A group of eight Fulbright Scholars from Iraq recently spent several hours at Utah State University’s Center for Persons with Disabilities, learning about disability and how services are approached.

The scholars, who are visiting the USU campus for 10 weeks, are all faculty members of universities in Iraq in the fields of applied linguistics and teaching English as a foreign language. USU faculty members Maria Luisa Spicer-Escalante and Karin de Jonge-Kannan from the department of languages, philosophy and communication studies submitted the proposal that led to the group’s visit.

CPD Director Bryce Fifield took the scholars on a field trip to the Assistive Technology (AT) lab, part of the CPD’s Utah Assistive Technology Project.

“The AT lab used to be used to fix lawnmowers,” he told the group. “Several years ago when we created the AT program, we knew we needed a place we could bring people and students so they could have hands-on experience.”

AT lab manager Clay Christensen said, “People come here when they need assistive technology—high-tech or low-tech, or mobility aids. It’s not uncommon for me to have someone come in with a need, and the solution either doesn’t exist or it is prohibitively expensive. We can create it for next to nothing.”

Christensen said in addition to the devices that he and his assistants create, the AT lab maintains a loan bank so services can be provided to people across the state of Utah.

“This is a wonderful program, and it can be easily duplicated,” he said. “This is possible. Money is always an issue, but there’s always a way around it. All this stuff exists in the world. A lot of it is thrown away, but so much of it can be reused.”

Christensen also showed the computer lab to the group, and demonstrated all the accessibility tools that are already built in to computers and smartphones.