

# THE CHARLOTTE W. NEWCOMBE FOUNDATION

## Conference Notes – Scholarships for Students With Disabilities Program

Edinboro University, October 15-16, 2009

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### October 15 – Welcome dinner

All twenty-one participants enjoyed dinner at The Riverside Inn in Cambridge Springs, PA. Tom Wilfrid presented a *PowerPoint* update of Newcombe Foundation activities and introduced the conference agenda.

### October 16 – Tour and discussion

*Introduction by Bob McConnell, Director of Office for Students with Disabilities, Edinboro University*

- After welcoming the group to the Edinboro University campus, Bob described the artwork that lined the walls of the meeting room as creations of disabled students at Edinboro. The pieces included one large, impressive wall sculpture that depicted daily life on campus from the perspective of a wheelchair-using student.
- Thirty years ago, faculty members at Edinboro began thinking that they could effectively serve students with disabilities. Sixteen students with paraplegia enrolled and did well. Initially, students asked for minor adjustments: help carrying cafeteria trays, assistance in reaching books on high library shelves. Edinboro was subsequently perceived as a place that could accommodate students with disabilities and their requests for adaptations. Faculty support continued to grow.
- Edinboro is possibly the only campus in the U.S. that offers 24/7 attendant care in the residence halls and has a waiting list of students wanting access to this service. There are 465 students who have formally disclosed disabilities on campus this year, forty-five more than last year; approximately half are students with learning disabilities. Approximately one hundred wheelchair-bound students attend the university; the exact number is not known because some do not register with the Office for Students with Disabilities. Although the flat Edinboro campus makes travelling by wheelchair manageable in good weather, learning to move through snow often presents a challenge for disabled students.
- Since Edinboro is a state institution, a typical student can expect to spend \$40-60K over four years if that student is very frugal. A student with a disability can expect to pay up to \$40-50K each year over five years.
- Graduate students with disabilities are able to access the same support as undergraduates only if an advanced degree is necessary for employment in the field. For example, a student with a BA in social work would not be covered, because one can find employment as a social worker with that degree. A student with a BA in psychology, on the other hand, would be eligible for support while attending the graduate school.
- There is an active chapter of Delta Alpha Pi, the National Honor Society for Students with Disabilities at Edinboro (see [http://www.edinboro.edu/departments/osd/delta\\_alpha\\_pi.dot](http://www.edinboro.edu/departments/osd/delta_alpha_pi.dot)).
- Students with disabilities – even those in wheelchairs – are integrated into all seven residence halls on campus, some without attendant care and some with their own attendants. Because attendant care is provided via a “shared caregiver” model, physically disabled students reside on the first floors of two connected buildings. Students who live in housing with attendant care often have private rooms because their reach range is limited. In addition, a student may have a power chair, a backup manual chair, a shower chair, and a service dog. One student who is ventilator-dependent has 24-hour nursing care that is set up privately.
- Pennsylvania’s vocational rehabilitation agency contributes to fees for services such as wheelchair maintenance, van shuttle service, and attendant care. Attendant care, which costs between a few hundred dollars and \$18,000 per semester, may be publicly and/or privately financed. State vocational rehabilitation generally pays these fees for students from Pennsylvania. (Temple and Penn State were interested to hear this, as they report serious problems and inconsistencies with state rehabilitation offices.) Bob reports that NJ vocational rehabilitation is not very supportive, but that Edinboro has had success working with vocational/rehabilitation departments in Ohio, West Virginia, New York, Texas, Georgia, and South Carolina. Recently, both Vermont and Massachusetts approved Edinboro for Medicaid funding for attendant care.
- The 585-acre Edinboro campus creates a real need for building-to-building shuttle service. Student users pay a substantial fee, but the service is available on demand.
- Students also have the option to sign up for the department’s wheelchair repair service (\$450 per semester).
- There are only two registered ASL interpreters that serve Gannon, Edinboro, and Mercyhurst Universities. Bob has access to “real time texting” but finds that many students prefer the personal touch of a live interpreter to this technological alternative. Mark Rust (McDaniel College) noted that “certified” interpreters tend to be better

at speaking (interpreting for hearing people on behalf of deaf students) than “qualified” interpreters, who prefer to sign an oral message for the deaf.

