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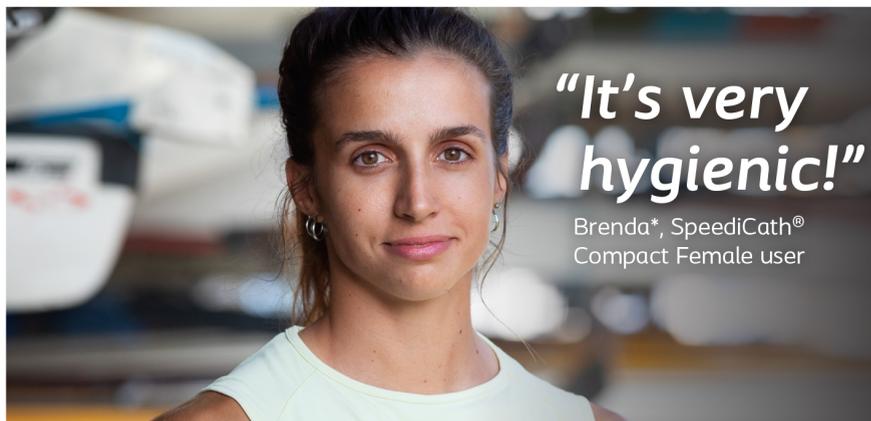
# WHEELS ON CAMPUS

A GUIDE TO WHEELCHAIR-FRIENDLY HIGHER EDUCATION



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## WHEELS ON CAMPUS CONTRIBUTORS



**Tim Gilmer**, project editor of *Wheels on Campus*, graduated with a bachelor's from UCLA in the late 1960s, added a master's from Southern Oregon University in 1977, taught writing classes in Portland for 12 years, then embarked on a writing career. After becoming an Oregon Literary Fellow, he went on to join *New Mobility* in 2000 and edited the magazine for 18 years. He has published more than 100 articles and 200 columns, as well as occasional movie reviews and essays. He and Sam, his wife and companion of 46 years, also own and operate an organic farm south of Portland, where they live with their daughter and son-in-law, four grandsons, and a resident barn owl.



Actor, writer and advocate for the inclusion of performers with disabilities in the entertainment industry, **Teal Sherer** is best known for creating the award-winning online comedy series, *My Gimp Life*. Most recently she starred in the Canadian premiere of the Pulitzer Prize-winning play *Cost of Living*. She also writes a regular column for *New Mobility* magazine and is the mother of River, her 5-year-old son. While she was gathering information, interviewing and writing four college profiles, she was busy 24/7 fulfilling the additional role of teacher during the stay-at-home pandemic. She lives in the Seattle area.



A spinal cord injury put **Derek Mortland** on the path of therapeutic recreation. Working with the Columbus Recreation and Parks Department, he gained expertise as an ADA accessible guidelines specialist working with ADA-Ohio and Access Ohio, where he did an accessibility survey of the University of Toledo's main and medical campuses. In 2018 he formed his own company, Advanced Access, LLC. He has done accessibility consulting for dozens of cities, including Chicago, Cleveland, Las Vegas, Miami, Minneapolis, Nashville and Syracuse, and has written for *New Mobility* as well. He lives in Columbus with his wife, Bobbi, his dog — Dean Martin — and three cats — Taz, Xena and Romeo.



While attending the University of California and earning a bachelor's in human geography and a master's in public policy, **Alex Ghenis**, a C5-6 quadriplegic, focused on how people with disabilities will be affected by the changing climate. He worked for six years at the World Institute on Disability, where he addressed inclusive urban design and how to adapt to climate change. He writes regularly for *New Mobility* and continues to be involved in local disability activism. Today he runs his own consulting firm addressing climate policies and financial empowerment from his home in Berkeley, California.



A frequent contributor to *New Mobility*, **Linda Mastandrea** earned her bachelor's from the University of Illinois in 1986 and her Juris Doctor from Chicago-Kent College of Law in 1994. While an undergraduate, she learned about wheelchair sports and disability advocacy, which led her to become a Paralympic athlete and focus her career on helping people with disabilities as an attorney, speaker, trainer and consultant. Mastandrea most recently was employed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Her job took her to Washington, D.C., where she currently lives with her Llewelin setter, Lucy.



## WHEELS ON CAMPUS

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For updates to this guide, follow *Wheels on Campus* through the pandemic and beyond at [newmobility.com](http://newmobility.com)



A freelance journalist for over a decade, **Aaron Broverman** has written for *Huffington Post*, *Vice*, *Creditcards.com*, *Greedyrates.ca*, *Yahoo* and more. He has been a regular contributor to *New Mobility* since 2009 when his work appeared in the “Fresh Faces, Fresh Voices” issue. His reporting and writing is the product of hard work and assertiveness, which explains why he considers himself an agitator. He is proud to be able to help wheelchair users choose their post-secondary institution through this first-of-its-kind guide. He lives in Ontario, Canada, with his wife and young son.



**Kasey Kaler** develops and manages the content and oversees the editorial direction of *LivAbility* magazine, published in coordination with Ability 360, Arizona’s premier independent living center and adaptive recreation and fitness complex. She is a graduate of Gonzaga University’s sport and athletic administration master’s program and Arizona State’s Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication undergraduate program. For the last six years, Kaler remained true to her passion for producing content for a multitude of platforms and sharing stories to help people view differences as an asset. She lives in the Phoenix area.



**Steve Wright**, writer, disability rights advocate and marketer of design services, is also a Pulitzer-nominated, award-winning journalist with 40 years of experience. Wright has contributed to *New Mobility* for two decades and writes about the impact of urban design and town planning on people with disabilities. He served a decade as the senior urban policy advisor for the chair of the Miami City Commission, creating affordable housing, economic development and park space. Wright’s entire professional and personal life has focused on issues of inclusion and equity. Based in Miami, he blogs at [urbantravelandaccessibility.blogspot.com](http://urbantravelandaccessibility.blogspot.com).



A wet freeway and a dangerous curve taken too fast sent **Ellen Stohl** down a new path, now as a wheelchair user. Initially, she thought living with a C7 spinal cord injury meant a full life was impossible, but she challenged herself and society’s views of who she could be. With a well-written, persuasive letter and a portfolio of tasteful photos, she became the first woman with a significant disability to appear in *Playboy* magazine. Today she teaches classes at Cal State Northridge, is a professional speaker, writer, wife and mom. Her goal, as always, is to defy arbitrary limitations, change attitudes, create access and live life fully.



