

Standing Committee On Disability

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Proposal to establish a
Standing Committee For Disability
Within the
American College Personnel Association
(ACPA)

January 13, 2000

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Purpose of the Proposal

Disability awareness has been part of the informal structure and substance of the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) for at least the last 18 years. Though clearly a concern of the ACPA membership, an administrative 'home' has never existed for this body of concern. This proposal seeks to establish an administrative home within the Standing Committee structure of the Association.

At a time when students with disabilities are enrolling in college in record numbers (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2/27/98), and those once-students are already present in the field as student affairs professionals with disabilities, the time is right for the Association to establish a Standing Committee For Disability to serve the purposes outlined below.

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 (Counseling and Psychological Services). 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. Eventually, what became the Task Force on Disability was lodged under the aegis of Commission I and from there it gained focus and momentum.

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 speech 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.

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 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 For 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.

Present

The present membership of the Task Force on Disability includes the three overlapping constituencies identified earlier: (1) student affairs professionals with disabilities, (2) disability support service providers, (3) disability allies. Twenty-six states and the District of Columbia are represented.

Student affairs professionals with disabilities

There are currently nearly 80 members of the Task Force, at least 15 (over 20%) of whom identify as ACPA members 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 a recent 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 Task Force who have a disability is not known. Hence the notation that "at least" 15 members identify as having a disability themselves.

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 Task Force.

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 is one of the primary motivations for seeking Standing Committee status within the Association.

Disability Support Service providers

Task Force membership includes those whose campus responsibilities include provision of disability-related services. Many of these Task Force 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 Task Force 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 Task Force 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 Task Force 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.

Because the Task Force is comprised of these three overlapping constituencies with student affairs professionals with disabilities as a primary focus, we believe the Standing Committee conceptualization is most appropriate for our needs. The historic ACPA conceptualization of commissions and the preponderance of commission current practice is as a vehicle thorough which to focus on functional areas, a perspective which would allow us to only meet the professional development needs of our Disability Support Service providers. Our focus on student affairs professionals with disabilities does not seem consonant with the focus of many of the existing commissions.

In addition, the more flexible, advocacy nature of the Standing Committee structure seems ideally suited for the organization we have evolved to become. As allies within the group, we wish to work within a standing committee structure to use the insight of student affairs professionals with disabilities to inform our understanding of disability in colleges and universities. Our understanding will include but not be limited to the experiences of student with disabilities.

Purposes of the Standing Committee For Disability

As members of this Standing Committee, we recognize that we are each members of one or more of the following three interconnected, mutually-supportive groups:

As student affairs professionals with disabilities within the American College Personnel Association, our purposes include:

- Providing a network within the Association through which we might share ideas, experience, concerns, professional development, and friendships among ourselves as student affairs professionals with disabilities;
- Providing a vehicle through which we might formally and informally share our individual experiences to better inform our colleagues in the association about the promises and the challenges of the higher education environment for people with disabilities;
- Showing others that we are just "normal" people who happen to have disabilities, neither helpless and dependent nor blessed with special powers and gifts; there are as many differences among us as there are differences between people who are without disabilities. Our disabilities are sometimes the environment in which we live rather than our individual attributes.

As disability support service providers within the American College Personnel Association, our purposes include:

- Providing a vehicle for the development, promulgation, and advocacy of best disability practices in disability support service provision within community college, college and university environments, informed by the experiences and perspectives of student affairs professionals who themselves have disabilities;
- Providing timely information and training opportunities on important and controversial "pressing issues of the day" concerning disability support services on our campuses, especially as this information pertains to functional areas within student affairs (e.g., admissions, residence halls, etc.);
- Providing a valuable Association connection to other associations concerned with disability so that resources and information might be shared across organizations whenever possible.

As able-bodied disability allies within the American College Personnel Association, our purposes include:

- Knowledgeably supporting people with disabilities in reaching their full potential, recognizing that though the disability may present challenges, so too are there challenges presented by our own and others' lack of knowledge and resultant attitudes based on that limited knowledge;
- Knowledgeably supporting changes in higher education that will benefit student affairs professionals and students with disabilities;

As members of one or more of these three interconnected groups, working together, our purposes include:

- Providing assistance to the Association and its membership of student affairs practitioners concerning the many pressing disability issues which we confront on our respective campuses, best practices in addressing these issues, and resources which might be employed in successfully answering disability-related needs;
- Assisting the Association in further developing policy, procedure and practice based on its Statement of Non-Discrimination encompassing race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, affectional or sexual orientation, and disability;
- Substituting knowledge about disability for misunderstandings, lack of information, and stereotypes about people with disabilities;
- Fostering positive, informed attitudes about college student personnel professionals and students with disabilities;
- Providing a vehicle within the Association for discussion of disability-related issues as they apply not only to the association and the college student personnel profession but also as they apply to higher education;
- Advocating for the needs of people with disabilities in higher education.