- Edinboro upperclassmen that are trained as minimum wage “peer advisors” help fee-paying students with disabilities to develop planning, organization, and study skills. Peer advisors are trained to break down coursework and offer guidance specific to the needs of the disabled student client, as well as to help the student stay on task. Bob’s office advises the advisors and receives weekly reports on student-client progress.
- Students with disabilities sometimes arrive on campus without experience in independent living. Parents of students with disabilities have often been strong advocates for them during their lives, and some students have been accustomed to depending too much on their parents.
- Students with disabilities occasionally behave badly off campus (a problem also common to many non-disabled college students); Bob offers his home phone number to students for use after hours.
- Bob notes, “Many typical students don’t know where to turn when they run into trouble. They’re lost. With students with disabilities, we emphasize right from the beginning” that the guidance offered by the Office for Students with Disabilities can provide valuable, personal support.
- Edinboro students with disabilities are 10% more likely than non-disabled students to return for a second year, and have a 5 to 8% better four-year graduation rate than non-disabled students.

*Remarks by Dr. Jeremy Brown, President of Edinboro University*

*Also present:* Marilyn Goellner, Director of the Alumni Fund and Stewardship, and Terri Birchard, Director of Records Management.

- Edinboro University is committed to providing a complete college experience for all students, and encourages interaction between disabled and typical students. The college acknowledges the learning that able students experience as they assist disabled students.
- Edinboro has one of the largest programs for disabled students in the U.S. with 5% of the student population qualifying as disabled. An increasing number of students served are disabled veterans.
- Edinboro is a good place for disabled students because of its flat campus, academic assistance, tactile labs, and general support from the faculty and staff. A number of faculty members who have children with disabilities are attracted to teaching at Edinboro. They see the setting as an environment that is good for their children; tuition assistance is also available once these children are ready to attend the University.
- Off-campus and extracurricular activities, such as wheelchair basketball, enrich the college experience of students with disabilities at the University. The wheelchair basketball team has won championships.

*Tour of The Crawford Center*

- There is a basement room designated for Braille and tactile services.
- The Lobby features a long ramp for wheelchair access to the second floor and a “constellation dome” that makes astronomy accessible to people with visual disabilities.
- A large open recreation room with a television, a couch, tables, a ping-pong table (adjusted to wheelchair-appropriate height) and weight-training equipment is available. Students with disabilities have access to all recreational facilities, but some prefer to use the dedicated space.
- Eileen Michaels, an occupational therapist, trains students in mobility and independent living, as well as traditional therapy. Students schedule OT around their classes. The health and physical education department adapts PE requirements for students with disabilities. Students from Gannon University who major in health sciences can do internships at Edinboro.
- Some of Edinboro’s testing rooms include assistive technology. Ceiling-mounted cameras monitor students while they take exams.
- An interview room is available for family consultation with Edinboro staff. This is a comfortable space meant to encourage confidential conversation about sensitive issues. For example, the family of an incoming freshman may seek reassurance that the staff at Edinboro can meet the complex needs of their son or daughter.
- A “life skills apartment” is available for students in transition (from high school to college and from college to community). Its kitchen and bathroom are specifically designed to accommodate students with physical disabilities. The living area contains a foldout sofa, and the bedroom is furnished with a bed and desk; both rooms have doors leading to the outside. Prospective students and their families may stay in the apartment when travelling to campus for admissions interviews. Students with physical disabilities can use the apartment in preparation for more independent living in the community with the requirement that they write a paper about their experience that includes suggestions for improving the space.

