Ball State Disability Services Receives National Recognition

As we continue to navigate this ever-changing landscape in higher education, one thing that continues to shine through is Ball State’s commitment to accessibility. In 2019, our university was ranked #1 in the “10 Best Colleges for Students with Physical Disabilities” by College Magazine. This recognition includes highlights about our awareness programming every March and our partnership with BSU Transportation for the on demand shuttle service. More about this ranking can be found here: https://www.collegemagazine.com/top-10-campuses-for-students-with-physical-disabilities/

In 2020, Ball State University gained recognition again from College Magazine with the #6 ranking in their article, “Top Ten Universities for Students with Disabilities.” This article recognized schools who excel at access for all students with disabilities. It also specifically mentioned our Faculty Mentorship Program for incoming freshmen with disabilities and our website that provides information based on disability. Details about this ranking can be found here: https://www.collegemagazine.com/top-10-universities-for-students-with-disabilities-2020/

Just recently, Ball State was listed as one of the top 10 “wheelchair friendly” campuses by New Mobility Magazine’s “Wheels on Campus” edition. The system for rankings by New Mobility is very thorough. They first send out a request to complete an in-depth survey. Then they conduct lengthy phone interviews with personnel at the colleges who work on accessibility. Courtney Jarrett, Director of Disability Services, spoke with Tim Gilmer from New Mobility about the accessibility at BSU. She then connected Tim to two BSU students who are chair users. The process for gaining this recognition focused on a holistic view of campus culture, architecture, community involvement, and student experience.

Additionally, Tim conducted an interview with Richard Harris, DS Director Emeritus, to gain a lens into the rich history of accessibility at BSU and the history of disability in higher education. Richard is known as a pioneer in our field, as he was instrumental in starting the national Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) and the state chapter, Indiana AHEAD. The ranking from New Mobility emphasized that BSU’s accessibility was built right from the beginning and notes that the Office of Disability Services has only had three directors since they opened their doors. “We don’t do this work to be recognized; we do it because we want students to be successful at Ball State no matter who they are,” Dr. Jarrett expressed. With strong alliances with past directors, local community support, and recognition within the field, our office feels honored to be recognized once again for the work we do. Check out the full “Wheels on Campus” magazine here: https://www.newmobility.com/wheels-on-campus/
A Message from the Director

Dr. Courtney Jarrett, the third Director of Disability Services in Ball State University history, spent some time reflecting on this past semester and her vision going forward. It has been a challenging year for many, but as professionals in the BSU division of Student Affairs, the joy we gain from building one-on-one connections with our students, faculty, and staff looked different this semester. Dr. Jarrett expressed the difficulty of connecting with new students virtually as we had to adhere to university guidelines limiting the number of visitors in our physical space. “In a typical semester, we spend at least 30 minutes with each student to discuss their transition, how things are living with a roommate, on campus involvement, and what they are interested in, etc.” she said.

With a fully online experience, many students are experiencing screen fatigue as they are already doing so many virtual meetings for classes and other things. Dr. Jarrett mentioned that staff tried to keep things as easy as possible when it came to office interactions, as to try and alleviate some of the stress for students. Come Spring 2021, we are hopeful that we will be able to see and interact with students in our office safely. We will continue to use Maxient, our office software, which helps tremendously with keeping student files online. With this virtual shift, it has made communication, creating accommodation letters, processing information, and announcements easier to send to students, faculty, and staff.

Accessibility during the Pandemic

Providing incoming students with an introduction of resources they can utilize here at Ball State looked a little different this semester. For the first time, Disability Services created an online live experience filled with Q&A’s and live speakers by Nick Bamgartner from the ACT Lab, Jim Mills from the Testing Center, Jeff Bowers from University Media Services, and representatives from the Gregory S. Fehribach Center at Eskenazi Health to discuss internship opportunities for students with physical disabilities.

In a global pandemic, our office had to get creative in communicating and connecting with students. In the past, many students would come in to chat, ask a quick question, or grab a bite to eat with someone in the office. With the pandemic, the majority of our communication has transitioned to a virtual setting. Our office did however launch a “Live Chat” feature on the DS website. This feature allows anyone to send a quick question that can be answered in real-time during office hours. Visit our website to check it out: www.bsu.edu/disabilityservices

Dr. Jarrett ended her reflection with this: “The pandemic has been really difficult for everybody in a variety of ways. We are really pleased with the students who continued to work with us and practiced flexibility. I am really proud of the resilience and grit that the students have shown this semester and the faculty we work with because this has not been easy for anybody. We really appreciate the collaboration that we have received from students, faculty, and staff to make sure we continue to be as accessible as we can be.”
A significant increase in collaborative captioning projects has also been a major part of this semester. Jeff Bowers, Caption Coordinator, provided some updates on his experiences during this pandemic. “In any given year, pre-pandemic, we were averaging 300 projects. This semester the university produced 1200 prerecorded video projects with captions as well as 176 live web conferences scheduled with captions.” Jeff and his team have been extremely busy this year working with vendors and faculty. Additionally, there has been an increase in caption requests for online classes. Going forward, Jeff is hoping that the communication with faculty around caption requests can be a smoother process. Jeff and James Marconi, DS Assistant Director, have been working closely with updating information that has been sent out to faculty to assist with the increase of captioning requests. James’ focus on cohesive streamlined communication with faculty and captioning is his main goal for 2021. This pandemic has exposed new areas of need for students and captioning is at an all-time high. Jeff and James expect this trend to continue in Spring 2021.

