University of Wisconsin-Whitewater
Disabled Student Services
External Review
June 3-4, 2002

Executive Summary

Barbara Jones, Assistant Chancellor for Student Affairs initiated a review of the Disabled Student Services Office (DSS). The Office has faced some significant challenges in the past year since its director of 30 years, John Truesdale, retired. The decision, upon John's retirement, was that a Director would not immediately be hired, nor would an acting Director be appointed. In the absence of a Director the Office was assigned to Richard Lee, Dean of Graduate Studies, Continuing Education and the Summer Session. The review was called for at this time, in part due to DSS being reassigned to the Division of Student Affairs.

As would be the case in any situation where the same person had administered an office for so long, many policies and procedures were long overdue for review. The budget had become very complicated due to reliance on funding from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation rather then a base of sound and permanent funding.

Prior to the visit, Dr. Jones supplied the consultants with information to help them prepare for their visit. Position descriptions, organizational charts, prior reports concerning the activities of the office, a report from the campus Auditor, documentation guidelines and policies and procedures were all included.

The consultants met initially with Barbara Jones and Lori Variotta, Dean of Student Life to discuss the format of the two days and lay the groundwork for the review. A two day schedule had been arranged for the consultants that included meetings with all available staff members as well as individuals from Campus Planning, Instructional Technology, Admissions, Financial Aid, New Student Programs, the Registrar's Office, Affirmative Action, Equal Opportunity and Diversity, the Internal Auditor, Residence Life, Risk Management, Physical Therapy and University Health and Counseling Services. Most meetings took place in small groups with all consultants present. Meetings with DSS staff took place individually, with a review panelist assigned to each staff member. Finally, there were small groups of student employees and students that used services who met with the consultants.

Areas that are fundamental to the management and operation of DSS Offices have provided the structure for this report. Guidance from the "The Book of Professional Standards for Higher Education" by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), 1997, has also been included.

Selected Observations:

- It is clear being on the UW-Whitewater campus that there is serious commitment to ensuring access for students with disabilities and moving beyond the law to create welcoming and inclusive environments. However, there are no clear and consistent mission, vision, and goal statements to guide this work.
• DSS provides many of the core components of disability services in higher education, but the organization and structure of the office creates confusion for students. Additionally, it appears as if there are three different offices (DSS, Project ASSIST, Counseling Center) that are engaged in determining and providing reasonable accommodations – this is problematic and may put the university at risk for inconsistency and inequity.

• UW-Whitewater insures the “special mission” language and philosophy are used consistently. Some reference materials indicated the “special mission” is “to provide access and accommodations to students with severe disabilities,” however the Board of Regents have recognized the “special mission” is to serve students with disabilities (not just severe disabilities) which is consistent with ADA and 504 requirements.

• UW-Whitewater appears to be meeting federal and state regulations in most areas. However, coordination and implementation efforts are confused and lead to misunderstanding about what services are mandated, who has the authority to determine eligibility and reasonable accommodations for disabled students, faculty, and staff and what the grievance procedure is.

• An audit was recently conducted of DSS and a report is being written to include detailed finding and recommendations. The consultants are concerned that when DSS loses its third party funding, it will not be adequately funded to accomplish its mission and goals.

• DSS appears to have enough staff relative to the numbers of students being served and the accommodations/services being provided, however it is difficult to determine staffing needs without a mission and vision, goals and objectives, and clear roles and responsibilities.

• Strained relationships within DSS have diminished staff/program effectiveness and negatively impacted service delivery and campus relationships.

• DSS staff members are individually responsive to the campus community, however there is no identified leader and initiative to plan and implement systemic change.

• The DSS office is not designed to be welcoming, accessible, and easily navigable

• The DSS office does not regularly collect data or conduct assessment and evaluation.

**Selected Recommendations:**

• DSS engage in a strategic planning effort to develop vision and mission statements to clarify its philosophy and role.

• DSS work to balance its emphasis on individual accommodations for students, with the provision of education and consultation to faculty and staff to help address systemic conditions that inhibit equal opportunity.

