



WORLD VIEWS

AER International Services and Global Issues Division

Welcome to the September 2020 edition of the AER Global Issues newsletter!

We are excited to share that our division has elected new officers:

Chair: Dr. Belinda Rudinger, TSVI, ATP
Past Chair: Dr. Kevin McCormack, COMS
Secretary: Katie Ericson, TSVI, COMS
Treasurer: Carmen McClain, OTR/L, CLVT, COMS

We're always looking for ways to improve the Division. Please send any comments, questions, suggestions, or encouragements to Belinda at belinda.rudinger@tamuc.edu

Belinda Rudinger, EdD, ATP
Chair
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Annual Scholarship Awards

For the past three years, the ISGI division has offered a scholarship competition for students originating from areas outside of mainland United States and Canada who are obtaining post-secondary education to serve students with visual impairments in their region. Two scholarships of \$500 are awarded each year to students studying to work with people that are blind and/or visually impaired. The scholarship is a restricted award and needs to be used to further the student's education in the field of blindness and visual impairments.

This year's award winners are Tracy Joubert & Isaiah Makam.

Tracey Joubert, from South Africa, is working to complete her Masters' degree in Orientation and Mobility from Western Michigan University. She shared, "I am an outdoor person and love mountain biking and hiking. My favorite holiday destination is spending time in the African bush where I get to practice my new hobby of wildlife photography."



Isaiah Anaeze Makam is a student of University of Uyo in Nigeria. Among his many talents and interests, he is passionate about teaching, reading, research, administration, entertainment (especially hospitality), athletics, driving, inspiring & motivating others.



Non-Profit Focus



According to their website ([once.es](https://www.once.es)), “ONCE ranks among the world’s largest social business groups and is a global benchmark for disability organisations. Our eighty years of experience and work in Spain have contributed to enhancing opportunities for inclusion and enabling people who are blind or have other disabilities to lead fully independent lives in Europe, Ibero-America and other parts of the globe. Now, under the umbrella of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and fully engaged in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, our model knows no boundaries.”

Vision Services in Turkey

by Sevgi Kirboyun, doctoral student

Any teacher preparation program’s goal is to teach educators how to implement best practices for their students. However, there are differences in teacher training programs for students’ education with visual impairments between Turkey and the USA. To become a teacher of students with visual impairments (TVI) in Turkey, it is required to have completed a bachelor’s degree (4-year) in a Special Education Department of Education Faculty. Those TVIs work in three school settings: schools for the blind; special education and rehabilitation centers for the blind (that students from age 1 to 50 can attend three hours a week); and public schools (as an inclusive setting or resource room). Currently, there is no education program which educates O&M specialists in Turkey. Therefore, TVIs teach both academic skills and O&M skills for students with visual impairments. Since there is limited itinerant teaching in Turkey, TVIs mostly do not work as an itinerant teacher.

A lack of awareness about using assistive technology (AT) devices can have a negative impact on expectations for students with visual impairments. AT devices play a critical role in the success of these students’ educations by giving both tactile and auditory output. Without AT devices, education is less accessible to these students. However, in Turkey, access to AT tools in a school setting is very limited. TVIs do not

use AT devices in advance frequency in the schools. There is a need to provide AT for students with visual impairments to create an accessible education setting in Turkey. Also, students with visual impairments use the general education curriculum. Recently, researchers are working to develop an expanded core curriculum and better education for students who need special education in Turkey. Hence, the common use of AT in the classroom and educating students with visual impairment depending on their own needs will be possible in Turkey.

The Turkish government currently offers its own scholarship programs to support Turkish students for graduate studies in special education. Since the United States is one of the best countries for special education settings around the world, Turkey sends more students to the United States than any other European country. In the United States, Turkish graduate students have a chance to learn more about itinerant teaching, expanded core curriculum, inclusive settings, as well as assistive technology devices for students with disabilities. Moreover, when Turkish students return home, they will work as a professor at the university. Therefore, those international students in the United States not only learn more about teacher training programs for TVIs and O&M specialists but also improve their research skills.

While I was a graduate student in the United States, I enrolled in a number of classes and did intern as an itinerant teacher for than ten weeks under the guidance of a supervisor. During my internship, I learned to use several AT devices (high-tech, low-tech, or adaptive devices), which I have never seen before. Since there is not enough information about using AT devices for students with visual impairment in Turkey, during my first year in the doctoral program, I reviewed, synthesized, and critiqued literature that examines the effectiveness of AT for students with visual impairments. These experiences helped me realize the need and focus on AT for my research. When considering AT devices for students, we need to keep in mind that AT devices should not give students an unfair advantage, but instead, should provide them with the independence to compete effectively with peers.

I can honestly say the experience has been amazing. I have been able to see firsthand how to teach and interact with students who are visually impaired. I have not only gained a wealth of experience and knowledge from working with these students, but I have also been able to practice in using high tech devices for both students with low vision and students with visual impairments. When I return home, I want to focus on using high-tech AT devices in both settings: inclusive education and schools for the blind. To make my dream real, I may need help form TVIs in the United States. Since there is very limited itinerant teaching, I want to collaborate with TVIs in the United States to make better itinerant teaching in Turkey too. I believe, if students with visual impairments use high tech devices, education will be more accessible for them. Especially in the general education setting, students with visual impairments need accessible materials for their education. In this situation, the experiences of TVIs in the United States about providing accessible content and materials would be significant for both Turkish students with visual impairments and TVIs. If you want to be a volunteer to collaborate with me to create accessible itinerant teaching (inclusive setting) in Turkey as well, please [contact me](#).