Writer, humorist and disability activist **Mike Ervin** lives in Chicago, where he helped found the Chicago ADAPT chapter. As a journalist, his writing has been published in everything from *Jobber* and *Warehouse Executive* magazine to *The New York Times*, and he is a regular contributor to *The Progressive* and *New Mobility* magazines. As a playwright, his work has been produced in theaters across the U.S. His published books are *Smart Ass Cripple’s Little Red Book*, which has a blue cover; *Smart Ass Cripple’s Little Yellow Book*, which has a red cover; and *Smart Ass Cripple’s Little Chartreuse Book*, which has a black cover. Read his blog at [SmartAssCripple.com](http://SmartAssCripple.com).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This guide was produced with the generous support of the Craig H. Neilsen Foundation, which shares our vision of individuals with spinal cord injuries living full and productive lives as active participants in our communities. The foundation is the largest private funder of spinal cord injury research, rehabilitation, clinical training, and programmatic support in the United States and Canada. For more information, visit [chnfoundation.org](http://chnfoundation.org)



# The Importance of Higher Education for Wheelchair Users

By Tim Gilmer

If only a guide like this had been available during my college years.

I entered the world of disability at the age of 20, having completed my sophomore year at UCLA. That summer, I took a daytrip with a friend of mine, a young pilot and sophomore at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo. We flew in his uncle's small plane from our hometown in the San Joaquin Valley to the California Coast to pick up some supplies from his campus apartment, then flew to a coastal ranch to visit a friend of mine. We never made it home, crashing in the coastal mountains. He died instantly, and I survived. From that moment until this day, I have been paralyzed from the waist down, a full-time wheelchair user.

When I returned to the UCLA campus eight months later, having been hospitalized for nearly five months, everything was exactly the same as the day I left for summer vacation — everything except my ability to navigate and use all of what the campus had to offer. About half the campus was no longer accessible to me. There were even fewer buildings and classrooms that I could enter independently. I had to plan my curriculum according to which buildings I could enter and how many floors were served by elevators. I had to change my major, find a workable place to live independently, and rely on finding a parking spot somewhere near the center of campus to even begin to access what was now available to me. In short, I had to accept that my choices were limited and somehow find workable solutions.

My return to UCLA took place in 1965, 25 years prior to the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

While extreme, my experience is by no means uncommon for today's wheelchair users, each of whom must learn to navigate issues far beyond the physical experience of disability. The greatest obstacles we all face are mostly cultural. In the world of higher education, we must upend long-held assumptions by others who think our abilities are severely limited because our bodies work differently. The beauty of acquiring knowledge is that, given equal opportunity, we can excel not only in learning, but in applying what we learn as well as, or better, than anyone.



UW-Whitewater Chancellor Beverly Kopper shakes hands with 2017 graduate Yarden Hershko.

Can a quadriplegic become a doctor? Yes, it is happening as you read this. Can a woman who depends on a ventilator and a power wheelchair teach astrophysics? Of course — our physical disabilities are no match for the power of our intellect. And colleges and universities throughout the nation that are readily accessible can function as learning and training centers for those who meet admission requirements, no matter their physical condition.

## The Current Challenge

The most blatant barriers to equal opportunity in higher education for wheelchair users still exist. Many colleges and universities have pre-1900 buildings. Today, 30 years post-ADA, finding a campus that is 100% accessible is a rarity. Physical access is critical to the full range of college experience, even now, in the age of remote learning. While online learning can be useful in many ways, as it has been during the coronavirus pandemic, the collaborative physical learning environment is still the best way to learn. Immersion is superior to isolation, especially for wheelchair users and others with significant physical disabilities, who have traditionally been marginalized.

Independence, or personal autonomy, is especially critical

for students with disabilities. Wheelchair users, whose varying needs relate to their unique conditions, are especially prone to being overlooked. One might think the opposite is true, that wheelchair users would be easily served since their need for physical accessibility is obvious. But physical access, as noted earlier, is only part of the problem. Social integration is every bit as important.

On college campuses, the creation of an inclusive welcoming atmosphere, from top to bottom, can create a sense of belonging. In this way, everyone can take part in making college a natural experience for those who are too often treated as “special” rather than equal participants in the quest for knowledge and certification of competency.

Being able to manage one’s daily personal needs and effectively utilize complex adaptive equipment is also critical for the wheelchair-using population, yet the details of these processes are not well known by the medical community, much less the general public, which includes college administrators, professors and college staff.

This publication was formulated with the purpose of helping students who use wheelchairs make informed decisions on choosing a college or university. It is the brainchild of *New Mobility* magazine, which has dedicated itself to informing wheelchair users about a broad range of lifestyle issues since 1989 and is now the membership publication of United Spinal Association. In 2019, the management of both *New Mobility*

and United Spinal hired me to coordinate and execute the gathering of specific, detailed information that would culminate in a publishable guide to wheelchair-friendly colleges and universities that would be widely disseminated.

In keeping with the tradition of *New Mobility*, we decided that the best way to put together what came to be known as *Wheels on Campus* was to employ reporters and writers with firsthand knowledge of the college experience for the intended audience. Counting myself as a writer-reporter, 10 of us set out to gather information and write about the 20 best choices for this project. All of us are college graduates, and nine of us are wheelchair users. The 10th is married to a wheelchair user and has a long career writing about accessibility in the built environment.

Prior to the selection of *Wheels on Campus* staff, an objective tool for evaluation of colleges had to be created in the form of a survey. How we went about creating the survey, building an appropriate email list and implementing the plan will be explained in the next section — a valuable tool in itself for understanding not only how our choices were made, but why. This information should be especially valuable to disability services professionals and staff interested in improving their service delivery.

Speaking for myself and the staff of NM and the management of United Spinal, it is our fervent hope that *Wheels on Campus* will prove to be a useful and encouraging evaluative tool for prospective and existing college students of all ages.

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# Who's in, Who's Out, How We Made Our Choices

To pin down a solid definition of “wheelchair-friendly,” we first created a detailed survey based on a series of questions intended to clarify which colleges have been most successful in building a comprehensive campus culture that best serves students who use wheelchairs.

We took as our model a 1998 *New Mobility* cover story written by then-editor Barry Corbet. We wanted to update and expand that concept into a full magazine-sized issue, complete with student profiles, campus evaluations, statistical sidebars, related articles and resources. As part of our research, we studied other disability-related college rankings but found that these lists had few wheelchair-specific criteria other than basic “accessibility.”

So we added questions to our survey that reflected an overall campus culture that clearly acknowledged the full range of wheelchair users’ needs and interests, such as adaptive sports and recreation, wheelchair repair options, appropriate physical therapy, nearby rehabilitation facilities and more. In short, those features that make up a truly wheelchair-friendly campus experience.

The survey proved to be exacting, a tool that would both screen in potential wheelchair-friendly colleges and screen out those that fell short, according to our criteria.

