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BEACON MAGAZINE

Vol. 1 Issue 7

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DISABLED, NOT UNABLE



EDITOR'S NOTE

DISABLED STUDENTS ARE GENERAL STUDENTS

CAYLA BUSH



EDITOR IN CHIEF

This week's theme focuses on students with disabilities and how these disabilities shape their experience in higher education.

Resources provided by the Disability Resource Center are explored, as well as the struggles the DRC faces to accommodate students. Readers will learn how the DRC works daily to give disabled students equal opportunity to succeed in higher education, while also dealing with lack of funding and staffing.

Readers will also learn about the role of emotional support animals, and the ways they assist students whose disabilities are not immediately visible. Emotional support animals are different from service animals, as emotional support animals can be any domesticated animal. These animals are used especially for students students who have anxiety and depression.

Athlete, Joshua Metellus, shares his story on dealing with hearing loss while also pursuing intramural football. Metellus was not born with his disability, but was diagnosed as a child after a severe ear infections caused him to lose his hearing. Metellus tells student about how he did not let his loss of hearing deter him from pursuing sports.

Athletes from FIU's Panther football team visited the Holtz Children's Hospital for a day of fun and support with children who have disabilities. The Panthers played video games, stacked legos, and made arts and crafts with the children.

These stories illustrate another aspect of our multifaceted community and emphasize a shared experience of our student body.

DRC aims to break stigmas surrounding disabilities

CHLOE B. GONZALEZ
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FIU's Disability Resource Center provides disabled students with any programs, services, or accommodations they may need to succeed academically while working toward eradicating social stigmas about disabilities among nondisabled students.

"We are trying to challenge some of the norms about what society has taught us about what it's like to have a disability," said Amanda Niguidula, director of DRC.

The DRC –located in the Graham Center, room 190– attends to the needs of all FIU Panthers with disabilities. They specialize their services

university community to teach them about disabled students and the services offered to them. The DRC wants to help them understand disabilities, spread awareness, and fix the misconceptions surrounding what it means to be a DRC student.

"There was a very big stigma that if you were a DRC student you were just trying to gain the system ... One of the major highlights of the last few years is really showing professors how accountable we hold our students and how accountable they want to be held," said Stephen Loynaz, M.S. access consultant manager for the DRC.

Loynaz commented that the relationship between university faculty and the DRC has become more trusting and there has been a change in the climate and attitude surrounding the DRC faculty over the years.

Niguidula explained that one of her objectives for the future of the DRC is to create a time when the needs of disabled students are incorporated in the classroom and when it's no longer necessary to segregate disabled students from nondisabled students or take them out of the classroom for exams. She also wants to change the idea that disabled students don't advance to pursue higher-level education after graduating with their bachelor's.

Graduate student, Elcana Jean-Pierre, challenges that misconception. Since she was diagnosed with cerebral palsy at 13 years old, she has graduated from FIU with a Bachelor of Science in social work and is now in the first year of her master's degree.

Jean-Pierre has been with the DRC for three years where they've helped her with

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We really think of ourselves as a type of one-stop shop ... So we're here to be sure that they have whatever supports or services they might need so they can fully participate alongside their nondisabled peers in the learning environment

Amanda Niguidula
Director
Disability Resource Center

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on a case-by-case basis to give a tailored fit and relevant accommodations such as note-takers, readers, adaptable furniture, and scribes, as well as extra exam time or computer software.

Additionally, students can receive coaching during their academic career from access consultants, and attend the Focus On Success and Blue Panthers workshops.

"We really think of ourselves as a type of one-stop shop ... So we're here to be sure that they have whatever supports or services they might need so they can fully participate alongside their nondisabled peers in the learning environment," said Niguidula.

They also aim to work with all academic departments in the

The history of FIU's DRC dates back to the late 1970's and since then, it has been constantly evolving.

Because of the flexibility provided by the re-initiation of the American with Disabilities Act, the department now helps over 2000 students, after starting out with almost 300 students.

They have also changed their approach to disability from the medical model, where they focused on the disability and a one-time academic adjustment, to a social model, where disability was seen as another difference and another part of a student's identity, said Niguidula.

Today, the DRC continues to constantly change, improve, and work toward its goals for the future.

accommodations such as a note-taker and scribe, special desks and extra time for exams. She explained that even though all those accommodations helped her, she learned that everything isn't solely about her disability.

"[The DRC] made me feel like they were here for me ... When they say you're a DRC student, it's not so much about focusing on your condition. They're pretty much focusing on what they can do to make it easier for you to do what you have to do," Jean-Pierre said.

"Our goal is to be sure that not just is the DRC providing the best services to students with disabilities but that FIU in general is the most welcoming and accessible university that we have for those students," said Niguidula.

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GC 190

Disability Resource Center is located in GC 190. Students must make an appointment to meet with access coordinators in order to begin working with DRC to receive accommodations.

2000

Because of the flexibility provided by the re-initiation of the American with Disabilities Act, the department now helps over 2000 students, after starting out with almost 300 students.

