

Standing Committee On Disability

The ACPA Standing Committee On Disability welcomes your interest and involvement. We are part of the American College Personnel Association (ACPA). Full information about ACPA, including membership information, can be found at their site: <http://www.acpa.nche.edu>

History of the ACPA Standing Committee for Disability

The Emergence of Disability Awareness within ACPA

Disability-related concerns have been evident in the Association since at least 1981. In that year, the 1981 ACPA National Convention in

Cincinnati, Ohio included no less than six programs concerning disability. Presenters of disability-related material in 1981 included several who were later to be ACPA leaders: William Bryan, Greig Stewart, Jeanne Likens, and Ron Speier. Commissions which co-sponsored these 1981 disability programs included Commission IV (Students, Their Activities, and Their Community), Commission XI (Student Development in the Two-Year College) and Commission XVI (Academic Support in Higher Education).

Two years later in 1983, the Convention again offered programs on disability, including a "Task Force for Handicapped Services," chaired by Kathy Hamilton of Southern Illinois University. The meeting of this task force was co-sponsored by Commissions I (Administrative Leadership) and VIII (Wellness). Though subsequent years showed additional programs and work of the Task Force, even by 1983, no less than five Commissions had been involved with disability issues within only three Convention years, an impressive broad base of support within the Association.

Subsequent Convention years included more programs and more meetings of the Task Force. In 1987-1988, an Annual Report was completed by Mike Stevens, chair of the then-named Task Force on Handicapped Students and a graduate student from Athens, Georgia.

In 1989, what became the Task Force on Disability, chaired by Kathy Hollister, was lodged under the aegis of Commission I.

The Convention years 1994 and 1995 saw the growing interest of ACPA members in disability concerns and the growing urgency of their need for information, focus, and advocacy. While some members showed interest on the basis of providing services to students with disabilities, an initially small but growing number of ACPA members identified as those with disabilities themselves and sought a focus for the needs and interests they shared as a constituency within the Association.

During 1994-1995, a Task Force on Disability mailing list established regular communication among members. In 1995, most communication moved to an electronic list, housed first at the University of Maryland College Park and then housed at ACPA when a server became available. The listserv speeded communication among the growing number of members of the Task Force. Use of electronic media also increased Task Force member access to communication, with member-owned technology allowing the

print to be converted to large print, read by a computer-based screen reader, or seen by deaf/hard of hearing members.

Concurrently, the Association began to recognize an increased need to coordinate disability-related services to its members, including those who attended the annual convention. While disability-related services designed to assure access to the convention had been offered in an ad hoc manner in the past, in 1995, the first Access Coordinator was appointed to the 1996 Baltimore convention planning team. Thus, the 1996 ACPA convention saw the first coordinated approach to providing these services. Access Coordinators have been named to each of the convention planning teams since 1996. In 1996, the Task Force on Disability became independent of Commission I, having shown that they were an entity that was ready for this independent status.

Also in 1995, the Task Force on Disability was pleased to submit a successful ACPA mini-grant application to enable it to contribute to the ACPA Affirmative Action goals concerning members with disabilities. Through the assistance of the grant, a consulting group of professionals from inside and outside ACPA was established to review the disability related services and programs available at the 1996 Baltimore convention.

The Task Force on Disability continued to gain momentum in academic year 1996-1997. Important dialogue and formative planning continued over the listserv with many good programs offered at the combined ACPA/NASPA convention that year in Chicago. Included in at least ten programs of that convention which addressed disability-related topics were a Deaf culture lecture, given by a local Deaf professional, followed by a signed supper at which both hearing and deaf ACPA members had an opportunity to learn more about American Sign Language (ASL) as well as to converse about shared interests.

Further informed by observations made at that 1997 convention, the consulting group funded by the 1995 Affirmative Action grant produced a report in May of 1997, providing the first informed overview of this aspect of our convention. The report was shared with several members of the Association, among them the 1998 convention Access Coordinator, the professional who would lead the provision of disability-related services at the 1998 convention. Subsequently, the 1998 Access Coordinator used the report and experiences gleaned from the report and from the 1996 and 1997 Access Coordinators as a valuable training tool for the 1998 convention planning team.

Membership in the Task Force itself continued to grow as well and it became increasingly clear that the Task Force was comprised of three overlapping groups: (1) student affairs professionals with disabilities, (2) disability support service providers, (3) disability allies who, as campus advocates, address issues of access and awareness of the needs of people with disabilities who work or study at their community college, college, or university.