To build our mailing list, we turned to the 2020 edition of *U.S. News & World Report’s* Best Colleges. We identified the disability offices of the top 100 public schools, cross-referenced those with the top 100 national universities, added in

## Survey Results

Overall, raw scores were calculated by counting the total number of wheelchair-inclusive criteria (programs, services, community support, etc.) that each campus said they have. The criteria themselves were created using our subjective evaluation of what constituted a “wheelchair-friendly” factor. Not all campuses that responded were considered for inclusion in our top 20. The wide range of raw scores followed, roughly, a classic bell curve. All schools that scored in the top 50% in raw scores were considered for inclusion. Raw scores of our top 20 schools ranged from 25 to 44 out of a possible total of 45. We chose not to publish individual scores because of the subjective nature of the questions. The scores were used only as a screening tool for which colleges would be further evaluated.



Lyndsey Zurbrugg loads basketball equipment at UW-Whitewater (see profile, page 21).

50 top liberal arts schools, dozens of the best engineering and tech schools, and topped it off with 50 of the best historically Black colleges and universities. To that we added our original 1998 *New Mobility* list plus other somewhat-similar lists, then sprinkled in colleges that we learned about through contact with the disability community. The result was a manageable email list of about 400 institutions of higher learning from every region in the United States.

The timing of our survey emails and in-person reporting ran into interruption after interruption. First came the 2019 Thanksgiving holiday, followed by the Christmas holiday and winter break. Next came the onset of the coronavirus pandemic and spring break in 2020. By that time we had started gathering specific information from our team of reporters and writers, but it was only a beginning. As the effects of the pandemic began to sink in and campuses closed down, our job of boots-on-the-ground verification of survey results with interviews and campus visits had slowed to a crawl.

But we persisted. We gathered personal emails and phone numbers from students using our network of United Spinal chapters, which are located in every state. Gradually we turned the raw information into stories and photos and the layout you see here. And during the entire process, which lasted from October 2019 to October 2020, we learned what worked, where we need to improve, and hopefully, how to continue the process, which can only get better as we refine it.

## What We Learned

The nature and extent of disability services in national colleges and universities has undergone tremendous expansion since the

passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. However, an unintended byproduct of that growth has been a disproportionate emphasis on delivery of disability-related services to those with non-apparent disabilities. What has benefitted an expanding population of students with learning disabilities and mental health conditions, for instance, has resulted in a corresponding de-emphasis on the “nuts and bolts” of physical accessibility.

The good news is that more campuses than ever now have at least partially-welcoming environments for wheelchair users. But as decent options expand, fewer wheelchair users choose to attend those extraordinary schools that originally recognized and addressed their full range of needs. If those institutions that have begun to incorporate physical and programmatic accessibility continue to improve and eventually achieve results similar to the pioneers in wheelchair-friendly culture, that could culminate in widespread equal opportunity. In time this would lead to more equitable career and job opportunities and better quality of life for wheelchair users, whose employment and income statistics have remained at the lowest rung of the socioeconomic ladder for decades.

## Good Choices That Were Not Included and Why

A one-time survey is bound to turn up results that are not entirely representative. A number of well-known universities were so preoccupied with the pandemic that they either missed the opportunity to respond to our survey or they declined in order to concentrate on their most pressing need. This is understandable. We intend to continue to contact these and other institutions in hopes of adding to our list of 20. In other words, we have made a good start.

A further disappointment was a similar lack of response from top historically Black colleges and universities. Complications related to the pandemic, staff limitations and spare budgets no doubt contributed to the sparse response. Of those

## 100% Building Accessibility

Exactly 50% of the colleges who responded to our survey said yes to the following question: Can all buildings on campus be entered independently by a wheelchair user? Of the campuses we chose to include in our top 20 choices, 16 answered yes to 100% building access:

Auburn University	University of Florida
Ball State University	University of Illinois
Cal State Northridge	University of Michigan
Hofstra University	University of Nevada
Miami of Ohio	University of Oregon
Southern Illinois University	University of Washington
Texas A&M University	University of Wisconsin
University of Arizona	Wright State University

that did complete the survey, only a handful were in contention, but none met the strict criteria we had laid down to make the top 20. Because we were unable to include a single HBCU in this edition of *Wheels on Campus*, we chose to interview Carmen Jones, an entrepreneur and leader in the disability community who uses a wheelchair and is also a graduate of Hampton University (see page 33). We plan on re-contacting a number of HBCUs to consider for updates to this guide.

## Pandemic Effects and Making the Best Use of *Wheels on Campus*

At publication time, we had all come to know the pandemic as an ever-changing unprecedented threat to our way of living and our very lives. Colleges and universities have been especially difficult to remodel, since they function as densely-populated communities in themselves and are made up of mostly young people who thrive on social contact. If there is

## Number of Registered Wheelchair-Using Students on Campus

An important criterion for inclusion in our top 20, in addition to scoring highly on our survey, was the number of wheelchair users registered by disability resource offices on each campus. There was a strong correlation between the number of registered wheelchair users and a full range of programs and activities that create a truly wheelchair-inclusive culture.

### Campuses with 40-100 wheelchair users:

- Cal State Northridge
- University of Illinois
- Wright State University
- University of Wisconsin, Whitewater
- University of Arizona
- University of Minnesota
- Portland State University

### With 10-30:

- University of Washington
- University of California, Berkeley
- University of Florida
- Texas A&M, College Station
- Ball State University
- Auburn University
- University of Nevada, Las Vegas
- Hofstra University
- Michigan State University
- University of Oregon

### With 5-7:

- University of Michigan
- Southern Illinois University
- Miami of Ohio



University of Illinois



University of Michigan

one main lesson we can draw from the spring, summer and early fall terms, it is that continuing an uninterrupted college campus education is most safely and efficiently achieved through a careful, comprehensive plan that combines small in-class groups with expanded online learning opportunities. Also, those colleges that have instituted aggressive testing and contact tracing protocols, combined with immediate separation of those who test positive, eventually produce the lowest percentage of positive tests and the greatest overall control.

As for how best to use this guide, nothing can substitute for due diligence on the part of each student. We have done our best to come up with 20 good possibilities for students who use wheelchairs. But we must acknowledge that these are not the only institutions of higher learning that can work for today's students. What this guide does best is give students a look at how today's leading wheelchair-friendly colleges have created their welcoming cultures: those programs, activities and resources — as well as the way they interweave with the overall campus experience — that provide the best chance of maximizing your abilities and potential.

One final word on what works best: Even though campuses are now generally aware of the needs of wheelchair-using students, assertive self-advocacy is critical to your success. Each disability is different, and each student expresses their strengths in a unique way. In a similar vein, each student knows what is needed to overcome certain limitations related to disability. Communicate your needs in a forceful, yet respectful way.

— Tim Gilmer

## Ratio of Wheelchair Using Students to Undergraduate Population

While the total number of wheelchair users on campus was most often associated with the creation of a truly wheelchair-welcoming culture, another interesting criterion was the ratio of wheelchair users to total number of undergraduates. This is a figure that may or may not be important to students who use wheelchairs. Some may be comfortable with going to a large university with a very small number of wheelchair users. Others may prefer to go to a campus where other wheelchair users are numerous. It is an individual preference.

