The Office of Accessibility Resources and Services

UNCG Staff Spotlight

This part of our newsletter is usually devoted to highlighting one of our wonderful students. However, this semester we decided to switch things up a bit and shine the spotlight on one of our delightful staff members, Janice Tullos.

Janice has been a great supporter to our office and our students. We interviewed Janice about her time here at UNCG and how she became involved with OARS. Here’s what she had to say:

I started at UNCG as an assistant professor of Political Science, (I received my Ph.D at MIT in 1991) where I became aware of the challenges many of my students with disabilities were facing, from physical impairments to learning disabilities, so when I left PSC to join ITS as Assistant Director for Student Computing in 1998 (a post that no longer exists) I brought with me an awareness of those challenges that many students were facing. I had also recently lost my father to ALS, and saw how he struggled with his growing disability, so I had a personal commitment as well. I understood in a very personal way that we are all only “temporarily abled.”

I began working with ODS and reviewing our assistive technology offerings and accommodations in the ITS computer labs, and worked to mainstream applications, moving away from "the handicapped machine" to ensuring assistive technology applications were made available on all lab computers, wherever possible, providing special accommodations for students on an ad hoc basis as needed, and created an area for specialized machines in the SuperLab for applications that had to be limited. I created a web page for Assistive Technology - http://its.uncg.edu/Software/Assistive_Technology/ to help people understand what resources were available through ITS.

I currently hold the position of Software Coordinator, where I am able to address issues of software accessibility, especially as we move into the world of virtualized software delivery, which presents its own special challenges. I work closely with the Student Computing Manager, Veronica Norville, and with Jay Purgason, an ITS System Programmer/Specialist, in ensuring we are meeting the needs of students using the ITS computer labs, and advocating for those students within ITS.

OARS Opens New Testing Facility!

OARS is pleased to announce that we have been able to add to and expand our testing facilities for students with disabilities that take their exams with accommodations. Our recently opened additional testing room has space for up to 12 students, and comes at a most appropriate time as students have just finished taking midterms and are beginning to make appointments for their finals.

We would not have been able to accomplish this wonderful feat without the support of the campus, and in particular a heartfelt thank you goes out to Dr. Cherry Callahan, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, Dr. Vicki McNeil, SA Associate Vice Chancellor and Dr. Jim Settle, SA Associate Vice Chancellor. They and all the others involved in supporting the project and seeing it come to fruition deserve a round of applause for their dedication.

We plan to have an open house to show off our new addition, but right now it’s too busy being used! Having this much needed space has greatly benefited students, and helped the university in meeting students’ accommodation needs.
Reminders and Announcements!!!

Faculty Letter Pick-up for Summer
Since implementing the faculty letter pick-up process, many students have enjoyed the ease and convenience of being able to pick up their accommodations letters. We will continue to offer this option for the summer. The process is generally the same as it is for Fall and Spring with a few minor changes. There will be an email going out to our registered students with information regarding the process. Plus, as always you can contact us by phone or email if you have additional questions.

Testing with OARS
As many of you know, we have an additional testing facility to help us better accommodate our students. Though we have been granted additional space, we still need our students to adhere to our test request procedure. Please be mindful of the time and date you are making your request, be on time to your scheduled test, and schedule your request within the 7-day window. Thank you for your continued cooperation.

Read & Write Gold
It’s here! We received our new software and are in the process of making it available to all of our students here at UNCG. This software is a great tool for every student and we look forward to helping you enhance your learning. Stay tuned!!

Note-taking: Tips for Success!

Though notes are an inevitable part of college, many students are unaware of how to effectively take notes. Notes are meant to be tools to help you remember information and perform well when tested. However, many students struggle with this major part of college life. Here are a few tips and strategies to help enhance your note-taking and learning:

- Go to class! And go prepared -Regardless of how quickly you can take notes, it won’t matter if you are not prepared to learn. Above all, do the required reading before class. If you are unfamiliar with the material in the lecture, your notes won’t be helpful. In addition, review your notes from last week’s lecture right before class. Always bring your textbook and course materials with you in case the professor refers to something in the book. This will allow you to follow along and make a quick note of where the material is located.

