ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY LAB OPENS DOORS FOR STUDENTS

About the Assistive Technology Lab

The Assistive Technology Lab, known as the AT Lab in Disability Resources and Services (DRS), offers a place for students registered with DRS to utilize computers, equipment, assistive technology (AT) software, hardware and a quiet environment. The AT Lab is available for all students registered with DRS and was made possible by a generous donation from Dr. David and Mrs. Nancy Lacey. The lab's services and technology is coordinated by Stephanie Robbins M.Ed., Assistive Technology Coordinator. Stephanie recently received her Master’s in Curriculum & Instruction with a concentration in Assistive Technology from George Mason University. She recently moved to Denver for this position and is very excited to be a part of the Student Affairs, DRS team.

Technology Related Accommodations

In addition to the AT Coordinator, the AT lab has 1 full time Alternative Format Media Technician, Stephany Camacho, and two part-time Student Assistive Technology Technicians, Paula Kretschmann and Nivin Alexis Lawrence. Together, the staff work as a team to provide access to technology accommodations for students referred to the AT Lab through their DRS Coordinator. These technology accommodations include: accessible textbooks (this could be an electronic book [e-book] in Word or PDF, or an audio book), Braille and tactile graphic formats of class materials for students with visual impairments, assistive technology informal assessments, access to literacy and learning software and more.

DID YOU KNOW?

Half of higher education students in America say e-books are important to their academic success and wish their instructors would use them more.

What’s New in the AT Lab?

In addition to software that is installed on the AT computers such as Read & Write and Zoomtext, the Lab began utilizing the Phoenix embosser this semester to provide tactile graphics for visually impaired students for access to science content.

The tactile graphics allow visually impaired students to feel an image, chart or graph that otherwise would be presented as a visual image on a document. In this format, individuals can “see” the image by touch and gain understanding of the concepts.

In addition to the Phoenix Embosser, the AT Lab recently purchased the Talking Lab Quest device by Independence Science. This is a handheld device with a sensor interface that allows students who are blind or have low vision to participate independently in science experiments.

The device provides talking, real-time data readings, an audible and viewable periodic table, spoken menus and more. The purpose of the Talking LabQuest is to help provide access to the typical science classroom for students who are blind or low vision. DRS will be offering the Talking LabQuest to students in science courses who may need it as an accommodation.

UPDATES IN ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

3D Printing

As new technologies become available, new ways of educational instruction are becoming available. 3D printing is one of those technologies bringing new opportunities to the assistive technology sector in regards to tactile assistance. For example, The Missouri School for The Blind offers visually impaired chemistry students the ability to ‘see’ chemistry in a whole new way through 3D chemistry models. Students have the physical representation of the molecule in order to help with conceptualization and the models also contain braille ingrained within the design. This is a great tool that allows students to understand spatial concepts like never before, especially as 3D printing machines become more widely accessible.

At CU Denver, the AT Lab is currently working to bring this technology to DRS students through In Works. In Works is an initiative through the University that brings together students, faculty and staff to create impactful solutions to human problems.

The AT Lab staff have partnered with CU Denver students who are knowledgeable in 3D printing and taking courses through In Works to arrange a process to provide 3D printed models for CU Denver students with visual impairments. The process is scheduled to begin Spring 2017.
Student Spotlight: Betty Pearson

Betty Pearson is a first generation, legally blind undergraduate who returned to college after almost forty years since originally entering higher education. She is currently in her senior year and is scheduled to graduate in Spring 2017 with a degree in psychology.

As a non-traditional, visually impaired student, Betty has faced multiple challenges returning to college. One of her biggest challenges has been learning to use new and assistive technologies to aid her in reading and writing on the computer.

During her time at CU Denver, she has received support from several on-campus organizations designed to assist students in having the best college experience possible, regardless of age or disability.

According to Betty, the department that has allowed her to reach further than she could ever imagine, has been Disability Resources & Services (DRS). The AT Lab in particular, quickly became a home away from home for Betty, allowing her to use up-to-date computers and technologies that she otherwise would not be able to access.

Betty mainly uses Zoomtext Magnification software, which enlarges everything on the computer screen in conjunction with the Zoomtext keyboard, which has enlarged printed letters and numbers. The AT Lab is also a place where she can come to study and interact with other students with similar challenges.

Student Quote

“The DRS staff is always professional, friendly and eager to help with any problems that may occur. If it were not for the help and technology training I have received through the AT Lab, my lifelong dream of getting a college degree would still be a dream”

- Betty Pearson
CU Denver Student