

Final Report: H.J. Heinz Company Foundation Fellowship Program
Fellow: Jyoti Vidhani
Year: 2005/2006
Area of Interest: Disability and Development

Acknowledgement:

I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to faculty members at UCIS for being supportive and mentoring my day to day activities during Heinz fellowship. I am substantially indebted to Elaine Linn who not only supported me academically but also on the personal and emotional level, was a motivating factor. I am also thankful to Karen Perkins for sharing her time and helping out with various logistical and other activities during my fellowship.

On the academic front, special thanks to my mentor Dr Rory Cooper for constant support and guidance in making this fellowship a rewarding experience. I also thank Prof Micheal McCue, and Prof Angelone , my course instructors. Their pragmatic approach influenced my thinking and improved practice in rehabilitation counseling for persons with disabilities.

In addition to persons mentioned above, thanks to other colleagues who have helped during my work and stay in the US.

Lastly and importantly, I want to express my deep appreciation to Heinz Company Foundation who made it possible for me to avail this valuable opportunity and visit of Judy Heumann to Pittsburgh will always be a memorable event in my life.

Personal Objectives:

While working as a Food Aid Program Officer and also consultant for the disability issues with grassroot organizations in India, I had a profound vision for the barrier free tomorrow for people with disabilities in India. I was extremely determined to enhance my knowledge, skills and expertise by exploring international practices related to disability legislation and law. Without doubt, United States at present is the most advanced place to mainstream disability issues within overall systems of the economy, therefore it was my deepest desire to spend some time in US and explore the area of my interest. Heinz fellow came as a fresh breeze to me, an incredible breakthrough in my career, through which I could have my dreams of moving forward come true. One of the rewarding aspects of the Heinz fellowship is the opportunity to combine academic work with professional activities, and no doubt this aspect enriched my experience and gave me more freedom to enhance my knowledge, skills and professional capacity.

Fellowship objectives:

Keeping my personal objectives in mind, I tried to gel them with fellowship objectives such as I was interested to audit courses to get advanced knowledge in the areas of development of assistive technology for people with disability and encompassing other threads to it like psychological, personal and vocational rehabilitation. I did lot of networking and met professional in this area to exchange ideas and best practices in the field.

Furthermore I was also keen to gain professional experience by working with community based organization on disability

Courses Attended during the three semesters; Fall 2005 – Summer 2006

Courses Attended:

Fall Semester:

- HRS 2731 Foundations of Rehabilitation Counseling Process
- HRS 2708 Individual and Social Experience of Disability
- HRS 2704 Fundamentals of Rehabilitation Engineering and Technology

Spring Semester

- HRS 2715 Medical Aspects of Disability
- HRS 2705 Clinical and Functional Evaluations--Assistive Technology
- HRS 2746/2747 Counseling or Job Placement Practicum

Brief description of the courses:

- Foundations of Rehabilitation:

The content of this course reflects the origins of vocational rehabilitation and rehabilitation counseling through the philosophy, legislature, and clinical history of the discipline. The intent for studying the history and foundations of vocational rehabilitation is to gain a perspective on the nature and scope of practice today and in the future

- Assistive Technology I and II

Theoretical and practical coursework explaining the interdisciplinary approach to the selection, implementation and provision of Assistive Technology Services to persons with disabilities to achieve their educational, vocational, transitional and independent functional goals of individuals with disabilities.

- Individual and Social Experience of Disability

The content of this course reflects on the individual consequences of disabilities, also psycho-social aspects of disability.

- **Medical Aspects of Disability:**

This course will provide an in-depth review of the anatomical structures of the human musculoskeletal system. Clinical faculty combined their efforts with skilled dissection anatomists to present a clinically pertinent musculoskeletal anatomy course

- **Vocational Rehabilitation:**

The course gives the basic idea about the job legislation, required accommodation on the part of employers and role of Office of Vocational Rehabilitation in promoting employment for persons with disabilities. The course has very creative approach of inviting guest speakers every week from the private and public sector to talk about the possible opportunities to enter into the workforce for persons with disabilities. Various assignments and group discussion were also the part of the class which made the learning very thought-provoking and interesting.

Lectures and Paper Presentations:

Lectures:

Delivered lecture at Benthworth High School, Pittsburgh on “ Disability Scenario in Developing Countries with focus on India”

Also participated as a ambassador in the student roundtable in which 18 students from Benthworth High School and Steel Center Vocational School had the opportunity to speak with numerous Ambassadors and business representatives about their current careers and their educational background. I gave background information about my country, political, social and health related issues and some reflections on job opportunities in development sector.

Delivered lecture at “Asia Over Lunch” series sponsored by Asian Studies Center University of Pittsburgh

Title: Nothing About Us Without US

The presentation was a deep reflection on the slogan ‘Nothing about us without us’ promoted by Disabled Peoples’ International at its founding in 1981 and has been used by disability rights activists ever since. It has been particularly effective in capturing a key idea of focusing on the need for the active participation of

person with disabilities in the planning of policies and programs that affect their lives. It draws the basic outlines for the inclusive barrier free society for all

Paper Presentation at :

Conference: Transcending Boundaries: Human Rights and the Security Continuum

Venue: University of Pittsburgh

Date: March 31 and April 1, 2006

Paper Title: Rights Based Approach to development for People with disabilities

The paper focused on the strategies for the creation of barrier free environment for the people with disabilities, adapting human rights approach to deal with their issues. It's been a common notion that people with disabilities are just the objects of pity or charity, they are always predicted as a receivers rather than a potential, contributing members of the society.

