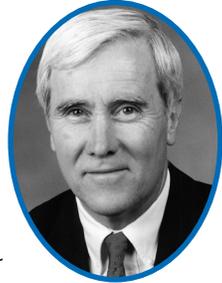


## Eulogy for “Mild” Retardation?

**Edward A. Polloway**  
Lynchburg College

*This article was part of Edward A. Polloway’s presentation for the DDD Showcase Session, “Eulogy for ‘Mild’ Retardation?”*



Prior to the 1970s, the category of mental retardation had the highest prevalence of learning-related areas of exceptionality, with the preponderance of individuals referred to as “mildly retarded.” Approximately 200 years after Itard is said to have launched the field as an area of study, it is fitting to consider the status of “mild” retardation and determine whether a eulogy is timely.

The traditional conceptualization of mild mental retardation was based on the presumption of high prevalence rates in programs for school-age children. Not uncommonly, the cited rate in the 1970s was approximately 2.5%–3% for mental retardation, with the majority (more than 2%) being considered to have mild retardation. With prevalence came significant attention. Individuals identified as having mild retardation were participants in much of the groundbreaking work in learning theory, which provided a foundation for many productive directions in contemporary practice. Of particular significance is the fact that the field was the home for many of the “founding parents” of special education (e.g., Burton Blatt, Lloyd Dunn, and Sam Kirk).

Dunn’s historical, stereotypical profile of individuals identified as having mild retardation was as follows: academic failure, achievement deficit, IQ: mid 60s to low 70s, poverty background, overrepresentation of ethnic minorities, behavioral problems, parents with limited education, and male. The accuracy of this traditional profile has eroded over time. A primary reason is that the portrait was drawn at a time of highest prevalence and prior to the widespread impact of challenges to the label. The first acknowledgement of change in the literature was in MacMillan and Borthwick’s (1981) research article on the “new EMRs.” Subsequently, Polloway and Smith (1983) cited multiple causes for changes: societal views, litigation, early intervention, and professional reconsiderations.

The prevalence of mental retardation (ages 6–17) nationally is 1.14% (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). However, this singular figure provides a gross oversimplification. For example, the percentage of individuals identified as having mental retardation in Alabama is approximately eight times greater than in New Jersey. These data are particularly interesting in light of the common assumption that the prevalence of individuals with severe disabilities (i.e., severe mental retardation) has traditionally been set at 0.4%. Thus, for New Jersey and California, the prevalence of individuals identified with mental retardation would seem to preclude the fact that any would be considered as having mild retardation.

Although recent trends in terms of characteristics and prevalence data are not surprising to anyone who has studied the field, attention to this change has been quite limited. The lack of focus in the literature raises the question of whether these changes are receiving any significant scrutiny at all. Given this state of affairs, there are two contemporary topics I want to consider briefly: the question of high incidence versus mild disabilities and the relationship between DD and MMR.

### High Incidence Versus Mild

The first question concerns the use of the term *mild retardation*. In their recent manual, the AAMR (2002, p. 208) noted, “People with higher IQs do not necessarily have ‘mild’ needs for supports.” This statement provides a

*(continues on p. 8)*

### Inside this issue . . .

President’s Message . . . . .	2
Students’ Corner . . . . .	3
Viva Las Vegas . . . . .	4
Membership/Unit Development News . . . . .	4
DDD New Orleans Meetings . . . . .	5
PD & Standards Committee Report . . . . .	6
Subdivision News . . . . .	6
Submit a Presentation in Baltimore . . . . .	7
Executive Director’s Corner . . . . .	7



## President's Message

**Andrea Babkie**

Dear Members:

Welcome to the first issue of the *DDD Express* as an insert in *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*. The members of the DDD Board of Directors hope you found the first issue of *Focus*, received in December 2003, to have been both informative and useful to you in your work as educators. By changing *DDD Express* from a stand-alone newsletter to one inserted in this journal, DDD not only provides its members with an excellent new member benefit but also retains the ability to convey important information concerning the organization directly to our members. Making the choice to change *DDD Express* to an insert has also allowed DDD to remain fiscally conscious in these times of increasing costs.