- A Pennsylvania Vocational Rehab Counselor's office is located in the building since that person spends so much time on campus.
- In the assistive technology lab, specialist (and speech therapist) Sharon Conklin fielded many questions about Edinboro's assistive services, and others in the group added comments from their experience.
  - Sharon uses "Dragon Naturally Speaking" by Nuance, voice-recognition software that enables one to "type" 120 wpm with 98% accuracy.
  - Students can access scanned textbooks via audio or large print. Some students use Media Player on their personal computers to read alternate media files.
  - Bill Welsh (Penn State University) mentioned a new program that works directly with publishers for authorization to scan textbooks. Bill also suggested Bookshare (<http://www.bookshare.org/>).
  - AccessTextNetwork works with publishers to improve college textbook accessibility.
  - Many students are learning on Macs now. A few years ago, Macs were not conducive to running assistive technology programs, but they have improved dramatically.
  - Kurzweil software is now available inexpensively enough to allow many visually disabled students to purchase it individually. Bill Welsh stated that "Read & Write Gold" software does what Kurzweil does for half the price (<http://www.readwritegold.com/>).
  - Digipens, available at Target, are a "live scribe pen." A student (or note taker) takes notes with the pen, and the pen "plays back" what is written. This technology also works with Dragon Naturally Speaking.

*Group discussion following the Crawford Center tour*

- LIU: Phyllis Brown Richardson reported that LIU was one of the first institutions to accept students with disabilities and expressed enthusiasm for what she had learned on the tour. She noted that "in the city, students have to learn how to become independent travelers. I'm excited about the apartment experience."
- LIU: Elaine Winslow is in a unique position as the Coordinator of Career Directions, which prepares students for the work world. Students with disabilities at LIU do internships during their freshman year. "They are small internships that I monitor very closely, and I do that with Newcombe money. I'm proud of what we're doing at LIU." Elaine mentioned that "no one else seems to know about" the federal Workforce Recruitment Program (<http://www.dol.gov/odep/programs/workforc.htm>).
- Edinboro: Bob McConnell expressed interest in expanding opportunities for students with disabilities at Edinboro to include reading bus schedules (and other "city" survival skills) and offering off-campus summer internships. Those are two aspects of undergraduate education that are not presently factors at Edinboro.
- NYU: Richard Moss. "We're getting ready to relocate the Moses Center. This tour gave us some ideas about how to best use our space. I definitely think it was worthwhile to come down here today."
- McDaniel: Mark Rust said, "It's amazing, what you have done at this facility." Comment: 86% of the teachers for deaf children are white, hearing women. Fewer than 20% are deaf themselves. Deaf students and their parents need (deaf) role models in educator positions. At McDaniel, 80% of the candidates in the graduate program are deaf, and Newcombe money is focused on this population.
- McDaniel: Kathy Curtin strives to cultivate partnerships with foundations, not just the "one-time ask." Her example: T. Rowe Price Alumni Breakfast. She arranged for a presentation about McDaniel at the corporate campus and invited alumni who now work at T. Rowe Price to attend for a half day. Subsequently, T. Rowe Price asked the University about establishing an "externship day," where 15 students from McDaniel would spend one day at the company. McDaniel will hold an orientation for these students to help them fine-tune resumes and prepare for the externship. Students will also have the opportunity to meet with McDaniel staff after the externship, to "wrap up." Kathy hopes that the College will use this model as a template for other corporations. There are no discussions about a gift yet, but the experience is promoting relationships between the corporation and the College at a number of levels. In addition to the possibility for funding, this experience offers real insight into the business world for students.
- Penn State: Jane Childs discussed establishing and augmenting endowment funds. Penn State's new "Trustee endowment challenge" means that income (from endowed funds) that is generated for annual scholarships will be matched by the University 1:1 every year from now on.

*Opportunities for sharing ideas*

- AHEAD Chapters (Association on Higher Education and Disability). Annual conference (Denver July 12-17, 2010). Partner (not for profit) and Institutional memberships available (range \$260 - \$865 annually)
- Listservs
- PEPNet: The Postsecondary Education Programs Network

- Several representatives volunteered to write an article for the Spotlight section of the Newcombe Foundation website about some aspect of the program at their institution that effectively serves students with disabilities. John Bennett (Temple) suggested that we invite everyone to comment about a particular topic from his/her institution's perspective.

