



Educational Assistance Center

THE ADVOCATE: A Newsletter Devoted to Disability Equity



the time to listen, learn, and understand one another, we open the door to new ideas, deeper empathy, and stronger relationships. Diversity challenges us to think beyond our own viewpoints and fuels innovation, creativity, and meaningful progress.

An essential part of this conversation is recognizing disability as diversity. Disability represents a wide range of abilities, perspectives,

and lived experiences that enrich our communities in powerful ways. Embracing disability as a natural and valuable part of human diversity helps shift us away from limiting assumptions and toward a more inclusive understanding of belonging. Prioritizing accessibility, physical, digital, and social, ensures that everyone has equitable opportunities to participate, contribute, and succeed.

Celebrating diversity also means committing to inclusion. It's about creating spaces where people feel seen, heard, and respected. Inclusion requires action through our words, behaviors, and decisions. We invite you to reflect on how we can build a more inclusive and equitable community. Even small actions—learning, listening, supporting others, and challenging bias can make a meaningful difference.

CELEBRATE DIVERSITY EVERY MONTH

“If you embrace diversity but ignore disability, you’re doing it wrong.”

-Paul Grossman

April marked Diversity Month, a time to recognize, appreciate, and celebrate the rich variety of backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences that shape our communities. But celebrating diversity is more than a monthly obligation; it is a lived reality that influences how we connect, collaborate, and grow together every day.

Each person brings a unique story shaped by culture, identity, beliefs, and life experiences. These differences are not barriers; they are strengths. When we take

DO YOU HAVE A QUESTION OR SUGGESTION FOR NEXT MONTH'S CONTENT?

Contact Leo Orange at lorange@vccd.edu

WHY THE PUSH TOWARD DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY?

It's More Than a Compliance Deadline

"I don't need to worry about digital accessibility because there are no blind students in my class."

This is a common refrain, and understandably so. It takes time and effort to ensure that course material is accessible, and instructors are already overburdened. Accommodations and alternate media are the prerogative of The Educational Assistance Center. Why, for example, should a syllabus be made available in Braille if no one in class even reads Braille?

But a Braille syllabus in every classroom is not what we're aiming for. We're aiming for digital course material that is natively accessible—material that can be converted to Braille. Material that can be navigated with a screen reader, understood with closed captions, or conceptualized with alternate text. We're asking for best practices that enhance inclusivity not only for the blind, but the visually impaired, the physically impaired, the hard of hearing, and the neurodiverse—for those with disabilities that may not be readily apparent, or even those with no disabilities at all.

Do you ever turn on closed captions while watching Netflix? Use the tab key to fill out a form? Copy and paste a word from a PDF to look up its meaning online? Digital accessibility benefits everyone, and incorporating it becomes second nature once you know how.

The digital medium now has the capacity to unleash accessible content beyond the limitations of prior generations, and that



capacity is growing every day. Computers, smartphones, and tablets have more accessibility features built into them than ever before. The barrier is not inaccessible technology; the barrier is inaccessible content. And content is something we can control.

It's up to us. Every webpage, every document, every email that we put out into the world can be accessible if we make it so. This is a powerful concept. Higher education is embracing a paradigm shift: Rather than assuming we don't need to make classes digitally accessible because there are no blind students enrolled, we are acknowledging that there may be no blind students enrolled because we haven't made our classes digitally accessible.

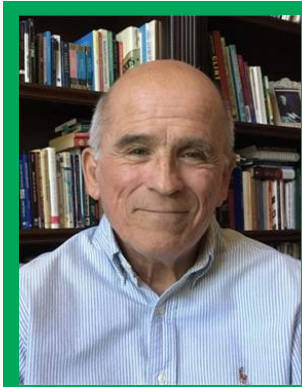
To this new precept, we say bravo.

DID YOU KNOW EAC NOW HAS AN ACCESSIBILITY WEBPAGE?
Check it out to learn best practices for all things digital!





EAC STAFF SPOTLIGHT



**LEO
ORANGE**

**EDUCATIONAL
ASSISTANCE CENTER
& VETERANS
RESOURCE CENTER
COORDINATOR**

Leo Orange has dedicated over 25 years to serving the students and community of Oxnard College, where he has been instrumental in leading key student support services. He has served as the Coordinator of the Educational Assistance Center (EAC) for over two decades and led the Veterans Resource Center (VRC) for 13 years. His leadership also extended to serving as Interim Dean of Student Services during his tenure.

Prior to joining Oxnard College, Mr. Orange earned a master’s degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from California State University, Los Angeles. He later joined the faculty at CSULA, where he taught undergraduate and graduate classes in the Department of Counseling and Rehabilitation Services for six years. There, he contributed to curriculum development, including courses in multicultural counseling, before transitioning into the community college system.

Leo is a prolific contributor to the field of rehabilitation counseling, with 24 published book chapters addressing a wide range of topics. He has authored 8 refereed journal articles in leading rehabilitation and

12 non-refereed articles addressing counseling, mental health, discrimination, and educational policy. His contributions also include 16 books and media reviews published in the Journal of Applied Rehabilitation Counseling and the Journal of Rehabilitation.

Mr. Orange has presented professional research articles and his book chapters at 36 national, state, and local conferences. He was the recipient of the 2007 H. B. McDaniel Hall of Fame Award for Outstanding Contribution in the Field of Counseling and Guidance, Stanford University and appointed to the President’s Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities during the administration of President Bill Clinton. He served on the California Governor’s Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities under Governor Gray Davis and has been the recipient of 15 additional awards recognizing excellence in counseling, advocacy, diversity, authorship, and professional service.

Leo is a dedicated scholar, counselor, and coordinator whose career reflects a deep commitment to equity, inclusion, and support for students with disabilities. His leadership and advocacy have shaped best practices in counseling and higher education, advancing the civil rights and empowerment of individuals with disabilities. Through his advocacy, Leo has championed the civil rights and empowerment of individuals with disabilities, leaving an enduring legacy of transformative impact. His work not only uplifts marginalized communities but also serves as a model of excellence and integrity.

