

Disability Awareness Week at UWO: Striving toward equal, not 'easy'

by Mandy Potts - Thursday, April 04, 2013

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/26213/disability-awareness-week-at-uwo-striving-toward-equal-not-easy/>

At the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, more than 350 students are registered as having a disability.

In truth, though, those students are no different than the other more than 13,500 students who live, work, play, learn and study at the state's third-largest University, said Jim Schlinsog, coordinator of services for students with disabilities in the Dean of Students office at UW Oshkosh.

Schlinsog spends his days connecting and coordinating with students who identify as having a disability at UW Oshkosh. His job, he said, is to focus on accessibility and inclusivity and try to remove barriers.

"We ask every student upon admission what they might need for accommodations," Schlinsog said. "It isn't our goal to make things easier for a student with a disability but instead to give them a level playing field."

To help make the public more aware of all types of disabilities, UW Oshkosh's Disability Awareness Week will be held on campus April 8 through 12. UW Oshkosh's Disability Support Services, the Diversity and Inclusion office and Reeve Memorial Union will offer a [variety of events](#) throughout the week to give campus and community members an opportunity to learn more about those with disabilities. Throughout the week, events like wheelchair basketball, speakers and brown bag lunches and film showings aim to give people a glimpse into the world of a life of someone living with a disability.

The institution's everyday efforts to create that level playing field come in all shapes and sizes – just like UW Oshkosh students do.

Schlinsog helps coordinate everything from accessibility in classrooms and residence halls to getting sign language interpreters to campus for special events to making sure page magnifiers are in the right classrooms and learning spaces. If a student needs a product or support service, Schlinsog goes to work to make it happen.

"We do whatever is reasonable to accommodate our students," Schlinsog said.

UW Oshkosh freshman Jon Heider is one of those students. Heider, who was born without arms or legs (he formally calls himself a "congenital quad amputee"), is a full time freshman at UW Oshkosh who said he appreciates the "minor accommodations" UW Oshkosh officials have made for him. Not only does Heider attend classes at UW Oshkosh, he also lives in Taylor Hall and is a team member on the UW Oshkosh swim team, where he's breaking records.

"Swimming (is the sport) that kind of stuck because it was the only sport that didn't require any extra equipment. I like the free feeling you get in the water... I never had any arms or any legs so I use

what I've got," said Heider, 20, of Green Bay.

Learn more about Heider and his story...

<http://youtu.be/NnDdvJZQ2pk>

"It makes me proud to be a Titan, proud to be part of the program, proud to be part of a University that's willing to do something for a student, not necessarily for a student with a disability but for any student," said Jon Wilson, UW Oshkosh swimming coach, who added it was also a learning experience for him having Heider on the swim team.

"The majority of our students have invisible disabilities that affect their learning and ability to succeed. Disabilities aren't always obvious," Schlinsog said.

Schlinsog said most UW Oshkosh students have "invisible disabilities."

"I think the aim is to remove stereotypes," said Schlinsog. "At the same time, we should have conversations and recognize our society hasn't always been inclusive of people with disabilities."

Schlinsog hopes Disability Awareness Week will help people become more accepting and aware.

"I just hope people understand that the world is bigger than just them," he said.

Learn more:

- [Inclusive Excellence at UW Oshkosh](#)
- [Student Support Services at UW Oshkosh](#)