



2013

# Making Disability a Part of Diversity


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## **TEAM ADDI**

### **Making Disability A Part of Diversity**

#### **TEAM MEMBERS**

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Stefanie King, Business Manager, School of Social Work

Scott Sherman, Associate Professor, Mass Communication

Lauren A. Shiver, Associate Vice President, Advancement Services, Development and Alumni Relations

Bhavna Shroff, Professor and Graduate Program Director, Orthodontics

*Project Sponsor: Velma Jackson-Williams, Assistant Vice President for Institutional Equity*

#### **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

As part of Theme I of VCU's Quest for Distinction, our project will help improve access to the services provided by Disability Student Services (DSS) office to students with disability. Recruitment and retention of qualified disabled students will increase. These students will achieve with higher graduation rates and contribute to a productive and skilled workforce. Improving the services provided to disabled students and better retention of these students at VCU will attract faculty members with expertise or a special interest in serving the disabled. Our project will also serve Theme I of Quest by continuing to make VCU a leader among national research universities in providing all students with quality learning/living experiences focused on inquiry, discovery and innovation in a global environment. VCU will be the central partner of a vibrant and enriched urban community.

The improvement of DSS at VCU will demonstrate to the surrounding community that VCU is committed to make disability a part of diversity - (Quest, Theme IV). The development of new outreach programs and the expansion of existing programs involving the community will be critical. This partnership will develop a "bridge of excellence" between the community and the university and enrich the surrounding community and the commonwealth of Virginia.

#### **PROJECT GOALS**

1. To persuade VCU that the Disability Student Services office has a critical need for additional support in several different areas which include funding, staffing resources, and increased space for staff and students.
2. To provide examples of successful models of disability service offices at other institutions (gold standards) around the country.
3. To motivate VCU to fund DSS campus wide to reach the gold standard in disability services

#### **STRATEGIES**

Our team interviewed the directors of the DSS offices on the Monroe Park and MCV campuses about the current organization of their respective offices/divisions. We analyzed the information received and compared various aspects our DSS office to other institutions known around the country for their excellent DSS offices (gold standards). For example, at the Arizona State

University, aside from the significantly larger funding and staff, the student disability services is computerized to expedite registering with the office, requesting and delivering services. The goal of the ASU system is to only have one face to face meeting and allow students to request all services and accommodations online. The ASU database also allows better tracking and outcomes assessment. The institution also decided to outsource the interpreting services to an outside firm so services are consistently good and available upon request. The number of interpreters on the fulltime staff is limited to one and two staff members are recorders and transcribers. This is significant savings in fulltime positions and an opportunity to fill these positions with more diverse expertise. The university has also implemented on campus transportation using golf carts. None of the services mentioned above are available at VCU.

From the information we gather from our peer institutions, this project identified several existing gaps in our current VCU disability support structure and resources.

### **ACTION STEPS**

- We defined Disability as a part of Diversity.
- During the spring, we met with the directors of the DSS office on the Monroe Park and MCV Campus to understand the mode of operation of each office and services provided to their respective student population. We established areas of needed improvement.
- We researched and called the institutions known for the excellence in serving the disabled. In our research, we had the opportunity to gather data and to speak with directors to discuss their experience in serving the disabled population (The Ohio State, and Arizona State University).
- In July, our group began meeting, either in person and/or by phone, to discuss our findings and brainstorm on how to apply some of the best practices to VCU.

### **OUTCOMES**

The outcomes of this project are two-fold:

- Short term: The short term outcomes include the immediate shift in the culture at VCU, embracing disability as a part of diversity, and the inclusion of disability into the marketing plan of VCU to convince the audience that VCU is committed to improve the entire experience of students with disability on campus and beyond. We also recommend that VCU purchase scribe pens and notebooks for students with disability. They are a small financial investment that will help students and foster collaboration between the two campuses.
- Long term: The long term outcomes include the increase in the amount of funding to support the two programs (MPC and MCV) to a level equal to the gold standard and the establishment of an online service request system that facilitates the distribution of services and also provides a tracking system for outcomes assessments. We request more space for the DSS on the Monroe Campus so multiple testing areas can be available to students and more program development can occur to assist students

Through this project, we identified existing gaps in the services that are provided on the two campuses based on the differences in student needs. There is a significant need to increase funding and space for DSS so students can be better served and innovative programs can be

developed by DSS. We also identified that the number of people providing services on the academic campus needs to be increased.