SUPPORT SYSTEM

Emotional support animals assist with student disabilities

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Emotional support animals, a growing demographic among universities nationwide, have taken up a role in the lives of students with diagnosed psychiatric disabilities — as residents of dorm rooms.

There is a difference between an emotional support animal and a service animal. Emotional support animals are any “typically domesticated animal” and “mainly have to do with comfort services,” according to Stephen Loynaz, access consultant manager for the Disability and Resource Center. Support animals are helpful if the student experiences anxiety, depression, homesickness or loneliness, Loynaz said.

“For some students, emotional support animals can help them with sleep regulation because the animal will wake you up at a certain time,” Loynaz told Student Media.

On the other hand, service animals are professionals trained for a specific task their owners may not be able to do on their own: opening doors, sensing seizures, night-terrors or flashbacks.

At FIU, service animals are allowed anywhere on campus where a student can go.

“We don’t have any miniature horses on campus,” Loynaz said. “My assumption is that because we’re a very urban environment, so we don’t have any students who have chosen to get a miniature horse because the care and maintenance is very similar to that of a regular horse.”

Loynaz advises students to make good decisions about choosing an ESA.

“Make sure you pick an animal that fits your lifestyle and fits your ability to care for it,” Loynaz said. “We want to make sure that you’re happy and that the animal is happy too.”

The DRC and Housing and Residential Life work together to accommodate the needs of students who request support animals.

Under the 1968 Fair Housing Act, which prohibits discrimination against race, sex, national origin or disability in the rental of dwellings to an individual, a

documented legitimate need for a support animal is met. Students have a civil right to house an emotional support animal, but because these animals are not trained professionals, Student Housing remains the only on-campus area designated as an ESA-friendly environment.

“[Support animals] can be brought in the outside area of housing so that they can relieve themselves, but the animal is not allowed in places like the Library, Graham Center, or classroom spaces.

““

The more people who who try to take advantage of this, and the more people present illegitimate cases, the harder it becomes for other students to benefit from the process because then, we have to put in more strenuous screening procedures,

Stephen Loynaz
Access Consultant Manager
Disability Resource Center

They are not trained like the service animals are, so they do pose other risks the service animals does not pose. That is where the difference lies, if you have an emotional support animal, you are limited to the housing facilities,” Loynaz said.

And some places on campus completely prohibit animals, according to Loynaz.

“It’s usually if it poses a health risk to animals or people, so some of our labs doing specialized research with chemicals, animal hair may be an issue,” Loynaz said. “We have those on a case by case basis. With our medical programs and operating rooms, there’s obviously a very high risk of putting someone’s life in danger if you bring an animal into this area. At that point, we do find alternative methods of recreating the learning experiences.”

Upon entering college, students are faced with a newfound liberty to consider their mental wellbeing and access tools, such as Counseling and Psychological Services, to develop a better understand of themselves.

“FIU is, in many cases, the first time a student might have the opportunity to

really explore the mental health side of their needs,” Loynaz told Student Media, “because of culture, socioeconomic status, stigma, or any history that student may have, sometimes mental health concerns aren’t looked at.”

Though, CAPS, in tandem with widespread discussion of mental wellness and efforts to destigmatize mental illness, is allowing students to open up about mental health.

“A student may come here to FIU

with long term needs, CAPS does a good job of referring them to service providers in the area. Once the student gets connected with one of those long term services, the ESA conversation can be brought up with that provider.”

Emotional support animals are supplementary to long-term therapy, not pets. Loynaz described the process the DRC uses to investigate the legitimacy of ESA requests. Not only will putting a pet out there as a service animal break FIU rules, but it’s felonious.

“The more people who who try to take advantage of this, and the more people present illegitimate cases, the harder it becomes for other students to benefit from the process because then, we have to put in more strenuous screening procedures,” Loynaz said.

“If we have a letter from your pediatrician saying that you need an ESA, we may look at that with a bit of suspicion because the pediatrician is not usually the one who would not usually prescribe you an ESA. It should be an appropriate doctor. That’s usually the main red flag that comes up when we see a letter.”

