Recognizing Successful Ball State Graduates with Disabilities

For this edition of the DS Communique, we thought it would be fun to catch up with some of the outstanding students with disabilities we have featured in these pages over the last ten years. Representing a variety of different types of disabilities, these Ball State graduates are now employed in areas commensurate to their Ball State degrees. Many have earned higher degrees, some now have families, but each of these individuals is successful within their given fields and proudly representing Ball State.

Each year the Graduate Assistant in the Disability Services office writes this newsletter which we send to faculty, staff, students, graduates, and other friends of Disability Services at Ball State. Who better, then, to write this newsletter featuring outstanding graduates with disabilities than Donelle Henderlong. Donelle received the Max Adamson award last year and a Greg and Mary Beth Fehribach award in 2011. Donelle is now seeking a Master’s degree in the Student Affairs Administration in Higher Education program. Her goal is to be an administrator at a college or university – maybe even directing a Disability Services office someday.

Like Donelle, the alums that we feature in this newsletter have received one or more award from Disability Services. It is a privilege for me to present awards to outstanding students with disabilities in honor or in memory of former students and friends of Disability Services. Below is a list of the awards we currently present at our spring program:

- Max Adamson Award – Named for a student leader at Ball State in the 1980s, this is given each year to a Ball State senior with a disability who excels in the classroom and is a leader on campus.
- Fehribach Awards – Named for Greg and Mary Beth Fehribach, longtime friends and generous donors to Disability Services, these awards typically recognize high-achieving sophomores and juniors with disabilities.

- Laura Kraska Awards – Given in Laura’s honor by Laura’s family, this new award allows us to provide scholarships for students with visual impairments.
- Adrienne Paige Gilbert Award – Provided in Adrienne Paige’s memory by her family, we recognize students with Osteogenesis Imperfecta with this award.

We hope you enjoy reading about the recent Ball State graduates. If you are a graduate with a disability, we would love to learn more about what you are now doing. Please contact us at dsd@bsu.edu and share your story!

Wishing you a happy and successful 2014,
Larry Markle
Dr. John Trombley

John Trombley graduated from Ball State in 2005 with a Bachelor’s degree in Chemistry and Biochemistry. After leaving Ball State, John began working on his PhD at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. His dissertation was complete in 2010. While working on some revisions, John took a position as a Chemistry instructor at Midwestern State University in Wichita Falls, Texas. He enjoyed this job because of the small department and the opportunity to teach almost every class he’s qualified to teach. His dissertation was finished that year, and in 2011, John graduated with a Doctorate of Philosophy in Chemistry from Miami University. After graduating, John filled in as a Biochemist at Midwestern State University before accepting his current position teaching General and Fundamental Chemistry at Arizona Western College in Yuma, Arizona.

Getting a PhD is no easy task. John spent five years gathering usable research on Tannins, a chemical found in plants, while taking classes, exams, and writing a dissertation. The writing proved difficult, as advisors would read drafts of the dissertation and tell John he needed to edit, but not where or why. To solve this issue, John was resourceful and looked for friends outside the department to proofread.

Some of John’s biggest challenges involve writing. Often, when he types tests, the word on the page is not the word he intended to type. John uses a level of humor when addressing this issue with his students and his students are very accepting. Still, John realizes that he must reflect professionalism in his writing. He finds Google to be the most helpful in correcting his spelling.

Natalie Russo

Natalie Russo graduated from Ball State in 2011 with a Bachelor’s degree in Journalism with an emphasis in Graphics. Natalie assimilated to life after Ball State very quickly: she learned to drive, got a job, and got an apartment in Carmel, IN, all within the same month. Using the databases Monster and Career Builder, Natalie got a job as a web designer for the Yellow Pages Group. Although she likes her job, she does have some mobility issues around the office but nothing that cannot be addressed through self-advocating. Natalie continues to play Power Soccer with the Circle City Rollers while working on a Master’s degree in Web Design and New Media from the Academy of Art.