Therefore to remove this notion, the introduction of human rights approach towards their equality will ensure removing the barriers not with the individual with impairments, but with the environment that create such disabling conditions for them.

Johnstown Pittsburgh Event:

**Invited as a guest speakers at University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown
Lecture: A Forum on Health Care Conditions and Human Rights**

Presentations on:

- (1) Disability Rights and Advocacy
- (2) Indian Demographics – With Focus on current scenario on Disability in India

Both the presentations focused on introduction of human rights approach towards their equality will ensure removing the barriers not with the individual with impairments, but with the environment that create such disabling conditions for them. Also the brief note on Indian geographical locations, cultural, social and gender issues made these presentations made interesting for the audiences. The audiences were the undergrad students and faculty members of the University who were very interested to know the about other countries and associated issues.

Conferences and Poster Presentations:

Pittsburgh Employment Conference:

Attended the biennial Pittsburgh Employment Conference for Augmented Communicators – fondly known as PEC. This was held August 5 – 7, 2005 in Pittsburgh, PA with the theme being “Employment and Community Integration.” More than 250 people attended PEC including more than 50 people who rely on AAC. Together, practitioners, parents, state vocational rehabilitation professionals, students, and researchers joined folks who use AAC to hear more than 28 platform presentations. Topics included: what VR counselors should know and how to interact effectively with them; strategies for becoming employed; effective community interaction; community interaction at the university, on the job, in public places, and in the hospital. More than half of the presentations were provided by individuals who use AAC.

Society for Disability Studies

Society for Disability Studies 19th Annual Conference
Disability Goes Public: Re-Imagining Policy/Protest/Possibilities
Venue: Hyatt Bethesda
Date: June 14 th – 17 th, 2006

The Society for Disability Studies (SDS) is an international non-profit organization that promotes the exploration of disability through research, artistic production, and teaching. Disability Studies encourages perspectives that place disability in social, cultural, and political contexts. SDS seek to augment understanding of disability in all cultures and historical periods, to promote greater awareness of the experiences of disabled people, and to contribute to social change.

Poster Presentation on:

Telerehabilitation –An innovative approach for rural assistive technology service delivery

The University of Pittsburgh Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center (RERC) has recently received grant from NIDRR to develop a project on Telerehabilitation. This initiative will serve people with disabilities by researching and developing methods, systems and technology that support remote delivery of rehabilitation and home health services for people who have limited local access to comprehensive medical rehabilitation outpatient and community-based services

Through the poster presentation I highlighted UPMC's wheeled mobility and seating devices for individuals with mobility impairments and home accessibility through the use of Telerehabilitation (TR) consultation model

Since this topic was very novel and based on a very innovative approach, it was very well received by the audiences. Many of the practitioners in the rehabilitation field in fact showed great interest in collaborating or contacting the faculty members at UPMC to know more about this project.

Organizations Visited

Three Rivers Independent Living Centers

A Center for Independent Living (CIL) is a non-residential, non-profit, community-based human service agency. Its purpose is to enable people with disabilities to lead self-directed and productive lives within the community

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

The Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation is a state agency responsible for helping persons with disabilities prepare for, obtain and keep employment. Federal and state government works in partnership to fund OVR. Pennsylvania OVR has provided rehabilitation services to thousands of persons and has enabled them to become competitively employed.

Career Links

CareerLink is a one-stop shop that connects employers and job seekers in the most efficient manner possible. At the sites in downtown Pittsburgh, Forest Hills, and Robinson Township, highly-trained staff offers visitors a wide range of materials, consultation services, and on-line access to a comprehensive database of employment information. The agency in conjunction with OVR, helps people with disabilities prepare for, obtain and keep employment.

United Cerebral Palsy

UCP of Pittsburgh serves people with severe disabilities who live in the Allegheny County area, offering programs that build on individual strengths and promote inclusion in the community. The mission of UCP of Pittsburgh is to support people with disabilities as they explore options, participate in the community and strive toward equality...we are "WORKING TOWARD A COMMUNITY WHERE EACH BELONGS"

Conclusion:

Lastly, I would like to summarize my report by saying that this one year was a unique experience in my life and I learnt a lot. During this one year, I did try to grab every single moment and utilized my time in best possible way. Academic study and professional activities remained equally important for me, moreover close guidance and support from my mentor Dr Cooper and professors actually played an important role in my learning. Apart from this, professional work and exposure of conferences came with two unfolding effects: firstly it really broadened my vision on disability issues and secondly, enabled me to make connections for knowledge sharing. Moreover, internship strengthened me in the sense that now I can move in challenging environment with more confidence and professional approach. If I just take a look back, I can feel much difference in my professional capacity and knowledge and participation in other cultural activities made it a unique experience of life. Now, just after completion of program I am feeling my self more determined and ready to influence changes in disability field in barrier. I am on my way to create barrier free tomorrow for people with disabilities in India.