

## Notes from the Director

I was sitting at my computer trying to think of a good topic for this article. I wanted to write something positive, inspirational and motivating. Self-doubt and stress has seemed much higher for so many students this semester than has been the case in semesters past. Numerous changes have been recently implemented, including new PeopleSoft procedures, increased tuition and fees, the new "6W rule," and more.

I wanted to exclaim "you can do it!" to students, but this seemed simplistic and trite. So I began to google, in search of inspirational direction. I found a story written by a woman whose child has a disability. It was a beautiful story in which

she described their victories and struggles. Then I thought, what could be more inspirational than hearing from our own graduates and their loved ones? Every student who we have the pleasure of meeting at CSD has a poignant story of their own victories and struggles, as does their family. So I asked two of our graduates and one of their mothers to share their stories, which follow. I hope their wisdom and strength serves as an inspiration to you as it did me.

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## The Benefits and Challenges of Being Blind at the University of Houston



When someone comes in contact with a blind person, many thoughts run through their head as to how a blind person or any person with a disability, for that matter, comes to grips with that disability and how they go about their daily lives. I can say that being blind has had its advantages and disadvantages, with the advantages outweighing the challenges. You might be wondering, "How can that be true?" Well for me, the answer to that is that through blindness, I have come to the realization that even though my physical eyes don't see, I can still see with the eyes of my heart. When it comes to the challenges and struggles of being blind, there have been many, but one way or another I have been able to overcome them.

One of the struggles of being blind is not being able to do something as simple as see the television screen, but I still sit in front of the TV and listen to it and I do the same when I go to the movies. I am just as normal as the next person, except that I can't see. But that really doesn't matter to me. Being blind has actually been a blessing in that I have been given many opportunities to tell my life experiences. One such opportunity was when I was on the "Deborah Duncan Show" approximately a decade ago. I was also featured as the incredible kid that same year on Channel 2, and there are a lot of other things that I have accomplished but the list is too long to mention.

All through my school years people assumed that my being blind would hinder me from getting a good education, much less going to the University of Houston. But with the encouragement and support of my mother and family I was able to get my high school diploma from McArthur High School, an Associates Degree from North Harris Montgomery County College, as well as a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Media Communication and Spanish from the University of Houston.

Receiving a college education at U of H has been a great experience for me. I was blessed and fortunate to have wonderful professors who were willing to go the extra mile for me when it came to getting my accommodations in place in the classroom. In fact, some of them would go so far as to speak what they were writing on the board. When there were things that I didn't understand they would help me in various ways to acquire the knowledge and understanding of what it was I had a hard time grasping.

When it came to taking tests, the Justin Dart Jr. Center for Students with Disabilities, (CSD) made sure that they were in Braille for me. The only thing I had to do was go take the tests on a computer. The CSD would also have my books, handouts, or anything that I needed that was in print turned into Braille. If they were unable to do it at the Center they would find ways to get it done or

accommodate me. The CSD personnel were always very cordial and friendly when I would call or come into the Center. From what I heard when I was there, they were the same to all people regardless of the student's situation.

I loved being at U of H. I would strongly encourage any student who is in my situation or has another type of disability to consider more than a high school diploma. I would say to them that if I can graduate from the university, they could do it also. They just have to put forth a little more effort and study harder than the regular student. You can reach for the stars if one desires, nothing is impossible, the sky is the limit. All it takes is determination and willpower to achieve one's dream. It might seem harder for a student with a disability because they have to worry about their accommodations and getting professors who are willing to help them in acquiring those accommodations. But I would advise them to not let that be an obstacle in getting a degree from the university. Don't let fear and doubt stop you from achieving your dreams. There is a lot of support at the University of Houston for people with disabilities, starting with the Justin Dart Jr. Center for Students with Disabilities, as well as the professors, and there are a lot of organizations that you can join if you so desire.

You have the choice of becoming what you want to be; all it takes is your initiative, your desire and willpower. Like all things, "Life is not a bed of roses." We have to work and speak up to be able to succeed in life no matter where we go or what we choose to become.

