

JR News

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Fall 2023

WORK, HOME, AND PLAY

Life is precious... Remember to make the most of each day

This is one of the first JR news updates in a while that I can say that all parts of life are humming well. Yes, there are a few areas that need improvement, but life is good. Erika and I do hope yours is also well.

Work

Summer was busy training a new TA, getting our learning system (Canvas) preprogrammed for the semester, and scheduling a few speaking/advocacy events. It seems the more I live, or the more I continue down the Oregon trail as a pioneer in the world of disability, the more issues I stumble across.

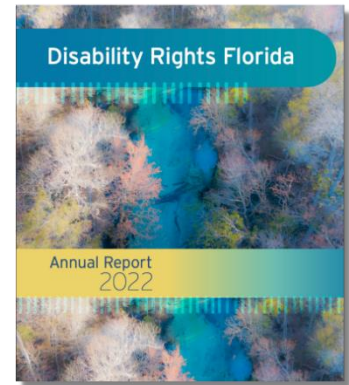
This past semester, I had two workforce inclusion courses plus my IDS 100 course uniquely designed for freshmen with disabilities. I also managed to publish a research article in the Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory and Practice. All three classes are going well, but I am trying to digitize or make everything assignable, reviewable, and interactive with our canvas product. The problem is, that the system is only as good as the programmer, and I could use some more practice. In some cases, like with grading, I am unable to save draft evals and come back to grading- a flaw in the system. Each student's assessment has to be completed and saved or you get to start over. The students continue to enjoy their field trip in the business world, their ADA excursions, and lived experiences as high notes in the course. My guest speakers both locally and internationally bring added value to the material. They are a great way to break up the weekly grind.

I am confident that I will receive some positive reviews again. Last academic year, I finished with a perfect performance score. In truth, I think my boss was a little generous 😊. Here is a little note a student sent me...

“I just wanted to let you know how much of an impact your class had on me... I really appreciated every topic we touched on and I've never been so engaged in a class before! I appreciated your flexibility, as well as your help from personal problems, to elaborating on class discussions!

To be honest, I shed a tear on the first day of class and I think since that moment I will never forget the impact this class had on me. I would always call my parents after class and tell them something that I learned in class or come home to my roommates and tell them all about our guest speakers. JR is a name everyone in my life knows now! “

Many of you may recall my work with my fellow wheelchair buddies. We formed the Wheelchair Highwaymen group. Our pictures have been on display at the Florida State Capitol, the FSU Fine Arts Department, and this abstract picture made the cover of the Florida Disability Rights Annual Report.



I am starting my 15th year as a member of the Delta Disabilities Advisory Board. I am one of the longest-serving members of the board. Nevertheless, I am most excited about how we have helped Delta



become a leader in air travel for persons with disabilities. It was super cool to be one of their “guinea pigs” on their new innovative seat that will allow PWDs to fly sitting in their mobility device rather than having to be picked up and transferred into a “regular seat”. For those of you who missed the news clips, here is a link to the [prototype chair](#). We are also working on accessible in-flight entertainment and accessible bathrooms. All good stuff. It was a pleasure to collaborate with my colleague, Mina, on this prototype. One of the challenges was to make it fit all user sizes. As you can see on the left, one size does not fit all.

The local newspaper and my friends at Different Brains have been equally supportive of my advocacy and messaging. This included a few Letters to the Editor: one on [EVs](#), one on [Rish Park](#), and another on the [33rd anniversary of the ADA](#). The Different Brains organization highlighted travel and international travel for persons with disabilities in their [podcast episode](#). I have a bill in the legislature this year called HB55. Its purpose is to provide spousal benefit upon my departure from the natural world. Florida gave spouses of first responders and veterans with disabilities a property tax benefit. But, quadriplegics were accidentally left out. Any of my Florida friends should feel free to their Florida legislators and say that this bill is a good policy. If it passes, it will have to go on the ballot as well.