Natalie graduated Ball State with a 3.4 GPA, among her many accomplishments. Thanks to Natalie, Ball State is
home to the first university-sponsored Power Soccer team in the country, officially founded in the fall of 2008. In the summer of 2010, Natalie had the opportunity to complete an internship with Reader’s Digest in New York. She was named one of the very first Fehribach Award winners in 2009, as well as the 2011 Max Adamson Award recipient. The best advice Natalie can give to future Ball State graduates is to “seek out all opportunities to get involved, especially within your major, in order to make connections for future jobs. Use college as a way to practice independence because you can make your own decisions while still having a support system.” Recently, Natalie returned to Ball State for Homecoming, one of her favorite memories, and got to see her friends, whom she refers to as her “second family.”

Dr. Jeff Snell

Jeff Snell graduated from Ball State in 2009 with a Bachelor’s degree in Chemistry. After graduating, Jeff attended the Indiana University School of Medicine and graduated with a Doctorate of Medicine this past May. Because of the rarity of wheelchair users in medical school, Jeff did face a few challenges, but nothing that he could not accommodate with the help of thoughtful faculty and staff. For example, Jeff was placed at hospitals with lower tables and bigger operating rooms and participated in surgical rotations where the surgeon was able to sit. A nurse pushed Jeff into the operating rooms whenever he scrubbed in. Jeff is quick to point out however that he would never jeopardize patient care to accommodate himself, such as in trauma situations, patients who were coding, or patients who looked to be passing away under anesthesia. Currently, Jeff is applying to schools to receive his PhD in Computational and Systems Biology.

While at Ball State, Jeff maintained over a 3.6 GPA. He was heavily involved in Thursday Night Recreation, a program that gave students the opportunity to participate in adaptive sports. While at Ball State, one of Jeff’s hobbies was competitive body building. He guest posed at the Mr. Ball State competition for three years and won a Mr. Ball State title in 2009. In addition to his Mr. Ball State title, Jeff was also the 2009 Max Adamson Award Recipient.

Jeff says that working in the Disability Services office is among the things that he misses most about Ball State. He advises future graduates to “make lots of mistakes—and learn from them.”

Teri Whitaker

Teri Whitaker graduated in 2008 with a Bachelor’s in Social Work. Upon graduation, Teri worked at the AccessABILITY Center for Independent Living, where she worked alongside other people with disabilities advocating for individuals and systems issues that impact them. In October of this year, Teri was hired by the Bureau of Developmental Disabilities for the state of Indiana, where she assists people in connecting with services and resources essential to independence. This position is a major accomplishment for Teri and the community of people with disabilities as a whole, as there are not many people with disabilities working in full time government positions.

Teri’s biggest challenges involve transportation with paratransit because she does not drive, and managing a personal care attendant schedule in conjunction with a full time job.
Sometimes the demeaning attitudes of others can be frustrating, but the key is education: “If you get angry and yell they write you off as lashing out at your ‘situation’, but if you go into teaching mode and educate them, it automatically reverses the roles and puts you in authority.”

Teri was no stranger to involvement on campus. She served as Co-President of DSIA (now Alliance for Disability Awareness) for two years, and was also on Homecoming Court. Teri was named Student of the Year in the Social Work department, and she received the 2008 Adrienne Paige Gilbert award and scholarship from Disability Services. Among the things she misses most about Ball State are hanging out with friends in Noyer and having “wheelchair drag races” at 2 AM.

Teri stresses the importance of being persistent to future Ball State graduates:

“Life doesn’t just happen, you have to make it happen! If you think you’ll graduate and move home and suddenly be inundated by job offers you’re not operating in the realm of reality. You’ll have to go on three times as many interviews and be a master of networking. You must want your independence more than you want air in your lungs! You have to grab your dreams with the tenacity of a crazed animal: think pitbull in a business suit.”

