

# International Day of Persons with Disabilities

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Thursday, December 6, 2012

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The first annual observance of the United Nations (UN) International Day of Persons with Disabilities was held in the MUB Monday, Dec. 3. Students had the opportunity to try assistive technology devices and to learn about removing barriers.

Launched in 1992 by the United Nations, the International Day of Persons with Disabilities strives to promote an understanding of disability issues and to mobilize support for the dignity, rights and well-being of persons with disabilities. Each year the day focuses on a different issue.

“I think the more individuals there are with a variety of needs—veterans, high-functioning individuals with autism—the more we as faculty, staff and students have to become much more aware,” says Georgia Kerns, co-chair of the President’s Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities, host of the event. “This was a time to explore how we can work together with intention to create a full UNH experience for all.”

This was the first year UNH participated in the day aimed at reaffirming the rights of people who live with disabilities. Offices and organizations across campus supported the event, including Health Services, the UNH Bookstore, the Counseling Center, Disability Services for Students, Residential Life, the Center for Academic Resources, Northeast Passage, Information Technology, the Center for International Education, the Institute on Disability (IOD), Wildcat Friends, and the departments of occupational therapy and education.

The bookstore featured a display of books that focus on disabilities. Health Services brought a light box, a tool that provides light therapy for people who have seasonal affective disorder. The IOD offered information on iPad applications that aid people with disabilities.

Additionally, there were representatives from the study abroad office and Northeast Passage who talked with people about their programs. And Disability Services for Students explained the benefits of the literacy software Read & Write Gold.

Students with a disability were also present.

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**living...** Undergraduate Nick Holtzhum said, “Being disabled is not something to overcome – it’s a different way of viewing the world. It is an ingenious way of living...being disabled just gives you different means to do the same things that others do. I was given extra gifts; I’ve just got to move them around.”

With an international theme of removing barriers to create an inclusive and accessible society for all, Kerns said this first event also was about education. And with that goal, and the response from the UNH community, she deemed it a success.

“There was a steady turnout and people were engaged with all the people offering information,” Kerns says. “It was a great opportunity for people who wandered through to talk with people who have a disability. I was very pleased with the breadth of representation.”

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**INCLUSION**



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