We used the ratios as a secondary evaluative factor. It is subject to change each term with fluctuating attendance, as is the number of wheelchair users. However, the total number, not the ratio, is most important, since it is most closely associated with the need for wheelchair-inclusive programs, activities and venues. Those schools with historically high numbers of wheelchair users also have a proven record of meeting those needs.



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# WHEELCHAIR FRIENDLY COLLEGES 1-10



# UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

Urbana-Champaign

## FIRST IN DISABILITY CULTURE SINCE 1949



**Location:** Urbana-Champaign, small city, population 89,169; 1,783-acre campus

**2020 tuition and fees:** in-state: \$16,210; out-of-state: \$33,352

**2020 undergraduate enrollment:** 33,915; student-faculty ratio: 20:1

**Popular majors:** accounting, psychology, economics, electric/electronic engineering

**Ranked #14 nationally in Top Public Schools (Best Colleges 2020, U.S. News & World Report)**

**Number of registered wheelchair-using students in 2020:** 98

**Disability Resources/Services:** 217-333-4603, [disability@illinois.edu](mailto:disability@illinois.edu); [www.disability.illinois.edu](http://www.disability.illinois.edu)

By Linda Mastandrea

I am home. It's the refrain that fills my head as I drive down Green Street approaching campus. The University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign was my physical home for four life-changing, transformative years in the 1980s, and it has been my emotional home ever since. But it was only after I enrolled that I learned that this campus was on the forefront of serving students with disabilities. And, for the first time ever, I was exposed to sports because of its world-class wheelchair sports programs.

While there I discovered — despite sitting out physical education my first 18 years — that I could be an athlete and compete at the highest level, the Paralympic Games. And I also learned that a wheelchair was a tool that increased my independence and mobility. It was here that my career path as a lawyer and advocate for disability issues was initiated.

My experience is not unique. Matt Buchi, an L3 paraplegic and student/athlete, played wheelchair basketball from 2003-

2008 and earned both a bachelor's and master's in recreation, sport and tourism. After brief coaching stints in Alabama, British Columbia and Oklahoma, he came back to Champaign in 2013 to coach the men's wheelchair basketball team. "There is nothing in the world like Illinois and being part of the extensive legacy of our sport," says Buchi. "It's about the family you build with your teammates. Illinois prepares us to be better than we are."

Stephanie Wheeler, a T10 para and now the women's wheelchair basketball coach, earned her bachelor's in kinesiology as a student from 1999-2004 while playing on the Illini women's wheelchair basketball team, winning three national championships. She also played on the U.S. women's national team for nine years, winning gold at the 2004 and 2008 Paralympic Games and gold and silver at three world championships.

Wheeler left Illinois for Alabama to pursue a master's in human performance, but returned in 2009 when she had the chance to coach the women's wheelchair basketball team. "It always felt like home. I knew I would have the resources to be successful and excel here and would be pushed outside of my comfort zone," she says.

Illinois' Varsity Adapted Athletics Program has a long and storied history spanning more than 60 years. As an official Paralympic Training Center, Illinois has helped athletes reach the podium in the Paralympics, as well as win world and national championships, in track and field, basketball and swimming. The Illini men have won 15 national hoops titles, and the women, 14. On the track, Illini have won medals in every Paralympic Games since their inception.

## Much More Than Sports

The University of Illinois is not solely a sports powerhouse. Students with disabilities from all over the world come to



**Matt Buchi, left, played for Illinois before returning to coach.**



On and off the court, Illinois offers a vibrant culture of inclusion and mentoring that spans from sports to self-advocacy.

Illinois because of its reputation. While there they learn the skills they need to be independent and use those skills to successfully transition to careers in law, government, marketing, business, nonprofits and more.

Ryan Wilson graduated in 2018 with a degree in broadcast journalism. He loved radio, spending part of his time at Illinois on the WPGU show, *Illini Drive*. As a junior, he started the radio show, “Rollin’ Illini” and did the show every week for two years before handing it off. Now a freelancer, Wilson recently worked on a Big Ten Network film about none other than Tim Nugent, the founder of the Division of Disability Resources and Educational Services at U of I, the first university program in the nation for students with disabilities.

DRES, with 44 staff and 75 volunteers and interns, offers a comprehensive range of accommodations and services for students with disabilities, including campus aides, a list of accessible off-campus housing, and one of the best — if not *the* best — personal attendant programs in the nation. In addition, computer labs with adaptive software are available, along with scholarships for wheelchair users and nearby medical and rehabilitation services.

In addition to DRES, the university’s Office of Campus Life oversees programs and services that round out a student’s Illinois experience — offering not only sports, but also recreation, leisure and volunteerism activities for students at every level. Delta Sigma Omicron, a rehabilitation service fraternity, has played a pioneering role in advancing education, employment and transportation for people with disabilities since 1948.

Students also have access to a gym, fitness center, physical therapist and an athletic trainer. Jeannette Elliott, a physical therapist at Illinois since 2004, works with the “non-athletes” on improving their general wellness. “I love it when a student comes in who doesn’t want to exercise at all, doesn’t think they have the capacity to do anything, and they morph into someone who not only wants to move but enjoys it,” she says.

The recently renovated State Farm Center is not only home to Illini basketball games, but also concerts and other events, with wheelchair seating and accessible restrooms on every level and seven elevators throughout the building. On-demand access to lift-equipped bus transportation with four buses running from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. serves the campus Mondays through Fridays.

### The Illinois Experience

Barrett Patton, a power chair user and junior majoring in communication and Spanish, came to Illinois from Tennessee. “I knew I wanted to go to college but didn’t know how I would get support with my activities of daily living,” he says. “I need help with things like showering, dressing and toileting.” Researching colleges led him to Illinois and Beckwith Residential Support Services. “Literally, no other school I talked to provided this level of support services.” Patton’s years at Illinois have helped him learn to be independent, manage a staff of personal assistants, and navigate classes and social situations. DRES provides one of the few university programs

## Barrett Patton: Advocating for Independent Living in a Pandemic

In mid-summer, 2020, with just one term to go to graduate from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Barrett Patton, a power chair user with cerebral palsy who needs help with activities of daily living, is worried about his on-campus living setup. An out-of-state student from Tennessee, Patton needs to live on campus and have daily assistance from personal care attendants.

But the coronavirus pandemic stands

Disability Resources and Educational Services' independent living management program for students is at the core of why many students like Patton choose Illinois. But now Patton's cohort of 20 students is being told, officially, that safety concerns will prevent them from moving back to Nugent Hall. Patton is skeptical and thinks it may be a kind of knee-jerk paternalism that inadvertently deprives a distinct class of people of equal opportunity. "At first the reason they gave was they don't have staff to support our needs. But other communications said it was deemed too risky to allow certain students to return. It took away our choice, our right to make that decision. Why should the 20 of us be singled out? Why should the choice be taken away from us?"