- Be organized- Too often, students take notes that are too messy to decipher after the fact. Begin each lecture on a new page. If you take notes on a computer, open a new file for each lecture and title the files sequentially. Write down the date and the lecture’s topic. Leave plenty of space on the page, including room in the margins for comments you might make when reviewing. Write legibly and bring highlighters so that you can emphasize any material the professor pays special attention to. If you think it sounds important, it probably is!

- Reread your notes- Taking notes successfully is not just a matter of copying down lectures and putting your notes away. You also need to review and sometimes add to your notes after the fact. Set aside time later in the day of the lecture to reread your notes. Write comments or questions that occur to you in the margins.

Attention!: Changes to UNCG’s Academic Policy

Beginning Fall 2014, two important academic policies will be changing. The university’s withdrawal policy and academic standing policy have both been revised. The new Withdrawal Policy states that undergraduate students will be limited to withdrawing from a maximum of 16 semester hours throughout their degree. Course withdrawals that have taken place prior to Fall 2014 will not be included in the 16 hour limit.

The new Academic Standing Policy states that a student’s academic standing will be based on their GPA and Satisfactory Academic Progress (percentage of hours completed each term). In addition to maintaining a 2.0 cumulative GPA, students will need to earn 67% of their hours each semester to maintain Academic Good Standing.

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The Libraries consist of Jackson Library and the Harold Schiffman Music Library and the online catalog includes the holdings of the Teaching Resource Center, the Multicultural Resource Center, and many resources from the Teaching and Learning Center. The libraries aim to advance and support learning, research, and service by providing quality access through a wide range of services, technology, and expertise.

Our libraries are committed to providing a learning environment that complements and enhances the study and research habits of our users. Recent renovations to the Libraries include the completion of a connector allowing easier access between Elliot University Center and Jackson Library; new carpeting, painting, and artwork; and plans for acquiring new furniture. These are intended to provide our users with a modern, comfortable environment in which to study, research, collaborate, work, and/or just read.

There are a many services available through the university libraries which include: the digital media commons, printing, scanning, photocopying, faxing, technology checkout, tutorials, workshops, and research guides. Each library has a wide range of convenient operating hours and is open every day of the week. For additional information about our libraries, visit the website or call 336-334-5304.

http://library.uncg.edu/

University Libraries—What you didn’t know was right at your fingertips

Have you ever been searching and searching for information, but just couldn’t find what you were looking for? Have you ever wished that you could use some type of technology, but just didn’t have access to it? Have you ever been bored and wished you could watch a movie? Well, here at UNCG there is a resource to help resolve many of those issues. The University Libraries houses a plethora of books, media, technology, and face to face assistance that can help any student with meeting their research, educational, and leisure needs.

The University Libraries’ collections total more than 2.47 million printed books, federal and state documents, microforms, music scores, and other material. The bound volume total now stands at 1,235,797. We added more than 41,000 items to the collections during the year. We subscribe to more than 37,000 full-text electronic journals, and offer more than 331,000 electronic books.

A Fond Farewell and Thank you to Sharon Williams-Brown

Here at OARS we make a point of recognizing folks who have gone above and beyond in their support of students and OARS, and to that end we’d like to extend a big thank you to Sharon Williams-Brown as she leaves UNCG. Sharon has worked here in Parking as the Associate Director in charge of Parking Operations and Customer Relations for the past 8 years, and has now left the university to begin another chapter in her life’s journey.

While at UNCG, Sharon was always supportive of OARS and the students who had parking considerations. She valued everyone, and put folks at ease when they came to her office with questions or concerns.

She would always listen to their concerns and offer options on how to address and resolve them. Sharon even lent her talents and dedication further to OARS serving on two OARS staff search committees to help ensure we were able to hire qualified staff members.

Sharon’s personal philosophy has always been to make sure things get addressed appropriately and get resolved.

She always made sure students got answers, and connected with the supportive resources on campus. Sharon looked for “a good ending” to situations, and made sure she “put out the fire” if there was one to everyone’s satisfaction.