## **SUSTAINABILITY**

The recommendations of this report should be integrated into the day-to-day function and operation of excellence at VCU. Team Addi understands that change cannot happen overnight. The first step is a positive change of the culture on the VCU campus. By creating a more welcoming campus for students with disability, VCU will recruit significant talents and expertise (students and faculty) and assure the long-term sustainability of the program.

Disability has to be valued as a full part of the living/learning experience that the campus wishes to offer. With the increasing number of disabled students attending higher education, we can assume the needs for students will also remain on the rise. Without increased funding and additional space, VCU will not be able to adequately serve the disabled population and assure that these students are on a path to success. The allocation of more space to accommodate a larger number of students and offer a better testing environment will certainly help students succeed.

We ask for meetings to be setup before January 1, 2014 and a dialogue started with Joyce Knight to identify a space that she will be able to relocate to within the next 12 to 18 months to increase her office and testing space.

## **RESOURCES**

- Access information on DSS at Monroe Park and MCV through interviews.
- Research the gold standard in disability services by contacting the ADA coordinator and the directors of DSS on both campuses.
- Contact directly the DSS at the Ohio State University, Arizona State University and University of California, Berkeley and research their webpages.  
Weekly meetings or phone conferences to discuss the findings and define the next step.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- a) Improved access to budget and funding - Increasing the funding and work space for the DSS office is the first step towards improvement for the office. The Monroe Park Campus should compile a summary of all services provided over the past 12/24 months, including the number of students served, type of needs served, cost to serve each student and anticipated cost to effectively assist students registered with DSS. The results of the summary will help establish a 3-5 year business plan on addressing the needs of the students that are the most important.
- b) The Monroe Park and MCV campus need to put in place some type of outcome assessment and follow-up. This is necessary to track students' progress and success during their matriculation at Virginia Commonwealth University
- c) Establish Goals for DSS - There needs to be increased collaboration and shared ventures between the two offices (program development, technology sharing, etc.). We recognize the needs for the two offices are different, but cross collaboration will only save on the cost for some resources, but it will also assist in identifying best practices.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Improving DSS at VCU will benefit students, VCU and our surrounding communities. Our project enhances the potential of making VCU the premier urban research institution and a leader that is committed to making disability a part of diversity. The future outcomes of our project will insure that disabled students have the opportunity to be successful in college and beyond, becoming active contributors to a vibrant and diverse society.

## **PROCESS OBSERVATIONS**

Our group jumped right into the process and everyone was eager to participate. The break during the summer proved to be our most challenging time due to different work schedules and vacations. Once we were able to set up a weekly time to meet, we were able to focus on the specifics of where we wanted our project to go and design the project.

Overall, our team worked very well together. We all contributed and were able to express our own leadership styles. During different periods of the project, we all acted as “team leader”.

Since the two campuses have different needs and serve different populations (undergraduates vs. professionals), we had to account for the needs in a different way.

Where we originally intended to proceed with our project and where it ended are very different. Once we realized that we had to change the focus of our project, challenges arose. Our original vision for the project was more visually appealing and practically applicable. The research aspect of the project, although difficult at times, allowed us to develop a stronger case in support of our project.

We were fortunate that Joyce Knight, Lisa Webb and our team sponsor, Velma Jackson-Williams, were very supportive of this project. They were all helpful in giving feedback as we moved forward with our research. Lisa Webb and Joyce Knight were available to provide us the necessary data critical to the foundation of our project.

Speaking with one director at one of the leading institutions in the country helped us realize that many people are passionate about the topic of disability. Although obtaining information was challenging at times, our interviewees were happy that we were trying to improve the access and quality of the services provided to students. They offered us the opportunity to call with questions at any time, and also asked that we let them know if any of our suggestions are implemented.