A group of eight students using Beckwith support services, including Patton, have voiced their desire to come

to the rooms. But we have a lot of work to do to come up with staffing. The costs associated with Beckwith typically are paid for by the Illinois Department of Vocational Rehab, but we were told early on that VR money earmarked to cover the program can't be used for alternative staff and housing for individuals. We are in contact with VR to reinstate funding."

But there's a Catch-22. Voc Rehab says that financial support has to come from a different arm of the department — Home Services — which requires in-state residency. That leaves Patton and other out-of-state students in — at best — limbo. "It may take 60-90 days just to open a case."

The independent living education the university gave Patton and others is about advocacy and demanding what they need, so in that sense Patton is a success story. "All of what we learned is coming to a head. This whole movement was based on choice, not asking for ignorance of risks. Nobody is free of risk, but [administrators tried to take] away our choice. At the center of all this is self-determination."

Three days prior to resumption of fall term, Patton returned to campus as part of a five-family group in a similar situation. Rooms will be provided, but normal program staffing will not. The cost of that staffing for one term, roughly \$30,000, will be borne by the five families.

After a valiant effort and insistent advocacy, Patton's drive paid off, but he didn't get everything he wanted. His motivation to succeed, however, is still intact and may even have been strengthened. "I will get my degree," he says.

in the way. On July 7, the university, with perhaps the best living situation in the nation for students with complications like Patton's, announced it would not reopen Nugent Hall — home to Beckwith Residential Support Services — in the fall. Beckwith sets the highest standard in comprehensive living accommodations for college students. "That is why Beckwith appealed to me," says Patton. "We hire, train and manage our aides. The rooms have specialized equipment like lifts. To be frank, it's the only university where my parents and I felt I would be safe."

back even though the program has been suspended. Parents and students have been advocating for continued support, but that is not all. "We proposed potential plans," says Patton. "The main one being to at least allow us to use the rooms. Even Beckwith administration would not express support. We even offered to supply all our own attendants."

Patton wrote and posted a petition in support of their plan that got over 5,000 signatures in a few days. "We finally got an email from University Housing that said they would allow us to have access

in the United States that teaches independent living skills. "Now I have a greater idea of what my possibilities are," he says. "For so long, my disability was the lens through which I considered everything. I was always thinking, can I do this? Can I go there? Now, I ask *how* can I do it, not *if* I can." Patton plans to be a Spanish language interpreter in the courts.

Matt Ludolph, a senior in interdisciplinary health sciences, left his studies at University of Illinois, Chicago, after sustaining a spinal cord injury in 2012 and becoming a quadriplegic power chair user. When he decided he was ready to return to school,

he chose to attend the Urbana-Champaign campus because of Beckwith support services. "I spent so long fearing the unknown. I couldn't wrap my head around how I could go back to school with my injury," he says. "But now I'm more self-assured, more confident in my ability to do things for myself."

"I love Illinois," adds Patton. "It has drastically changed the way I see my own possibilities. And I can't help but wonder — what would happen if every institution in the country put more time and energy into supporting students with disabilities?" (For more details on Patton's life, see sidebar, above.)

"At the center of all this is self-determination."

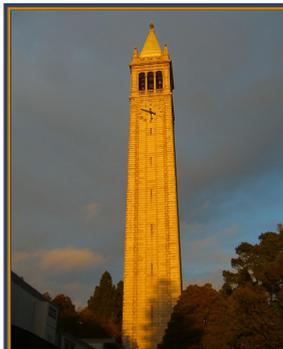
ILLINOIS

I'M AN ILLINI!

# UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Berkeley

## A PIONEER IN DISABILITY INCLUSION INVOLVING THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY



**Location:** Berkeley, semi-urban, near San Francisco, population 122,000; 1,232-acre campus  
**2020 tuition and fees:** in-state: \$14,184; out-of-state: \$43,176; avg. financial aid: \$24,500  
**2020 undergraduate enrollment:** 30,853; student-faculty ratio: 18:1  
**Popular majors:** economics, social sciences, engineering, biological and medical sciences  
**Ranked #4** in Best Global Universities (Best Colleges 2020, *U.S. News & World Report*)  
**Number of registered wheelchair-using students in 2020:** 25  
**Disabled Students' Program:** 510-642-0518, dsp@berkeley.edu; dsp.berkeley.edu

By Alex Ghenis

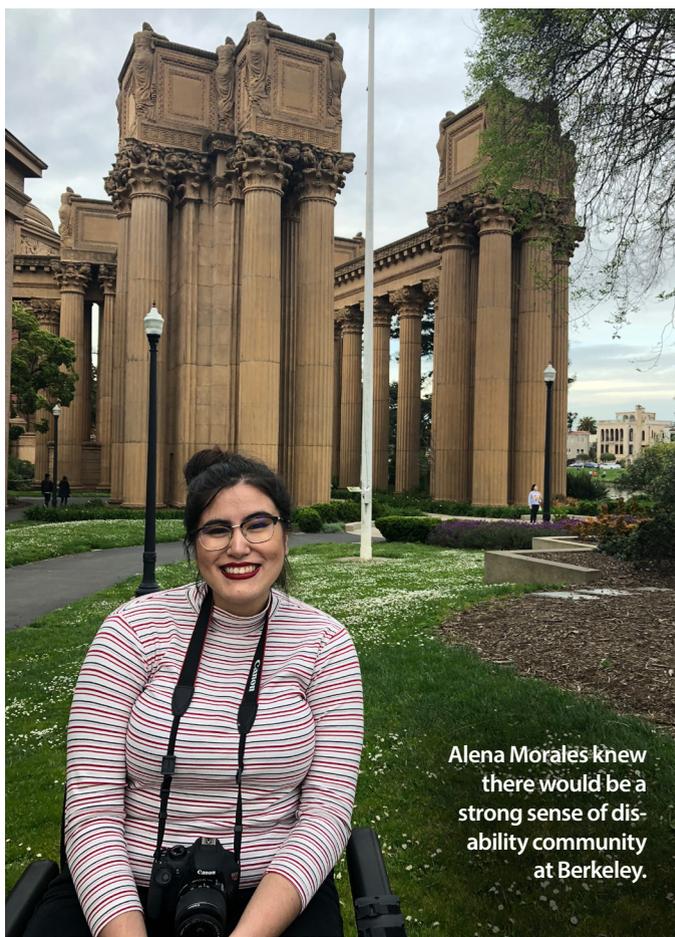
University of California, Berkeley, appears almost out of nowhere when you approach it from Telegraph Avenue to the south. The campus opens on Sproul Plaza, featuring a range of buildings, including an administrative building, student services, a large grassy Memorial Glade and the Campanile — the third-tallest Clarion clock tower in the world. The campus sits on the side of a hill just east of San Francisco Bay, so taller buildings and open areas have panoramic views, including of the San Francisco skyline and Golden Gate Bridge. Students can engage in cutting-edge research from sociology to physics. The Golden Bears' athletics program hosts dozens of sports and has a new hillside football stadium with beautiful views of the Bay Area.