• UW-Whitewater discontinue the “special mission” language and philosophy from DSS. Reference materials indicated the special mission is “to provide access and accommodations to students with severe disabilities,” however ADA and 504 require this of all disabled students.

• DSS develop policies and procedures for its services and programs (accessible through its website), as well as an operations manual for DSS staff (accessible to all staff through a common Drive). Consultation with other DSS offices, especially those in the UW system could help guide this initiative.
• To insure consistency and equity in accommodation recommendations all mandated accommodations for qualified UWW students with disabilities should be recommended by the DSS staff.
• DSS hire a director with significant experience in management, who has strong managerial and interpersonal skills and a vision that will be backed by central administration. The new director must be empowered to evaluate all program areas; conduct task analyses of all staff positions, and implement necessary changes.
• DSS and the affirmative action office are given clear roles and responsibilities for ensuring that the institution fulfills its legal obligations and have campus-wide visibility and credibility in this regard (delineate between service and compliance activities). These roles and responsibilities need to be clearly stated and require staff in both offices to be well versed on ADA and Section 504 as well as have an understanding of institutional constraints. Policies, procedures, rights, responsibilities, and grievance procedures must be developed as well as a good working relationship with University General Counsel.
• DSS delineate the funding level and source of funding to support mandated and non-mandated services and that mandated services be reviewed carefully to determine how they are being provided and to ensure that students are not incurring any costs for them.
• The new director address personnel issues quickly and effectively, establish clear lines of communication among staff, collect data, establish accountability, and review job titles, classifications and descriptions to determine the essential functions necessary to support the program needs.
• DSS be directed to conduct annual surveys that address satisfaction and need of disabled students, faculty, and staff. Additionally, quantitative data (i.e., number of students, utilization of services, attrition and graduation rates) should be collected annually and reported and all functions of the DSS be reviewed and a comprehensive assessment and evaluation plan developed.
Full Review

Mission

"The DSS program must develop, record, disseminate, implement, and regularly review its mission and goals. Mission statements must be consistent with the mission and goals of the institution." – (CAS, 1997)

It is clear being on the UW-Whitewater campus that there is serious commitment to ensuring equal access for students with disabilities and moving beyond the law to create welcoming and inclusive campus environments.

The philosophy of DSS appears to be more attuned to individually assisting students than on creating systemic change. Their individual assistance to students has a rehabilitation mentality vs. a student development or disability support orientation. Feedback from campus staff fluctuated between “DSS is at times too enabling,” to “DSS places too many administrative burdens on disabled students.” The mission statement was located in three places and written differently in each. (“To make the University accessible to all students with disabilities”) was found in one document and only mentioned in passing. (“The mission of DSS is to make the university accessible to all students with disabilities; to permit the development of the students academic, personal, social, vocational, recreational, and physical capabilities to the fullest extents possible” was found on the DSS website. It is critical that DSS develop one mission statement that captures the unique roles and responsibilities of the unit; addresses student development concepts such as building disability community and identity. The DSS mission statements are not reflective of most mission statements of other disability service offices; have no philosophical base; and are not reflective of new conceptualizations of disability (sociopolitical model vs. medical model). Additionally, DSS has no vision statement or accompanying goals and priorities to help fulfill and clarify the mission.

It is recommended that:

- DSS engage in a strategic planning effort to develop vision and mission statements to clarify its philosophy and role at UW-Whitewater. The statements should reflect a more aggressive statement of commitment to equal opportunity, universal design, and disability culture. A review of websites of other Universities could help guide the formulation of a new statement. Also, DSS should develop continuing goals and annual objectives or priorities.

- DSS work to balance its emphasis on individual accommodations for students, with the provision of education and consultation to faculty and staff to help address systemic conditions that inhibit equal opportunity. This effort may eventually reduce the need for individual accommodation.

- UW-Whitewater identifies and publicize institutional rights and responsibilities
and student rights and responsibilities relative to the ADA. UW-Madison has done a nice job of outlining these on their www site.

- DSS insure the "special mission" language and philosophy is applied to all students with disabilities (not just severe disabilities) to be consistent with ADA and 504 requirements.

