

March 4, 2009

New Accessible Workstations Touch Upon SSU's Past

Although not widely known, Sonoma State University has a long and storied history of serving students with disabilities. One of SSU's proudest days came on August 31st, 1983 when it was selected by the Xerox Corporation to receive one of the first "talking computers" for students who are blind. This prototype computer, more commonly known as the Kurzweil Reading Machine, was the size of a dishwasher and valued at nearly \$30,000. SSU's selection to receive this amazing technology was the direct result of collaborative efforts between the University Library and Disability Services for Students, both of whom proposed the idea to the Xerox Corporation.

Just over twenty-five years after the acquisition of the Kurzweil Reading Machine, the University Library and Disability Services for Students have collaborated again to install four accessible workstations in the University Library. These new workstations incorporate a range of accessible technology, such as magnification software for students with low vision and speech recognition software for students with physical disabilities. Furthermore, in a case of history repeating itself, the workstations have the latest Kurzweil Reading system, a smaller but similar version of the 1983 Kurzweil Reading Machine. Current SSU student, Andrew Giese, refers to the Kurzweil Reading system and the new accessible workstations as giving him "...independence that I never dreamed of."

For additional information about the new accessible workstations in the University Library, as well as the history of disability services at SSU, please contact Scott Kupferman, Assistive Technology Specialist & Lab Coordinator, Disability Services for Students (Phone: 664-4361, Email: scott.kupferman@sonoma.edu).



1983 – University Library and Disability Services for Students staff operating the original Kurzweil Reading Machine.