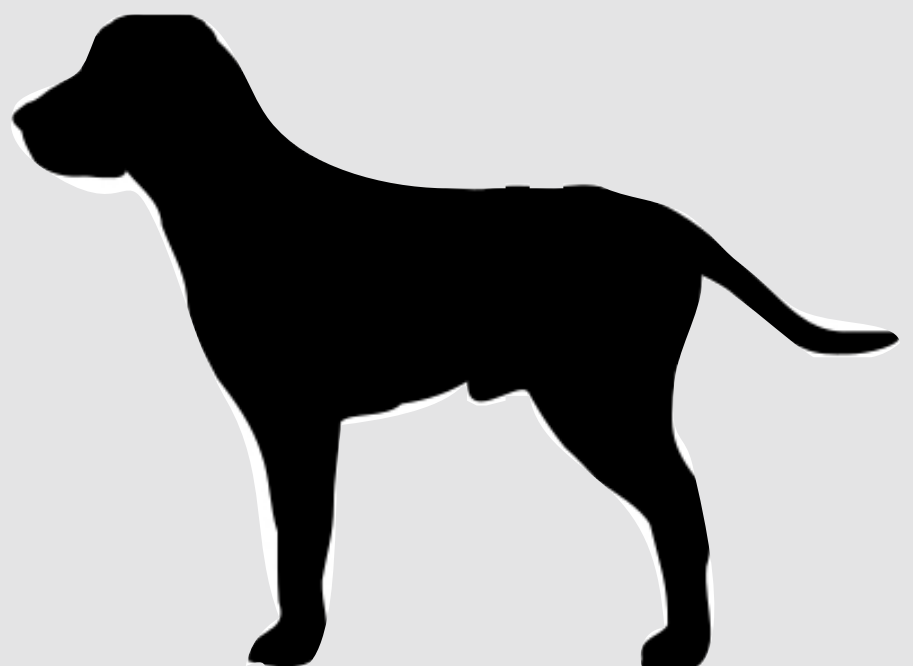
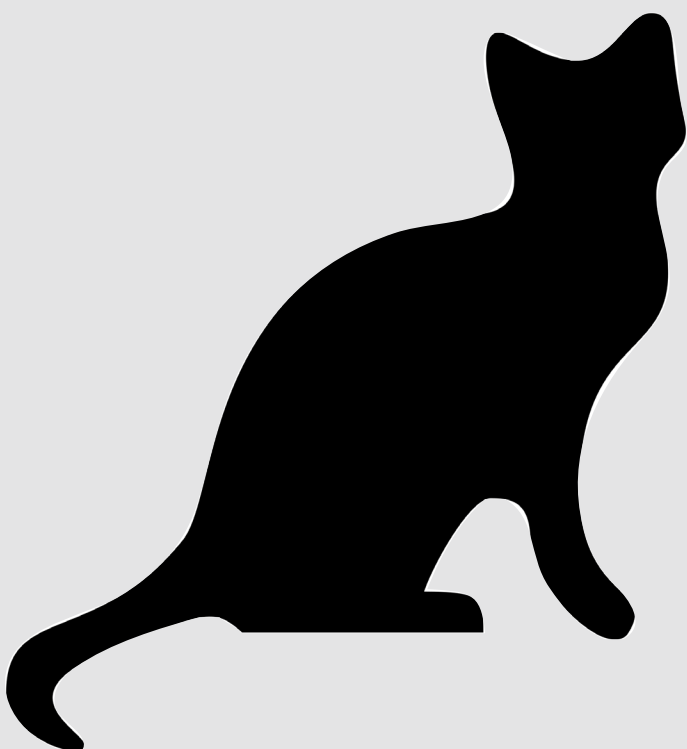
He urged students not to purchase these letters online.

“We know about these sites. The thing about these places is that, legally, they can’t say they’re been seeing you long term because they haven’t been ... They’ll usually say that they’re backed up by these laws and all this research. The letter will usually have more information about laws and research than the actual student and that’s a big red flag.”

The entire process to apply for an ESA should only take a few days and begins in Loynaz’s office with the presentation of a letter. Afterwards, Housing is notified by the DRC. The student will meet with Housing to go over University policy and their roommates to make sure there aren’t any complications in the form of allergies or phobias, then, the student is free to bring their ESA into their dorm.

“Don’t suffer in silence,” Loynaz said. “If you are dealing with something that requires some support, there’s a lot of support on campus. All FIU employees are trained to get in contact with us. Speak to your RA [resident advisor], speak to your professors or speak to your mentors. The earlier you get to us, the better.”

“When a student presents themselves



DRC faculty works for those ‘left behind’

STEFEN REID SUTTLES
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College is often referred to as the most difficult time in one’s academic career. For students with disabilities, it would be exponentially more difficult if it weren’t for the efforts of the Disability Resource Center.

The DRC —located in the Graham Center, room 190 at the Modesto Maidique campus and the Wolfe University Center, room 131 at The Biscayne Bay Campus— provides assistance for students with disabilities and training for faculty to be better equipped to handle the finer aspects of instructing these students. Assistant Director Martha Wong fell in love with this career path during her tenure as a teacher. “I’ve always been very passionate about helping students with disabilities” says Wong, calling attention to a population that is often “left behind.”

“We love what we do, we love to be here for our students,” said Wong, mentioning the abilities of the students that visit the center.

Of course, disabilities aren’t



Amanda Niguidula, director of the DRC (left), and Martha Wong, assistant director for DRC (right).

PHOTO COURTESY OF DRC

always those that are obvious from a cursory glance. “That’s what most people are used to,” said Wong, mentioning the struggles of students with “invisible” disabilities; learning disabilities that might equally preclude a student from excelling academically.

Director of the DRC, Amanda Niguidula, mentions the importance of these students doesn’t matter solely to the success of the students themselves, but the betterment of “the entire university community.” An FIU alumna, Niguidula remembers her own experiences of

sharing ideas with other students as “what I found so valuable” about attending the university. Niguidula feels that it’s an important facet of her job to ensure that future FIU students have the same opportunities.

Wong also has long standing ties

to FIU, having worked in finance for many years before transferring to the DRC. When asked why she liked the work so much, she responded, “because these are the students that want to be here, because they want to continue on in their career.”

