

## **DISABILITY AWARENESS WEEK REPORT 2008**

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Published on August 17, 2008

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“Students for Disability Awareness aims to spread awareness and to educate the WWU community about the disability culture, promote equal opportunities and better accessibility for all students, faculty, and staff with disabilities, and to empower them with the strength and tools to have a positive university experience while working with campus resources.” (SDA Mission Statement)

The following report outlines the evaluation of Disability Awareness Week. The categories analyzed were the following: evaluation of the planning process and the implementation phase, and the analysis of the survey data. The report concludes with practical recommendations for future Disability Awareness Weeks (DAW) to come.

The planning process included a lot of the work that was done leading up to the actual events during the week. It is vital to understand the work behind the scenes to fully comprehend why certain events were not as successful as others. While discussing the implementation phase, successes and failures were noted when using the data provided to assist in making conclusions. There were two surveys in total, both were analyzed and compared.

At the opening ceremony of DAW, the President of Students for Disabilities, Daman Wandke challenged each person in the audience to “be the person who breaks the mold.” This was a challenge that was not taken lightly by anyone in the room. Being an eyewitness to people’s perceptions and stereotypes change about people with disabilities was inspiring. Furthermore, the information in this report proves Daman was also right when he said, “our society is based on change.” Disability Awareness Week began a legacy that will continue year after year here at Western, but even more importantly it has started a chain reaction of people who now carry a broader knowledge of disability awareness with them.

The planning process is what determines the success of the week. Included in the planning, but not limited to, is: scheduling volunteers, locations, and events, receiving waivers, creating a website, getting equipment, creating and displaying publicity, presenting to administration and students, and finalizing the official Plan of Action. All of these components are important to the success of the week, but certain aspects of planning were more vital than others and will be focused on for the evaluation of the planning process.

The first aspect evaluated in the planning process is creating the Plan of Action. The Plan of Action is the detailed schedule of events that includes time, location, volunteers, and a description of the event. It included such small tasks as who was to get a microphone to the larger issues of who were the guest speakers. The Plan of Action was important to the success of the week because it prepared people for the responsibilities of the week and it acted as a manual to the week's events. Clearly the process of creating the Plan of Action was tedious and time consuming, but this year's Plan of Action can act as a template for Disability Awareness Weeks in years to come. The Plan of Action was a very useful and practical tool for each volunteer and should remain a vital component of the planning process.

The next important step in the planning process was scheduling volunteers. This process was incredibly time consuming and difficult to accommodate to all the volunteers' schedules. After much work, we allotted about equal hours to all the volunteers. The main problem was that many of the volunteers felt overworked. This could be solved by recruiting more volunteers, which may be solved through more publicity. Another problem was scheduling volunteers to work right up to the time they

had classes, not allowing for travel time, breaks, or meals. To solve this, we could ask, instead of class times, but for available times so the volunteers can decide when they need breaks before the schedule is made.

The final key step that will be evaluated in the Planning Process will be the publicity. Publicity includes buttons, posters, handbills, bookmarks, tabling, newspaper articles, word of mouth, Facebook.com and emails, and through the Disability Simulation. In general, the publicity for this event was successful. General response from volunteers was that tabling in Red Square and at the VU should have started earlier than before the Monday of DAW to improve awareness of the week before it started. Also, some of the posters and handouts had some grammatical and factual errors that could have been prevented through revision. That being said, this was the SDA's first year of planning the Disability Awareness Week. The publicity was a clear success as it laid the foundation for the next years and created awareness that we need to start earlier on publicity and review the publications more carefully.

### **Implementation Phase**

Disability Awareness Week was not only monumental to the lives affected by it, but furthermore it was the first Disability Awareness Week in all of WWU's history. The Disability Awareness Week fulfilled the aim of DAW, as quoted Daman Wandke, president of SDA, who states "Students for Disability Awareness aims to spread awareness and educate the WWU community about the disability culture, promote equal opportunities, and better accessibility for all students, faculty, and staff with disabilities, and to empower them with the strength and tools to have a positive university experience

while working with campus resources.” The events of the week live up to the expectations of the SDA by educating students and faculty about issues facing the disability culture. Such issues include accessibility in technology and WWU’s campus, language use, policy, obstacles, and stereotypes.

