

# COLLEGE Accessibility:

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The university has provided wide sidewalks to allow easy access for wheelchair users.

Edinboro University of Pennsylvania's faculty, students, and staff have made a firm commitment to students with disabilities.



# A Case Study

## The college years are a

transition between childhood and adulthood. It is a time when, with minimal risk or consequences, we can explore and experience a variety of what life has to offer.

It is an exciting time. But it can also be a difficult one. It can be even more difficult for people with disabilities, as they often must overcome physical and cultural barriers in order to maneuver through the challenges of the everyday life of a college student.

Some colleges do a better job of addressing the special needs of students with disabilities than others do. Recently, Frank Anderson (Buckeye PVA), Fred Tregaskes (Keystone PVA), and Frank Menendez and Scott Speser (PVA Architecture) visited the Edinboro University of Pennsylvania (EUP) campus. This school is an excellent example of how a university can provide for the special needs of students with disabilities, programmatically and in the physical environment.

As we arrived on the campus, we noticed an unusually large number of students using wheelchairs. Upon further investigation, we learned it was EUP's annual Disabilities Awareness Day, and students who use wheelchairs were holding a Wheel-a-Thon. In this event, people who have never used a wheelchair join groups led by those



who use chairs on a course throughout the campus in order to experience what it is like to use a chair for mobility. Participants seemed to enjoy themselves, and the event was extremely well attended in spite of the fact it was finals week. But the success of the Wheel-a-Thon was just a glimpse into the commitment the university has made to its students with disabilities.

## Accommodations

EUP is part of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's network of colleges and universities. Of the

A large number of wheelchair users turn out for Edinboro University of Pennsylvania's annual Disabilities Awareness Day, which includes a Wheel-a-Thon.

**TOP:** Edinboro University of Pennsylvania's annual Disabilities Awareness Day allows nonwheelchair users to experience wheeled mobility.



A feature of the Crawford Center is a ramp that connects the first and second levels. Everyone—not just wheelchair users—goes up and down the ramp.

7,700 undergraduate and graduate students, approximately 100 use wheelchairs. The university's commitment to accommodating students with disabilities began with advocacy by several faculty members in the 1980s. As a result, the university has implemented a comprehensive program to promote "independence, individuality, and determination" for *all* students enrolled.

Many programs have been implemented to support these concepts. These include a fully accessible campus and an Adapted Intramural and Recreational Sports Center that supports wheelchair basketball and football, adaptive snow skiing, and adaptive bowling. The university also sponsors wheelchair basketball and power-lifting teams. Delta Alpha Pi, an honor society for students with disabilities, is active on the campus.

Oversight for these programs is conducted by the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD). Their offices are located on the second floor of a new addition to the Crawford Center. A feature of this facility is a ramp that connects the first and second levels. Although there is an elevator, this ramp is used by wheelchair users as well as people who walk.

OSD addresses the needs of not only students who use wheelchairs but also those with other disabilities as well. Major services include personal care, van transportation, wheelchair

maintenance, learning-disability support services, a living-skills center, an academic aide system, a tactile laboratory, an assistive technology center, and a recreation/multipurpose room. Most important for the success of these programs, however, is the support of the entire university faculty, staff, and student population.

### The Highlands

In early 2009, EUP students began to occupy Phase I of the Highlands, a new \$115-million suite-style student housing and dining hall complex. Completion of Phase II is scheduled for 2011. Although the project is called the Highlands, the EUP campus is relatively flat and the topography is not an obstacle for wheelchair users.

Located at the easternmost boundary of the university campus, the new dormitory replaces three outdated residence halls. The complex is centrally located in proximity to classes, the student center, and sports and recreation opportunities.

The Highlands will provide students with a variety of housing options that have many of the amenities they enjoy at home, including wireless Internet access, privacy within their living spaces, and spacious and inviting common areas. The types of rooms and suites vary greatly. Most rooms are single or double bedrooms with in-suite and semi-suite configurations. The suites offer single- or double-occupancy sleeping rooms, bathrooms, and common living areas with a snack preparation area. The semi-suites offer double or single occupancy student sleeping rooms and bathrooms. In addition, there are single bedrooms with private bathrooms.

All furniture is provided, and the complex has a warm and inviting atmosphere. In addition, state-of-the-art geothermal technology makes the Highlands one of the nation's most energy-efficient dormitory facilities.

The complex's design continues the university's effort to provide equal opportunities for their

**OPPOSITE PAGE: Features of the fully accessible suites include roll-in showers, accessible kitchen and baths, cabinets mounted at a height to accommodate wheelchair users, and adequate space for wheelchair maneuverability.**

students with disabilities. University President Dr. Brown noted during his announcement of the project, “Developers will place special emphasis on creating new accessible-housing communities for students with disabilities, as well as common-area features to support living-learning programs within the residential environment.”

There will be a total of 96 fully accessible rooms and suites upon completion of the complex: 48 in Phase I and a minimum of 48 in Phase II. Accessible rooms and suites are “stacked,” providing the opportunity for students with disabilities to live with their friends on any floor in the complex. In addition, students with disabilities can live with other students within the same suite.

Features within the fully accessible suites include roll-in showers, accessible kitchen and baths, cabinets mounted at a height to accommodate wheelchair users, and adequate space for wheelchair maneuverability. The facility has accessible common areas and front-loading laundry equipment. Of particular note is that the beds specified for the project can be configured in two heights. The lower height can accommodate students who can transfer into bed from their wheelchair, while the higher one accommodates those who require the assistance of a lift. The entire facility is fully sprinklered, and



The new dormitory facility, at the easternmost boundary of the university campus, replaces three outdated residence halls that are currently being removed.

areas of refuge are provided in the stairwells in case of the need for evacuation.

The facility is designed to encourage students to interact with each other. As a result, all students have the opportunity to visit all dorm rooms. In order to help accomplish this, all doors are no less than 36 inches wide, and all plumbing fixtures are outfitted with lever-type faucets.

### Conclusion

Some people might consider Edinboro University of Pennsylvania to be a small college, but its commitment to accommodating the special needs of students with disabilities is huge. They have made the campus *very* accessible and continue to consider the needs of students with disabilities in future programs and construction projects.

With its commitment to provide all students the same opportunities and college experiences, Edinboro University of Pennsylvania serves as an example to other universities.

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