- In light of the fact that equal access for qualified individuals with disabilities is federally mandated, funding sources are being cut, many of the services provided for the "special mission" students are non-mandated and funded through DVR, and some disabled students are also receiving mandated services through Project ASSIST, it also becomes critical to clearly define and clarify the following:

  The commitment in funding that will allow UWW to continue going beyond the letter of the law

  Recruiting practices for the "special mission" population

  Any conflict the "special mission" may have with the overall DSS mission – must there be a distinction?

  Any inequity in mandated service delivery as some students perceive; distinct eligibility and budget delineation's to ensure fairness

  Any duplication of services

- **Questions that remain are:** Has the department and university evolved in a way that has internalized the "special mission" into the current campus culture? Should there be a distinction?

**Services & Programs**

"The program must provide those physical and/or academic support services that cannot be provided adequately or developed by other campus departments. The following components must be among those offered: eligibility determination, reasonable accommodation determination and provision, education and advocacy, problem-solving and support, information dissemination, and policy/procedure coordination." – (CAS, 1997)

DSS provides many of the core components of disability services in higher education, such as establishing eligibility, determining reasonable accommodations, providing/coordinating reasonable accommodations, and engaging in problem-solving and support to students. DSS has established guidelines for documenting disability and provides, arranges, or coordinates accommodations that are reasonable and appropriate and consistent with what is available on most US campuses (i.e., test accommodations, readers, scribes, interpreters, assistive technology, etc.). DSS relies heavily on student employees to coordinate and deliver services to disabled students.
The process for determining the appropriateness of the accommodation is determined by professional staff, but the consultants are concerned about whether these determinations are being made fairly and consistently among DSS staff as well as between DSS, Project ASSIST, and the Counseling Center. Students seemed confused about what accommodations they are entitled to and some students have a perception that students within the “special mission” population receive preferential treatment (this point was also noted in the 1996 review of DSS). There is also confusion about whether or not students are paying for reasonable accommodations through Project ASSIST, and whether some students are being over-accommodated in order to obtain DVR funding. There is no handbook for students, faculty, or staff that provides an overview of campus units, services and concomitant policies and procedures.

The consultants have concerns about the relationship between Project ASSIST and DSS, as well as the existence of a separate fee-for-service program designed exclusively for students with learning disabilities. Project ASSIST appears to be an organized and well-managed unit providing valuable services to some students. However, its existence raises legal questions as well as issues of fairness. Are students paying for reasonable accommodations? Why are learning disabled students given an opportunity for enhanced services over other disabled students? Over non-disabled students?

Education and consultation services to the campus community, as well as dissemination of information is not provided deliberately and consistently; and DSS does not appear to collaborate with other units on campus to assure equal access. Students with vision impairments complained about the timeliness of obtaining alternate print formats and staff expressed confusion about who serves students with psychiatric disabilities. Regarding the latter, it was noted in one document that the Counseling Center recommends accommodations to faculty, but it was not clear how that happens or for which disabled students.

It is recommended that:

- Efforts are initiated to promote the image of students with disabilities as functional and full members of the campus community, rather than viewing these students primarily in the context of their disability and as “rehab clients.” DSS needs to shift language and terminology in disseminated materials that are used to promote the identity of disabled students and the services offered.

- DSS develop policies and procedures for its services and programs (accessible through its website), as well as an operations manual for DSS staff (accessible to all staff through a common Drive). Consultation with other DSS offices, especially those in the UW system could help guide this initiative.

- To insure consistency and equity in accommodation recommendations all mandated accommodations for qualified UWV students with disabilities should be recommended by the DSS staff. They are the appropriate compliance program office on campus to do so. Project ASSIST is a non-mandated fee for service program. Their recommending mandated accommodations could be construed as a conflict of interest. The Counseling Center may recommend treatment and as appropriate, diagnose and provide documentation. Both programs could give general recommendations for the DSS professionals to take
into consideration. But by recommending, they may put the university at risk for inconsistency and inequity in the accommodation decision-making and delivery process.

- DSS develop a service delivery model that is reflective of DSS, Student Affairs Division, Dean of Students, and the University visions and missions and that is designed to alleviate administrative burdens for students. This would assist in ensuring staff consistency in the documentation of disability, determination of eligibility for services and recommendation and provision of reasonable accommodations.