Goals

- (1) To initiate, design, and select Convention programs and related services and activities that will inform the Association membership and provide people with disabilities with full and equal access to Convention activities;
- (2) To regularly provide ACPA members with information about disability-related topics and best practices through articles in ACPA publications, including Developments, About Campus, Commission and Standing Committee newsletters, Association websites and other media;
- (3) To educate ourselves and others not only about the physical and medical aspects of visible and non-visible (HIV, LD, psychological, etc.) disability, but also about related aspects such as the cultural and political aspects of disability;
- (4) To create a climate of opportunity for people with disabilities in higher education by supporting informed placement services for both candidates and employers.

Involvement in presenting programs/workshops at ACPA conventions

As detailed in the earlier History section of this proposal, disability awareness has long been part of the informal structure of the Association. Increasing numbers of student affairs professionals with disabilities, coupled with elevated campus attention to issues of students with disabilities makes this a propitious time for the Association to establish a place for disability awareness in the formal Association structure.

As also detailed in the History section, there have been an increasing number of ACPA convention programs focused on disability. Selected programs in the last three convention years have included a deaf culture lecture followed by a signed supper, and several programs heralding the change from an accommodation service orientation to student-directed advocacy.

Of particular note is the increasing number not only of disability-related convention programs but also of those programs which are presented by ACPA members with disabilities. There appears to be great interest in this topical area among ACPA members, whether they are student affairs professionals with disabilities, disability support service providers or those without disabilities.

Proposed Activities

Activities of the proposed Standing Committee For Disability would focus on the three inter-related constituencies within the Standing Committee, (1) college student personnel professionals with disabilities, (2) disability support service providers, and (2) able-bodied allies. While many activities would be held during the convention, the Standing Committee For Disability will also offer a continual source of information and assistance throughout the year. The goals of these activities are those outlined in the previous "Goals" section.

While activities designed to meet the goals could be many and varied, the inaugural activities of the Standing Committee For Disability will include:

Continual contributions

- (1) regular contributions to ACPA publications designed to increase practitioner knowledge about disability. These contributions will include further development of the Standing Committee For Disability website, a resource will be linked to the ACPA site and which will provide links to many important disability-related resources to assist campus practitioners in addressing disability-related concerns;
- (2) providing information about accessible program development to those whose programs are accepted for convention, and, by extension, to all ACPA members who offer programs in the performance of their routine functional responsibilities; and
- (3) development of an ongoing Mentor program, now in the early stages of development, to provide assistance from experienced student affairs professionals with disabilities to new student affairs professionals with disabilities and also to student affairs practitioners who though they have been in practice for several years are now newly-disabled and seeking resources and collegial support.
- (4) providing consultation assistance to ACPA leadership on Association policy and practice related to disability.

Convention-focused contributions

- (1) sponsorship and co-sponsorship of disability-related convention activities to include pre-convention workshops, programs, receptions, etc.;
- (2) regular contribution to convention planning activities to include identifying presenters, entertainers,

exhibitors, etc. who can bring disability-related knowledge to practitioners who attend the ACPA convention;

(3) in conjunction with the convention on-site placement service, providing employer and candidate education concerning disability-related topics for those involved with convention Placement;

(4) as a special initial focus, developing convention programs about disability-related topics for Chief Student Affairs Officers, a group whose heightened concerns and need for information offers a special opportunity for early assistive focus for the Standing Committee For Disability.

Proposed relationship of the Standing Committee For Disability to other structures and professional organizations

The proposed Standing Committee For Disability would join other Standing Committees of the Association in their focus on constituency-related advocacy and support though informed professional development and integrated practice within student affairs functional areas. The present Standing Committees include the Standing Committee on Multicultural Awareness, the Standing Committee for Graduate Students and New Professionals, the Standing Committee for Men, the Standing Committee for Women and the Standing Committee for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Awareness.

Outside of the Association, the proposed Standing Committee would look forward to the opportunity to form liaison relationships with other associations concerned with disability in higher education. These associations include HEATH and AHEAD as well with the disability-related network in NASPA.

The Standing Committee would also look forward to establishing professional relationships with associations which may focus on specific disability groups in higher education. These groups include the Postsecondary Education Programs Network (PEPNET), a professional association dedicated to enhancing postsecondary opportunities for deaf/hard of hearing students, as well as other professional associations which focus on other specific areas of disability.

Proposed target population within the general ACPA membership

As indicated earlier in the Purposes section, the target population for the proposed Standing Committee For Disability includes ACPA members with disabilities, disability support service providers, and able-bodied allies.

Conclusion

It is a pleasure to bring before you this proposal from the Task Force on Disability, a vibrant group within ACPA and an important part of the Association's future. We look forward to the possibility of an administrative "home" within the Standing Committee structure of the Association and our shared work together from that base. We have much work that awaits us and important progress to be made together.

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