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CPD CLASS IS KEY IN PREPARING USU STUDENTS TO WORK WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

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Daniel Roberts, an IDASL student presenting his research during USU Research Week 2010.

The Interdisciplinary Disability Awareness and Service Learning Program (IDASL) offers opportunities for students from a variety of disciplines to increase their awareness, knowledge and understanding of people with disabilities and their families across the life span.

Seniors and graduate students from a variety of disciplines are encouraged to enroll in the IDASL Program, which is listed as Special Ed 6500. In the past, students from diverse disciplines, such as audiology, elementary education, family and human development, music therapy, school psychology, social work, special education and speech pathology, have participated in the IDASL Program which has a strong interdisciplinary component. With the growing numbers of individuals with disabilities and their families, anyone going out into the professional world could have contact with people with disabilities.

According to the US Census Bureau, nearly one in five people in the United States have at least one disability. The possibility of acquiring a disability increases with age. By retirement age of 65 years old, 44.6% of the population report having a disability. By old age, over 85 years old, 84.2% report a disability. With numbers like these, disability will most likely touch everyone. The IDASL Program prepares students to interact in a world, both professionally and privately, where disability is a part of life.

Individuals with disabilities and family members of children with disabilities are encouraged to participate and share their unique expertise in the IDASL Program. The real-life experience with a disability greatly enhances the disability awareness and understanding of the disability community for the college students taking the class.

A student related how much she learned from a mother of a child with disabilities with these words: “I learned so much when [the mother] talked about how important people-first language is. Her daughter has multiple disabilities, but she isn’t defined by them.”

A community member with a disability who participated in the IDASL program responded that she wanted “to share about [her] TBI (Traumatic Brain Injury),” thus becoming an advocate. After a seminar relating the history of disability and societal attitudes, she had this to say about how people have reacted to her disability: “I have a deeper understanding of my negative experiences.” Including community members with disabilities has positively impacted both the students and themselves.

One student shared the most important thing he learned after participating in the IDASL Program: “Instead of focusing on disabilities, let’s focus on abilities. Focus on the person—everything is about the person, bettering their life, helping them feel like they are doing something, feeling fulfilled.”

The IDASL Program offers students much more than the typical academic credits and stipend. Using their interdisciplinary skills and disability awareness, students can benefit people with disabilities they will meet and serve in their professional and private lives far beyond graduation.

For more information about the IDASL program, you can go to the IDASL project description or contact Alma Burgess or Jeanie Peck.