- Education, consultation, and information dissemination efforts become more visible. DSS is undoubtedly the only office on the campus that has disability access as its sole mission. This expertise and resource should be used to the maximum extent to address disability access issues. DSS should develop a brochure that clearly states its vision, mission, role, and services. In addition, DSS should develop a guidebook (WWW-site) that clearly spells out student/institutional rights and responsibilities, University policies, DSS policies and procedures, and information on disability conditions, eligibility and documentation, reasonable accommodations, and instructional strategies. The brochures and guidebooks should be widely disseminated and concomitant training provided to the UW-Whitewater campus. All materials should contain a statement regarding their availability in multiple formats upon request.

- UW-Whitewater establishment an ad hoc work group to thoroughly review and assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and barriers regarding the existence of a separate fee-for-service program for students with learning disabilities.

**Organization/Administration**

“The DSS office must be structured purposefully and managed efficiently to achieve stated goals. Evidence of appropriate structure must include current and accessible policies and procedures, written performance expectations for all employees, functional organizational charts, and service delivery expectations.” – (CAS, 1997).

DSS has been administratively housed with Continuing Education, but moved to Student Affairs on July 1, 2002. DSS has been without a Director for the past year. Prior to that, John Truesdale directed the office for approximately 30 years. Currently, there is no acting director and the staff is without leadership. The office has a unique relationship with the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), in that DVR pays for many accommodations and non-mandated services for both the "special mission" population and other DSS/DVR eligible clients. The campus provides programs and services over and above mandated services, ie., physical therapy and pre-enrollment assessments, Project Assist, PCA identification and referral, etc. In some cases there appears to be a designed duplication of services such as the career counseling component of DSS, and in other cases the services are provided by different offices, but lack the coordination to ensure consistency (i.e, Project ASSIST, Counseling Center, Career Counseling).
DSS has no operations manual for staff and procedural aspects of many office functions are limited. There is almost no written documentation to help staff know how to handle their assignments. The consultants were told that former Director had a habit of doing business under the table and making decisions with individual staff members rather than the staff as a whole. Individuals who met with the consultants confirmed this deficit. They identified DSS as a secretive organization that as a unit does not collaborate with other campus programs. Some also consistently indicated a moderate level of discomfort and lack of confidence in DSS. Many of these individuals stated that the unit suffers from a long history of poor management, or as stated by one individual, “DSS suffers from an array of pervasive historical, contextual, infrastructure, and organizational issues that at the heart of most of their problems.”

Student access to services and information is also problematic. There is no designated reception area or obvious waiting area where students can be greeted and staff alerted to their arrival. The office is poorly organized and placed for its mission and role on campus. It is unclear to the consultants and to others on campus how students maneuver through DSS. There is no organized system for instructing/orienting students on how to access the services. It appears to be somewhat ad hoc and ill defined. Students appear to seek and get help from staff who have roles that do not designate they provide this type of help and from students and student work staff as well. In one case, students were described as waiting in line to see one staff member while others were available but not sought out. This has developed because students clearly feel more comfortable with some staff members.

It is recommended that:

- DSS hire a director with significant experience in management, who has strong managerial and interpersonal skills and a vision that will be backed by central administration. The new director must be empowered to evaluate all program areas; conduct task analyses of all staff positions, and implement necessary changes.

- DSS staff members are notified that the new director will strategically plan, re-organize and re-structure.

- The new director assesses and works with other campus units to address service duplication.

- The new director delineates mandated services vs. those services to support the “special mission” population (1996 DSS Review), Project ASSIST and fee for service tutorials.

- The new director network closely with General Counsel and Affirmative Action prior to implementing staff and program changes.

- The new director solicits student input and communicates changes in advance to smooth transitions.
ADA Compliance

"The institution must appoint an ADA Compliance Officer, must make available a published set of grievance procedures to individuals with disabilities as required by the ADA, and must inform staff and students about extraordinary or changing legal obligations and potential liabilities.” (CAS, 1997).

