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CLASS INCREASES UNDERSTANDING OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

November 24, 2010 by cpehrson

When the Interdisciplinary Disability Awareness and Service Learning (IDASL) class meets on Friday afternoons, there is a wonderful mixture of students from several different disciplines and individuals with disabilities and their families.

Together, these students are having a unique experience learning about one another and sharing their experiences. The goal of the IDASL program is for their students to understand more about people with disabilities and what challenges they might have to face across the lifespan. Students will be able to use this knowledge to become strong advocates for those with disabilities in their professional lives.

Dr. Judith Holt, Director of IDASL, works with a team of professionals from the CPD to provide a wide array of experiences for the IDASL students.

Students have an opportunity to have a hands-on learning experience at different community programs that serve individuals with disabilities. They choose the programs that reflect their own interests and support the requirements of their college discipline.

As they work face-to-face with individuals with disabilities of all ages, from birth to adulthood, they get to know them as people, not just as people with disabilities. As one IDASL student put it, “Instead of focus(ing) 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.”

An important part of the IDASL experience is to participate in interactive seminars presented by USU faculty and professionals, helping the students understand the real issues faced by individuals and their families and brainstorming how to resolve them. As those with disabilities and their families share their personal experiences, students gain an understanding and respect for the challenges that they face.

Students also have an opportunity to participate in disability-related research during the two semesters. One IDASL student commented on the research experience that he had, “What I learned will help me be a better collaborator with people in and out of my discipline.”

Participating in the IDASL program builds bridges of understanding and improves the lives of the trainees and people with disabilities.

Note: This is the fourth in a series of blog posts summarizing presentations made by CPD staff members in late October and early November. They attended the 2010 conference for the Association of University Centers on Developmental Disabilities. Those of you who can stop by our building can check out the research posters in the hallway leading to the CPD’s southwest door.