Sarah (Risinger) Bottos

Sarah (Risinger) Bottos graduated from Ball State in 2007 with a Bachelor’s degree in Elementary and Special Education. Upon graduation, Sarah was offered a job at Flint Lake Elementary School in Valparaiso, Indiana where she teaches second grade. She found that her student teaching experience in Germany was her biggest asset in interviewing for jobs. Sarah has learned that her disability has not so much been a hindrance but a help in the real world: “I am able to relate and tell them my experience. Often when parents find out that I personally went through special education and have a special education degree, they are more willing to listen to my suggestions.” Sarah recently graduated with a Master’s in Education from Indiana University Northwest. Sarah married her husband Michael in June of 2012, and although they do not have children yet, they recently adopted a puppy named Jameson.

During her time at Ball State, Sarah earned over a 3.6 GPA and was a BIC Industries Award winner in 2006. She was involved in Kappa Delta Pi, the National Society of Collegiate Scholars, and the Student Council for Exceptional Children.

2014 Disability Services Awards Program

The annual Disability Services awards program is scheduled for Tuesday, April 8, at 3 p.m. in Cardinal Hall B of the Student Center. Please join us as we recognize outstanding students and an alumnus with a disability and express gratitude to faculty and staff for promoting accessibility.
Katie (Klee) Crist

Katie (Klee) Crist graduated from Ball State in 2008 with a Bachelor’s degree in Elementary Education. Upon graduation, Katie worked as a substitute teacher for Carmel Schools and a cadre teacher for Indianapolis Public Schools until 2011. Katie just received a Master’s in Social Work from Indiana University and now works as a counselor for teens with drug addictions. She married fellow Ball State graduate Mike Crist ('04) in December of last year.

While she was a student at Ball State, Katie was a student worker in the Disability Services office. She was also involved with Epsilon Sigma Alpha service sorority and enjoyed going to Late Nite and Friday Night Filmworks with Friends.

Katie misses the overall kindness of people and accessibility at Ball State, but for as far as the accessibility challenges that she faces in her life after Ball State, “I’m not afraid to ask for help when needed.”

RJ Crace

RJ Crace graduated in 2010 with a Bachelor’s degree in Telecommunications. Following graduation, RJ did an internship with WIBC in Indianapolis where he now works as a part-time radio producer and does sportscasts on the weekends. The biggest “real world” obstacle that RJ faced coming out of Ball State was “selling himself short and not trying new experiences.” Prior to his internship, RJ had no experience with audio and editing software, but after some dedicated supervisors spent some time teaching him how to use it, he was able to take five to ten-minute interviews and cut them down to two to three-minutes, a skill that he is able to use frequently in the workplace.

While at Ball State, RJ won one of the very first Fehribach Awards in 2009. As a member of the Honors College, RJ maintained a 3.4 GPA. He was very involved with the student-run radio station, WCRD, hosting a weekly hour-long radio show during his first two years at Ball State, as well as numerous pre-game, post-game, and halftime shows during football games. In 2009, RJ served as president of College Republicans. RJ was an active member of the Ball State Debate Team for three semesters, during which time the team won two national championships. The debate team, one of RJ’s favorite memories, also brought about personal success for him: In 2010 he became the first undergraduate student to receive the President’s Award for Outstanding Contribution to Debate.

RJ advises future Ball State graduates to “not assume they cannot do things until they have tried.” When it comes to interviewing for jobs, he reminds students to be sure to “tell employers what they bring to the table. What can you do for the company that makes you the right person for the job?”
**Renee (Goodwin) Haack**

Renee (Goodwin) Haack graduated in 2006 with a Bachelor’s degree in Special Education - Mild/Moderate Interventions and Hearing Impairments. Following graduation, Renee and her husband Judd moved to Fulton, Missouri, where Renee became a fifth grade teacher at the Missouri School for the Deaf. After about six weeks in that position, Renee was asked to move to the vocational building in the school to teach Career Transitions to high school students, a position she became very passionate about. After about four years in that position, Renee moved back to Indiana and worked as a middle school teacher at the Indiana School for the Deaf. She is currently the Transition Coordinator at the Indiana School for the Deaf where she is working to create a new transition to work program for students there. Renee loves her job because it gives her “the opportunity to partner and educate business owners on how to work with a diverse population.” She hopes to help as many people with disabilities as she can to gain rightful employment. In addition to the amount of work she does with her job, Renee keeps busy raising her son and daughter, Abram, four years old, and Aubrey, two years old.

