



Disability Resource Center Newsletter

Spring 2020

An Introduction by Debra A. Miller, Director

Welcome to the spring 2020 edition of the Disability Resource Center Newsletter. The DRC is an important department in the Division of Student Affairs serving approximately 1000 students annually. The current academic year has been another year of growth for our office. In December 2019, the department made the long-awaited move to our new space. Now situated in a student-centered, first-floor-accessible building, students can more easily access a variety of services. The first area set up in our new space was a lounge where students are welcome to relax, study and visit. Another important plus is the addition of more testing rooms. In our former location, we had use of nine testing rooms. We have expanded to 17! This affords more options for scheduling exams and opportunities for securing a private room.

At the end of January, we hosted an open house for our campus partners, students and the community. With support from Campus Dining Services and the Office of Military Student Services, we enjoyed plenty of food as we offered tours and conversation. Students in particular have been impressed with the new space. Comments included, “This space is far more aesthetically pleasing.” “I can’t think of a more welcoming and comfortable place to do my homework!” “Now that you have moved into a student-centered building, I am ready to register for services. I never felt comfortable going to the Health Services Building as that represented the medical model of disability.”

A highlight from the open house was meeting two former students who came to see the new layout. They remember when the DRC opened in 1980 in the Health Services Building. A year prior, they were taking a class, and for an assignment created a large, raised graphic map of the campus that was later installed on the fourth floor. The map is accurately to scale and the key indicates different textures that align to specifics on the map. It is in braille, but a little outdated now! They remarked that they were both shocked that it still existed and very touched that we brought it with us. The map is visible in several photos on the wall in our “living room.”

Read more about our new office space in the NIU Today article from Jan. 13, 2020, included with this newsletter.

Office Statistics

Our office works to provide reasonable and appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities. Exam accommodations, classroom accommodations, reformatting of text materials and provision of adaptive technology are just a few of the services that we offer.

Spring 2019	Fall 2019
328 Student Appointments	373 Student Appointments
185 New Students	248 New Students
1171 Exams (1/16 — 5/4)	1283 Exams (8/26 — 12/20)
321 During Final Exam Week (5/5 — 5/11)	354 During Final Exam Week (12/9 — 12/13)



Staff Changes

Rhiannon Luft Access Consultant



Rhiannon joined the DRC in March 2019 as an access consultant. She works with students to establish accommodations, access resources on campus and advocate for their needs.

Rhiannon is an NIU alumna, graduating with her bachelor's degree in communicative disorders and her master's degree in rehabilitation counseling. Prior to coming to NIU, Rhiannon worked as a case manager for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. She jumped at the chance to return to NIU and work one-on-one with students.

Rhiannon enjoys crafting, exploring new restaurants and traveling. An ideal day for Rhiannon is relaxing at home with her husband and three beloved sphynx cats, Priscilla, Lennox and Tyson.

Julie Slaby Access Consultant



Julie started as an access consultant in March 2019. At the DRC, Julie meets with students who may benefit from accommodations and helps develop an appropriate plan to promote success. Julie earned her bachelor's degree from NIU in communication disorders and her master's degree in rehabilitation counseling. Prior to joining the DRC team, Julie was a service coordinator, working with individuals who have developmental disabilities. Julie loves establishing a rapport with the people she supports.

Julie is excited to be working in the higher education setting as she has always valued her own personal education and wants to help others meet their own individual goals.

Outside of her passion for working with people with disabilities, Julie enjoys teaching ballet and tap to children ages 3 to 5. She also enjoys spending time with her family and friends.

Pamela Stangley
Office Support Specialist



Pamela Stangley has been with NIU for 14 years with the last 13 months as office support specialist for the DRC. Pamela excels at interacting with the students, staff and faculty, treating everyone who walks in with courtesy and respect. She brings a fresh perspective to the DRC and has become a valuable member of the DRC team with her strong organizational skills and sense of humor. DRC offers a very welcoming atmosphere and her smile is a big part of making students feel valued and welcome.

She obtained a certificate in human resource management from Cardinal Stritch University. Combined with numerous years in customer service-related positions, she transferred that experience to a successful career in human resources with various companies.

After more than 25 years in the human resource field, three closures and one RIF, the one thing we can be sure of is that the next move will be a more permanent one — to that wonderful land of retirement. Sleeping in, lunch dates, no driving in bad weather, being in the kitchen and doing whatever, whenever.

Pam Wixom
CART Specialist



Pam Wixom joined the DRC fulltime more recently, but started at NIU in 2003. She is our full-time CART provider (computer aided real time transcription) which is the instant translation of the spoken word into English text using a stenotype machine, notebook computer and real-time software.

Her past experience includes serving as a licensed certified shorthand reporter (court reporter) doing pretrial deposition work and courtroom testimony. She also worked doing broadcast television real-time closed captioning for local news and sporting events. Pam provides stadium captioning for all Huskie football and men's and women's basketball games.

Pam shared, “I enjoy spending time with my family, listening to music, walking on the beach, the sun and vacationing in Aruba.”

Erin Wilhelm
Volunteer



Erin Wilhelm feels privileged to be volunteering in the DRC at Northern Illinois University. Although she is currently in her third year of doctoral studies in the CAHE department — studying higher education and student affairs — she has spent the majority of her professional career as a public school teacher.

After completing a bachelor's degree in special education from Illinois State University, Erin taught in a self-contained, deaf and hard of hearing classroom for two years in the southwest Chicago metropolitan area.