Unfortunately, increasing costs are something we are all faced with, and DDD is no exception. Publication costs, mailing and handling costs, and costs to manage the organization are all rising. As a result, DDD will be seeking an increase in dues for 2005. A proposal will be presented at the Annual Business Meeting at the CEC convention in New Orleans for a vote, and I encourage all members to attend, both to hear what DDD has to say and to offer feedback to the organization. While we feel DDD

offers many outstanding benefits to members, including our flagship journal, *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities* (ETDD); free copies of each new book in the PRISM series; excellent and cost-effective biennial conferences; *DDD Express*; our ever expanding and informative website ([www.dddcec.org](http://www.dddcec.org)); as well as this latest member benefit, *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, the Board of Directors of DDD remain anxious to hear from you, the members, as to whether we are meeting your needs. Please feel free to contact me at [ambbk@aol.com](mailto:ambbk@aol.com) about any areas of interest on which you'd like to see more information, with questions or concerns, or just to offer input and feedback to the organization. I look forward to hearing from you.

As we look toward the CEC Convention in New Orleans this April, I hope to have the opportunity to meet new DDD members and renew old acquaintances. Elsewhere in this newsletter is information on the many innovative and informative sessions DDD will be sponsoring. As noted above, please try to attend the Annual Business Meeting, where you will hear reports on the progress of the organization. You'll also have the opportunity to join DDD in recognizing many fine individuals for their efforts on behalf of students with developmental disabilities and to the organization itself. If you can't be in New Orleans, consider planning ahead for a trip to Las Vegas in October to attend the DDD conference there.

Wishing you all a productive and happy spring.

## Editor's Note . . .

**Darlene Perner**, *Editor*

On behalf of DDD, I would like to thank **Ed Polloway** for his article from the *DDD Showcase Session* at CEC last year and **Jennifer Miller** for her suggestions on accommodations for children with autism written for our "Students' Corner." I am pleased to be working with **PRO-ED**, which now publishes the *DDD Express*—my thanks to **Judy Voress**, **Leslie Walker**, and **Lisa Tippett** for making this a smooth transition and for assisting with this DDD membership benefit, *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*. Hope you will join us for two great conferences in 2004—DDD at CEC in New Orleans and the 9th Biennial DDD Conference in Las Vegas! For more information, please go to our website ([www.dddcec.org](http://www.dddcec.org)). If you have any questions or would like to submit an article for the *DDD Express*, please contact me ([dperner@bloomu.edu](mailto:dperner@bloomu.edu)).



**Karen Kainz**,  
DDD Secretary, works  
behind "the scenes."  
Thanks, Karen, for all the  
words you have taken the  
past 6 years for DDD!

## Students' Corner

### Accommodations for Students with Autism

**Jennifer Miller**  
*Student Governor*



Students with high functioning autism are typically included in the general education classroom. Special and general educators need to work as partners so that all of the students in the classroom are successful. As a student teacher, you might be asked to adapt materials or make various accommodations for a child with autism. Listed here are some ideas and ways you can do this.

#### Accommodations in the Classroom

- Use a classroom schedule with pictures posted on the board for student manipulation.
- Give advance warning when a change occurs in the schedule. If this is not possible (e.g., fire drills), work with the child after the change has occurred to help him or her get through the situation.
- Create a personal schedule for the student with autism that shows all of the tasks he or she will be responsible for during the day. Check the sheet off as the student completes the tasks.
- Create a workspace that is free of distractions.
- Put written and pictorial labels on all materials placed in the classroom (e.g., markers, mailboxes, pencils, television).
- Place a basket of materials the student can use when he or she has completed assigned tasks. (These may include puzzles, silly putty, crayons, books, and tapes).
- List all of the activities (with pictures) a student can do when he or she has completed the work.
- Designate an area in the classroom as the “break area.”
- Adapt books with pictures or page-turners for independent reading.

- Use a timer or stopwatch when limiting the time on an activity. To avoid any disruptions when the time is up, give a 30-second warning. When the timer goes off, give a direction using verbal and pictorial cues.
- Use a “quiet picture” to condition the child’s behavior (reward for positive behavior) if the child is being noisy at inappropriate times.
- Create a positive classroom behavior management program.
- Make sure the behavior management program is concrete; pair all written words with a picture.
- Use simple and concrete language.

