“One of the things that we know is the variable inextricably tied to poverty is not gender, sex, ethnicity, race or education. It’s disability. And so though I don’t want to get in a contest of who’s more marginalized, who’s suffered more discrimination, it’s relatively obvious to me.”

Brent Williams, coordinator for the UA rehabilitation counseling program, is a fiery champion of the disabled, who says he lives under the burden of everyday discrimination in a world that often sees them as damaged or helpless.

APRIL ROBERTSON
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE
AYETTEVILLE — On the first day of class, University of Arkansas stu-
dents wandered into the auditorium as Brent Williams took the podium to begin his introduction. It didn’t take long for them to realize he was being confront-
ed by more than a 50-year-old man with a long, greying ponytail.

“If you graduate from this master’s pro-
gram and you are not pissed off with the way
our society treats people with disabilities, you
will not have failed,” he said. “But I will have failed you.”

Since Williams’ arrival as program coordi-
nator for the UA rehabilitation counseling pro-
gram two years ago, his graduates have gone to
work at the chief executive officers and executive
directors of the Arkansas Support Network,
Sources for Community Independent Living
Services and the Elizabeth Richardson
Center and have largely made up the staff of the
Arkansas Rehabilitation Services counselors.

His students are mad and they’re doing something about it.

As principal investigator of the federal PROMISE (Promoting Readiness of Minors in Supplemental Security Income) grant, an award of $2 million, and believing in the
larger grant awarded to the University of Ar-
kansas ever, Williams is helping focus efforts
of state agencies to help disabled teenagers
and grant writer for issues associated with
... earned beliefs in power, in opportunity. I realized that
some people were successful because they...
For 80 years, the beautiful Georgian Revival-style building on Main Street in North Little Rock served as a U.S. Post Office. After a year of remodeling and restoring, the building is now the Argenta branch of the William F. Laman Public Library System. North Little Rock’s leaders, movers and shakers and other guests got a sneak peek of the new library April 4, the day before its grand opening.

Attendees enjoyed wine and soft drinks and a buffet of finger foods as well as a tour of the library, which includes a children’s area, meeting rooms, gallery space and computer lab. The gallery currently holds an exhibit of historic photos of Argenta and construction of the post office.

Library system Director Jeff Baskin told the crowd that he thought the remodeled building had turned out beautifully. He noted that it had been brought back as much as possible to the original design, including opening the center of the building up to the roof, making the space light and airy.

Library programming already scheduled at the branch includes children’s story times; Good Gardens, an adult program that will include hands-on gardening and guest lectures; and a summer reading program.

— Story and photos by Cary Jenkins