Another important aspect that is shared among the students visiting the center that most people tend to discredit is that “they have the right to come to higher education, they have the right to continue their degree.” For a population that is often ignored, being seen and treated with dignity is something deeply appreciated.

The DRC isn’t solely responsible for interfacing and providing resources for students, but also ensuring “that all departments are working in accordance with the ADA.” Compliance with these programs is vastly important for the university as a whole, which is just another way that the DRC looks out for the greater good of the university.

Overall, these two alumni work hard for the students who would otherwise be left by the wayside and make sure to look out for FIU’s academic environment as a whole.

What you should know about the DRC

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College can be an exciting time in someone’s life that is spent not only on learning about your future career, but also about yourself. However, these years can be stressful and difficult for some. One place where students can seek aid is the Disability Resource Center.

“The DRC is able to provide a safe space for students to discuss their disability related concerns. We are sometimes the first opportunity some students have to explore this part of their identity and communicate about it with the University,” said Stephen Loynaz, the access consultant manager of the Disability Resource Center.

Although not spoken about often, the DRC at FIU is a welcoming place with various resources and services to help students throughout their college career. Some of these resources and services are reasonable attendance accommodation, informal/formal academic grievances and even seeking a resolution with the U. S. Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights if no other resolution presents itself.

In the Modesto Maidique Campus, the DRC can be found on the first floor of GC, and in the Biscayne Bay Campus, it can be found on the first floor of the Wolfe University Center.

One valuable resource provided by the DRC is the state-of-the-art assistive technology computer facility. The facility has both PC and Macintosh products, as well as study tables, scanners, wireless capabilities and printing. The purpose of the lab is to support student’s coursework, as well as serve as a product demonstration and training facility for students, faculty and staff. This means that if a student were interested in making a purchase, they could visit the lab prior to assure their decision.

The DRC also aids students financially by providing a multitude of scholarships, which over 30 students are granted each year. Some of these include the Dr. Fareed Haj Scholarship Endowment, which supports scholarships for undergraduate and graduate students who are blind or visually impaired and the Johnson Scholarship Foundation, whose mission is to aid disadvantaged people to obtain an education.

However, it should be noted that the DRC’s resources and services are not limited only to students attending school physically. If a fully online student with a disability wants to seek

“The DRC is able to provide a safe space for students to discuss their disability related concerns. We are sometimes the first opportunity some students have to explore this part of their identity and communicate about it with the University.”

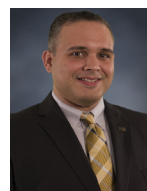
Stephen Loynaz
Access consultant manager
Disability Resource Center

out the DRC, they can get connected via phone or email to schedule a welcome appointment. If students would like to interact with the DRC this semester in a less official manner, a special workshop is going to be held later this semester.

“We are hosting our semester Focus on Success Workshop,” explained Loynaz, “we are going to be focusing on Career Development and Victim Empowerment. We are partnering with our colleagues to bring forth an engaging presentation that will help shed light on some of the major points students should be aware of regarding their careers and relationships.”

Removing the stigma attached to disability

DEAN OF STUDENTS



TONY DELGADO

As a member of the Dean of Students office, part of my responsibilities is to promote student access and success by connecting students to the resources and services available

on campus. However, one of the barriers I frequently encounter when working with students is stigma. Over the years I have met with many students who do not want to access disability-related university services because of the societal stigma we have attached to the word disability and to people with disabilities. Stigma involves negative characteristics associated with a label or condition that contributes to social stereotypes. When it pertains to disabilities, the negative stereotypes stem from medical and deficit models which falsely imply there is something missing, wrong, or broken with an individual. We have almost 2,000 students who access services through the Disability Resource Center (DRC). But how many are not accessing services because of perceived stigma?

To remove the stigma attached to disability, we must look at (dis)ability as one aspect of human variation. Disability itself is a variation because it may involve

any number of domains -- physical, learning, invisible, temporary, contextual, and conditional. It is not about inability, but rather a different ability.

Our responsibility as a university is to remove barriers to access and promote student success. If we do not change our views, we will continue to perpetuate stigma and communicate the message that students with a (dis)ability do not belong here at FIU. But college is not just about academic pursuits. How can we promote social inclusion and full participation of all students in university life? We can start by educating ourselves further, promoting inclusion, and speaking up when others perpetuate negative stereotypes about people with disabilities. We are all FIU Panthers.

For more information about the Disability Resource Center at FIU, visit drc.fiu.edu to learn more about the Disability Resource Center at FIU.

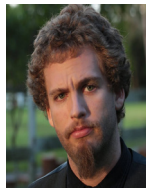
The Dean of Students Office, in the Division of Student Affairs, creates a culture of care for students, their families, faculty and staff by providing proactive education consultation, resources and response to distressed students or students in crisis. The Dean of Students will provide a regular column in the Beacon to acquaint students with some of the important campus resources in place to support student success.