The University has several programs and services to support wheelchair-using students, including accessible equipment in the gym, a wheelchair basketball team, a list of accessible off-campus housing and connections to off-campus wheelchair repair. The Disabled Students' Program provides a full range of accommodation support services, including computer labs with adaptive software. Karen

Nielsen, the DSP's director for the past four years, is committed to improving the program even more. "We are working to provide services beyond what the ADA requires," she says. "Our focus is on retention and student success, not just the access that the law requires."

Alena Morales arrived at UC Berkeley in 2016, not only for its academics and services, but also because of its history. "It was the birthplace of the disability rights movement," she explains, referencing activist Ed Roberts and the self-titled

"rolling quads" who attended Cal in the 1960s and pushed for more accessibility and services. "I did a lot of research my senior year of high school," Morales says, "and it convinced me this was a place I wanted to go." She also cites the strong disability community in the city of Berkeley and the East Bay in general, including the first-ever center for independent living, a backup attendant care and accessible transportation non-profit, and the Ed Roberts Campus with over a dozen disability organizations (see more on the Ed Roberts Campus on page 15). "I was very interested in connections with community members," she says.



Alena Morales knew there would be a strong sense of disability community at Berkeley.

The famed activist movement of the 1960s mellowed out by the early 2010s, but a team of advocates, including Morales, has rekindled the movement in just the past few years. The Student Coalition for Disability Rights (formerly the Disabled Students Union) was quite small when she arrived: “Freshman year, there were two of us,” she says, laughing. “I spent a lot of time flyer-ing for new members.” The progress since has been impressive. There is now a coalition of five disability organizations that is pushing for its own community space in a student-services building. Weekly meetings range from five to a couple dozen people, with some recent events drawing 50 attendees.

Nate Tilton, a senior, is a scooter-and-power-chair-using member of a campus veterans group in the Disabled Students Coalition. He tells the story of the revival of the No Limits Program at the University gym, which Tilton describes as “basically free personal training for any disabled students on campus.” The program ran off a three-year grant and supported the health of many students, but funding ran out in May 2019.

The Disabled Students Coalition pushed for the reinstatement of the program, spearheaded by fellow Coalition member Josh Levine. It took them eight months to secure another strong grant to keep the program running. “We feel that one of the benefits is they do seem to listen to their students,” he says about the school’s administration, although it sometimes takes a big group and a team effort.



Nate Tilton

## Wide Choice of Classes and Community Involvement

Students have a range of disability-focused classes as part of a Disability Studies minor, including classes from English, City Planning, Architecture, Computer Science, Public Health, Art, Social Welfare and other departments. One of the classes Tilton really enjoyed was Anthropology 189 (Disability, Ethnography and Design) taught by Professor Karen Nakamura: “I think it’s a class anyone should take,” he says. Tilton also works regularly in UC Berkeley’s “Mad Lab” (formally the UC Berkeley Disability Lab), a project by Nakamura to get disabled students and allies more involved in emerging technologies and innovation around access.



Students can easily catch an accessible ride around campus.

Photo © Melinda Young Stuart/Creative Commons

“The idea is to take creative technologies such as CNC machines and laser cutters,” he says, “and modify them so people with disabilities can use them more easily and also link with the disability and tech communities in the Bay Area that are not open to people with disabilities.”

As is the case with other universities, not everything about Cal is perfect. The beautiful views of the Golden Gate Bridge come with a downside: occasional steep grades. Power chairs sometimes struggle, and manual chair users get a challenging workout traversing the campus. On the upside, golf-car-sized shuttles are available to take students with disabilities around campus, and a couple of the regular campus shuttles can accommodate wheelchairs. Physical accessibility can unfortunately still be an issue: UC Berkeley was established 112 years before the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act and has several very old buildings with accessibility repairs waiting in a long pipeline.

Ella Callow, the director of the Office for Disability Compliance, focuses on policies, procedures and practices happening outside the classroom. “People ask, ‘Why do you need the big conference room with only four people in the meeting?’ It’s so we have enough room that wheelchairs don’t run over guide dogs!” One of her half-time employees is Morales, the advocate in the Student Coalition for Disability Rights and one of two wheelchair users in the office. She manages the “loop” shuttle system and has found the work a source of mentorship and optimism. “To see people navigate work with their disability, and succeed full-time — when I’m preparing for the future — it’s very empowering.”

Overall, there’s more to Berkeley than academics and activism. Morales has found a strong community in the Rochester apartments of the Berkeley Student Cooperative — a student-run nonprofit with nearly 1,300 members and many affordable accessible housing options, including both accessible apartments and solo rooms in larger homes with communal kitchens and living rooms. Accessible recreation goes with the territory.

“My happy place is the Berkeley Marina and adaptive cycling with the Bay Area Outreach and Recreation Program,” she says. She also describes herself as “a theater geek” and former member of Theater for Charity, a low-key group that focuses on original comedy. “Everything we do goes to charity,” she says. Other members were unsure about sketch comedy with a wheelchair-user, but the longer Morales was in the group, “the more other people became more aware of disability issues,” she says.



## Berkeley's Landmark Ed Roberts Campus

About 1.5 miles south of UC Berkeley's campus sits the Ed Roberts Campus, a two-story office building full of disability-focused organizations. The ERC, which opened in November 2010, is named after the founder of the modern disability rights movement, Ed Roberts, who fought to attend UC Berkeley as a post-polio quadriplegic. He was admitted after several appeals, then led a whole crew of "rolling quads" to improve access in Berkeley and beyond. He

and elevators directly to the underground Bay Area Rapid Transit station. It was built with universal design in mind: Every main entrance, office entrance, restroom and community room door has an automatic opener with buttons placed at both foot and waist height; there is a large spiral ramp to the second floor, in addition to two elevators; and the rental rooms have audio loop systems for people who are hard of hearing.

Seven tenants are the "founding partners" of the ERC. In addition to the first CIL, the WID and DREDF, also included are the Bay Area Outreach and Recreation Program, the Center for Accessible Technology, the Computer Technologies Program, and the parenting resource Through the Looking Glass. Other building tenants include a community health clinic, a center for people with developmental disabilities, a branch of the California Department of Rehabilitation, the California Telephone Access Program, the Lighthouse for the Blind, Toolworks and the ADA Café.

Some of the organizations are especially useful to wheelchair users, including Berkeley students. The CIL supports students through advocacy, independent living skills instruction, housing assistance, connecting with personal attendants and more. "Being on top of the transit station and being housed with other disability organizations is very valuable," says Thomas Gregory, the CIL's executive director. Clients have easy access to several disability services, as well as a launching spot to learn about using public transportation.