In 1999, important conversations occurred with the Chairs of the Commissions and the Director for Commissions. These conversations confirmed Commission understanding of the constituency which would be represented by such a Standing Committee and the strong and urgent need felt by Commissions for collaboration on issues which wove together functional areas (e.g., admissions, counseling, etc.) and disability topics.

The constituency nature of the proposed Standing Committee on Disability had been discussed for several

years with chairpersons of the existing Standing Committees. Strong and unwavering support was evident from this group of leaders within ACPA.

The year 2000 proved to be a momentous one for the Task Force on Disability. Considerable dialogue within the Association had resulted in a fully-developed proposal for the Task Force on Disability to become the Standing Committee for Disability. Following the procedures described by the Bylaws of the Association which had been revised as part of the years-long dialogue, a vote was held at the convention Business Meeting of the Association.

It was at this historic April 4, 2000 meeting that ACPA members voted to indeed establish the Standing Committee for Disability, effective July 1, 2000. Many members showed strong support for the creation of this entity, particularly members of ACPA Commission VII (Counseling and Psychological Services) and the Standing Committee for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Awareness, the latter of which adjourned their own business meeting early so that members of their Directorate could attend the Association Business Meeting and support the proposal. The June 2000 post-convention issue of ACPA *Developments* contained quoted reactions of members of all three constituencies represented by the new Standing Committee for Disability. The vote was a most emotional moment for all, as reflected in the *Developments* comments.

Also in 2000, the then-Task Force was pleased to again receive an Affirmative Action Mini-Grant from the Association. Grant monies were used to establish the first formal connection between ACPA and Gallaudet University, the only university in the world for students who are deaf. At the 2000 ACPA convention, a most stimulating and enjoyable meeting occurred between Gallaudet Executive Director for Student Affairs Carl Pramuk, members of his staff, and ACPA leadership. Located in Washington DC, Gallaudet's rich history adds an important part to the strong diversity initiatives of the Association. We are proud and deeply pleased to welcome Gallaudet student affairs professionals to ACPA.

Present

The membership of the Standing Committee for Disability includes the three overlapping constituencies identified earlier: (1) student affairs professionals with disabilities, (2) disability support service providers, (3) disability allies.

Student affairs professionals with disabilities

Identification as a person with a disability can be a matter of concern, including fears about discrimination for those who have health-related disabilities such as diabetes or other less-visible disabilities. Additionally, debate about the necessity of declaring ones' disability has been particularly contentious within the disability community as demonstrated by an article in the Chronicle of Higher Education (Whose Field Is It, Anyway? Disability Studies in the Academy. Chronicle of Higher Education March 19, 1999, page A60). For these reasons, the exact number of those on the Standing Committee for Disability who have a disability is not known.

Among the areas of concern for this group have been employment, including employer knowledge of relevant accommodations and employer attitudes toward student affairs professionals with disabilities. Additional concerns have included the provision of mentoring opportunities by professionals with disabilities for professionals with disabilities, including those who become disabled adventitiously after

several years as an able-bodied student affairs practitioner. Professionals with both adventitious and congenital disabilities are currently represented on the Standing Committee for Disability.

Student affairs professionals with disabilities bring their life experience as a person with a disability to the dialogue, informing a more insightful development of policy and practice concerning disability in higher education. The focus on this group of constituents was one of the primary motivations for seeking Standing Committee status within the Association.

Disability Support Service providers

Standing Committee for Disability membership includes those whose campus responsibilities include provision of disability-related services. Many of these Standing Committee for Disability members are members of additional organizations such as AHEAD and bring a wealth of knowledge about current law and practice. Some of these providers are specialists in individual areas of disability (e.g., interpreters and others who are especially knowledgeable about deaf/hard of hearing issues). Others are generalists within the field of disability support service.

Disability Allies

The Standing Committee for Disability includes those who are not members of either of the two preceding groups but who wish to learn more about disability and address disability issues for a variety of reasons. Within this group of allies, some are Directors/staff within units on their campuses which focus on diversity/multicultural issues. For these allies, their disability interest is part of an inclusive definition of diversity.

Also within the Standing Committee for Disability allies group are those who are Chief Student Affairs Officers (CSAOs) within their institutions. Among the many pressing issues facing these practitioners, disability services have certainly emerged as one of the most contentious and needing of a broad base of knowledge concerning law and current practice. Among the many hopes of the Standing Committee for Disability in seeking a recognized place within the governance structure of the Association is the hope of more vigorously assisting CSAOs in these sometimes confusing areas.

We look forward to our future work together as contributing members not only of the Standing Committee for Disability but also of ACPA and of the student affairs profession.

- Read the [full proposal](#) to become a standing committee!

[Back to Top of Page](#)

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