UW-Whitewater appears to be meeting federal and state regulations in most areas. Procedures for students identifying themselves as having a disability seem to be appropriate and contact with faculty is within legal parameters. ADA coordination and implementation duties are divided somewhere between affirmative action, facilities planning, risk management, human resources, and DSS. Coordination and implementation efforts are confused which leads to misunderstandings about what services are mandated, who has the authority to determine reasonable accommodations for faculty, staff, and students, and whether students are paying for reasonable accommodations. There does not appear to be a published grievance/complaint/appeal process for students who wish to challenge a reasonable accommodation decision. Some individuals expressed concern about lack of confidentiality practices to ensure protection of student rights to privacy.

It is recommended that:

- DSS and the affirmative action office are given clear roles and responsibilities for ensuring that the institution fulfills its legal obligations and have campus-wide visibility and credibility in this regard (delineate between service and compliance activities). These roles and responsibilities need to be clearly stated and require staff in both offices to be well versed on ADA and Section 504 as well as have an understanding of institutional constraints. Policies, procedures, rights, responsibilities, and grievance procedures must be developed as well as a good working relationship with University General Counsel. It is not necessary for UW-Whitewater to hire a full time ADA/504 Compliance Officer, but it is very important that someone have responsibility for legal compliance.

- DSS develop and publish policies and procedures for requesting an appeal of a reasonable accommodation decision as well as for determining academic adjustments (course substitutions).

Financial Resources

"The DSS office must have adequate funding to accomplish its mission and goals as well as obligations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990.” - (CAS, 1997).

The budget review for DSS was fairly cursory because UW-W has recently conducted an audit of this unit. The final audit report is being written and will include detailed findings and recommendations. The consultants are concerned that DSS may not be adequately funded to accomplish its mission and goals.
Consistent with the DSS Review of 1996, non-mandated services include the transportation system, transitional assistance, personal care attendant assistance, career placement service, etc., and the direct and indirect cost to administer these services. The mandated services include eligibility determination, determination and provision of reasonable accommodations (test accommodations, readers, scribes, notetakers, sign language interpreters, CART, alternate print formats, assistive technology), consultation and education, information dissemination, etc. To a large degree the non-mandated services/programs appear to be funded wholly or partially by grants or direct billing to DVR. The system for funding mandated services is also supported by a direct billing system with DVR and GPR dollars, as well as the funding for services provided by Project ASSIST.

The consultants’ confusion regarding financial resources of DSS is due to budget processes being in disarray, blending of mandated and non-mandated services, an over-reliance on third party sources for mandated services, student fees for Project ASSIST, and possible over-accommodation of disabled students in order to obtain DVR funding.

It is recommended that:

- DSS delineate the funding level and source of funding to support mandated and non-mandated services.
- Mandated services be reviewed carefully to determine how they are being provided and to ensure that students are not incurring any costs for them.
- DSS have adequate institutional resources to provide a balanced approach to ensuring access for disabled students – individualized and flexible accommodations/services to students and education/consultation to the campus community - to ensure that all units on campus are providing access to their courses, programs, services, activities, and facilities.
- UW-W develop a strategy for funding accommodations that are unpredictable and uncontrollable (interpreters, readers, Braille production etc.). These types of situations can create emergency situations if not addressed proactively.
- The transportation system is assessed for efficiency, effectiveness, and cost. It is possible that the service is too large and elaborate for the number of students that it is serving.
- That in the event there is a decision to cut some of the non-mandated services, DSS develop a plan to assist students during the transition.
- Carefully review any recruiting policies and publications to ensure students expectations upon arrival to UW-W are accurate.
Human Resources

"The DSS office must be staffed adequately by individuals qualified to accomplish its mission and goals and meet legal obligations. The DSS office must establish procedures for hiring, training, and evaluation; set expectations for supervision; and provide appropriate professional development opportunities." (CAS, 1997).

DSS appears to have adequate staff relative to the numbers of students being served and the accommodations/services being provided, however it is difficult to determine staffing needs without a mission and vision, goals and objectives, and clear roles and responsibilities.