While many ERC tenants focus on the logistics of independent living, BORP provides recreation opportunities. The nonprofit operates the fitness studio in the building (with classes ranging from strength-training to adaptive yoga), hosts outings, and manages an adaptive cycling program near the Bay Area waterfront. Team sports for people with physical disabilities include wheelchair basketball, power soccer and sled hock-

advocated for independent living – the ability to live in the community outside of nursing homes – founded the first center for independent living, co-organized the landmark Section 504 protests in San Francisco, served as director of the California Department of Rehabilitation, and later cofounded the World Institute on Disability. When Roberts passed away in 1995, advocates around Berkeley looked to memorialize him in some way.

Susan Henderson is the executive director of Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund, an advocacy nonprofit and one of the seven founding organizations of the ERC. "We thought, 'Let's build something [in honor of Ed],'" she says. After more than a decade of planning, fundraising and construction, the ERC was complete. It includes over a dozen offices, a large lobby and event space, a café, an art studio, several conference rooms, an outdoor patio, a playground,



Photo © Tim Griffith/ Leddy Maytum Stacy Architects

**An elegant spiral ramp sends a strong message about universal design.**

ey (hockey is youth-only). Rick Smith, executive director, notes that the cycling center has "maybe 350 users per year — people can drop in, although now we are doing appointments because of COVID-19." BORP's Adventures and Outings program also takes 100 trips per year, such as longer outings to wineries and state parks, or places nearby like Ghirardelli Chocolate Company in San Francisco. "It's a game changer that gives people a fuller, richer life," says Smith. "And it's an extra plus for students looking for respite from studying."

With the Ed Roberts Campus and its networks, students can keep their lives stable and grow through school and beyond. Gregory has even built partnerships with UC Berkeley in ways that include students with and without disabilities. One successful program was the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program, often just called "VITA Tax." Students and staff from Cal's Boalt Law School, a volunteer tax attorney and the CIL partnered to help the disability community (including students with disabilities) file their taxes. Job opportunities are another great feature. Cal students often sign up for internships with ERC's tenants, and most tenants have at least one alumnus on staff. With Berkeley's strong disability community, the connection between ERC and Cal is bound to be long-lasting.

*Visit [edrobertscampus.org](http://edrobertscampus.org) for more.*



Photo © Tim Griffith/ Leddy Maytum Stacy Architects

# WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY

Fairborn, Ohio

## AN INNOVATOR IN DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE CAMPUS DESIGN



**Location:** Fairborn, Ohio, small city, population 33,736; 557-acre campus  
**2020 tuition and fees: in-state:** \$9,578; out-of-state: \$18,996  
**2020 undergraduate enrollment:** 10,925; student-faculty ratio: 14:1  
**Popular majors:** business, management, marketing, engineering  
**Ranked #1** in management information systems (College Factual 2019 rankings)  
**Number of registered wheelchair-using students in 2020:** 80  
**Office of Disability Services:** 937-774-5844, [disability\\_services@wright.edu](mailto:disability_services@wright.edu); [bit.ly/2Sabfr7](http://bit.ly/2Sabfr7)

By Derek Mortland

**W**right State University, in Fairborn, Ohio, a suburb of Dayton, was named in honor of pioneer airplane designers Orville and Wilbur Wright and is in close proximity to Wright Patterson Air Force Base, which partners with the university in providing internship opportunities for students majoring in science, technology, engineering or mathematics. Upon graduation, interns are frequently able to secure government employment or find work with nearby government contractors in the aerospace field. For students interested in cybersecurity, Wright State has been designated a National Center of Academic Excellence in Cyber Defense Education by the National Security Agency and Department of Homeland Security. WSU also has a veteran and military center that serves all branches of the military. In terms of wheelchair accessibility, the campus is one of the best in the nation.

Universal design principles are present in the centralized main campus of 20 buildings, which are offset around a court of accessible walkways. WSU goes beyond the legal minimum of accessibility by providing access underground. A tunnel system connects every building on the court, including Hamilton Residence Hall. The tunnels, legendary among the Ohio disability community, are especially important to wheelchair users who need to get to classes and activities during occasional snowstorms.

Close by an accessible pedestrian bridge that leads to the residence halls is one of Wright State's prized innovations — the Wingerd Service Dog Park. The park is one of the first of its kind and offers a full acre of accessible, fenced green space. Entry is available via power gate openers that lead directly into a sheltered patio area, where an emergency response phone is located. WSU will provide electronic key cards as an accommodation for students who are unable to operate the power openers. From the patio, paved accessible paths lead to shade trees

up a slight grade to the west. Behind the shade trees, concrete tunnels make up the first part of a developing dog agility circuit.

Grace Lombardo, a sophomore from Upper Arlington, Ohio, is a paraplegic who regularly uses the dog park with her service dog, Dearborn, a large black Lab. Dearborn loves to romp and stretch his legs in the open space, and Lombardo, a full-time manual wheelchair user with spina bifida, likes the easy roiling and greenery. "It's one of the many things that makes attending WSU so enjoyable," she says. "I love the feeling of inclusion here."



Wingerd Service Dog Park shows Wright State's commitment to students with disabilities.

Abby McCabe, a first-year student from Medina, Tennessee, uses a wheelchair because of muscular dystrophy. After researching many campuses around the country, she made Wright State her first choice due to its accessible features. “Being a college student is already enough to worry about,” she says. “Knowing I am welcomed and have full access on campus allows me to concentrate on my education and being successful.” She likes to eat lunch at the Union Café on campus because the atmosphere makes her feel like she is part of an active and enriching campus life.

The Café, one of nine dining venues on campus, can be found in the Student Union, located up a medium grade on the southwest side of the campus. It’s a central location for many of the inclusive activities and adaptive services unique to WSU. The Café features eight unique food court dining options. Choices range from Mediterranean, Middle Eastern and sushi to pizza, burgers, salads and vegetarian options. Trained staff provide assistance in loading dining trays and carrying them to tables, if needed. Students with limited hand dexterity can enjoy their meals with their peers through the availability of two Obi robotic feeding arms provided at the café. The Obi is designed, developed and manufactured in Dayton by DESIN, LLC. A third Obi is available for use in the disability services office in University Hall.

## Disability Services, PA Station, Wheelchair Repair and More

Thomas Webb, a former Kennedy Disability Policy Fellow who worked with the 110th Congress drafting the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, is director of Disability Services. Webb has a dual role at WSU as the ADA/504 coordinator and is a key player in arranging access and inclusion efforts. As someone who lives with CP, Webb brings personal disability experience to his role, touring around campus using his scooter as a mobility aid. Webb works from the first floor of University Hall, a modern five-story building. When students enter the office, they are welcomed by posters from the campus’s ADA 25th Anniversary Presidential Lectures Series.

