

# Monday Bulletin on

# Services to Youth

*To Coordinate ... To Enhance ... To Serve ... Through Communication*

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## Interview with Roy DelValle—MRS Lansing District Office Site Manager



Roy DelValle previously worked for MRS as a Rehabilitation Counselor for 8 years, mostly serving transition youth and adult customers who are deaf and hard of hearing. For the past year, Roy has worked as a counselor for Michigan State University in the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities (RCPD). Roy is now a Site Manager at the MRS-Lansing District Office.

**Question (Cynthia Wright):** Welcome back Roy! You have worked for both the State of Michigan/MRS and Michigan State University/RCPD. What are the major differences

**working with people with disabilities in state government and in the university setting?**

**Answer (Roy DelValle):** The obvious difference is the absence of the VR process and focus on employment. In the university setting the focus is on developing accommodations to access the classroom. Also, eligibility criteria is different. At the post secondary level the student must have an ADA defined disability that interferes with a major life activity, e.g. learning, and requires accommodations to access the classroom or other academic activities. As we know in the VR process, eligibility centers on a physical or mental impairment that constitutes or results in a substantial impediment to employment and if they require Agency services to prepare for, secure, retain or regain employment consistent with their abilities and capabilities.

Additionally, college is often the first time Students with Disabilities (SWD) are away from home. This can be a stressful period for some students as it is now their responsibility to manage their disability without the assistance from parents, teachers or others they may have relied on in the past. It can be quite a challenge for some students to advocate for their accommodations, develop new support systems, manage their medications and/or treatments to keep their condition stable and meet the requirements of a challenging academic program with minimal assistance. This is where the university's office of disability services can be of great assistance in helping SWD develop the supports needed to ensure academic success.

**Q: About what percentage of SWD at MSU are on caseload at MRS?**

**A:** Based on my experience at MSU, a small percentage of students had an open case with MRS. Most of the MSU students I worked with were unaware of MRS. There appeared to be no knowledge regarding the availability of transition services through MRS and most students had never met an MRS counselor during their high school careers.

**Q: Did you notice any differences between students on caseload and students not on caseload?**

**A:** Of course, I cannot speak for all the students who are registered with the MSU Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities (RCPD) and are involved with MRS. However, if a student did have a case open with MRS, the RCPD staff would involve the MRS counselor as needed. The RCPD staff considered the MRS counselor a possible resource to address issues and disability related needs.

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# Interview with Roy DeValle

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**Q: In your experience at MSU, is there a population of students on campus that MRS is under serving?**

**A:** That's a good question. Remember at the post secondary level, responsibility lies with the student to identify, provide documentation and request accommodations. This is because the college is required to determine if the student is an individual with an ADA defined disability. Also, the university does not know, nor is the university required to monitor, the actual number of students with disabilities on campus at any given time. But in response to your question, I noticed two distinct populations that in my experience were underserved.

The first group, Hard of Hearing (HOH) students with mild to moderate hearing loss were often underserved. This is due to a combination of factors, e.g. their level of hearing loss does not require accommodation, not feeling or recognizing the need to request accommodations, being unaware of disability services available, lack of knowledge regarding technology that could enhance classroom accessibility (FM Systems) and not wanting draw attention to themselves. This last issue is highly significant, as HOH students with mild to moderate hearing loss tend to not identify themselves as an individual with a disability and not to advocate for themselves as strongly as Deaf students. HOH students rely on their residual hearing by using hearing aids, sitting in front of class, obtaining missed information from classmates or other learned strategies that proved successful in high school.

The second underserved group is Chronic Health Conditions. Chronic health conditions encompass a diverse range of disability or chronic conditions such as diabetes, arthritis, cancer, sleep disorders, food allergies, asthma, sickle cell anemia and a host of other chronic health conditions too numerous to list here.

Often students with chronic health conditions choose not to register with the college's office of disability services preferring to "tough it out" or not realizing the need for accommodations until their chronic health condition is exacerbated by the stress of academic demands. Some students with chronic health conditions are able to manage their disability and the stress of academic demands therefore do not require accommodations. However, some students fall behind in their academic requirements through poor attendance, not meeting class requirements or missing exams. When this happens the student may be referred to the RCPD by faculty/academic advisors or the student will access the RCPD on their own. Here it is important to note that identifying a disability and developing required accommodations is **NOT** retroactive and will not excuse a student from prior poor academic performance. In other words, seeking accommodations after missing class, doing poorly on class requirements or missing exams even if it is disability related is not acceptable, however most faculty and staff will work with the student to the best of their ability and within the college's academic policies to resolve academic issues.