Sharon’s time at UNCG was a true win-win situation, since not only did she share her talents and abilities in her position, but in her time here she had the opportunity to grow personally, academically and professionally. She blossomed and gained leadership skills through her experiences here. The students, OARS and the university will miss Sharon and all she was to us, but we wish her all the best in her new adventures. She left UNCG a better place through her dedication and drive while she was here. Thank you Sharon.
When students need their academic materials in an accessible format, it sets into motion a wide variety of things to consider regarding meeting this need. There is a multitude of variables that come into play when contemplating the concerns of accessibility for our students. Some variables we consider can range from whether the material is available in some sort of accessible format from the publisher, if not how best to scan a text, clean it up and convert it into an usable format for the student. All of these variables lead to further considerations such as turn around time for producing and providing accessible versions of printed materials, and the amount of intense labor that will go into making this happen.

One of the major concerns for students who are blind or who have a visual impairment is the need for their educational materials to be in an accessible format. Many visually impaired students use screen-reader software called JAWS or other types of magnifier software such as Zoom text. Another option for some of our visually impaired students is the use of a CCTV to help enlarge print materials.

JAWS software can read word documents and other types of text oriented materials such as web based pages but cannot read PDFs. Thus, the need for our office to assist with ensuring that all required readings and printed materials are converted into a format that is accessible and can be read by our students. Below is an overview of the text conversion process here at OARS:

First, students are required to fill out our “Text Conversion” form (found on our web site) that gives us all the pertinent information to check with publishers to see if books are available in Word or PDF format. If not, books must have their bindings cut and be scanned with a high speed scanner and become PDF files.

Once we have the PDF file for either a book or a reading posted on blackboard etc. we use Abbyy PDF Transformer software to convert the PDF into a MS Word document. It’s at this point we begin the “cleaning” process. The conversion software is not a perfect science in that it will convert text with what it recognizes. To this end pictures, graphs, some tables etc. do not convert nor does foreign language or words it doesn’t recognize.

The cleaning process consists of the staff reading the PDF text and editing the Word doc to be the same. If items don’t convert, we identify the object such as, Figure 1. Did not convert, caption reads: (Then state caption). This would work for any object that doesn’t convert and isn’t able to be recreated.

Text quality is key to text conversion. A book or PDF that has poor quality, is underlined, blue highlighters etc. will make the conversion very difficult. Also books that are of a math, science and/or foreign language nature are very difficult and labor intensive.

Students are asked for their “reading list” for each class so that we are able to work on their materials in the order they are needed. These “reading lists” are put into a google doc on our network drive so that anyone working on conversion can look to see what is due next and go to work. When conversion is completed, it is marked clean and sent to the student as an attachment to an email.

As you can see from this brief overview, a lot goes into insuring that materials are provided in an accessible format. To help address this need and provide equal access to learning for students, it becomes imperative to address this process as early as possible. When an instructor is contacted by a student or OARS with the concern that materials will need to be provided in an accessible format, it is so important to address this accommodation in a proactive and positive approach to be able to get materials to the student in a timely manner. Working together, we can make sure all students can have equal access to education. OARS appreciates the assistance and support we receive from our faculty members.

On the next page you will find an interesting open letter written by Matt Reed where he discusses some of the issues associated with accessible textbooks. This letter takes an honest look into the textbook industry and the responsibility publishers should have to our students.

Changes to UNCG’s Academic Policy (Continued from pg. 2)

You can also find more information about these policies and the changes made on the Student’s First Office website at studentsfirst.uncg.edu. Additionally, this information will be outlined in the 2014-2015 Undergraduate Bulletin, which will be available online this summer.
An Open Letter to Textbook Publishers

February 25, 2014 - 9:38pm
By: Matt Reed

Dear Textbook Publishers,

I have a question for some of you. Having been in administration for quite a while now, I know that sometimes things that seem easy and obvious from the outside, aren’t. So I’m wondering if there’s a smarter answer to this than anything I can figure.

Why aren’t all of you issuing all of your major textbooks in formats that are accessible to students with disabilities?

I’m trying to be careful here. Some publishers are quite good about it, freely making available electronic editions of their popular texts so that students who need alternate formats can be up to speed from the first day of class. To you, I’m grateful. In the community college world, we’re focused on student success; it’s hard for a student to succeed when she can’t get the textbook until it has been ripped up and scanned. The publishers who make it easy upfront do a real service.

