

"One of the most common misconceptions about science is that it isn't creative — that it is inflexible, prescribed or boring. Actually, creativity is a crucial part of how we do science, and being blind just adds to that," said Gina Ceylan, a University of Missouri Ph.D. candidate. Ceylan's insights are, in many ways, reflective of the open-hearted, ambitious attitudes she and several of her colleagues hold toward the human creative process. Those attitudes often are a core focus of the student organization she helped found a year and a half ago, MU Student Exceptions, or MUSE.

To view Keith Montgomery's documentary on MUSE and creativity, visit [vimeo.com/keithmont](http://vimeo.com/keithmont).

In the summer of 2010, Ceylan was busy helping form two campus groups for people with disabilities, Sight Club and Delta Alpha Pi. But neither of the groups was all-inclusive — one is intended for people who are blind or visually impaired, and the other is an honor society. Ceylan and a friend, MU graphic design major Allison Reinhart, decided a new community was needed — a community with a collective voice. "We have a lot to say and do," Ceylan said in a recent email, "and we figured we'd do a much better job if we worked together."

#### UNITY THROUGH DIVERSITY

MUSE is different from other disability organizations on campus because it is all-inclusive, said Matt Ballou, a professor in the art department who informally supports and meets with the group on occasion. "They make themselves a lodestone for ... especially those who have 'invisible' disabilities," he said. "Often, people who have obvious disabilities are taken into account — but not as often as you might think. But people who have less obvious disabilities find it hard to find support and understanding." He sees MUSE as stepping into that role in growing ways.

The members who have passed through MUSE exhibit plenty of diversity among themselves. They have studied art, physical science, psychology, philosophy, history, public affairs and social work. Reinhart, who is now the president of MUSE, uses a wheelchair. Ceylan is blind. One member suffered a traumatic brain injury. Another has bipolar disorder. Ballou added that one distinction of the group is that many of the members are highly creative culture makers in the MU community. A short documentary, created by Keith Montgomery in conjunction with the Missouri Student Artist Community, shed light on the exceptional creativity MUSE members demonstrate.

#### REACHING OUT

The group's goals include promoting the concepts of universal design and the social model of disability. Universal design, Ceylan said in the documentary, was initiated by architect Ronald Mace. It was then pioneered by Selwyn Goldsmith, who wrote "Designing for the Disabled" in 1963. The principle calls for new developments, architectural elements, technologies, curricula and other fundamental aspects of society to be built in a way that is simple, intuitive and usable for all people. The social model of disability, a term coined by Mike Oliver, responds to the medical model of disability, which assumes the disability is an "illness" that needs to be "fixed," Reinhart said. The social model presumes, instead, that the real problem is societal and environmental constraints on people with disabilities instead of the attempt to fix the people who have disabilities.

MUSE has a significant campus presence in pushing ahead with other practical goals as well. Members hold demonstrations of wheelchairs, canes and Braille machines during accessibility fairs and Celebrate Ability Week on the MU campus. They have spoken on numerous panels and help advise other campus organizations about accessibility issues. "I think we all want a community where we can share ideas and resources, tell stories and reach out to other students with disabilities," Ceylan said. In addition, the group meets informally twice a month to hang out, reflect on how things are going and discuss new ideas. Outside of official meetings, they get together for brunch, go rock-climbing or attend live music shows.

#### LIVING CREATIVELY

Reinhart is a graphic design major engaged in several different artistic media, and living with a disability necessitates that she adapt Ballou's and other art instructors' directions in each class. Ballou, who facilitates an independent study in art with Reinhart, explained that she has to make her work from the ground up. For example, instead of making prints using standard methods, "she has coordinated with the environment around her and collaborated with other artists to make prints that perhaps no one else could make," he said. "That's important and necessary in the artistic community."

Reinhart sees her art as a mode of expression, release and communication, she said, especially because language can only go so far. And art also can be a source of comfort, she added. "It can be hard not to get caught up in the tedious little whatever's of the day, but sometimes, I'll get home and read about something totally cool happening in art or science, and it just kind of zooms things out for me — puts things in perspective."

Ceylan, by contrast, doesn't consider herself a fine artist per se — her Ph.D. study is in science education — but she acknowledged the ways in which science is inextricable from art. "As someone who is blind, really into science, perception and experience, I think I live creatively," she said. "There are so many different ways of doing things, and I really enjoy exploring possibilities and pushing the boundaries."

"Also, I'm obsessed with music," she added. Music is like fuel to her, she explained. "It carries time forward, it expresses things I can't articulate and is otherwise extremely fabulous."

#### 'THE WAY IT OUGHT TO BE'

Ballou's interactions with MUSE, including participating in the creation of the documentary, has influenced his thinking on matters of culture-making, accessibility and accommodation. One of the biggest areas of personal growth "has been to realize that making accommodations for my students isn't an area of 'special' or 'additional' effort — it's the way it ought to be," he said. "All culture-making is about access. When we — as institutions or individuals — legitimize the denial of access to those who wish to participate, we're functioning as gatekeepers and operating in illegitimate systems of refusal. ... As an educator and person who deeply

believes in **the** value of university-level teaching, I don't want to be a part of that."

"I really consider **living** with a disability to be a creative process all on its own," Reinhart said. "I think, for an average able-bodied person, a lot of **the** day-to-day opportunities to be creative have been made obsolete. But, for us, there **is** still so much area to explore just getting through**the** day."

**CITATION (MLA STYLE)**

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