Following graduate school at Bowling Green State University, she continued her career teaching middle school-aged students in Illinois' northernmost area. Now that Erin finds herself back in school, she relishes all of her educational opportunities, both in and outside the classroom. Her research interests include social justice education, universal design for learning and accessibility to inclusive and equitable education for all students.

John McAnally
Courier



John is the DRC's courier, which means he delivers testing materials between faculty and the DRC. He loves walking outside in any weather. Really.

John first came to NIU with his girlfriend (now wife) in 1985 as a commuter student studying Psychology. He received both his B.S. and M.A. degrees in psychology from NIU. After completing his master's degree, he stayed at NIU to work in IT support. In July of 2019 he retired from NIU after 28 years in IT support, computer programming and database administration. Now, he wants nothing to do with computers. Really.

John lives in Sycamore with his wife, daughter and two dogs. His son lives in DeKalb. Both of his children are currently attending NIU. John enjoys vegetable gardening, going to NIU football games and NIU jazz concerts. He especially likes doing the dishes, cleaning up after his dogs and mowing the lawn. Not Really.

Alex Raskind
Graduate Assistant



Alex is a newly hired GA with the DRC, helping out with a variety of responsibilities around the office. Primarily, Alex assists with testing and the seating of students coming into the center to take exams. He enjoys this role and sees it as his responsibility to help students feel welcomed and at ease when preparing to begin an exam.

Alex is working on a master's in higher education and student affairs and is looking forward to a career working to support students in their pursuits of a college education. Prior to working at the DRC, Alex worked as a registered behavior technician, providing therapy to clients on the autism spectrum. Overall, Alex is passionate about working to help people who need extra support to be successful.

In his free time, Alex enjoys being outdoors, whether that be biking, running or spending a day at the beach. Also, Alex enjoys traveling, trying new restaurants and he is always down to challenge someone in a game of pool.

Brian Glick
Cannon Fellow



Brian Glick is completing a Cannon Fellowship, authorized by Student Affairs, within the Disability Resource Center during the spring 2020 semester.

Brian's projects during the semester include working with the Division of Information Technology to create and implement an online portal for exam requests, as well as other assigned projects. Brian's full-time position is with the Student Conduct office.

NIU Today (2020)

Disability Resource Center's new location provides welcome spot for students

Jan. 13, 2020 Andrew Pemberton Centerpiece, Faculty and Staff, Parents, Prospective Students, Students

Relocated from the Health Services Building, the Disability Resource Center has found a new, student-friendly home in the Campus Life Building.

Employees settling into the spot as the new year began shared the same sentiment: "It's the right place to be."



Students and staff settle into the new location of the Disability Resource Center in the Campus Life Building.

Aligned with the university's Strategic Enrollment Management Plan, which outlines President Lisa Freeman's goals to make NIU as welcoming and as inclusive for all students as possible, the move to Suite 180 in the Campus Life Building provides a more accessible and comfortable spot for students to access services.

And it puts the Disability Resource Center right where it belongs, in a place where Huskies go to access other student services, including Military and Post-Traditional Student Services, Career Services, the University Honors Program and Counseling and Consultation Services.

Previously located in the Health Services Building for several decades, the Disability Resource Center was on a fourth floor with limited space and parking, Director Debra Miller said.

Among the numerous services and accommodations provided to anywhere from 800 to 1,000 students at a time, the center offers testing rooms for students requiring space with limited distractions, extra time, specific software or equipment and other needs not typically available in the classroom. As the center's staff expanded through the years, the testing space became increasingly limited in the Health Services Building, Miller said. Students would sometimes have to be crowded into testing rooms to be accommodated.

The Disability Resource Center's new space in the Campus Life Building has provided more space for testing.



The move to the Campus Life Building allows the Disability Resource Center to expand from nine to 17 testing rooms.

“Low distraction testing is not having a bunch of people in a room where you’re trying to take a test, especially during sniffle season, so that aspect is huge for students,” said Amanda Newman, associate director at the center. “It’s breathing room.”

The expanded space makes it easier for the testing coordinator to accommodate all students.

“It’s flexibility,” Office Manager Karen Eaton said.

Students now have a lounge area and a waiting room. They have access to Campus Life Building vending machine areas, as well as a nearby lounge space open to all students through Military and Post-Traditional Student services.

“I think the new space as a whole is a lot more welcoming to students,” said Carrie Aldrich, Interpreting/C.A.R.T. coordinator for the center.

“When students would come with appointments to our old space they would have to sit in the hallway right outside one of our offices to wait. Now we have an area where students can sit, and it’s quiet.”

The new location also provides work spaces and computer areas for many of the part-time and contracted employees Aldrich oversees to ensure students have access to the adaptive technology, interpreters and reformatted course materials they need. Those spaces weren’t available in the previous location.

The center also works with students to provide housing, dietary and other accommodations.

Along with the larger space, the move provides another benefit. It sends the right message to students and their families, Miller said.

The previous location in a medical setting aligned the center with health services. A medical environment can send a message that the disability needs to be altered or fixed, when, in truth, a disability is a characteristic of an individual, Miller said.

“The move is very much about being in a student-focused space,” she said. “This is in total alignment with the policies President Freeman set forth and the commitment of the university to have a larger space for student for their benefit and access.”

The Disability Resource Center Hosts their First Open House in the Campus Life Building



Faculty, staff and students enjoy food and refreshments while touring the new space at the DRC open house!





Contact Information

The DRC is located on the first floor of the Campus Life Building Suite 180

Hours: 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday

Email: DRC@niu.edu

Website: niu.edu/disability

Telephone: 815-753-1303