The Accessible Education (AEC) Center History

Student activism set the stage for the establishment of the first program to serve students with disabilities within the California State University (CSU) System on the San Jose State University (SJSU) campus in **1972**. The Disabled Students Office (DSO), working within the Student Activities Office, was comprised of merely two staff members and served 64 students, most of who had mobility impairments and were wheelchair users.

In **1982**, the DSO hired its first Director. In 1985, on the program’s 13th birthday, the University made the DSO an independent department within the Division of Student Affairs. The DSO served 307 students.

In **1987**, Dr. Charles Burdick, Dean of the School of Social Sciences, worked with the DSO to obtain the department’s first reading machine for blind students: the Kurzweil Reading Machine. The KRM weighed several hundred pounds, was as large as a washing machine, and was just as noisy. However, this remarkable piece of machinery was the first of its kind to allow visually impaired and blind students to scan printed documents and to read aloud the text scanned in a robotic voice (synthesizer). By this time, 355 students with disabilities were registered with the DSO.

In **1988**, the DSO was one of four CSU campuses awarded a grant to established a High Technology Center (HTC). The HTC grant established two part time positions and funds to purchase several adaptive computers and was the start of adaptive computing at SJSU. In 1988, there were 496 registered students with disabilities.

In **1990**, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law, having a profound effect upon universities and colleges across the nation. In 1990, there were 670 registered students with disabilities. The 90’s proved to be a time of change, growth, and challenges for disability services across the nation. Newly-identified students with specific learning disabilities were presenting themselves to disability centers, posing new types of accommodations and needs.

In **1993**, the Disabled Employee Assistance Program (DEAP), which served 150 employees with disabilities, was housed in DRC. By 1994, 1,003 students with disabilities were registered with the DSO.

In **1995**, the DSO became the Disability Resource Center (DRC) signifying a shift in DSO’s multi-faceted role to campus: a resource to students as well as to faculty and staff. DRC actively participated in conducting and completing the SJSU “ADA Self-Evaluation & Transition Plan” (1995). In 1995, President
Robert Caret signed the first of Presidential Directives (PD 95-04) committing the University to making appropriate accommodations to promote and ensure inclusion for students with disabilities.

In 1997, President Caret revised PD 95-04, issuing PD97-03, “Accommodations for Students with Disabilities” and established the Accommodations Review Board (ARB), which assisted the senior administration with policy development and guidance, review of access and faculty/student accommodation dispute resolution.

In 1998, President Caret issued PD 98-03, “Access to Computer Technology & Laboratories for Students with Disabilities,” which ensured that access to information technology is provided to students with disabilities noting the explosion of Information Technology (IT) in higher education across the nation. Additionally, DRC started the first Alternative Media Center (AMC) in the CSU one year prior to its services became a state law mandate. The AMC began as a small operation making accessible media for students with a variety of disabilities who faced barriers with print material.

In 1999, Assembly Bill (AB) 422 was passed, adding Section 67302 to the Education Code, relating to instructional materials. Although AB 422 mandated publishers of text books to provide accessible file formats to California Higher Educational institutions, the burden of providing alternative materials clearly fell upon the campuses and, more specifically, the disability programs.

In 2002, Section 508 was codified in Government Code 11135 by the State Legislature in 2002 through S.B. 105. Government Code 11135 requires CSU to comply with the accessibility requirements of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended, and to also apply the US Access Board accessibility standards to the electronic and information technology products and services that it buys, creates, uses and maintains. This paved the way for the CSU’s Accessible Technology Initiative (ATI), which later began in 2006.

In 2003, the High Technology Center and Alternative Media Center moved from its 300 square foot room in the old Clark Library to a 3,000 square foot facility in the new Martin Luther King Jr. joint University/City Library. The ATC was renamed the Emma E. Legg Adaptive Technology Center. With this move, the AMC was able to expand and develop state-of-the-art facilities and meet the growing demand from students with disabilities for Braille books, books on CD-ROMs, as well as accessible file formats. At this time, 601 students were registered with DRC.

