

## International News and Awards

### Indian Students Assist Disability Support Services

Written by: Anna Reynoso

CSU, Chico's Disability Support Services (DSS) provides alternative text formats for students who are visually impaired or unable to turn the pages of a book.

Before this year students who needed Alt text formats would have to wait long periods of time for their textbooks. Now, thanks to five international grad students from India working with DSS, the wait is almost gone.



The Alt text format initially used by a few students, but now it is used by many more. Prasad came to DSS looking for work and Lauri Evans hired him to help convert the text books into Alt text formats, a process that took place in Evans' office. Soon Prasad Patkar, Umesh Kalkundrikar, Kaushal H. Trivedi, Dhananjay Prabhukeluskar and Anand Srinivansan were able to find their niche along with Alex Prator, and Rusty Steel to improve DSS' current the Alt text technology.

The Alt text conversion is a tedious and time consuming process. The spine of a book must first be cut off. Then the book is scanned into the computer and converted into a PDF by a software program. The book is then edited and proof read by Zone Editing and in six different formats. Thanks to the work of the international students, the process is now simplified and efficient. The five grad students, mostly computer science majors, working for DSS, improved the conversion process and reduced the waiting time from five weeks for a single text book to five days for a single book.

The Accessibility Technology Initiative has increased the need for Alt text formats at Chico State. Accessibility Technology Initiative is new mandate requiring California State University campuses to make all course materials accessible for students with disabilities before the first day of class. They have been fantastic about helping DSS to deal with its technology issues, Evans said.

The students dubbed, Accessibility, Instructional Materials Specialists or AIMS, are now an integral part of DSS. "Working here is the best thing that has happened to me since coming to the U.S.," Kalkundrikar said. The students' improved the technology used by DSS; the biggest was upgrading the computers and the software making the process faster.

Kurzweil 3000, the previous program, needed updating. Omnipage, the new software, quickly converts the text book into a Word document or a PDF file. However, Kurzweil is still better for audio files like mp3s, Srinivasan and Kalkundrikar said. Kurzweil 3000 has word to speech converter that allows adjusting the voice speed.

The staff has become close to them and DSS students are close to them too, Evans said. They have revolutionized the way DSS uses Alt text. The grad students will be at Chico State for two years and DSS anticipates working with the students until they graduate. Evans hopes the students will take their experience working with DSS back to India.

“Their work ethic is beyond compare,” Evans said. “They changed and improved the program significantly. I hope they learned a lot about people with disabilities and we’ll never forget them,”

It’s the hard work of Kalkundrikar, Prabhukeluskar, Srinivansan, Patkar, Trivedi, Prator and Steel that has made a difference at DSS. Their contribution and expertise has secured them a place in the hearts of all who work with DSS.

Photo (left to right): Prasad Patkar, Rusty Steel, Lauri Evans, Umesh Kalkundrikar, Kaushal Trivedi, and Dhananjay Prabhukeluskar.