During the course of the site visit it became evident that staff job descriptions need to be re-evaluated and re-written to reflect actual job responsibilities. Current job descriptions are of a generic nature and have limited value in regards to actual staff accountability of time or action. Some staff may not be qualified for their current positions. Others seem to have taken on the lion's share of responsibility. This suggests the need for systems and evaluation tools that can be used to justify positions and other program funding requests. The consultants are concerned that the DSS office may be out of sync with current disability support service protocols.

Student workers appear to be doing most of the service delivery under supervision, including alternative print formats production, assistive technology testing accommodations and transportation. This is not necessarily an uncommon practice however, some student workers feel they are not supported by professional staff and sometimes, they appear to have taken on responsibilities that would be more appropriately handled by professional staff.

There has been a significant breakdown in staff communication, collegiality, and professionalism since the former Director's retirement. The result has been significant and pervasive tension. At times, it is visible to disabled students, DSS student workers and other campus units. Significant professional staff time is spent "blaming," particularly at the middle management level. The lack of defined leadership roles and the resulting powerlessness among staff are undermining the DSS infrastructure. Strained relationships have diminished staff/program effectiveness and negatively impacted student support services delivery and campus community relationships. In fact, it was reported that some DSS students seek support through Project ASSIST because they perceive ASSIST staff to be more responsive.

There is a sense of diminished respect for some staff based on their perceived lack of professionalism, integrity and lack of leadership capability.

The former director and his individual relationships with staff apparently held DSS together. Individually they appear to have a genuine desire to serve students. As a program, they have become largely dysfunctional in the absence of leadership. What may appear to be a lack of enthusiasm for working with students may actually be the reflection of identity loss and insecurity. DSS needs radical change in the status quo and admittedly it is difficult to affect systems and program development without a mission, vision and solid leadership. DSS needs a vision for today and the future. They are currently standing still in the midst of a campus environment that has moved on.
Many of human resource problems can be resolved by defining the mission and goals of DSS today (including the role and relationship of Project ASSIST) and bringing in strong leadership that will be backed administratively and funded for successful implementation. However, the consultants cannot minimize the current reality -- DSS has serious personnel issues, many due to a program structure that is built around soft money and compounded by a current lack of leadership. The atmosphere in the office is tense and commitment is further diminished by the knowledge that positions may be cut.

It is recommended that:

- The new director demonstrates solid and current administrative experience with disability and higher education and a supervisory style that is open to new and creative possibilities. Additionally, the person should have demonstrated leadership and budgetary experience.

- The new director address personnel issues quickly and effectively, establish clear lines of communication among staff, collect data, and establish accountability.

- Job titles, classifications and descriptions be reviewed to determine the essential functions necessary to support the program needs.

- Staff evaluations are linked to job performance and unit goals and objectives.

- There be an effort to increase staff diversity (gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability).

- Standards for professionalism be reviewed with professional and student staff to ensure awareness of protocol and consequences for non-compliance.

- The roles and responsibilities of student workers be clarified and evaluated.

- Upon hiring the new director, staff begin working with professionals trained in team building, conflict resolution and staff mediation.

Campus & Community Relations

"The disability support services program must establish, maintain, and promote effective relations with campus offices and external agencies to ensure that disabled students receive necessary and equitable services."

Although it appears that DSS staff members are individually responsive to the campus community needs, there was a real concern about the lack of clarity regarding roles and responsibilities of DSS staff and 504/ADA Compliance activities. It became apparent that the former director was the primary DSS/campus liaison until he left the university last year. Unfortunately, prior to leaving, he did not set up a transition plan to facilitate campus DSS interaction to ensure DSS student issues and concerns remained in the forefront of institutional planning and development. Questions and concerns related to DSS students or disability issues were diverted to individual DSS staff members whose areas of expertise appeared to fit the need.
It is clear that particularly the "special mission" students have become part of the campus culture as non-mandated services and programs have been institutionalized through the University Health Center (e.g., Nurse Practitioner and Physical Therapist) and Wheelchair Athletics through Recreation and Sports. These programs ensure students have opportunities on campus to become independent and competitive. However, it was also reported that many of these students choose not to use DSS unless they absolutely have to. There is definitely a campus awareness and concern for these students' needs and safety.