Considering that it was a groundbreaking event, there were many successes in Disability Awareness Week, not to mention the success that SDA and DAW are even in existence. Many of the volunteers were surprised at the attendance of the events. Many more people than anticipated showed up at the events, a direct effect of the publicity. A success factor of the tabling was that it really helped with publicity which acted as the catalyst for the high numbers of attendance. Even more critical was the attendance of the volunteers. Each volunteer followed the schedule and if unforeseen events occurred found a replacement. The attendance of the volunteers was also key so that unanticipated problems could be taken care of and the evaluations distributed, providing us with essential feedback. Another success was how the budget was maintained and followed strictly throughout the week. In addition, many people were excited by the Simulation and Wheel Chair Races. They were not only an unexpected way to publicize the week, but physically transformed people’s daily routines and internally transformed what the participants may consider to be “normal” by allowing them to experience what it may feel like to be a person with a disability. Having a Plan of Action laid out on paper was essential to implement any of the events and to their successes.

Clearly many of the events were implemented successfully, but as it was the first year, there were also some suggestions from the volunteers of how to improve DAW for future years. As mentioned above, there are clearly issues needing to be addressed

regarding the scheduling of volunteers. A main complaint of the volunteers was that they felt overworked throughout the week. Also, many participants expressed their wish that there was more participation at each event. Both of these issues can be solved by trying to increase the amount of people involved with SDA, which is a major goal of the SDA for the following year. Events should be scheduled earlier in the day and more detailed descriptions of the events should be accessible.

### Analysis of Survey Data

#### Workshop Evaluations

<i>Workshop</i>	<i>How appropriate was this workshop for DAW</i>	<i>Effectiveness of presenters</i>	<i>Satisfaction with refreshments</i>	<i>Likelihood that you will attend another DAW event</i>	<i>Overall effectiveness of this workshop</i>
Opening Ceremony	5	4.9	4.4	4.83	4.75
Invisible Disabilities	5	5	5	4.9	5
Straight Talk about Blindness	5	4.6	4	4.6	4.8
Simulation Discussion	4.87	4.75	4.375	4.25	4.75
Waiting to Inhale					
Creating Safe Spaces	4.3	3.87	4.67	3.8	3.9
You Can't Use This	4.14	4.57	4.86	3.86	4.43
That's So Retarded	4.57	4.57	5	4.1	4.57
Sex & Disability	4.5	4.1	4.3	4.65	4.3
Ableism 101					
The Handi-Capable...	4.8	4.8	4.8	4.7	4.75
Opening the Door?	4.5	4.6	4.6	4.6	4.25
Policy and Practice	5	4.86	5	5	5
Closing	5	5	4.5	3.5	5

Ceremony					
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Important Comments to Consider for the Workshops:

*Opening Ceremony*

- “enthusiasm and commitment of presenters, very inspiring and thought provoking”
- “equal rights between able and disable”
- exciting because it “gathered people together”
- “made me really want to be here
- “Daman’s speech was very powerful”
- “Explain a second time what the upcoming events are, what will happen, how long and what prizes are”
- “spread out events more”
- “more pictures on power point and less writing”

*Invisible Disabilities*

- effective because showed “people of all ages and of different backgrounds” (profession, major, ability/disability, etc)
- more people should be there and a better description of what the event is and what it would involve (for example: level of participation in activities)
- more facts about the prevalence of invisible disabilities on WWU’s campus

*Straight Talk about Blindness*

*Simulation Discussion*

- “I felt okay to be open and honest. Thank you for making this opportunity available for us”
- “I liked the idea of not allowing people to choose their disability”

*Waiting to Inhale (no evaluations received)*

*Creating Safe Spaces*

- needs to be tailored to larger group
- meaningful dialogue
- many found the discussion on ground rules was important
- should be focused more on disability topic
- instructions on activities, organization, and structure needed to be improved

*You Can’t Use This*

- have accessibility hardware there that people can use
- created awareness of barriers people were not aware of
- many considered the examples very helpful

*That’s So Retarded*

- awareness to words/phrases that are offensive, new idea to many
- should provide a list of offensive phrases and alternatives
- session should be longer
- personal perspectives very helpful

*Sex & Disability Talk*

- “I thought the speaker presented this topic wonderfully”

