

ASAN-OSU Involvement Fair Activism

Category : Changing Perceptions of Autism and Disability

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On the afternoon of Monday, September 21st, the Ohio State chapter of the Autistic Self-Advocacy Network (ASAN) worked a table at the student involvement fair, a community event that boasted over 500 student and community organizations. The members of ASAN-OSU distributed informational handouts during the event, including a flyer entitled "Why Autism Speaks Does Not Speak for Us," authored by Meg Evans of ASAN-Southwest Ohio. Members also solicited signatures for a petition against the upcoming Columbus Walk for Autism Speaks and OSU President E. Gordon Gee's continued support of the walk. In keeping with themes of self-advocacy and protest, on display at the ASAN table was a poster with prominent slogans such as nothing about us without us; we're people, not puzzles; and autistic people can speak for themselves. ASAN-OSU also distributed candy in ziploc bags with ASAN labels attached.

At the event, ASAN-OSU distributed approximately 450 flyers to community members, students, faculty, and staff. The signature tally on the pledge to President Gee has reached 31, not counting ASAN-OSU members, and the chapter anticipates that this number will increase over the next week. Additionally, ASAN-OSU members held many conversations with supporters as well as non-supporters of the neurodiversity movement. For instance, one woman wearing a Walk for Autism shirt, when approached with a flyer, refused to take one and claimed that Autism Speaks needed all available support, implying that ASAN-OSU's efforts are a distraction. Additionally, many women throughout the course of the event -- most of whom were wearing pink Alpha Xi Delta t-shirts -- refused flyers, one even making fun of the ASAN name (claiming that the group misspelled "ASIAN"). Of note is that this particular sorority has chosen autism awareness -- and, more specifically, Autism Speaks -- as its local and national philanthropy project. Several other students, including a number of student athletes, engaged in similar taunts when passing by the ASAN table.

A few autistic individuals, as well as several students with autistic relatives, stopped by the table and expressed relief at ASAN's presence on campus. ASAN-OSU has also begun to develop relationships with other human rights-oriented groups through this event.

In order to continue the efforts made at the involvement fair, ASAN-OSU/Central Ohio has recently begun a new advertising campaign directed toward the Autism Speaks walk. Arrow-shaped flyers bearing slogans such as "Walk if you support eugenics" have been affixed to countless walk recruitment flyers, as can be seen in the attached images. Upcoming events include the group's first fall meeting, which will occur on Thursday, October 1st at 5:45pm at the campus Barnes & Noble. The group will also protest the autism walk on Sunday, October 11 from 8:00am to 12:30pm and is actively looking for volunteers; if you are interested, contact asan.ohiostate@gmail.com for more details. Between now and the walk, the group anticipates distributing flyers and soliciting petition signatures in heavy foot-traffic areas near campus.

Finally, a note of thanks: ASAN members in attendance at the involvement fair were Melanie Yergeau, Hillary Spears, Stephanie Ballam, Whitney Brooks, and faculty advisor Cynthia Selfe. Several other ASAN members contributed to the success of the event, creating flyers and other take-aways, and included Jeffrey Strasser, Noranne Cochran, Justin Rooney, Kristin Rohrbeck, and Natalie A. Finally, many other non-OSU ASAN members made significant contributions in terms of promotional materials and advice, including ASAN President Ari Ne'eman, ASAN-Southwest Ohio director Meg Evans, and ASAN-New England director Andrew De Carlo.

Melanie Yergeau at the ASAN-OSU table



"Walk if you support eugenics" arrow sign



"Walk if you support stereotypes" arrow sign