Maricela Garcia  
University of Houston Alumnus  
Dec. 2006

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## A Mother's Perspective

As a parent of a blind student at the University of Houston, at first I was worried whether my daughter would be able to succeed in her career goal. She did run into an obstacle with one of the Deans, but we were able to resolve it and she was allowed in the class. All students, whatever their situation or status is will run into snags in whatever university one attends. But all you have to do to try and resolve your problem is talk to the person in charge of that department. Don't give up because if you do, you will fail in life in whatever you do. Failure comes when we hang up our gloves and stop trying. My daughter Maricela always talked highly of all of her professors and how they would accommodate her needs.

I was especially glad to know that the Justin Dart Jr. Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) personnel were there for Maricela whenever she needed any type of material Brailled, whether it was books, exams or handouts. They were always there to assist her in whatever she needed. The CSD was especially ready and on time whenever exams came around. They always had the exams ready for her to take. The University of Houston and the CSD are well equipped to accommodate students who have any type of disability. The CSD is always looking for ways to make things better for the accommodations of disabled students, not only in the classroom, but also in the dorms for such students.

Maria Garcia  
Maricela's Mother

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## Words from an Alumni

Having been a student with a disability, I have to say it was a challenging, yet quite rewarding experience. I still remember the day I went to the Admissions Office and registered for fall classes in 2000. Uncertain of how many accredited hours I needed to complete in pursuit of an undergraduate degree in psychology as a transfer student, I visited with an academic advisor to discuss a degree plan and determine my semester schedule. Towards the end of the meeting, I felt pretty comfortable about my classes and I inquired about the ADA accommodations that I would require throughout my course of study. The advisor then encouraged me to visit the Center for Students with DisAbilities, an instrumental support during my academic years at the University of Houston.

As a transfer student from a community college and having somewhat of an exposure to college life as well as student support services, I had familiarity with the type of accommodations that I would need and the procedures taken to put these accommodations



in place. Therefore, my prior experience with community college in a sense prepared me and made things easier as I made my transition to a four-year university.

I knew I required assistance with tasks such as note-taking, extra time on exams and projects, and the use of assistive technology to complete projects and assignments. When I visited with the disability services counselor at the Center for Students with DisAbilities, both she and I established an agreement of these ADA accommodations at the beginning of each semester. This was the easy part. The big challenge came as I realized how much more of a proactive role I would have to engage in to ensure that these tasks were being done. In the beginning it was difficult because the classes were larger and it was hard for professors to provide individualized attention, or some professors just simply were not interested in working with me. I also struggled with finding note-takers. The instructors were too busy to assign one. I've learned early on that in order to make it happen, I had to take charge and be an active participant in my own action plan. I began communicating with instructors and educating them about my needs and discussing options as to how they could best work with me. I became active in finding and assigning note-takers each semester, always having a back-up plan in the event of the unexpected. I managed my time to ensure that the assignments were completed in a timely manner. At times it got overwhelming, but I was ambitious enough to get it done.

After a couple of semesters I was involved with my classes on a full-time student basis. Additionally, I joined the American Humanics Program, a leadership program that prepares students with skills and competencies related to the non-profit sector. On occasion I served as a member of the Disabled Student Association, where I promoted and collaborated on DisAbility Awareness Week activities. I was also involved in the Catholic Association. These activities facilitated the leadership and discipline which would influence my determination to achieve my successes in life.

Despite the busy schedules, long nights of study and the array of responsibilities, I gratefully rolled across the stage to receive my diploma at the end of the spring, 2003 semester. I can attribute this accomplishment to the supports that were in place and hard studying. But most essentially, I attribute the success of this accomplishment to my determination in setting forward a goal, where I was an active participant, fully engaged and responsible in taking actions to follow through with it. It was not an easy road, but the truth of the matter is, it was worth the effort.

Many more goals have come along the way after graduation: an internship; living independently; traveling; and a job. Currently, most of these have been achieved. Thus, regardless of how far the journey may seem, we must be determined to follow through the paths leading to success in life.

