Introducing Greg Fehribach with the Office of Institutional Diversity

The Office of Institutional Diversity is proud to welcome Distinguished Fellow Gregory S. Fehribach.

Greg educates the large and diverse population of students and faculty with disabilities at Ball State. Greg arrived at Ball State as an undergraduate in 1977 and finished his masters in 1983. During this time, he was elected president of the student body. Greg recollects, “As a person with disability, an undergraduate, and being elected president of the student body at the university was the inaugural integration of people with disabilities into the world of diversity here at BSU, although we didn’t know we were doing that. We didn’t know we were being diverse. We didn’t recognize that there was this collaboration between people with disabilities and the world of diversity. That all came later when I graduated from Ohio Northern Pettit College of Law in 1985. I recognized it in law school and even before that, but didn’t know how to articulate it.”

Greg completed his 30th year practicing law in October, 2016. His current affiliation with the Indianapolis-based law firm Doninger Tuohy & Bailey LLP spans 25 years.
With his perspective as an attorney with a disability, Greg noticed that people with disabilities, as a whole, were underrepresented. He recounts, “As a trial lawyer and educator, I always paid attention to the diversity side to try to figure out how disabilities integrated into this world of a diverse population. One thing that became clear to me was the fact that people with disabilities were left out of all of the diversity language. They weren’t in the Civil Rights Bill that became law in 1964. They were specifically left out. As Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie said, ‘Those who have the most reason for dissent are those least allowed dissent.’ I began practicing law in 1986, which was the infancy of the Americans with Disabilities Act. It was starting to percolate under the ground.” This led Greg to testify in front of Congress as an Indiana representative to support the creation of the historical Americans with Disabilities Act.

Greg returned to Ball State in 2009 as a Distinguished Fellow and a partner of Dr. Raymond Scheele, Professor Emeritus of the Bowen Center, and Director Larry Markle of the Office of Disability Services. This team of Dr. Scheele, Director Markle, and Greg developed the Disability Project, which identifies barriers that people with disabilities face. Their work has helped Ball State be recognized as an inclusive, accessible, and supportive community for students, faculty, and people with disabilities nationwide. Commenting on his return to Ball State, Greg said, “The recognition that we must include people with disabilities [when promoting diversity] is a fabulous analysis. I’m not sure it’s done any place else. I think it may be included or talked about, but the disability sector joining the Office of Institutional Diversity is absolutely appropriate. Diverse populations, including people with disabilities, must overcome the stigma that straightforwardness represents entitlement. The Project teaches that confidence in inclusion is not arrogance, and as a result, a unique partnership was born.”

As a member of the Board of Trustees for Health and Hospital Corporation, Marion County, and the Board of Directors for the Eskenazi Health Foundation, Greg has facilitated a partnership with Eskenazi Health, one of the five largest safety net health systems in the country. Eskenazi Health opened a new, ADA state-of-the-art facility in December of 2013. This paved the way for Ball State and Eskenazi Health to establish the Initiative for Empowerment and Economic Independence (IEEI). IEEI is an innovative initiative designed to: engage qualified students with physical disabilities into
comprehensive and diverse internship opportunities that build skills, confidence, and work history to maximize competitiveness in the workforce; empower Indiana college students with physical disabilities to find gainful, sustainable, and equitable employment; and to connect Indiana employers with a highly qualified, untapped pool of employees with physical disabilities.

Greg believes that leadership is an important quality to promote to students with disabilities in order to accomplish diversity and equality. When speaking for the interview, Greg said, “We’re sitting in the Ralph Whiting building, right now, doing this interview. Ralph Whiting ’29 was a wheelchair user. He was an accountant for the Ball family, so he was the guy that demanded that Ball State start a program back in the 50’s to put in ramps et cetera, so wheelchair users could get around. It goes right back to this internship program. It goes back to leadership. Mr. Whiting was a leader. He was a successful accountant, successful businessman, and a wheelchair user. Because he had the backing of the Ball Corporation and the Ball family, he was able to make a stand on this topic and obviously did.”

There are areas where our university can grow to increase the potential of our students with disabilities. “I don’t think faculty set high enough expectations for students with disabilities,” Greg said. He continues, “[Students with disabilities] have to learn they need to be engaged in, for instance, the STEM fields: Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math. Just because it doesn’t sound traditionally appropriate, we now have the technology so that people with disabilities can be educated in these fields.” Greg also asserts that, “We have to ask the tough questions. We have a difficult time communicating with some of our students with disabilities. That is not unlike boardrooms back in the days of integration in a variety of fronts. Recognize that people with disabilities need to be a part of that conversation. Being comfortable with a person with a disability is important.” He concluded, “It’s okay to be a person with a disability.”

As an alumnus, Greg understands what it’s like for students with disabilities arriving on campus. “When you show up here, you’re 18 or 19 years old and it’s scary. As a person with a disability back in 1977, it was really scary.” said Greg. He has some encouragement for students with disabilities as they begin their education. He stresses, “Figure out a way to make money and have a quality job, quality employment, and really participate in the world today from that aspect. It’s our duty to shed the old philosophy that we are here to be taken care of.” He continues,
“Use your BSU years, and the years beyond, to figure out how to break the shackles of the concept of a handout.” He believes that students with disabilities have a bright future ahead of them. We are ecstatic to welcome Greg and the Disability Project to our office, bringing the perspective, experience, and skills he has to promote diversity.