The biggest challenge that Renee faces in her day-to-day life is communication. Renee’s hearing loss makes it difficult to hear and understand others, but knowing herself and surrounding herself with people who love and support her is an asset in addressing these issues.

**Welcoming Tiffany Peters**

We are pleased to announce that Tiffany Peters is the newest member of the Disability Services team at Ball State. Tiffany began her new role as the Coordinator of Success Strategies and Writing and Languages at the Learning Center midway through the fall semester. In addition to overseeing tutoring for students needing assistance with writing, time management, organization, and study skills, Tiffany administers the test accommodation program at the Learning Center for students with disabilities. Approximately 2,000 exams are administered each year at the Learning Center.

Prior to joining the staff at the Learning Center, Tiffany was the Coordinator of Student-Athlete Support Services at Ball State. She holds Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees from Ball State, and is currently pursuing a Doctorate in Adult, Community, and Higher Education.
Brandon Gore graduated in 2007 with a Bachelor’s degree in Architecture. Following graduation, Brandon worked at the BSA Architecture Firm in Indianapolis for two years and then came back to Ball State for a Master’s in Architecture. After graduating again in 2011, Brandon married his wife Erica, a 2012 Ball State graduate. Although they do not have any children yet, they do have a Labradoodle named Lucy. Brandon received another Bachelor’s in Construction Management before beginning his job as a graduate architect for Ball State, where he works to survey and maintain buildings across campus. The biggest challenges that Brandon faces in life after graduation are mobility issues and getting sick easily because of a weakened immune system. By exercising regularly and taking some extra time on work, Brandon is able to accommodate these issues.

Brandon was heavily involved as a Ball State student. While maintaining a 3.0 GPA, Brandon held a leadership role within Baptist Collegiate Ministry, played Power Soccer, was a Resident Assistant in Klipple Hall for two years, and served as President of Disabled Students in Action (now called Alliance for Disability Awareness) for two terms. He also received many awards, including the 2007 Max Adamson Award, a BIC Industries award, and the Diversity Award from the Multicultural Center. In 2003, Brandon and two other individuals were the overall winners of Air Jam during Homecoming, for their routine to the song “Roll Out.” Brandon counts this as his favorite Ball State memory.

Brandon advises future Ball State graduates: “Keep plugging away. The only obstacles you have are the ones you let get in front of you.”

2013-2014 Bush Scholarship Recipients

Myrna Bush, a 1928 graduate of Ball State, endowed funds to the university to support students with visual impairments. Recipients of the Bush Scholarships are selected annually based on a combination of their academic achievement and their involvement on campus. This year thirteen students received Bush Scholarships.

Award Recipients:

Tara Abella: Freshman, Elementary Education/Special Education

Tim Allison: Senior, Entreprenurial Management

Joshua Arter: Junior, Criminal Justice

Aimee Burns: Graduate Student, Applied Behavioral Analysis

Jacob Caudill: Graduate Student, Information and Communication Sciences

Brittany Feilen: Senior, Special Education

Alex Gilland: Freshman, Pre-Telecommunications

Blaine Helm: Senior, German

Andrew Neylon: Senior, English

Preston Radtke: Sophomore, Public Relations

Amanda Rusk: Junior, Criminal Justice

Rochelle Schmitt: Senior, General Studies

Patrick Weaver: Senior, Music Media Production

Congratulations to each of this year’s recipients. For more information on how to apply for this scholarship, please visit the Disability Services’ website – www.bsu.edu/disabilityservices.
The DS Communique is published once a semester by the Office of Disability Services for the students, faculty, alumni, staff, and friends of Ball State University.

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If you are a BSU/DS alumni and have news you would like to share with the readers of this newsletter, please drop us a line or two about anything you’d like us to know, such as accomplishments, events, or milestones. Please notify us about a change in address as well.

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www.bsu.edu/disabilityservices

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