My student Group, University of Choice, hosted its 8th annual speaker series. They brought in [Chris Ruffin](#). He is an Emmy Award-winning News Producer from Memphis. We had a nice chat about living and thriving with a disability. His challenge is Sickle Cell...which has some unique issues and I was uninformed before his arrival.

HOME:

Earlier this year, I reported some chronic pain; I am pleased to share that it has passed! The cause of this discomfort was my seating and wheelchair cushion. Apparently, 40 years of living with Quadriplegia has resulted in significant atrophy in the buttocks area--not enough cushion on the backside anymore. Many of you may remember the flap surgery back in 2018...Cannot and will not undergo that experience again.

Team JR is doing well, but a number of the guys will graduate in the spring of 2024. Thus, the recruiting process is never-ending. I did have the pleasure of seeing three different PCAs over one of the football weekends. One was from 1996, another from 2010, and the last from the present! It was kind of cool 😊. I always enjoy bowling with my teams as well. Of course, the old guy got the high score with a 154 on 2/3 games. With extra practice, I might be able to beat my personal best of 179. I believe bowling is a new Paralympic sport this summer, should be interesting to watch and see the best quads consistently break 220.



Another accessible and fun pastime is miniature golf. [Sloppy play](#) on a miniature golf course, helps me stay competitive against my PCAs. Thanks to my friends at the University of Pittsburg, I have a new adaptive putter, which should make me more competitive/consistent on the greens. Here is a link showing my [practice putt](#) in the kitchen.

We did have a hurricane this past August. It was not as bad as the 2018 Michael, but it did some damage. Below are two pictures: one showing Tallahassee in the Bullseye, and the other two down trees in the yard. Tree removal people are a racket! 1,000 bucks a tree! Also had to repair the fence. Another \$3,500 for one side – home ownership has its high points! Sometimes it is better to be a renter. No, it's better to own your own home.



PLAY:

This summer was full of meaningful trips, far and nearby. We were finally able to visit our beloved Rish Park again. It took 3 years of advocacy to raise the money, push the contractors, and work with the new managers (State Park System) to get this place going again. It was great to enjoy outdoor meals with friends and family, fly some kites, and enjoy the new outdoor trails.



Our big summer trip was to England. Despite having lived in Europe for nearly 5 years and crossing the pond many times, this was the first time I got to experience the British “Up and Close”. Erika had a grand time showing me around. I was very touched by the British hospitality and inclusive nature. Everyone was helpful (unlike America). I truly enjoyed the on-demand accessible Black Cabs they have. It made getting around so easy. In fact, we spent way too much money being spontaneous!

We had million-dollar seats for the “Changing of the Guard” ceremony. For those who have not experienced the spectacle upfront and unobstructed, this [link](#) will deliver high-definition coverage. I attended my first horse race at the Royal Ascot Event, won 175 pounds, and saw King Charles! I was thoroughly impressed with the London Tower- it's 1,000 years old and still holding up well. Just think about all the history that has happened behind those walls! Perhaps my favorite experience was the Churchill Bunker. Taking the elevator down reminded me of riding in President FDR’s elevator in the Whitehouse.



My Florida State Seminoles are entering Thanksgiving weekend at 11-0! With a W over the Gators, we will have an undefeated season. First time in 10 years. It's good to be in the top 5 once again. College football just seems to be a little bit better when the Seminoles are contending. This is a picture from our famous pregame pageantry. Chief Osceola rides in on Renegade and slams the flaming spear. I think it is the coolest pregame tradition.



Unfortunately, our other hedonistic activities for the Christmas season will prevent us from going to one or both of the college bowl championship games. But first, we have to get past Louisville at the ACC Championship. Our star quarterback went down with a broken ankle in his last home game. It was really quite tragic.

Currently trying to finish up the semester, planning for next semester, and looking forward to spending time with friends and family over the holidays. Look forward to hearing about what's happening in your life.

Speak with you in 2024 or before!

JR