Freshmen Spotlights

**Jenna Rust**
For new freshman Jenna Rust, COVID-19 was not going to get in the way of her college experience. Jenna has continued to thrive in college regardless of the circumstances this year. From Carmel, IN, Jenna was drawn to Ball State because of the community atmosphere and the dedication of supportive faculty. After visiting other institutions Jenna knew she would feel the most academically supported here at Ball State. Despite the pandemic, Jenna recently became a member of the Alpha Chi Omega (AXO) sorority. “I did not expect to join a sorority, but it has brought me opportunities to meet new people! I have met so many friends from it. I was worried it would be challenging to make friends, but it was so easy to connect with girls in my sorority.”

Majoring in Telecommunications, Jenna’s passion for sports has been part of her academic journey since high school. As the previous manager for her girl’s high school basketball team, Jenna’s goal is to continue that path here at Ball State. She is hoping come 2021 she can apply for the position as a manager for the BSU Women’s Basketball team and make that dream a reality. Her future career goals include wanting to work for the Indiana Pacers as a social media consultant. It is her ideal blend of basketball, marketing, and media.

COVID-19 has caused many students to miss out on traditional college experiences. For Jenna not being able to attend sporting events and in-person classes have been the toughest. Jenna’s advice for any incoming freshman is to “…not be afraid to put yourself out there to meet more people.” Although it has been challenging to find motivation in a mostly virtual college experience, she emphasized the importance of being yourself and “trusting your gut.”

**Rosie Portelli**
As a new freshman from Valparaiso, IN, Rosie Portelli was not going to let COVID-19 interfere with her college experience. Rosie heard about Ball State and the academic opportunities that mirrored her career goals of teaching high school English. “I would like to teach high school English to make students feel included and understood.” Since coming to Ball State, Rosie has joined the Education in Action organization and Ball State Dance Marathon. Both organizations have allowed Rosie to make strong connections and make new friends. “I have made a lot of friends… it’s really fun and a lot of commitment to be a part of the Dance Marathon…” Rosie has participated in fundraising events, organizing, and participated in collaborative projects to help raise money for the Riley Hospital for Children in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Finding balance as a freshman can be challenging, when you add COVID-19 to the mix it can add an additional layer of stress. When asked what advice she would give to any incoming freshman, Rosie stated: “Try not to join too many organizations which could affect your schoolwork…” Rosie is proud of the contributions she has made for both the Education in Action organization and Dance Marathon but knew finding balance and staying focused with school was her priority. Rosie’s positive outlook on her first semester sparks hope and optimism. No matter the barriers COVID-19 presents itself Rosie continues to find meaningful connections and is ending her first semester strong.
A Message from the Assistant Director

Celebrating over a year with Disability Services, Assistant Director James Marconi shared a moment of reflection and optimism moving forward. With a drastic shift in class modalities in 2020, there has been a significant alteration in note taking accommodations. Advising students to think ahead, James has been resolved to pushing students in becoming more self-sufficient and discovering alternative accessible technology to assist with their academic goals. James noted that online learning allows students an opportunity to have their educational experience be in their own hands. “It is important that students feel they have some control over their educational experience in order for them to feel a sense of ownership in what they learn while at Ball State.” Preparing students to shift from in-person to online overnight can be hectic, so to alleviate this pressure, James worked diligently in reaching out to students early on to prepare. “It is my hope that we can continue to provide opportunities to students so when they look back after graduation, they feel a sense of ownership and pride in what they have learned and accomplished – I think online learning is one such opportunity.”

James and Nick in the ACT Lab are currently brainstorming ways to create educational guides to assist students in ways to utilize alternative note taking assistance. In the past, students would rely heavily on peers. In 2021, James is hopeful that note taking procedures will be revamped and restructured so students can begin relying on technological advancements rather than individuals. When asked what he is looking forward to most in 2021, James said: “All things going well, I hope we can return full time to campus in fall 2021 and begin seeing people more comfortable with the current situation.”

Meet Nick Baumgartner, BSU Manager of Accessible Technology

Nick Baumgartner, a proud Ball State Alum (BS ’10, MA ’14), is celebrating his one-year anniversary as the Manager of Accessible Technology in the Assistive Computer Technology (ACT) Lab. Recently he sat down to share some of his goals as we enter 2021.

The ACT Lab doesn’t just assist students registered with Disability Services. The staff also oversee web accessibility and evaluate possible educational and enterprise solutions for BSU. Having a strong alliance with Enterprise Solutions within IT has allowed accessibility to be at the table when BSU purchases new technology. “In 2020, we have consolidated a large majority of the purchasing of new technologies down to two people, both of which have strong alliances with accessibility. Special thanks to Mark Watters and Todd Meister for helping Ball State be a more digitally inclusive place through purchasing. Also a big thanks to Chief Information Officer Loren Malm and all IT leadership for taking accessibility on campus seriously and viewing it as a priority and part of our technological quality of life here on campus.”

