

## Memorandum

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To: W. Terrell Jones, Vice Provost for Educational Equity

From: Hilary Chubb

Subject: Addressing Concerns About Renaming Disability Services

Date: October 22, 2013

CC: Educational Equity Staff Members

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I would like to take this opportunity to formally address some of the questions and concerns which were raised last week at the staff meeting in reaction to my proposal to change the title of our Office for Disability Services.

**Summary of Proposal:** I propose to change the name of our Office for Disability Services to the Accessibility Resource Center in order to better serve our students and campus community. The Accessibility Resource Center reflects a social view of disability which is the direction in which our field is headed, while the Office for Disability Services reflects a medical model. This makes now an important time for our institution to move in the social model direction as well. Exchanging the name of our office, as it is one of the most visible artifacts, is the logical place for this change to start. In addition to moving our institutions resources in direction with the rest of our field, I believe this will allow us to provide resources to more students. This means that we will have more successful students and an even better institution

**Response to Questions:**

*What are the medical and social models?* Simply put the medical model of disability frames disability as the problem. Therefore in this model curing or managing the disability is the goal. The social model of disability identifies the environment as an issue or a barrier. The social model also embraces disability as part of diversity. As practitioners in higher education we know that diversity is beneficial to all people at our institution; students, faculty, and staff.

*What are the direct costs associated with the process?* The immediate cost will only be in changing the sign outside of our office. We have few printed materials, as electronic files tend to be more accessible. The printed materials we do use (primarily business cards and envelopes) will not be reprinted until our current stock of these materials have been used, therefore adding no additional expense. Our estimate for the sign will be less than fifty dollars.

*Will this draw more students to access services?* One of our hopes in transitioning from being known as the Office for Disability Services to the Accessibility Resource Center is that more students will feel comfortable coming to our office. One of the points I made in my presentation is that using the word Disability in the title can alienate two specific populations of students; students who identify as having a disability but do not want

others to identify them as such, and students who may have a medical condition which qualifies as a disability but do not identify themselves as having a disability. These students should be able to use resources available through our office, and when they do not use them, we are not fulfilling our legal obligations to these students.

*How do you convince students to use the office even with stigma?* Changing the title of our office is one of our next steps in this process. We treat each student respectfully and kindly to ensure that they continue using the resources available. We advertise our services at New Student Orientation events, and in University publications. Without shifting our framework from the medical model to the social one, there is little to nothing else we can do to encourage students to use our resources. Not only will the title change our office but it will also contribute to climate change on our campus and hopefully larger social change which will go even further to remove disability stigma which often discourages students from using our office.

*What are some additional costs that would be associated with this change?* As more students use our office we will need additional resources. Over the past 3 years the population of students seeking resources through our office has doubled, and we expect this trend of increased students registered with our office to continue whether or not our name changed. Therefore we are already projecting that we will need additional resources. Beyond additional staff to meet with students this will likely mean additional licenses for screen reading software, and note taking services. Fortunately, thanks to amazing advances in assistive technology, these softwares and services are already less expensive than providing similar resources was five to ten years ago. An example is the smart pens which students use to assist in note taking. Students who prefer this form of note taking resources take their own notes and our office does not hire a note taker for this student. While the pens are an upfront expense, it is a one-time cost, unlike note takers each semester for four to six years. These changes in technology make it difficult to predict exactly how much additional accommodations would cost.

*How would student know how to look up the office?* One of the things we planned from the start was to keep the word disability in our materials because many of the students who use our resources currently know us only by Disability Services. For these students, and students looking for our office on the internet, including the word disability will make us search engine friendly. This will allow us to continue working with students we currently work with and also move into the new group of students who will feel comfortable coming to our office with the removal of the word disability from our title.

*How would you educate faculty about this change?* Due to the size of our institution we could not hold a mass training for faculty about our changes, but also because of the size of our institution the Faculty and Staff Newswire is a remarkable medium for communication. This would not only allow us to put out a statement about the change in title to faculty and staff but current students as well. Another benefit to this is that there is no cost at all.