Anabel Rios  
Independent Living Specialist  
Houston Center for Independent Living

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## **Welcome-Shannon Richardson**

My name is Shannon Richardson. I'm 32 years old and am a happy father of 2 boys. I started coordinating interpreters and captionists for the deaf and hearing impaired community in May of 2002. In February of 2007 I moved over to University of Houston to work with the deaf students here. I've found all of them quite pleasant, and the work environment here is excellent. Soon I will be trained in C-Print captioning, and will be able to utilize this training to further help the students here. The Center for Students with DisABILITIES amazes me with the service they provide, and I'm happy to be a part of this team.

Shannon Richardson  
Interpreting/Captioning Coordinator  
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## Substance Use Pop Quiz

Have you experienced any of the following symptoms within a 12 month period?

- ✓ recurrent use resulting in a failure to fulfill major obligations at work, school, or home
- ✓ recurrent use in situations which are physically hazardous (e.g., driving while intoxicated)
- ✓ legal problems resulting from recurrent use
- ✓ continued use despite significant social or interpersonal problems caused by the substance use.

If you answered yes to ANY of the above, you may have a substance abuse problem.

In addition to the above, is your substance use characterized by:

- ✓ increase in tolerance (more of the drug is needed to achieve the same effect)
- ✓ withdrawal symptoms
- ✓ substance is taken in larger amounts than was intended
- ✓ persistent desire to cut down or control substance use
- ✓ a great deal of time spent in activities necessary to obtain, use, or recover from the substance
- ✓ important social, occupational, or recreational activities are reduced because of use
- ✓ continued use despite significant physical or psychological problems that are likely to have been caused or exacerbated by the substance.

If you answered yes to at least 3 of the above, you may be suffering from a substance dependence problem. Detoxification treatment may be necessary.

Social support is very important with respect to treating abuse and dependence. An openness to accept the abuse is also paramount in successfully treating the illness.

**YOU ARE NOT ALONE!** Many students are also dealing with these concerns. Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) will be offering a Substance Abuse Support Group for UH students this spring, 2008 semester. If you are interested in meeting fellow students who have similar struggles and getting the support you need, please contact Dr. Lisa Mancuso at 713-743-5454 for more information.

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## Spotlight On... Special Collections @ M.D. Anderson Library

What do University of Houston yearbooks, original letters of Stephen F. Austin, and medieval manuscript books have in common? All three happen to be housed in the Library's Special Collections.

Centrally located on the second floor of the M.D. Anderson Library, Special Collections is the place to find a wide variety of materials that can add that extra something to your term paper. So what's there to choose from? Available for your use are many collections of original papers in subjects such as literature, American and Texas history, performing arts, the Civil War and World War II, women's studies, and architecture. Also available is a wide variety of original and published material focusing on the history of the University of Houston. A collection of about 50,000 books, many of which are considered to be rare, round out the collections available to students, faculty and staff.

Any Special Collections staff member is happy to work with you, whether you need access to adaptive equipment, a quick

question answered or your needs involve more in-depth research. Staff, whose specialties cover the gamut of collections are always ready to make suggestions or pair you with the materials you need.

Special Collections is open Monday-Friday from 9 to 5. During the fall and spring semesters the department is also open most Saturdays from 12 noon until 4. It's always best to check library hours before making the trip, so you might want to check hours for any particular day in the gray, left-hand box on our web page: <http://info.lib.uh.edu/libraries/sca/index.html>. And while you're at that page, be sure to check out our collections, exhibits, or whatever else strikes your fancy.

## WHAT'S NEW?



### Adaptive Sports

A disability can be defined as a condition that curtails to some degree a person's ability to carry on his/her normal pursuits-- it may be partial or total, temporary or permanent. There are many students that attend the University of Houston who fit into this category, but like every other student they want to be treated fairly, with respect, go to school and learn and better themselves for their future. One area that the university is trying to get students who have disabilities more involved is in adaptive sports and recreation. The University of Houston has a first class Campus Recreation Center that is available to every UH student. There are activities and events being put on not only by the Recreation Center but by the university as a whole to raise awareness of the UH community concerning students who have disabilities. We want to show these students that we care and want to help them to make their college experience the best it can be.

Recently the Campus Recreation and Wellness Center hosted an awareness day called, "A Day at the Rec," in which we provided an opportunity for students who have disabilities to try various activities and equipment available at the Center. There was a very good turnout, and from the looks on the participant's faces they seemed to have a really good time.