Cartoonist refuses to be defined by disability



SAMUEL PRITCHARD-TORRES/THE BEACON

FRANK & IRENE



SAMUEL PRITCHARD-TORRES

At a young age, my parents taught me that having Asperger's Syndrome was not something to exploit but to overcome. I had concentration issues, couldn't interact with people well, was obsessive on subjects to the point of annoyance for most people, and had emotional issues of depression and anger. In some ways, I still have these symptoms.

When I was diagnosed as a kid, I would get into all sorts of trouble, not understanding why I couldn't just do that. It was difficult; I was antisocial and wasn't happy no matter what class I was in, as I was put in mixed classes of special needs development and more traditional ones. For both, I preferred to sit far away from people.

Drawing started as a therapeutic act for me and it's something I've been doing since I was 10 years old. I didn't get a lot of encouragement from teachers, though, as I drew really ugly stick figures for the most part. However, it didn't matter to me.

It started as something to play with, but it evolved into something I could use to concentrate. Doodling characters around my notes while I took notes helped me form associations with what I was studying.

Concentration was always challenging for me, a symptom of Asperger's. I didn't want to focus on most subjects, unless I had an obsessive interest in something, then I would be laser focused on it. I would take medicine to help me study, but it didn't help much. When I had to repeat the fourth grade, I decided to stop taking it and would try to learn how to concentrate on my own.

I wanted to do more with my art, as it overtime became more and more my favorite thing to do. I didn't get much help in class, so I decided to self

teach myself how to draw. At a book fair, I saw a "How to Draw Anime" book and worked from there.

Eventually as I got more into drawing, I started going through my dad's comics; the first I ever read was the original "The Mask." It was something very unlike the movie but I loved the style, flow and action portrayed in each panel. My love of comics started there and I explored it starting from superheroes, to humor, and then the hardcore underground works.

In high school, I started just going to regular classes, and when I did, I never told anybody I had Asperger's. When people knew, they treated me different. So I was scared to lose people, thinking maybe if they didn't know better, they'd think I was just a very awkward kid.

In Drama Club in my freshmen year, I met my best friend Chris, who was working on finding actors for his movies he wrote and directed. After a while we started writing scripts and stories together, and even when I eventually told him about my diagnosis, he still never treated me differently. In fact, this comic is based on a real experience of when I told him the first time.

When I got serious about making comics, I never really knew how to get a project going. It would be a lot like waves on the beach. I'd begin, reach a certain point in a story, run into a problem, and save nothing but instead start all over again, and repeat the stages.

Working at Student Media has helped me to create a good work ethic, having to bring in multiple strips on time for every issue, teaching me the discipline of a deadline and the chance to test my writing and art style. It's allowed me to finish two of my own amateur comic books.

I've been doing comics at FIU Student Media for over two years and I love every minute of it. As a person who lives with Asperger's Syndrome, I want the people to not define people by their disability. Once you accept someone as a person, they can flourish and become even stronger.

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TO YOUR
STRENGTHS
YOU
ONLY GET
STRONGER

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PANTHERS GIVE BACK

FIU football team visits local children's hospital

PETER HOLLAND
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On their day off, the Panthers visited a local children's hospital to give back to their community.

Every Monday, when the Panthers are not on the field or in the classroom, they are in the community, visiting schools and local children's hospitals. On Monday, Oct. 3, some of the players took a trip to Holtz Children's Hospital, located at University of Miami's Jackson Memorial Hospital.

Starting left tackle Diegot Joseph is no stranger to visiting the children's hospital and always looks forward to putting a smile on the children's faces every time he visits.

"It was a great experience," said Joseph. "We just went to the hospital and we enjoyed the kids and they enjoyed us, showing them a good time. We had so much fun doing bedside visits just to cheer them on. They are going through a tough situation. We're just trying to do well for the community."

Some of the activities the players did with the children were arts and crafts, playing video games and building with lego toys.

Senior outside linebacker Davison Colimon spoke about one little Haitian boy named Pierre, who couldn't speak any English, according to the fifth year senior.

"It's a blessing, it's always good to give back, making the kids happy and do whatever we can to brighten someone else's day," said Colimon. "He was trying to play with the other kids, but they couldn't understand him."

Isaiah Hill, a true freshman, also enjoyed making the visit with his teammates and didn't shy away from interacting with children. This is his second time the Tallahassee native visited the children's hospital.

"I love giving back to the community," said Hill. "I got the opportunity to talk to a lot of the kids and brighten their day."

When the players entered, at first, the children were intimidated because of their size. However, once they got to know the team, they started to open up more and wanted to be around them.

"When we walked in, they actually thought that we were basketball players because some of the o-linemen were tall," said Hill. "It's fun because the kids think we are gigantic. They were scared at first but then they understand that we are nice people and friendly people so they get to open up to us."

The Panthers will travel to El-Paso, Texas, to face University of Texas El-Paso on Oct. 8 at 8 p.m.

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It's a blessing, it's always good to give back, making the kids happy and do whatever we can to brighten someone else's day.

Davison Colimon
Outside linebacker
Football

”

FIU 'fortunate' to have DRC help educate

RIVERS OF TRUTH



LINDA RIOS

There are certain students who struggle in some classes because they live with a disability that impairs their learning, however that doesn't mean they should stop their education because of it. By making the choice to volunteer to and help those students, you're giving them a chance to earn a degree.