#### Ways to Adapt Classroom Materials

- Put pictures next to words on chart paper, books, and even worksheets.
- Simplify worksheets by using less words and bigger writing.
- Put reading materials on tape.
- Make a “window” out of file folders for reading assignments.
- Pair the child up with a buddy who will be a good support.
- Create a board with all of the activities available to structure play and have the students put their names by the chosen activity. If the student with autism continually picks the same activity, put it away and bring it out to reward positive behavior.
- Think about multiple intelligences when creating the classroom activities. Look at the child’s strengths and interests and adapt with them in mind.

If you would like more information on any of these suggestions or would like suggestions on behavior management in the classroom, please e-mail me ([JRM5145@aol.com](mailto:JRM5145@aol.com)).



## Viva Las Vegas!

### Join Us at the Next DDD Conference in October

The **9th International Conference on Developmental Disabilities** will be in **Las Vegas, Nevada, October 11–12, 2004**. The conference will have a practitioner's focus and will include strands on assistive technology, autism/autism spectrum disorder, cognitive disability—best practices, differentiated instruction, multiple disabilities, and wellness. Several nationally known keynote speakers will make presentations and will be available to discuss your issues and concerns. Make-and-take-it sessions will be available for teachers wanting to get new ideas and develop new materials for their classes.

The conference will be held in the beautiful **Alexis Park Resort Hotel**, just a few blocks off the famous Las Vegas strip. Because the Alexis Park is a suite hotel, several individuals will be able to share a room with reasonable comfort. DDD has arranged for an excellent rate of only \$109.00 per night for suites, a very competitive cost that will enable participants to attend and stay a few extra days, if their schedules

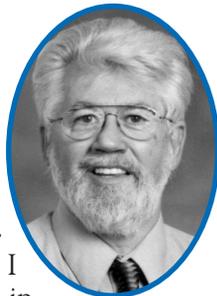
permit. On **October 7–9**, just prior to the DDD conference, the **Council for Learning Disabilities (CLD)** will hold its **26th international conference at the Alexis Park**. You might want to consider attending both conferences. We are currently discussing a joint registration rate with CLD for individuals desiring to attend both conferences.

This conference will provide teachers, parents, teacher educators, researchers, and others with an opportunity to gather and learn about the most current information related to services for individuals with mental retardation, autism, and other developmental disabilities. It will be an excellent opportunity to attend a conference in an attractive city. If you would like more information, please contact **Barbara Gartin** ([bgartin@uark.edu](mailto:bgartin@uark.edu)), **Tom Smith** ([tecsmith@uark.edu](mailto:tecsmith@uark.edu)), or **Cindy Perras** ([cindy.perras@cogeco.ca](mailto:cindy.perras@cogeco.ca)). Cindy is the program co-chair and should be contacted regarding specific information about presenting at this conference.

## Membership and Unit Development News

### Jim Forristal

*Membership/Unit Development  
Committee Chair*



Once again, as in past years, the Division will be having a **DDD Membership Booth** at the **CEC Conference** in New Orleans in April of 2004. I would like to take this opportunity to invite you to stop by our booth in the Expo Hall and say "hello." Members of the Board of Directors, which includes the Membership Committee, will be available Thursday and Friday between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. and again on Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. This is an opportunity for you to share with us the things that are important to you as members, to tell us what you are doing within your local chapters or subdivision, to get information on starting a subdivision within

your state or province, or just to say hello. Feel free to bring your non-DDD colleagues by to visit as well. See you in New Orleans!

### PROPOSALS for CEC Conference in 2005

Don't let May slip by and miss the proposal deadline for the **2005 CEC Annual Conference** in **Baltimore**. Be on the lookout for the proposal form at [www.cec.sped.org](http://www.cec.sped.org). All submissions will be made online via the CEC website.

