr. Charles Burdick, Dean of the School of Social Sciences, worked with the DSO to obtain the department's first reading machine for blind students: the Kurzweil Reading Machine. In 1987, the KRM weighed several hundred pounds, was as large as a washing machine and just as noisy. But this remarkable piece of machinery was the first of its kind to allow visually impaired and blind students to scan printed documents and to read aloud the text scanned in a robotic voice (synthesizer). In 1987 there were 355 registered students with disabilities. In 1988, the DSO was one of four CSU campuses awarded an grant to established a High Technology Center (HTC). The HTC grant established two part time positions and funds to purchase several adaptive computers, and was the start of adaptive computing at SJSU. In 1988, there were 496 registered students with disabilities.

In **1990**, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law, having a profound effect upon universities and colleges across the nation. In 1990, there were 670 registered students with disabilities. The 90's proved to be a time of change, growth, and challenges for disability services across the nation. Newly-identified students with specific learning disabilities were presenting themselves to disability centers, posing new types of accommodations and needs. In 1994, there were 1,003 registered students with disabilities.

In **1992**, the Disabled Employee Assistance Program (DEAP) served 150 employees with disabilities and officially became a part of the DRC.

In **1995**, the DSO became the Disability Resource Center (DRC) signaling a change in both its role serving students and employees with disabilities, as well as serving as a resource for faculty and staff to better serve our disabled community. DRC actively participated in conducting and completing the ADA "Self-Evaluation" & "Transition Plan"¹ (1995). In 1995, then President Robert Caret signed the first of Presidential Directives (PD 95-04) committing the university to making appropriate accommodations to promote and ensure inclusion for students with disabilities.

In **1997**, President Caret revised PD 95-04, issuing PD97-03, "Accommodations for Students with Disabilities" and established the Accommodations Review Board, which assisted the senior administration with policy development and guidance, as well as review of access.

In **1998**, President Caret issued PD 98-03, "Access to Computer Technology & Laboratories for Students with Disabilities," which ensured that access to information technology is provided to students with disabilities noting the explosion of Information Technology (IT) in higher education across the nation. Additionally, DRC started the first Alternative Media Center (AMC) in the CSU one year before it was mandated by state law. The AMC, albeit a small operation, began making accessible media for disabled students who, for a variety of disability reasons, would face barriers with print materials.

In **1999**, AB 422 was passed, adding Section 67302 to the Education Code, relating to instructional materials. Although AB 422 mandated publishers of text books to provide

¹ The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) required that public universities and colleges conduct a thorough "Transition Plan" of their physical plant detailing how and when they would remove architectural barriers. The ADA also required a "Self-Evaluation" of all the programs and services to ensure access.

accessible file formats to California Higher Educational institutions, the burden of providing alternative materials clearly fell upon the campuses and, more specifically, the disability programs.

In **2003**, the Adaptive Technology Center (ATC) moved from the old Clark Library to the new Martin Luther King Jr. joint University/City Library, and was renamed the Emma E. Legg Adaptive Technology Center. With this move, the AMC was able to expand and develop state-of-the-art facilities and meet the growing demand from students with disabilities for Braille books, books on CD-ROMs, as well as accessible file formats.

That year, the ATC moved from a 300-square-foot room housing 10 computer stations, to a 3,000-square-foot facility housing 60 computer stations, shared with the AMC.

In **2005**, the demand for services soared as students requested a record number of accommodated exams, textbooks in alternative media and many other curriculum based accommodations. DRC at SJSU has also become one of two campuses in the nation to produce music Braille in house for its students. The need to address adaptations in information technology was finally becoming a major issue for institutions of higher education.

In **2006**, additional staff joined the DRC family adding one position to the AMC and one to the ATC to address the demand for support services reflected in the use of Information Technology (IT) now an embedded part of the teaching curriculum. The first deaf student graduated from the Nursing department, truly a milestone. The number of students who are deaf and hard of hearing continued to be a slow but steady increase, making SJSU the largest program serving students who are deaf & hearing impaired in state supported programs. In 2006, there were 1,024 students with disabilities (962 students in general session and 62 in International and Extended Studies). San Jose State University continues to lead four year institutions in providing a comprehensive approach to accommodating and supporting students and employees with disabilities.

Founded in 1857, SJSU is now celebrating its Sesquicentennial year with activities and events that started in January of 2007. As a part of that celebration “Where Tradition Meets Tomorrow” the DRC now serving over 1,100 students with disabilities celebrates its 35th birthday. In 2007 the campus is actively engaged with the other CSU campuses to implement a system wide initiative that ensures access to electronic information. SJSU is once again leading in the field of disability services and accommodations. In March of 2007, President Don Kassing signed the Presidential Directive (PD): “Access to Electronic and Information Policy for Persons with Disabilities.” The PD sets the stage for working teams across the campus to focus on making sure that electronic information and technology provided through computers or electronic media are accessible.