Many of these concerns reflect the poor interdepartmental communication and reflect the lack of DSS visibility on campus. They also reflect the limited collaborative relationships between DSS and other UWW programs. However, there are some serious problems that need to be addressed and there is an apparent need for change.

**It is recommended that:**

- DSS become actively and visibly involved on campus via committees, task forces, education, consultation, etc.

- DSS develop comprehensive student, faculty and staff handbooks including common questions and answers, policies and procedures, including: documentation policies, accommodations eligibility, deadline policies and procedures, grievance procedures, complaint processes, etc. These should be available in alternative formats and on the web.

- DSS revise their website and begin contacting key departments on campus to establish links to DSS.

- DSS work with Admissions to establish a subcommittee with diverse representation to review all admissions exceptions (disability professional, faculty, advisor etc.), but with the Admissions Director making the final determinations based on committee feedback.

**Facilities**

*The DSS office must have adequate, suitably located facilities and equipment to support its mission, goals, and legal obligations."* - (CAS, 1997).

The DSS Office at UW-Whitewater is a number of different offices that are poorly furnished, and unwelcoming. There is no clear reception area for students to obtain assistance or to sit comfortably while waiting for service. Although the offices are on one floor, there is no obvious layout that will guide students on how and where to go for what. One of the offices uses benches from vans for seating. While this may be a practical way to store the benches, it does not help with the appearance of a professional space. In the computer room, which appears to contain good, useful equipment, the curtains are not hung well and the room is not inviting. The consultants acknowledge that DSS may be doing the best they can with the space and furnishings provided.
It is recommended that:

- A main reception area be designated. Signage be improved and visible/accessible (i.e., Braille display) to help students navigate through the unit.

- There be a meeting with DSS staff, facilities planning staff, an interior designer, and Lori Variotta to plan the development of DSS physical space that is designed to be welcoming and functional.

**Evaluation and Assessment**

“The DSS office must regularly conduct systematic qualitative and quantitative evaluation of program quality to determine whether and to what degree the stated mission, goals, and legal obligations are being met.” - (CAS, 1997)

It is possible that more evaluation and assessment has taken place over the years than was made available to the consultants. Information was requested in the form of student satisfaction surveys, however none were available. A program evaluation was conducted in 1996 and that report was reviewed. A recent report developed by the auditor also provided helpful information. DSS offices for the most part are client-centered and value open communication and constructive interaction with all segments of the campus and community. Therefore it is essential that students, faculty, staff, and guests be given regular opportunities to provide feedback in different formats. The DSS office is the primary source of information about programs and services for disabled students. Efforts must be made to develop multiple means of disseminating information to move the access agenda forward.

It is recommended that:

- DSS be directed to conduct annual surveys that address satisfaction and need of disabled students, faculty, and staff. Additionally, quantitative data (i.e., number of students, utilization of services, attrition and graduation rates) should be collected annually and reported.

- All functions of the DSS be reviewed and a comprehensive assessment and evaluation plan developed. The assessment and evaluation plan should incorporate the following objectives:

  Collect data that will determine whether a program’s mission and desired outcomes are congruent with the mission and desired outcomes of the Division of Student Affairs. Targeted focus groups for faculty, students, staff and other key university personnel should be included.

  Collect data that will help determine the extent to which the program is managing its resources. The new director may want to meet with other directors in the UW System, UW-Milwaukee and Madison annual reports were particularly interesting
Collect data that will help identify obstacles that prevent the program from achieving desired outcomes.

Collect data that is informative about how satisfied consumers are with their interactions with DSS and the services that they utilize.

Conclusion

This report contains impressions and recommendations from multiple sources, including material that had been generated for other purposes, old and current reports, and interviews. The consultants recognize that UW/Whitewater is committed to being in compliance and providing students with the accommodations that they are entitled to. To date, the University has operated without a comprehensive plan and policies. The University needs direction for its DSS Office and sound ADA/504 compliance advice.

There are committed staff members and administrators throughout the campus. However this is not enough in an age where campuses must have plans and systems in place to not only comply with the law, but to offer an education to students with disabilities that is equal to that of their non-disabled peers.