The Disability Resource Center at FIU allows students who suffer from various disorders to continue their studies by providing them with the help and support they need to finish their studies and succeed in their careers. There are volunteer programs available that pair up students to help take notes for them in class, making it easier to study afterwards.

I've been fortunate enough to see this happen some of my classes. I remember a legally blind student in my class who needed some assistance taking notes; when the professor asked the class, several people raised their

hands and volunteered to write notes and send them to the student.

Not everyone is willing to help those in need unless they find themselves in that same situation, but we must consider the importance of acting selflessly; we're all here to learn and help each other, not let everyone else suffer through their obstacles alone.

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We are very fortunate to have a university that supports everyone's needs.

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The DRC provides volunteers with information on the student who needs help, the type of assistance they would like —taking notes, reading or writing— and allows students to sign up for the service.

Events such as workshops enhancing learning skills as well as learning certain learning skills to improve our learning abilities are

sponsored by DRC to involve the students participating in this program in the rest of the student life. It also serves as an opportunity for other students to approach and ask about volunteering opportunities.

There are services provided through websites, namely One Class, in which students can submit their notes to the internet to help out those who need them most, especially those who have special needs.

We are very fortunate to have a university that supports everyone's needs, allowing for a better education. Not every university or college has a program able to aid over 2000 students like our University, which is why we must do what we can, whether that's volunteering, or at least providing class notes. This helps to keep the program going and expand it to assist more students and offer more services.

Linda Rios is a contributing writer for FIU Student Media. Her column, Rivers of Truth, is a commentary on pop culture current events. For suggestions or comments, please contact Linda at opinion@fiusm.com.

Intramural sports are inclusive teams

JASMINE CASIMIR
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Despite suffering from hearing loss caused by an ear infection in his childhood, Joshua Metellus has been encouraged to play intramural football at FIU.

Intramural and club sports accept all students to participate, with accommodations for their disability. Collegiate sports differ because of the recruitment process to be a part of the team but they do offer walk-on opportunities to students.

Metellus, a junior majoring in recreation and sports management, has not let his disability prevent him from participating in sports.

Metellus was not born with his disability; he was diagnosed with hearing loss around age three or four after getting an ear infection that damaged his hearing.

"I wear hearing aids and I read people's lips," Metellus told Student Media. "I do get left out in conversations multiple times due to lack of awareness of my hearing

loss."

Metellus loves the game of football because it's a stress reliever for him when he's out on the field hitting his opponent. And although his hearing can be viewed as a setback, there are resources available where he can be accommodated to play his best.

"I'm confident that if a coach had a special situation for a recruit, they could ask the school about accommodating the particular disability," Ryan Rose, assistant director of Athletic Media Relations, told Student Media.

Metellus understands that collegiate sports do require a lot of attention, so instead of getting involved in a college level sport, family and mentors encourage him to go a different route.

"I'm very physically active to play," said Metellus. "They recommend me to play Intramural sports such as flag football or soccer."

If there are any students with a disability who are interested in joining a club or intramural sport, they can register at www.imleagues.com/FIU, or contact the Intramural Sports office.

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I do get left out in conversations multiple times due to lack of awareness of my hearing loss

Joshua Metellus
Junior

Recreation and Sports Management

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Campus restroom handicap buttons should be required

POLITICOBUZZ



FABIENNE FLEURANTINE

In my first semester at FIU, my best friend and I would always hang out in the law building. We found it extremely sophisticated and perfect for getting work done because of how silent it was.

But I noticed something else — before entering the women's restroom, there wasn't a handicap button to open the door for disabled students.

When I saw this, it irked me. How are disabled students supposed to open the restroom door without proper accommodations? Doesn't this violate the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990?

The ADA was enacted to "guarantee the right of individuals

with disabilities to receive reasonable accommodations in order to work and participate in all aspects of society. It prohibits disability discrimination," as mentioned on www.olmsteadrights.org.

The purpose of the ADA, as stated by Congress, is "to provide a clear and comprehensive national mandate for elimination of discrimination against individuals with disabilities."

On the University's College of Law website, it states that: "Students should not assume that because their application to law school indicates the presence of a disability that this information is known to the Disability Resource Center."

Yet, the accommodations for students with disabilities are not as adequate as one would think.

The law building is not the only place on campus that doesn't comply or properly

accommodate students with disabilities.

There are restrooms in the Management and Research Center building that need to be physically opened instead of having a handicap button to automatically open the door.

Title II of the ADA prohibits public entities, including state and local governments, from discriminating against "qualified individuals with disabilities" by excluding them from services and activities due to their disability. As part of the ADA, federal regulations were created to enforce the Act.

One of the regulations created by the United States Justice Department is called the "integration mandate." It requires public entities to "administer services, programs, and activities in the most integrated setting appropriate to the needs of the qualified individuals with disabilities."

FIU has done an incredible job of

providing the necessary resources for students with disabilities; they have the Disability Resource Center as a place where students with disabilities can go for support and help throughout their college career.