In 2005, the demand for services soared as students requested a record number of accommodated exams, textbooks in alternative media format, and a variety of other curriculum based accommodations. The SJSU DRC had also become one of two campuses in the nation to produce music Braille in-house for its students. The need to address adaptations in information technology (IT) was finally becoming a major issue for institutions of higher education. At this time, DRC student registrants boomed to 899 students.

In 2006, additional staff joined the DRC family adding one position to the AMC and one to the ATC to address the demand for support services reflected in the use of IT, which was now an embedded part of
the teaching curriculum. The first deaf student graduated from the Nursing department, which was truly a milestone. The number of students who are deaf and hard of hearing continued to steadily increase, making SJSU the largest program serving students who are deaf & hearing impaired in state supported programs. In 2006, there were 1,024 students registered with the DRC.

In 2007, the Disabled Employee Assistance Program (DEAP) announced its new name: Employment Accommodations Resource Center (EARC). The DRC Director was also appointed a dual role as Director and ADA Compliance Officer. With this new role and the inception of ATI, the ADA Compliance Office was established with an ADA Compliance Specialist & Section 508 Coordinator to ensure the success of campus wide compliance.

In 2008, the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act was passed broadening coverage for people with disabilities. The Act has a tremendous effect on the evaluation of eligibility for disability services for both students and employees. At this time, the DRC served 1163 students, which compromised a 94% increase in registration over the past five years. Approximately, 74% of the students registered had hidden disabilities, or disabilities not apparent to the eye (e.g., psychological disorders, HIV, Asperger’s, Autism, learning disabilities, etc.). Over this five year timespan, students registered with hidden disabilities increased by 187%.

In 2009, the CSU issued Coded Memo AA-2009-27, the Policy for Provision of Accommodations & Support Services to Students with Disabilities, to align with current disability accommodation and service needs.

In 2011, the DRC’s accommodation requests are at an all-time high despite the reduction in overall SJSU student enrollment. Student and employee cases continue to grow in complexity of individualized service needs. Currently, the DRC has 1134 student registrants while the EARC currently has 116 employee registrants. Amidst the past and current challenges of budget cuts, layoffs, reassignments and increasing registrants, the DRC and EARC has continued to fulfill its mission to the highest quality.

In 2012, the Alternative Media Center (AMC) and Adaptive Technology Center (ATC) changed its name to the Center for Accessible Technology to reflect a universal name for both centers. Numerous years have gone by since the original naming of the centers, along with substantial advancements in technology utilized in both the ATC and the AMC. To this end, the renaming of the ATC/AMC to the Center for Accessible Technology (CAT) holistically reflects the functions and services provided in both areas, as well as represents current technological advances and functions within the Center for Accessible Technology. In April 2012, the DRC will be celebrating its 33rd Annual Gala Scholarship Fundraiser and Awards Ceremony, themed Transformations, to honor the achievements of students, faculty and staff who have contributed to the success of students with disabilities at SJSU.

In 2013, The Disability Resource Center (DRC) changed its name to the Accessible Education Center (AEC). The new name incorporates a philosophy of accessible education for students with disabilities without emphasizing disability. Moreover, the new name change reflects the broad scope of attention and support to SJSU students with disabilities and the University’s continued advocacy and commitment to increasing accessibility and inclusivity on campus.
In 2014, The AEC created our first tagline, which exemplifies the mission of the AEC: Ability Redefined. Ability Redefined is more than simply a tagline; Ability Redefined is a way of life, both academic and personal, for students with disabilities. Ability Redefined incorporates AEC’s on-going work to improve in its mission and achievement of goals in order to provide cutting edge and visionary tools, intervention compensation strategies, and accommodations to this population of students while at SJSU, and beyond SJSU.