Some of the activities the students were able to participate in included:

- Climbing the 53-foot Rock Wall
- Playing "beep baseball"
- Touring the fitness zone area to see the accessible weight and cardio equipment
- An adaptive swimming training demonstration

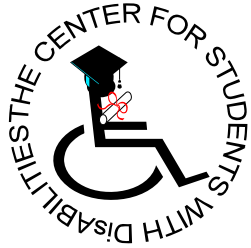
The Pasadena Texans, a local wheelchair rugby team practiced for everyone's enjoyment. After the success of the "Day at the Rec," we would like to move towards including adaptive sports as part of the University of Houston's recreational activities. We believe that the support that has been shown from the university in making adaptive sports mainstream will happen.

### Troy Hoff

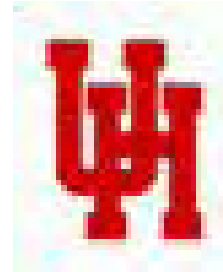
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## OPPORTUNITIES. . .



### **ASSISTANCE LEAGUE OF HOUSTON SCHOLARSHIPS FOR STUDENTS WHO HAVE PHYSICAL DISABILITIES**



The Center for Students with DisABILITIES (CSD) is pleased to announce continued scholarship opportunities available to eligible University of Houston students. These scholarships are provided through the generosity of the Assistance League of Houston (ALH). Scholarships are available each semester to eligible students who have physical disabilities. The Assistance League of Houston is a non-profit local organization that is committed to providing several scholarships each semester for eligible students who apply.

Scholarship amounts will vary, depending on each student's academic-related needs. The application deadline for the spring, 2008 semester scholarships is Friday, November 30, 2007.

### **SCHOLARSHIP ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS**

- Applicant shall be a UH student who has a physical disability due to birth trauma, accident, or injury. Students who have visual or hearing impairments or other health impairments that do not meet the above criteria are not eligible.
- Applicant shall have a financial need, and have applied for Financial Aid through the University of Houston for the Spring, 2008 semester.
- Applicant shall maintain a GPA of 2.5.
- Applicant shall complete the entire application process.
- Applicant shall be a citizen of the United States of America.
- Finalists shall participate in an interview with ALH Scholarship Project Members.
- Applicant shall consent to allow CSD to forward application materials and other pertinent information to appropriate ALH Scholarship Project Members.

Applicants must submit a complete original application packet to CSD on or before November 30, 2007.

### **CANDIDATE GUIDELINES**

- Obtain application form and application procedures from the Center for Students with DisABILITIES.
- Submit a letter describing your disability and need for scholarship including family situation, obligations and academic goals.
- List other financial assistance you are receiving. Specify financial assistance sources and dollar amounts you will be receiving in the spring, 2008 semester.

- Provide two letters of recommendation from UH staff and/or instructor(s).
- Provide a copy of college transcript(s).
- Retain copies of all materials submitted for personal records. Applications will not be returned.
- Submit all required paperwork to CSD by the deadline. Submit documents to Alan Russell at the Justin Dart, Jr. Center for Students with DisABILITIES, CSD Building, Room #100, Houston, Texas 77204-3022.  
Fax #713-743-5396, e-mail [arussell@mail.uh.edu](mailto:arussell@mail.uh.edu).
- Finalists shall attend an interview at CSD scheduled by the Scholarship Selection Committee of Assistance League® of Houston.
- Scholarship recipients shall be notified in writing by December 31, 2007.

**Questions? Please contact Alan Russell at CSD at (713) 743-5400, or [arussell@mail.uh.edu](mailto:arussell@mail.uh.edu).**

## **Other Scholarships**

### **Houston and Harris County**

Mayor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities

Contact:; William Miller  
713-827-5060  
[William.miller@emersonprocess.com](mailto:William.miller@emersonprocess.com)  
<http://www.hmcepd.org/>

Program Description: Scholarships of \$1000 are awarded & renewed to graduating high school seniors in Harris County who have a disability. Academic progress, extracurricular activities, essay, letters of recommendation and financial need are all considered.

**Have a safe and happy holiday!**



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