- information about myths, sex information for people with physical disabilities
- should be time for conversing after straight lecture
- too much focus on developmental disability
- more media/film
- more viewpoints
- more information, less myths

*Ableism 101*

- good that it was interactive
- good that it addressed the idea of paternalism
- should be a break between sessions

*The Handi-Capable-Bi-Queer-Slut of the World*

- good that it touched on all areas of disability issues
- sarcasm and comedy very effective
- disliked presenter's use of profanity
- many felt put down for being "abled"
- needs to be more clear on what being an "ableist" is
- very interesting, creative, effective approach of speaker
- many like the openness, honesty, bluntness of presenter
- presenter very relatable
- presenter needs to be more positive and proactive: offer suggestions about what to do/solutions

*Opening the Door?*

- Things that were meaningful during the session: case studies, laws, and where to go for help
- More discussion with the case studies or have students bring up possible problems
- More information about employment for people with disabilities
- Allow for anonymous questions

*Disability Awareness at WWU: Seeing how Policy and Practice Impact our Community*

- Great dialogue and discussion
- Very informed panel, learned a lot about issues
- Needs better promotion
- More people should attend
- Need instruction on how to approach a disabled person
- How to be respectful and assist the blind
- Smaller, more intimate room

*Closing Ceremony*

- It was good that all the groups who had helped were acknowledged

SurveyMonkey Online (attached)

*Summary of SurveyMonkey*

- Majority of people who attended were students (83.9%)
- On Monday, the majority of people attended the Opening Ceremony (72.7%)
- On Tuesday, the majority of people attended the Creating Safe Spaces Workshop (62.5%)
- On Wednesday, the majority of people attended the Sex & Disability Workshop (57.1%)
- On Thursday, the majority of people attended the Handi-Capable-Bi-Queer-Slut-of-the-World (56.3%)
- On Friday, the majority of people attended the Closing Ceremony (75%)
- As a result of attending DAW events, 54.8% of people agree they feel more comfortable interacting with people who have varying levels of ability
- 45.2% agree they now have a greater understanding of the breadth of issues facing people with disabilities
- 38.7% agree they now have a greater understanding of issues of accessibility on campus
- 38.7% agree they are more willing to take action to improve accessibility on Western's campus
- 48.4% agree they are more likely to attend other events sponsored by SDA

*Comments about DAW in general:*

- "It was a very educational and eye opening week for myself. I have always been a little afraid and intimidated by the disabled. I guess because I never really understood their stories, this week allowed me to see past their disabilities and look at them for who they are."
- "It may be helpful to have fewer events after 5 PM and not have any on Friday night. Many students, staff, and faculty leave on Friday evening. I am so proud of the students that put the event on and all the work that went into the production. I was also impressed by Daman's articulate speech at the Opening Ceremony. WAY TO GO!"

Analysis of Evaluations

Reviewing both sets of surveys, it was found that while many of the comments were specific to the workshop, there were a number of recurring comments that were made

about DAW as a whole. The majority of the surveys indicated that they would like there to be more attendance during sessions to aid in discussion. This may be a direct result of the publicity. When reviewing the data, 64% heard of the week's events through word of mouth. Although this was effective, it showed that the publicity (posters, tabling, etc) was not as impacting as it should've been on campus. One of the most valuable comments was about not hosting events on Friday nights or late in the evening when people are less able to attend because of personal schedules. The general score for the "effectiveness of workshops" was very high averaging between 4.5 and 5. Both surveys will help to better DAW for the following years to come!

### **Recommendations for Future**

During the planning process, it is recommended to recruit more volunteers and collect their availability at least 3 weeks prior to the event to allow for smooth process of scheduling. The Plan of Action proved to be very effective as the first step in planning DAW and it should be continued. The publicity needs to be displayed earlier and more effectively to gather more participation.

In the implementation phase, the events should be given more description so that people will be able to know in what they will be participating. Evaluations should continue to be distributed so that further improvements can be made to DAW. Catering was a great idea so that less attention could be given to food preparation and tasks such as set up etc.

Many of the comments were helpful to specific workshops, rather than the week as a whole. The majority of events received positive feedback, but specific comments should be considered so that workshops can be the most effective for next year.