Thus, it is very important that regardless of the stability of the student's chronic health issue, that he/she register with the college's office of disability services as soon as possible.

**Q: In general, what are the major barriers for SWD on college campus?**

**A:** That would depend on the particular college campus and availability of services. At MSU the RCPD has a full time staff of six disabilities specialists and associates to provide services to meet a wide range of disability specific needs.

Other colleges, depending on their size, may only have one staff member dedicated to disability services. So SWD need to carefully examine the size and scope of services available through any college's office of disability services.

*"It is very important that regardless of the stability of the student's chronic health issue, that he/she should register with the college's office of disability services as soon as possible."*

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# Interview with Roy DelValle

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Some SWD worry that faculty will not be accepting of their need for accommodation. However at MSU, the overwhelming majority of faculty and staff are very accepting of accommodations needs and more often than not will contact the RCPD to ensure they are providing the appropriate accommodation or share their concern if a student appears to be having difficulty in the course. Additionally, the RCPD has worked very closely with the university over the years to address and remove physical barriers on campus. The RCPD continues these efforts to ensure physical accessibility through out campus.



**Q: What are the essential skill sets and strategies that SWD use to be successful in the college setting?**

**A:** SWD should be prepared to identify their disability, have an understanding of how their disability affects their ability to learn and be able to discuss accommodations required in the academic setting. The SWD must be prepared to self advocate regarding every aspect of their disability related needs. Remember the IEP does not apply to the post secondary level and SWD should never assume that accommodations will automatically be available. At the post secondary level it is the student's responsibility to identify a disability, provide documentation and request accommodations. Additionally, SWD planning to attend college need to be aware that academic course requirements are not easily waived or substituted. While a SWD can request a course waiver or substitution based on a disability, it is usually an exception and not the rule. SWD should plan their academic programs accordingly and thoroughly understand the program requirements.

*“Getting to know the college’s office of disability services staff and resources are an important piece of ensuring academic success at the post secondary level.”*

SWD should also make every effort to visit the college campus as soon as possible after acceptance to gain an in depth knowledge of the physical layout, distances between dormitories and classrooms, transportation systems, campus accessibility, dorm room size, food service systems, etc. Most colleges provide tours or have dates set aside for incoming students to visit the campus. Be sure to include an appointment with the college’s disability services office to learn about the staff, services available and the registration process.

Visiting the campus early provides the “Big Picture” and should initiate discussion and planning regarding accommodations that might be needed. Early discussion and planning is critical to ensuring required accommodations are in place prior to arriving on campus.

**Q: Did you see SWD struggling to find internship and employment opportunities?**

**A:** At MSU, internship opportunities for SWD are readily available. The MSU RCPD regularly receive notices from a wide variety of sources regarding internships for SWD. The internship and employment notices are emailed to all SWD registered with the RCPD.

**Q: Is there anything that MRS can do better to support SWD to be successful in college?**

**A:** MRS can assist SWD by helping them prepare to discuss their disability and disability related needs in detail. The SWD should be fully informed of the college’s office of disability services registration process and required documentation. SWD should also be prepared to advocate for their needs without the assistance of parents and/or the MRS counselor. SWD need to be educated on how to present and discuss their disability in terms of ADA and not from the stand point of their high school IEP. Remember, the college is required to determine the student is a person with an ADA defined disability. Not only will this approach assist with accommodations at the post secondary level, but will prepare SWD to request accommodations in the employment setting following graduation.

In closing, the earlier the SWD begins to prepare, plan and access the college’s office of disability services, the more likely the required accommodations needed for academic success will be in place on the first day of class. SWD with disabilities should take full advantage of the disability services offered regardless of the stability of the disability. Getting to know the college’s office of disability services staff and resources are an important piece of ensuring academic success at the post secondary level.

# Tips for College Bound Students with Disabilities

By Monica M. Del Castillo, M.A., L.P.C.

Counselor, Office of Disability Support Services / Lansing Community College

The transition from high school to college is a difficult and exciting time for all students, but especially so for students with disabilities. Here are some tips that will help ease the transition from high school to college:

**Self advocacy** skills are critical to success in college. Students need to understand their disability and how their disability impacts their learning (functional limitations). In addition, students need to feel comfortable communicating what accommodations are needed based on their documented disability. Students must self-identify in order to receive accommodations at post-secondary institutions. Students need to inform disability services when accommodations are not working, need to be modified or symptoms change. Therefore, good disability awareness and self-advocacy skills will help ensure that appropriate accommodations are provided in a timely manner in order to have a positive impact on student success.