Although the pandemic has been a challenge, the ACT Lab has been able to assist the increase of remote and online learners rather well. “Majority of our products are on the cloud so no matter where you live, we can get materials sent over digitally.” Prior to the pandemic, Nick and his team worked closely with online learners and were well equipped for the virtual change. Nick shared that the largest group of individuals who utilize their services were already fully online students in specific programs like the ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis) program in the Department of Special Education.

Increasing retention and new users has been a challenge for the lab. One of Nick’s goals in 2021 is to increase exposure, retention, and awareness of the ACT Lab. “All people can benefit from having their books put on a digital format. It has a practical use for people with different disabilities.” Nick has already started communicating with current students to begin preparing for Spring 2021. Nick highlighted that the lab does more than just converting textbooks to alternative formats, they also offer course consultations and resources. “If you find yourself taking longer than your classmates to study the same material, you should be using the ACT Lab. We can give you tools to increase the quality of studying while decreasing your time input. If it takes you 3 hours to struggle through a reading, I can give you a tool that reads it to you in under 30 minutes.”

If you are interested in learning more about how you can incorporate technology to improve your quality of life, you can contact the ACT Lab at actlab@bsu.edu or visit RB 168.
Alliance for Disability Awareness (ADA) Update

“This semester has been trial and error…” President of Alliance for Disability Awareness (ADA) Savannah Bassett stated. But it’s through these moments where ADA has uncovered new and innovative ways to stay connected. Mark your calendars because starting Spring 2021, ADA is planning “Coffee with ADA” on University Green. Dates will be shared soon. At these events, students, faculty, and staff can enjoy FREE coffee, tea, or hot chocolate to mix and mingle while following CDC guidelines. ADA is currently looking for volunteers to assist with “Coffee with ADA”. If you are interested in volunteering please email: ada@bsu.edu

As Indiana prepares for Disability Awareness Month in March 2021, ADA has some amazing virtual events planned. Starting March 17th ADA will be hosting a weeklong Disability Awareness Week starting off with “Piss on Pity: We Will Ride” film about the origins of ADAPT (American Disabled for Attendant Programs Today). Additionally, plans are underway for a keynote virtual presenter to speak to students during the week. ADA also wants to celebrate the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) turning 30 years old with a trivia night.

ADA is hoping to collaborate with the American Sign Language club as they have done in the past. Elizabeth Love, ADA Secretary and Social Media Coordinator, is currently working on a new logo which should be ready soon. You can find ADA on Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/ADABSU/

ADA Officers:
President- Savannah Bassett
Vice President- Caleb Posey
Secretary and Social Media Coordinator- Elizabeth Love

Sadly Noted

It is with deep sorrow that Disability Services report the passing of Matthew R. Bodine, Chase L. Tetzloff, and Dustin Gilmer.

Matthew R. Bodine

Born on October 28, 1972, Matt attended the Indiana School for the Blind from kindergarten through 5th grade. Matt honorably received his bachelor’s degree from Ball State University in 1998. Competing all over the Midwest as a member of the goal ball team, Matt eventually found himself in Denver, Colorado playing at Nationals. Additionally, his love for bowling did not go unseen. Matt participated on several bowling leagues throughout Indiana and Roanoke, VA. After college Matt worked for several companies as a customer service representative, including Internal Revenue Services, WellPoint, and Bosma Industries for the Blind. Matt loved spending time with his family, fishing with his dad and uncles, eating his mom’s home cooked meals, listening to weather stations, and pestering his sister. Matt will be missed, and our sympathy goes out to the family and friends of Matt who knew him best.

Dustin L. Gilmer

Dustin had a devotion to disability justice that did not go unnoticed. As the project manager for the Office of Disability Affairs in the Indianapolis Department of Public Works, his dedication to improving accessibility was unparalleled. Dustin earned his bachelor’s degree with a double major in journalism and telecommunications from Ball State University in 2015. During his time here, Dusty was involved in Ball State’s Power Soccer Club. During his freshman year, Dustin became close with Greg Fehribach, a Ball State graduate and Indianapolis attorney. Greg soon became Dustin’s mentor and assisted him throughout his professional career. Dustin and his sidekick Carver will be deeply missed. Our deepest condolences to the family, friends, and community who knew him best.

Chase L. Tetzloff

Chase was born September 10, 2000, and would have been a sophomore at Ball State University this Fall. Chase had a passion for traveling, motorcycling, and gaming. While in high school he was part of the wrestling team and a former boy scout. We send our deepest sympathy to the family and friends who knew Chase best.
Don’t forget BSU’s Disability Services in your giving plans.

Funds donated are used for resources and equipment to enhance campus accessibility.

All Indiana taxpayers’ donations to BSU Foundation - 8603 are a 50 percent tax credit (a $100 gift costs only $50)!