#### *Discussion of proposed changes to CWNF policy*

- There were several useful suggestions about nomenclature for the use of Newcombe funds for disability-related assistance to students. "Newcombe Support Scholarships" was eventually chosen.
- Temple: John Bennett described how distribution of such awards is done monthly, using money set aside for this purpose. Financial Aid and OVR representatives are "at the table," and many issues are solved via non-Newcombe sources.
- Penn State asked whether other institutions "hold back" Newcombe dollars for accommodations awards, as Temple does, and also asked how OSD staff can be sure that students are spending the awards as they say they will. Wendy Kohler (Temple) explained that funds are put into student accounts. She and staff colleagues are directly involved in setting up some of the funded services; they know how students spend their funds. Students requesting grants for special technology must complete a three-month technology training module. Tutors secured by OSD for students with disabilities who receive grants for such services report back to the office regarding sessions with students. Tom Wilfrid emphasized that the Foundation's expectation is that if a CWNF grant is awarded for a certain disability-related purpose, the institution will make sure it goes to that purpose.
- There was general agreement that there is great advantage, as prices become more affordable, in providing personal equipment for students with disabilities to own (vs. access in institutional labs). This gives students more independence.
- LIU objected to the requirement (not new) that Newcombe Scholars have a 2.5 or higher GPA. At LIU, students need a 2.0 to graduate, and it is "unfortunate" that CWNF requires more.
- There was a general discussion of how/when to determine GPA. Some students could bring a lower GPA up to a 2.5 if they receive an accommodation award (and hence the support they need), but not without it. [Note: The Foundation has no fixed opinion on this point.]

#### *Use of Newcombe Funds: Getting the money to the students*

- LIU is testing ways to distribute scholarship funds to students. As of now, if CWNF funds are deposited into a student's tuition account, the Financial Aid Office will first apply the funds to any outstanding balance that may be in the students' accounts. All other bills have to be paid before they can benefit from Newcombe Scholarship. "It really takes away from the gift of Newcombe." As a scholarship award affects the financial aid calculation, it may not provide additional funds for the student (especially one with very low income).
- Bob McConnell pointed out that, for some students with disabilities, the OSD can certify for the Financial Aid office an elevated estimate of financial need. This can offset the negative impact of a disability-related scholarship on the financial aid calculation.
- For certain types of equipment, OSD can purchase it for the institution and loan it to students as needed.

#### *Other topics*

- Students often enter college with psychological evaluations from many years ago; some need to be updated.
- It's important to insist that students "bring something (i.e., \$) to the table." This helps them realize their role as adults.
- Some Voc Rehab offices are frustratingly inconsistent; students and staff are unable to know what (if any) expenses will be covered and at what rate. Judgment may also vary from state to state and from office to office.
- International students must provide evidence of financial sustainability, and if they apply for a scholarship (thus claiming financial need) they need to provide evidence of what changed (from the time they were considered to be "financially sustainable") before being considered.
- To alert eligible students to the availability of Newcombe scholarships, multiple avenues of communication seem to be most effective (web announcements, posters, email blasts, letters to home, and word-of-mouth).

#### *Future conferences*

Tom Wilfrid asked for suggestions as to the frequency and location of future conferences. Participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to tour a university campus and voiced interest in holding future conferences at other partner institutions. Bill Welsh (Penn State) said he had learned from everyone, and suggested a listserv and meeting every 12-18 months. Valerie Stewart Lovell (Brooklyn) suggests meeting in two years, as they will have had a chance to see how the new policy is working. Others chimed in as well; the consensus appeared to be that we

should convene somewhere between annually and biannually. At this point, the Foundation's preference is to meet next during the spring of 2011, hopefully at Gallaudet University in Washington, DC.