But some don’t. And the workarounds in those cases -- especially at community colleges, where our mission dictates access and our budgets dictate light staffing -- are time-consuming, expensive, and absurdly cumbersome. That may have been necessary ten or twenty years ago, but it shouldn’t be now, when everything is prepared electronically.

I hate to “go there,” but part of the push for Open Educational Resources is in response to exactly this issue. If a commercial textbook that costs two hundred dollars has to be ripped apart and scanned manually, by someone paid to do that, but an OER resource is accessible and free, well, what would you do?

Exactly.

I understand that some very specialized subjects and texts are basically monopolies. But nobody ‘owns,’ say, Intro to Sociology.

Please understand what I’m saying here. You have the opportunity here to do well while doing good. Taking the extra step upfront to make your stuff accessible isn’t only virtuous, although it is; it’s also a way of maintaining market position in the face of an increasing array of alternatives. Because -- and I hate to be so blunt, but at this point, you’re forcing my hand -- if you don’t provide options that meet our students’ needs, we’ll increasingly find other sources that will. Any cost savings you’re hoarding will be more than swamped by lost adoptions. Every single time we have to do some expensive and time-consuming workaround, OER options look that much better.

I’m not bluffing. I don’t have to.

The law has changed, the world has changed, and technology has changed. You can step up and do the right thing, and in so doing, try to protect your market position. Or you can let your standing erode, protecting an exclusionary practice out of, well, I don’t know what.

As my regular readers know, I grew up in Rochester, New York, which used to be a company town for Kodak. Kodak was slow to move into digital photography. You know the rest. You can choose to move with the world, or you can choose to follow Kodak. I’ve seen that movie, and know how it ends. You don’t want to choose that route.

Holdouts, step up. Do the right thing. We will do right by our students, with you or without you. Which will it be?

Sincerely,
Matt Reed

Read more: http://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/confessions-community-college-dean/open-letter-textbook-publishers#ixzz2zvCh5Klh

Inside Higher Ed
In accordance with The ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, The Office of Accessibility Resources and Services works with departments across UNCG to ensure that educational programs and campus facilities are accessible to individuals with disabilities. In order to qualify for services, students with disabilities must provide our office with current, comprehensive documentation. Once qualified, students meet with OARS staff to identify reasonable accommodations which are then drafted into a Letter of Accommodation (also known as faculty letters).

It is the student’s responsibility to provide their instructor with this letter in order to receive accommodations. Although accommodations are determined by the OARS staff, the application of these accommodations can vary in the classroom depending upon the faculty’s teaching pedagogy. Our office encourages a collaborative relationship when discussing accommodations. If a student requests additional accommodations that are not indicated on their letter of accommodation, please consult OARS. Faculty are invited to contact OARS whenever there is a question about a student with a disability or their accommodations.

About two years ago, OARS introduced the Online Testing Accommodations Form. This form replaced the original paper version of the form and was designed to ease the testing accommodations request procedure.

Before any student can take their test with accommodations, they must be registered with OARS and meet with a staff person. In this meeting, students and staff will co-create faculty letters outlining their approved accommodations for the semester. Students will then give those letters to the instructors of classes for which they require accommodations.

OARS strongly encourages students to work closely with faculty to determine if the instructor is able to proctor the test. This is beneficial to the students because they are able to ask questions, if needed. Faculty also benefit from proctoring the exam as it reduces the amount of time required to communicate with OARS regarding the test.

If a faculty member cannot proctor a test, then OARS is prepared to proctor a student’s test. OARS is available to proctor tests Mon.-Fri. from 8am-5pm. Please note that some students may have to schedule their test earlier or later in the day, depending on their class schedule, to accommodate their needs for extended test time. Also keep in mind, tests must be completed by 5pm, so be sure to schedule accordingly.

In order to maintain the integrity of the testing process, it is very important that faculty confirm their students’ online test requests. If faculty do not complete each request, then we are unable to determine if the testing situations have changed. For example, a student may be allowed to use notes for one test, but may not be allowed for the following test. Without a completed online testing form, OARS will not know how to proceed with proctoring the test for the student.

Please call OARS at 334-5440 if you have any questions.