  
**Making Disability  
a Part of Diversity**


**Team Addi**  
Arianne Dowdell    Stefanie King  
Scott Sherman    Lauren Shiver    Bhavna Shroff  
2013 VCU Leadership Development Program  
Sponsor: Dr. Velma Jackson-Williams

 Make it real




 Make it real

**Importance of Diversity**

 **“Diversity is absolutely essential at a research university, just as it is in life. It is an indispensable part of the learning process. It shapes what we learn and how we learn it, how we solve problems, how we interact with one another and how we think about ourselves and each other.”**

*-Michael Rao, Ph.D.  
President of Virginia Commonwealth  
University and VCU Health System*

 Make it real

**Why Disability is a Part of Diversity**

Various challenges and perseverance

Different motivation

Inclusiveness

Different perspective


**Disability / Diversity =  
Successful Individuals  
Enriched Society**

Respect

Inspiration

Different life experiences

Different sense of compassion

 Make it real

**Purpose of the Project**

Our project is about giving smart people with a disability the opportunity to get a great education to be productive in society.



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**Goals of the Project**

- 1. Persuade** VCU to continue to invest in disability services on both campuses.
- 2. Increase support** for DSS on the Monroe campus.
- 3. Motivate** VCU to become a leader and reach the gold standard in disability services.





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## What is a Disability ?

Cerebral Palsy,  
Muscular Dystrophy,  
AIDS  
Chronic Fatigue,  
Blindness, deafness,  
wheel-chair bound

ADHD, ADD,  
Traumatic  
Stress Disorder,  
Dyslexia,  
Depression

A physical or learning impairment that limits one or more major life activities.




## Differences in Disability Student Services at VCU

### Monroe Park Campus

- Director
  - Counselor/Learning Spec.
  - Disability Specialist
  - Prog Support Tech


### MCV Campus

- Assistant Director
  - Learning Specialist
  - Learning Specialist - Assistive Technology
  - Testing Center Coordinator
  - Office Assistant
  - Intern
  - Tutors, proctors and note takers (approximately 25)



## Comparing DSS at VCU


	Monroe Park	MCV
Square feet	1331	2208
Students (est.)	550	221
Budget	\$700,000	\$498,000
Staff	4 FTE	5 FTE, 1 hourly, 1 intern; 25 tutors

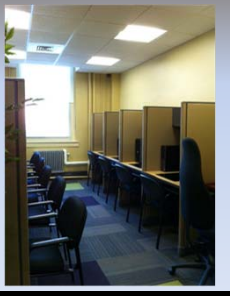



## Differences in Disability Student Services at VCU

Testing Center on the MCV Campus

Testing Area on the Monroe Park Campus









## Meet VCU Students

The video here



## Gold Standards for Disability Services

	Monroe Park	MCV	VCU	Ohio State	Arizona State
Space Allocation – Square Feet	1,331	2,208	3,539	49,941	9,000
# Students Registered	550	221	771	1,434	2,503
Budget	\$700,000	\$498,000	\$1,198,000	NA	\$2,200,000
Staff size	4 FTE	5 FTE, 1 hourly, and 1 intern	9 FTE	25 FTE	27 FTE
faculty/staff to student ratio for direct services to students	137:1	44 : 1	85:1	34 : 1	92:1





## Call for Action Includes a Change in Culture



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## Immediate Solutions

- **Low-cost solution:**
  - Shift in our thinking/culture for VCU to embrace disability as part of diversity
  - Include disabled students in VCU marketing
  - Scribepens (\$150)
  - Notebooks (\$25)
- **Online service request system**



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## We Align with Quest

- **Theme I:**  
High quality living/learning experience for **ALL Students**.  
Outcomes: Recruitment, retention, graduation success rate, and job placement.
- **Theme IV:**  
Community involvement: Bridge to excellence between the university and the community



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Disability is a  
part of Diversity

Success in College  
and Beyond



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THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION



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