However, more needs to be done in order to make every student feel accommodated and their rights respected.

Putting a handicap button in the entrance of restrooms would be much more helpful and benefit students with disabilities to feel more at ease in their academic institution.

Fabienne Fleurantine is a staff writer for FIU Student Media. Her column, PoliticoBuzz, is a commentary that raises awareness about political issues in the US and worldwide. She also covers events at FIU's Biscayne Bay Campus. For suggestions or comments, please contact Fabienne at fabienne.fleurantine@fiusm.com.

Take the time to learn about the different disabilities

POP TALK



CINDY CUADRA

home. Students with disabilities are no exception.

FIU has made efforts toward making its campuses handicap friendly and safe.

With every bathroom stall having handicap stalls, and every set of stairs accompanied by either ramps or elevators, the University takes into account the needs of students with disabilities.

Disabled students are unfortunately forced to live in an abled-person's world.

The integration between peers that are abled and disabled is extremely important toward learning and progressing.

The existing gap and stigma that surrounds disabilities is one that needs work.

At FIU, students are made to feel as comfortable as possible and are supposed to feel like campus is their second home.

To achieve integration between abled students and disabled students, FIU created the Disability Resource Center in 1992.

According to the DRC's webpage, the DRC assists students while working diligently with their schedules and professors in order to have a successful college experience.

FIU also implemented ramps to help students with wheelchairs get around effortlessly.

The newest addition is the ramp next to the pit in the Graham Center, which was made for disabled students to enjoy and participate in events held at the pit.

While FIU does many things to make campus accessible to disabled students, the lack of student participation can be improved. Inclusion between peers is important in understanding our similarities and differences.

One solution to help improve the lack of student participation

is to volunteer to help a disabled student at the DRC.

Taking notes for them in class or studying with them is a step toward progression.

Another solution is to get to know your peers and classmates that are disabled. Sometimes it's hard to see or understand what a person goes through until you walk a mile in their shoes.

At FIU, it's easy for students, like myself, to get caught up in our own world and only think about ourselves. However, everyone has needed help at one point or another.

Therefore, if students with disabilities are forced to live in an abled world, we should take the time and try to live in theirs for a change.

Cindy Cuadra is a staff writer for FIU Student Media. Her column, Pop Talk, is a commentary on pop culture current events. For suggestions or comments, contact Cindy at opinion@fiusm.com.

BEACON | Editorial

Disabilities not always visible

Since 2006, the Disability Resource Center has gone from helping 300 students to 2,400. As an editorial board, we feel that the increase in students seeking disability assistance comes from dissolving stigma and the realization that disabilities extend beyond the physical limitations they may impose and can come from mental illness as well.

Any issue that impairs a major life function, such as eating, thinking, learning or communicating, is identified on campus as a disability.

While some cases, such as pregnancy or a broken bone, may be temporary and obvious, there are long-term disabilities such as narcolepsy, eating disorders or autism that are not immediately visible.

Such disabilities often come with a stigma that prevents students from seeking assistance in completing their degree out of fear of judgement.

"There was a very big stigma that if you were a DRC student you were just trying to gain the system ... One of the major highlights of the last few years is really showing professors how accountable we hold our students and how accountable they want to be held," Stephen Loynaz, access consultant manager for the DRC told Student Media.

"FIU is, in many cases, the first time a student might have the opportunity to

really explore the mental health side of their needs," Loynaz said. "Because of culture, socioeconomic status, stigma, or any history that student may have, sometimes mental health concerns aren't looked at."

The DRC doesn't offer cookie-cutter solutions for students in need of accommodations. Students have access to scribes, readers, music for those using auditory therapy among other options, depending on their specific needs.

"Anytime a student has a disability or a suspicion of a disability, they'll make an appointment with us so that we can get them situated with our access consultants, and at that point the access consultant will review documentation to determine what kind of accommodations the student would be eligible for," said Kimberly Hunter, the DRC's testing coordinator.

Our editorial board would like to applaud the students that have taken the necessary steps to seek assistance and encourage other students who feel they may have a disability to do so as well. We know the social stigmas that come with disabilities, visible or not, may cast fear of judgement on undeclared disabled students and may make them more inclined to 'tough it out.' It is imperative to the success of these students that they seek the help that is readily available.

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HERE TO SERVE

Disability Resource Center offers students many resources

AMANDA DELGADO
Contributing Writer
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Committed to guiding and supporting students with disabilities during their college experience, the Disabilities Resource Center at FIU “provides the resources to facilitate a smooth transition to university life,” as stated on their website.

According to Stephen Loynaz, access consultant manager at the Modesto Maidique campus, a student may become part of the DRC in various ways.

If students are coming in through a high school or another organization that has accommodated their needs before, then the University can match up the resources they had in previous institutions. Those students usually already have documentation or a letter from previous schools confirming the information, and are walked through the registering process since forms tend to be slightly different.

Some students that are enrolled in FIU get tested for disabilities a little later on.