**DEADLINE DATE: May 14, 2004**

# DDD New Orleans Meetings

April 13–17, 2004

## Divisional Meetings

All DDD Divisional Meetings are at the Hilton Hotel in the DDD President's suite (Location to be announced)

<b>Tuesday, April 13</b> Executive Committee Meeting Time: TBA	<b>Past Presidents' Meeting</b> 1:30 p.m.–2:30 p.m. <b>Critical Issues &amp; Legislative Committee</b> 2:30 p.m.–3:30 p.m.	<b>Friday, April 16</b> <b>Committee Meetings:</b> <i>All meetings will be held in the DDD President's Suite</i> <b>Conference Committee</b> 8:30 a.m.–10:00 a.m. <b>Publications Committee</b> 10:00 a.m.–11:00 a.m. <b>Research Committee</b> 11:00 a.m.–noon <b>Finance Committee</b> Noon–1:00 p.m.	<b>Membership Committee</b> 1:00 p.m.–2:30 p.m. <b>Awards Committee</b> 2:30 p.m.–3:00 p.m.
<b>Wednesday, April 14</b> Board of Directors Meeting 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m.	<b>General Business Meeting</b> Hilton Hotel Grand Salon A Section 6 5:00 p.m.–6:30 p.m.		<b>Saturday, April 17</b> <b>Board of Directors Meeting</b> DDD President's Suite 8:30 a.m.–noon
<b>Thursday, April 15</b> Subdivision Presidents' Meeting Noon–1:00 p.m.	<b>DDD President's Reception</b> 7:30 p.m.–10:00 p.m.		

### National CEC Meetings

Inter-Divisional Caucus (IDC)  
Marlborough A & B

**Tuesday, 1:00 p.m.–4:30 p.m.**  
Andi Babkie, Barbara Gartin, Tom Smith

Program Advisory Committee (PAC)  
Grand Salon D Section 21 & 24  
**Friday 8:30 a.m.–10:30 a.m.**  
Dagny Fidler

Representative Assembly  
Convention Center, La Louisian Ballroom  
**Friday 1:30 p.m.–4:00 p.m.**  
**Saturday 2:00 p.m.–5:00 p.m.**  
Andi Babkie & Cindy Perras

### DDD Showcase Session

**Thursday, April 15, 8:30 a.m.–10:30 a.m.**  
Rm R8-9  
What Are the Employment Models  
Working for Young People with Disabilities?  
Paul Wehman

### Invited Session

**Friday, April 16, 8:30 a.m.–9:30 a.m., Rm. R7**  
Millennial Children in a Digital Age:  
Future in Assistive Technology  
Phil Parette

### Invited Session

**Friday, April 16, 9:45 a.m.–11:45 a.m., Rm. R7**  
Differentiating Instruction in Standards-Based  
Environments to Meet the Needs of All Learners  
Darlene Perner

### DDD Workshop

**Friday, April 16, 3:45 p.m.–5:45 p.m., Rm. 228/229**  
Sexuality & Persons with Developmental Disabilities  
Peter Gerhardt

### Invited Session

**Saturday, April 17, 8:30 a.m.–11:30 a.m., Rm. R7**  
Learning Styles of Students with  
Autism Spectrum Disorder  
Leslie Broun

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# Professional Development and Standards Committee Report

**Scott Sparks**

*Ad Hoc PD and Standards Committee Chair*

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The ad hoc Professional Development and Standards Committee has been very busy this year developing new standards on autism, revising old DDD standards, and beginning an “evidence-based” database to support the standards. This is part of the overall process that CEC is following in the next phase of evidence-based standards development. The standards presented in the “Red Book” (*What Every Beginning Special Educator Should Know*) from CEC have not had an evidence base to support them. Rather, we have relied on expert opinion over the years as evidence of their relevance and validity. As our field has grown and the needs of learners have become more defined, however, it has become clear that we must present a wider base of support for our teacher/educator standards. With that in mind, the Committee began its work of finding research evidence to support our specific set of DDD standards.

The first phase of the standards process was to write new ones to include autism in the Developmental Disabilities set. We also set out to revise the old MRDD standards. Many different people helped with this process, and it was a very successful collaboration. The result has been a new initial set of standards to guide teacher-training programs. The second phase of this project has been to find

research-based evidence to support these new standards. An aspect of this phase has been to define exactly what constitutes “research.” We approached this task with some guidance from CEC and members of the Knowledge and Skills Subcommittee of the Professional Standards Committee. We decided to include both quantitative and qualitative evidence in our database, given that most of the “science” in special education is of the social variety. Thus far in this phase, we have collected several citations for every standard and have the beginnings of a database. We have submitted our initial set and bibliography to Kathleen Shank of the CEC Professional Standards Committee and to Richard Mainzer and Margie Crutchfield at CEC headquarters. DDD President Andi Babkie and I will participate in a conference call in the next month with Kathleen, Richard, and Margie to discuss format and other editing that may be required. Our goal is to have the set ready for final submission to CEC by New Orleans for validation and approval. DDD is among the first two organizations to have sets of standards go through this evidence-based process and will serve as a model for others to follow.