Now, one of my Turkish professors is conducting research to compare teaching for students with visual impairments in Turkey and the United States. It is a critical study

to show the needs in Turkey for both students with visual impairments and TVIs. Please, can you take the [survey](#) to help me?

International Spotlight

Abril Denisse Meraz Hernandez (from Mexico)



By Carmen A. McLain, OTR/L, CLVT, COMS

The international spotlight for September is on Abril Meraz who is the founding director of the first learning center for the blind and visually impaired of Durango, Mexico. The learning center provides training in ADLs, O&M, assistive technology, and counseling to individuals of all ages. I learned of Abril's center through the institution's Facebook page "CEID ve por ti." Due to Covid-19's in-person restrictions, Abril and her staff became very active on Facebook and they found inventive ways to use it to provide short online tips for students and their parents, and to keep their community's spirit uplifted through inspiring live interviews.

Here is Abril's brief story.



[Photo of Abril Meraz looking into the camera with a slight smile and her right hand fingers slightly touching the side of her face]

Can you tell us a little about yourself?

My name is Abril Denisse Meraz Hernandez. I was born in Durango, Mexico. From a young age I was diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa, a congenital disease that has led me to live with low vision throughout my life. I am the second of three siblings, but the first to have a visual impairment.

How are the social conditions in Mexico for individuals who are blind and have low vision?

The social conditions for those who have a visual disability have improved considerably since I was a little girl. However, there are still many obstacles to a full inclusive education and to the tools that can allow us to be more independent. In addition, and most significantly, is that within the Mexican culture the people with impairments are considered incapable of making positive contributions to a sighted world. This is why when we do something noteworthy, people see us with amazement or disbelief.

What is the level of access to technology in Mexico?

When compared to other countries, Mexico could be considered to have considerable access to technology. Almost 60% of the population has access to internet in one form or another. However, when we consider people with disabilities, the percentage is significantly lower because there are no public programs that provide us with these types of tools. Whether someone has devices or not depends on their or their family's financial ability. In general, assistive technology is expensive. From my own personal experience I can say that it is not a priority for those who live with a disability, despite the positive impact that technology can make in our lives.

What is CEID?

CEID stands for Centro de Estudios para Invidentes de Durango (Learning Center for the Blind of Durango). We are a non-profit that started in 2009 providing children, adolescents, and adults who have a visual impairment with the tools and techniques that will allow them to be independent in their homes, schools, work and social environments, and of course, in their personal lives. CEID was conceived after we visited the Learning Center for the Blind in Chihuahua (Chihuahua is the adjoining state north of us) because we could not find in our own city an institution that helped people achieve independence. Most of the help for the visually impaired came in the form of a handout. So, after we received training, we created a similar institution so that the children and young adults from Durango would have access to these needed tools.

How have the lives changed for those who receive training at CEID?

Some years ago we did a study because we also were interested in this question. Our research showed that the tools that we provide are very useful for the lives of our users, but what has made the biggest positive impact has been the change in expectations that families have. We learned that our counseling and home training programs changed in a positive way the expectations that families have of their visually impaired family members.

What are you doing differently due to Covid-19?

As is true for everyone in the world, the pandemic has had a tremendous impact for us and our users at CEID. During the first few weeks we had to build a digital program that could be adapted to the needs of the users as well as to the social restrictions imposed on us. Initially we offered parents counseling through platforms like Zoom, and we created content for our social networks to disseminate the diversity of tools available to a person with visual impairment. Starting in August we were able to return to in-person training, but restricting the number of users that can be in our building at one time, and of course, following the health measures recommended by the national and world authorities.

What are the greatest barriers that you have as an institution?

Without a doubt, the greatest obstacle that we face, as well as all the non-profits in Mexico, is the funding of our programs. Since we are an institution directed to a specific group, the governmental authorities and the businesses are not interested so much in what we do, until there is a particular situation that forces them to learn about our services. I must say though that we can tell that we are knocking down cultural barriers even though our finances do not allow us to be as strong as we'd like to be.

What are your plans for the future?

The most important plan is the construction of our own building. We already have the blue prints that, when they becomes a reality, will give us the possibility to triple the training we can currently provide children, adolescents and adults who are blind and have low vision. We will have the capacity to offer services not only in our city, but throughout our state. In addition, we are always trying to keep up with the latest technology that comes out every day so we can include it in our training programs.

Anything else you would like to mention?

Something that I think important to mention is that in CEID we have a group of teachers with diverse specializations. Some of our teachers are specialized in early intervention, in preschool, in Braille, in math, in assistive technology, in visual stimulation, in psychomotor stimulation, in psychology, and others. I am sure that without them, the impact that CEID has had in the society of Durango could not have been possible.

How can our AER membership find out more information about you and about the work you do in CEID?

We have a website with a general description of our institution at: <http://ceidveporti.com>. We also have a Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/ceidveporti> where we publish information about our services and about the real lives of people with visual impairment.

If a member would like to contact you, are you on social media?

I am in most social networks as: "abrildennis17". I will be happy to answer questions and messages as we continue working towards the inclusion of people who have a visual impairment.