“We do have other students that come in, and because of many variables, whether it’s culture [or] it’s socioeconomic status, they [might’ve never] had the opportunity to test themselves or get evaluated for disabilities. And it’s a sad thing because we’ve had a lot of students come in with narratives that sound like ‘everyone said I was stupid’ or ‘everyone said I was lazy’ or ‘I wasn’t able to do certain things and I always knew I could, but I just needed an extra support,’” said Loynaz to Student Media.

Students are given the opportunity to use psychological services at FIU, and are also offered testing at the fraction of what they cost outside of the University, in hopes that students learn more about themselves.

In some cases, temporary accommodation can be given if disabilities are apparent while doctors or physicians fill out paperwork.

The DRC also works with

students with psychological disorders such as anxiety, depression and bipolar disorder.

“A lot of those diagnosis require medication management and that medication can have side effects that would affect the student ... It may cause drowsiness, may cause a bit of memory loss, may [affect processing abilities], so because of those things, we do have accommodations in place for students that take that type

an access consultant determines that the student needs testing accommodations, the student’s professors will be notified of the academic adjustment, but not what the student’s disability is. Next, the student completes an exam proctor form with their professors so the professor can note the testing conditions and time and date of the test. Kimberly Hunter, a testing coordinator for the DRC said.

The exam proctor form must be

that have test anxiety or a traumatic brain injury, and they need a bit more time to process things and answer questions, they’ll have the accommodation of extended time on an exam.” Hunter said to Student Media.

Testing accommodations will be undergoing some changes, as the DRC hopes to involve faculty in the proctoring process.

“What we’re trying to do, because of funding, staffing and

required to give proper advising. So what we do is let the student know what their needs are, disability-related,” said Loynaz.

“What classes they need to take, sequences they need to do to their prerequisites, that all sits in advising – those are the experts in their programs.” Loynaz said. With tutoring, tutors have been trained and have been exposed to disabilities, according to Loynaz.

Students can work with OneStop to complete a medical appeal if a medical, family or military-related situation comes up and they are required to drop classes. However, accommodations are not retroactive – meaning that if a student’s grades suffer due to a medical disorder, grades can’t be adjusted. A medical appeal can be put into place at any point in the semester, up to six months after the last day of class in a semester.

Through the DRC, students are also eligible for three scholarships: Dr. Fareed Jah Scholarship Endowment, Johnson Scholarship Foundation, and Accessing the World Scholarship. Students may contact drc@fiu.edu for more information and for applications.

There’s a replication of the DRC on Biscayne Bay Campus and FIU Online’s set up allows easy incorporation of services needed by students registered with the DRC. I-75 and Engineering Campus still don’t have replications because of their small student body, but if numbers go up, services will be extended there. In the meantime, students can seek services at MMC or BBC.

“We have over 2,000 students registered,” said Loynaz, “We are a department, so you are not alone in the university if you need services. Some of our students feel a little intimidated [because of] stigma or a bad experience. I would encourage students to come in as early as possible, whether you know your situation or you just have a question about your situation.”

Additional reporting by Cayla Bush

“

FIU has over 150 different academic programs – it would be impossible for any one of us to know [everything] in the depth required to give proper advising. So what we do is let the student know what their needs are, disability-related,

Stephen Loynaz
Access Consultant Manager
Disability Resource Center

”

of medications or have those disorders,” said Loynaz. “They can vary from being able to get extensions from assignments, being able to makeup exams if they’re absent, or maybe not get penalized for absences.”

Students only have to register once with the DRC and every semester they must go back to fill out a Notification of Academic Adjustment Form --Notification Form for short. By filling out the form, students authorize the DRC to disclose information to their professors, which includes the accommodations the student is approved for, and in turn allows the DRC to let students know if classes are compatible with their accommodations.

For example, in a foreign language class, it may be difficult for a student to keep up with the class material if they miss a lot of classes caused by switching medication.

Testing accommodations are another point of interest. Once

completed each time and with the increase in students accessing the DRC, completing this form ahead of time is critical.

“Back in 2006, we only had maybe 300 students that were actually registered with the DRC,” Martha Wong, the assistant director of administrative services said. “Now we have 2,400 students. Let’s say we get 50 to 60 students a day testing, with them getting two hours of testing, in only three testing rooms, we do not have the capacity to be able to accommodate all these students without the necessary preparations ahead of time.”

Testing accommodations are given based on the student’s need and range from minimal distraction testing rooms, zoom technology for the visually impaired and scribes.

“Depending on the case, some students, because of their disability, may not be comfortable having anybody in their testing environment, so they would have a private testing room. Some students

spacing challenges, is have more of our faculty involved in the actual proctoring process. We haven’t started it yet, we’re just getting Student Affairs Division involved. We’ve reached out to Student Affairs staff and let them know that during our busy time, which is usually midterms and finals, we need some assistance from all of our professionals in Student Affairs to come and help us proctor our students,” Wong said. “The volume of testing is so high during finals week, we receive about 120 students testing on average per day and we only have three front desk staff members, and three testing rooms.”

DRC has partnered with Advising, Center of Academic Success, and the rest of the academic departments to offer students the best possible services in tutoring.

“FIU has over 150 different academic programs – it would be impossible for any one of us to know [everything] in the depth

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