The process of standards development is a never-ending one. Our set will continually change and grow as our field changes and grows. Anyone who is interested in working on this ongoing project should contact me ([sparks@ohio.edu](mailto:sparks@ohio.edu)) and I'll put you to work! Thanks to those of you who worked so hard this past year on this project; it could not have been successful without you.

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## Subdivision News

### *Pennsylvania*

The PF-CEC DDD meets annually at the PF-CEC Convention in Grantville, Pennsylvania, in November. DDD organized three showcase sessions at the 2003 convention. Two were on autism spectrum disorders and secondary programs for students with moderate DD. The third session consisted of a panel of first-year teachers who answered questions addressed to them by **Heather Jacobs** and **Heather Mumford** from PF-SCEC. Thanks to them and the teachers who presented in these sessions: **Christine Cooney**, **Marie Dotson**, **Judy Hunchar**, **Debra Kern**, **Leslie Kolodin**, **Matt McCrone**, **Kristen O'Hare**, **Jennifer Padora**, **Penny Pardoe**, **Brett Sarnoski**, and **Barbara Wert**.

For more information on PF-CEC DDD, contact **Darlene Perner** ([dperner@bloomu.edu](mailto:dperner@bloomu.edu)).

### *Wisconsin*

The **Wisconsin Chapter** of DDD is in the process of reorganization at this time. The chapter is looking for members who would be interested in helping with the reorganization. If you are interested in helping, or would like to have your name included on the list of nominations for office, please contact the current president of the chapter, **Karen Gromowski-Lietzow**, by phone (414) 817-0814 or e-mail ([Dphdmuk111@aol.com](mailto:Dphdmuk111@aol.com)).

## Students, Teachers, and Practitioners: Submit a Presentation in Baltimore!

At the **CEC Convention in 2005**, the DDD will honor two presentations with a plaque and cash. Submit a proposal for the 2005 convention and be part of all the fun and learning that will take place in **Baltimore on April 6–9, 2005**.

The **PRACTITIONER PRESENTATION AWARD** is intended to encourage participation in the convention by persons who work directly with children or adults with developmental disabilities (e.g., teachers, paraprofessionals). Candidates for this award are selected from among the practitioner proposals relative to the field of developmental disabilities that are chosen for inclusion in the program of the CEC annual convention. In order to be considered for the award, the lead presenter must be employed as a practitioner providing direct service to persons with developmental disabilities at the time the proposal is submitted. Moreover, the proposal must represent practitioner-coordinated research, or be a practitioner-oriented program or project for which the practitioner has had a major responsibility. If you work directly with persons with developmental disabilities and have been implementing an innovative research project or program, please submit a presentation proposal for the Baltimore CEC convention.

The **HERBERT J. PREHM STUDENT PRESENTATION AWARD** is given to an outstanding student presentation. It was initiated in honor of Dr. Prehm, who died in 1986 at the age of 49 after a courageous bout with cancer. This



Sue Argiro, Wendy Ashcroft, and Joyce Keohane receive last year's DDD Practitioner's Award from board members Barb Gartin, Jim Thompson, and Cindy Perras.

award recognizes exceptional work by students in the field of developmental disabilities. The guidelines for this award state that (a) the submitter shall be a full-time student(s) at the time of submission, (b) the presentation shall represent student-coordinated research or be a student-oriented program/project for which the student(s) has had major responsibility, and (c) the faculty sponsor of the students shall attest to (a) and (b) above. Any undergraduate, masters, or doctoral students should submit a proposal for presentation at the 2005 CEC Convention.