**Documentation** of disability is needed in order for students to receive accommodations at any college/university. I recommend that students maintain a file of all disability/accommodation related information, including psychological evaluations, IEPs/504 plans and bring that file with them when they are meeting with ODSS to discuss accommodations that are needed.

**Planning** ahead is a critical component of the transition process. I highly encourage students to gather information about the college/university's disability support services and consider that information when making a decision on where to attend. Once the decision is made, early contact with staff in the disability services office usually translates into a less stressful, more pleasant transition.

**Collaboration** between colleges/universities and Michigan Rehabilitation Services is imperative, especially in these difficult budget times. College success is often associated with a student's ability to maximize resources. More often than not, a team approach is warranted to ensure that everyone is working toward the same goal.

I've asked a couple of Lansing Community College students to share their perspective on the aforementioned tips and relate them to their own college experience.

## Student Testimony

By Christine Mull

I am a student at Lansing Community College (LCC) and a client of Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS). My goal is to graduate from college, become independent, and return to the workforce. My MRS counselor, Stacy Janusz from the Grand Rapids District Office, is working with Monica Del Castillo, LCC counselor in the Office of Disability Support Services (ODSS), to help me understand my disability and use the support system that has been provided for me. These two offices are also partnering with Learning Connections in Okemos where I am working with Dr. Mangala Sadasivan. She is helping me to recognize my areas of struggle and teaching me ways to overcome my disability. With her help, I am learning to succeed in life and in classes that in the past, I've been unable to pass. In July, I will complete the requirements for the Certificate of Completion (Sign Language Interpreter Program) and in May of 2010, I will graduate with an Associates Degree. I would not be where I am today without the support of MRS, ODSS, and Learning Connections. Their collaboration has been the key to my success in college.

*“Self advocacy skills are critical to success in college”*



## Student Testimony

By George Hanley

As a college student with a disability at Lansing Community College I would offer three pieces of advice:

- 1) Get to know not only ODSS but also the campus police/public safety office and the maintenance staff as you need to be aware of emergency procedures concerning persons with disabilities. Also these are the people who will haul you up the stairs when (believe me not if) the elevators fail.
- 2) Don't limit class options just because of difficulty, but be aware of the increase in workload and time management. I passed Calculus 1, 2 & 3 but only by taking no other intensive courses those terms. This was worth it because I later became a nationally certified math tutor and got an additional job on a grant.
- 3) Nearly all colleges have disability or diversity boards - find yours and get involved. These boards contain virtually all the people on campus you need to know for services, and also gives you a much stronger voice. It can even lead to career options as it has for me in the last year and a half.

## Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS) and Office of Disability Support Services (ODSS) on College Campuses Can Work Together for SWD

By Cynthia Wright, Transition Consultant

Students with disabilities (SWD) are seeking postsecondary training more and more as additional training beyond high school is essential for young people to achieve substantial employment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century global economy. This has created the necessity and opportunity for MRS and ODSS to work together on behalf of students more than ever before. While SWD need to function independently in college, MRS and ODSS need to have knowledge regarding the function and roles of their respective organizations to create a solid foundation for working together to assist and empower students pursuing postsecondary training and employment. Opportunities for collaboration are at every stage along the way in a student's postsecondary training.

### Referral

Many SWD are receiving services at ODSS on college campuses and are not on MRS caseload and visa versa and not all students require services from both ODSS and MRS. However, many times a MRS counselor is working with a college student that is struggling in school and is not accessing accommodations and supports from their college. In addition, ODSS counselors often see students who are struggling with career choices, academic work and have barriers to employment. In these situations it is advantageous for MRS and ODSS to have solid referral relationships. Attending joint meetings, developing and using referral forms and joint training are all good strategies to develop a good understanding of the benefits of collaboration and to establish a solid referral relationship.

### Disability Documentation

Colleges vary in what disability documentation they will accept in order to provide accommodations to students. MI-AHEAD recommends that documentation be provided by a medical doctor or a psychologist and be no more than 3 years old. School documentation provided to a student when they leave high school often does not meet this standard. MRS is often asked to purchase and/or coordinate appropriate documentation in order for students to be able to receive the accommodations they need in postsecondary settings. ODSS should use caution to not refer students to MRS to purchase and coordinate updated documentation. This is because MRS provides vocational rehabilitation services leading to an employment outcome. When students are seeking documentation of their disability **only**, they are not appropriate for MRS services. Ongoing dialogue between MRS and ODSS can clarify MRS' role in providing documentation and keep other avenues open for students to obtain updated documentation.