### Executive Director's Corner

*Tom E. C. Smith*

This is truly an exciting time for DDD. We have recently changed the name of the division to reflect a broader constituency; we had a very successful conference in 2003 in Hawaii; we are planning a very exciting conference for **fall 2004 in Las Vegas**; we are now receiving, as part of our membership benefits, *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*; and a new issue of our Prism series will soon be available free to membership. The upcoming conference in New Orleans is shaping up to be

an excellent opportunity for practitioners, teacher educators, and researchers to come together to learn from each other and to generate new ideas. If you will be in New Orleans, please plan on attending some of DDD committee meetings and the DDD business meeting on Thursday evening. Times and locations for these meetings are listed in this issue and will also be in the CEC program. In the midst of all this activity is a wonderful opportunity for new and existing DDD subdivisions to become more active. The DDD Board of Directors is always ready to assist you in your individual membership as well as subdivision development. Please be a part of this exciting time for DDD; become more active at the local, state, or national levels. If you or your subdivision have any needs, please contact me ([tecsmith@uark.edu](mailto:tecsmith@uark.edu)).

(“Eulogy” continued from p. 1)

rationale for why the concept of mild retardation creates misconceptions and potentially threatens the eligibility of individuals for support. In fact, it can be argued that the concept of “mild retardation” itself represents an oxymoron that, perhaps for this reason alone, results in its need to be stricken from the professional vocabulary. As an option, the term *high incidence disabilities* reinforces the fact that there are a relatively large number of students who have learning needs that traditionally have been associated with mental retardation but that these learning needs are incorrectly captured by the term *mild*. Thus, high incidence can be seen as *a fact*, whereas mild is *a judgment*.

### DD and MR

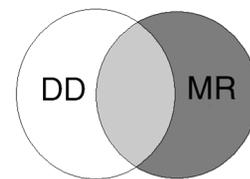
By definition, 40%–60% of those persons who have mental retardation do not qualify under the federal DD definition (AAMR, 2002). Although there is significant overlap of the two terms (largely in reference to individuals with severe disabilities), there are also areas of nonoverlap (e.g., for developmental disabilities: epilepsy; for mental retardation: high incidence disabilities; see Figure 1).

In terms of school services, it could be argued that the impact is limited. DD is not widely used for school-based services, and *mental retardation* (or a substitutive term) still governs eligibility for special education. The situation would be quite different, however, for adult services. In this domain, DD is used more commonly; its use to the exclusion of mental retardation may result in the exclusion of some individuals for adult services. The recent Supreme Court decision relative to the death penalty has underscored the importance of careful diagnostics in mental retardation and would be clouded by the sole adoption of the term *developmental disabilities*.

For CEC-DDD, the key question is: Will it still serve the broader constituency? If Figure 1 is applied literally, a substantial portion of the professionals previously served within the division would be excluded. Literal translation of the title thus would suggest that articles submitted to ETDD would no longer be within the purview of the journal if the paper addressed “mild retardation,” conference presentations would focus away from this area, and teachers and professionals with this focus as their primary affiliation would find themselves unrepresented by any of the divisions of the CEC.

### Discussion

For many professionals, the field of “mild retardation” provided an entrée into special education. No doubt their professional work may have moved many to a broader focus on special education in general or to related emphases,



**Figure 1.** Developmental disabilities exclusive of “mild retardation.”

such as in learning disabilities. As the prevalence figures in mental retardation have diminished over the last 25 years, a parallel decrease in professional interest and careful scrutiny (e.g., research institutes) has occurred. As a consequence, there appear to be limited voices of advocacy raised for this population.

Although the current trend of benign neglect in this area may serve some students well (i.e., it may have led indirectly to successful inclusion efforts), nevertheless, the reality is that these individuals have not historically prospered in education. Their rates of success in terms of post-school adjustment certainly offer us little in terms of complacency. Thus, in our appropriate efforts to downplay the deficits associated with mental retardation and emphasize the importance of a supports-based model, we may lose sight of the educational and life needs of persons traditionally identified as having mild retardation. The movement to inclusion is admirable, but a parallel commitment to ensuring the success of these individuals is also essential.

I began this paper by raising the question of whether a eulogy was needed for mild retardation. Typically, eulogies are associated with the passing of an individual loved and revered by family, friends, and colleagues. In this instance, the question is unanswered as to whether the passing of this category is best classified as lack of interest, lack of awareness, or deliberate attempts to bring about its demise. Regardless of cause, it is important that we continue to focus on making sure that these students will not be advantaged by our ignorance of their educational needs.

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*A copy of the complete article is available from the author upon request: Dr. Edward A. Polloway, Office of Graduate Studies and Community Advancement, Lynchburg College, Lynchburg, VA 24501*