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## Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS) and Office of Disability Support Services (ODSS) on College Campuses Can Work Together for SWD

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### **Career Exploration**

Students often begin college without a clear career goal and frequently change direction mid stream. MRS and ODSS can develop ways to address this challenge in local communities. Often college campuses offer career exploration testing and counseling and students may be more comfortable participating in career exploration activities on their college campus rather than at MRS or at a Certified Rehabilitation Provider (CRP). In other situations students require special support and expertise to do effective career exploration and therefore need counseling and support from MRS. This is an area where MRS and ODSS can collaborate on behalf of students to provide the most effective intervention.

### **Advocacy**

Students come to college with varying degrees of readiness to succeed in the college setting. MRS support is often needed to help students develop and use their self determination skills in the college setting. When students are not at a point where they can navigate in the college environment, MRS can provide advocacy to help students make the transition. Meetings between the MRS counselor, ODSS counselor and the student are often the best way to bridge the gap for students. Once students get their footing, the MRS counselor can step back and the student can take the lead.

### **Academic Supports and Accommodations**

Colleges have responsibility to provide reasonable accommodations to college students in the classroom. However, students are often reluctant to ask for accommodations or don't know what accommodation to ask for. MRS and ODSS can provide encouragement and counsel to students to clarify what accommodations a student needs and to access accommodations that are available to them. In situations where there is a discrepancy, MRS and ODSS can communicate on behalf of students to tease out what accommodations are appropriate and needed. Sometimes additional documentation may need to be purchased and/or coordinated by MRS to ensure students receive appropriate accommodations.

### **Assistive Technology**

Colleges have an abundance of technology available, but it is constantly being changed and updated. A.T. is an area where MRS and ODSS need to have ongoing dialogue and training to keep up with the constant advances. Both MRS and ODSS can play a role in providing A.T. to students. Colleges have responsibility to provide A.T. to students in the classroom, but that responsibility does not carry over to outside of the classroom. MRS has the capacity to provide appropriate technology for students outside the classroom in individual situations. With good documentation, communication and collaboration, MRS and ODSS can work together to ensure that students have access to the technology they need to promote success in college.

### **Tutoring**

Free tutoring is often offered at colleges and is a wonderful resource for many students. The hours tend to be limited and tutors often do not have an expertise in working with SWD. This is another area where MRS and ODSS can put their heads together to determine if specialized tutoring is necessary. When tutoring that is provided is not sufficient to meet a student's specific disability related needs, MRS can consider priority tutoring on a case by case basis.

### **Work Experience/Part Time Employment/Internships/Volunteer Work**

Current research and data indicates that getting a degree is no guarantee that SWD are able to become successfully employed. Relevant work experiences, internships, part-time employment and/or volunteer work help to build a strong skill set where SWD can compete in today's job market.

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## Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS) and Office of Disability Support Services (ODSS) on College Campuses Can Work Together for SWD

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Another benefit is ongoing refining of an individual's job goal because real work experiences are often the best indicator of whether or not a person truly has interests in the direction they have chosen and has the skill set necessary to be successful. With real and relevant work information a student can make adjustments to their career direction if necessary.

Learning is made easier when an individual can integrate what they are learning in a classroom or reading in a text book to real situations. This is another reason why work experiences, part time employment, internships and/or volunteer work are essential adjuncts to a person's postsecondary educational experience.

MRS and ODSS can work together to assist and empower students to pursue and arrange real work opportunities while they are in school. Some students may need help thinking about accommodations or preparing for interviews. Others may need assistance locating or creating opportunities for these types of experiences. Good communication between MRS, ODSS and the student, laying out a clear understanding of what supports the student needs to be successful is critical.

### Employment

After a student completes their education, employment in their area of expertise is the big prize. However, job seeking in today's economy is a huge challenge. Some students have the ability to seek employment independently. Other students may need to access every resource available to them including job placement services at a student's college, Michigan Works! Agency and job placement services available at MRS. Students should be thinking about employment, honing their job acquisition skills and getting their resume together well before graduation. Employment preparation and job seeking is one last opportunity for MRS and ODSS to put their heads together on behalf of students.

## Save the Dates

Michigan Transition Services Association (MTSA)  
Annual Spring Conference

*"Outcomes Express"*

March 18–19, 2009

Bavarian Inn, Frankenmuth

[www.michigantsa.com](http://www.michigantsa.com)

Michigan Adult Education & Training Conference  
*"Reaching Out—Changing Lives"*

April 28–30, 2009

Marriott Hotel & Conference Center, Ypsilanti

<http://www.regonline.com>

MDE/NCA Spring School Improvement Conference

*"Effective School Improvement Practices"*

April 21-22, 2009

Rock Financial Showplace, Novi

[www.gomiem.org](http://www.gomiem.org)

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