A short elevator trip down from the Union Café at the tunnel level is the PA Station, which provides personal assistance services. There are three single-user accessible restrooms in the Station that are equipped with adjustable height transfer tables and ceiling lifts to assist with maneuvering over the toilet. Personal assistants — students trained by WSU — work in shifts from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. weekdays. The station also has limited weekend hours. Students with disabilities can receive assistance toileting, changing clothes and repositioning. The station also provides wipes, Chux pads, pull-ups, cleaner and plastic laundry bags free of charge.

The first Monday of every month at the PA Station is Numotion Monday. A service tech from the local office of Numotion, a national wheelchair and equipment company, is available to assist with wheelchair maintenance and repairs. Most simple maintenance and quick repairs are done free of charge.

Around the corner from the PA Station is Adapted Rec-



“Knowing I am welcomed and have full access on campus allows me to concentrate on my education,” says Abby McCabe.

reation, fully integrated within WSU’s student fitness center. While there are no competitive sports teams for wheelchair basketball or quad rugby, these sports are integrated into an inclusive intramural sports program. WSU has 10 well-maintained sports wheelchairs for use in wheelchair soccer, basketball, rugby and dodgeball by students with and without disabilities. The fitness center also features accessible exercise machines that are easily adapted for chair users, and they are integrated with non-adaptive equipment.

The Workout Buddy Program, another inclusive adapted rec program, has doubled in participants in the last year. The program pairs students with and without disabilities for regular training sessions two to three times per week. Aubrey Weaver, a senior from Chillicothe, Ohio, has cerebral palsy and participates as a workout buddy. She is also a resident assistant in Hamilton Hall, located next to the Student Union. “Since joining the program, my strength and mobility have improved, and it’s a lot easier for me get around campus and out in the community,” says Weaver, “especially to my internship in downtown Dayton.”

WSU’s Office of Disability Services helped Weaver coordinate paratransit services through Dayton RTA for her internship. They have also provided note taking assistance and adapted labs as she has pursued her criminal justice degree.

Director Webb would be the first to admit that as it is with wheelchair accessibility everywhere, there is still room for improvement at Wright State University. Lombardo says there are a few sidewalks that are pretty bumpy and some others have potholes. “But,” she says, “those improvements are coming, thanks to the Abilities Group.” The AG is a student organization focused on improving WSU’s outstanding access, accommodations and inclusion to an even higher degree.

# UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

Tucson

## A UNIVERSITY THAT IS BUILDING A TOP-NOTCH DISABILITY CULTURE



**Location:** Tucson, medium-sized city, population 547,000; 380-acre campus  
**2020 tuition and fees:** in-state tuition: \$12,467; out-of-state: \$36,366  
**2020 undergraduate enrollment:** 35,233; student-faculty ratio: 15:1  
**Popular majors:** business, marketing, biological and biomedical sciences  
**Ranked #53** nationally in Top Public Schools (Best Colleges 2020, *U.S. News & World Report*)  
**Number of registered wheelchair-using students in 2020:** 50  
**Disability Resource Center:** 520-621-3268, drc-info@arizona.edu; drc.arizona.edu

By Kasey Kaler

Situated in between Saguaro National Park, Mica Mountain and Mount Lemmon, the University of Arizona is approximately 110 miles southwest of Phoenix and 60 miles from the Mexican border, in Tucson. The city is surrounded by a metropolitan area of close to 1 million residents. While known for its intensely sunny, hot summers, Tucson is slightly cooler than Phoenix, and its winters are mild, with average highs in the 60s and 70s, and lows from 30 to 40. Snow is rare in Tucson. The university is the number one employer in the city, owning two independently accredited medical schools, and has been designated as a Hispanic Service Institution, with 25% or more full-time undergraduate Hispanic students.

The four-level Student Union Memorial Center, reconstructed between 2000 and 2003, has 405,000 square feet of space, including 14 restaurants, a grocery market, a two-level bookstore, 23 meeting rooms, eight lounge areas, a computer lab, a U.S. Post Office and a copy center. According to the *Wheels on Campus* survey, 90% to 100% of buildings on campus are wheelchair accessible.

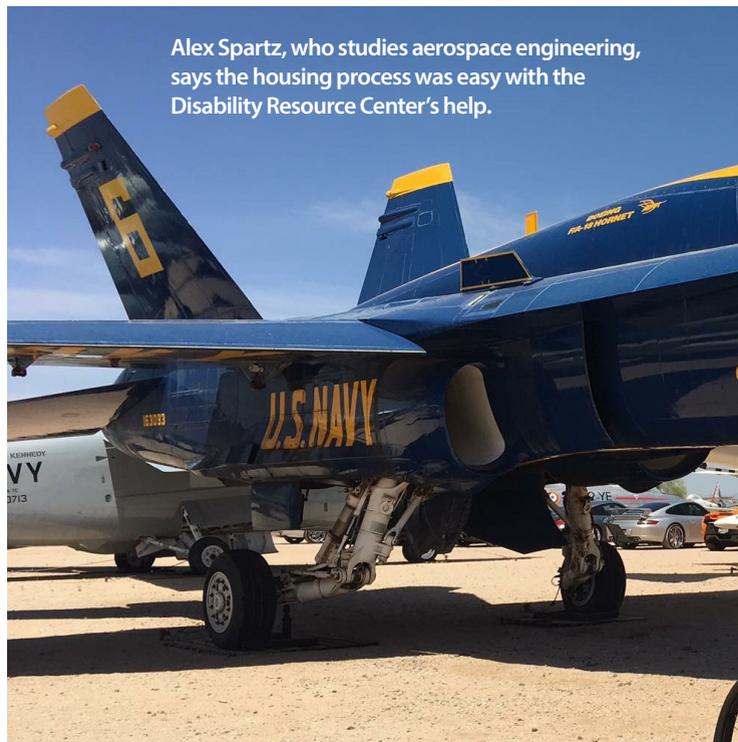
The university claims one of the premier adaptive athletic programs in the nation, offering men's and women's wheelchair basketball, rugby, track and road racing, handcycling, wheelchair tennis, and what is believed to be the first adaptive golf program in the country. Arizona Adaptive Athletics houses an adaptive fitness center to support athletes' athletic goals and students with disabilities. The center was designed with equipment to be easily accessible for those who use wheelchairs. The fitness center also houses a variety of weightlifting and conditioning equipment.

The McKale Memorial Center athletic arena also offers training opportunities, varsity weight rooms and strength and conditioning staff availability for student-athletes with disabilities, which makes the university unique among Division I schools.

"There is more than one location that features accessible

equipment and access to trainers," says Disability Resource Center Director Amanda Kraus, a wheelchair user herself. "There are a lot of options at the Student Recreation Center as well. We want to be chipping away at larger, systemic and campus-wide opportunities to make sure that students have a range of options." She says the prevailing hope is that the college, by addressing universal design and programmatic principles, will continue to reduce the need for individual accommodations or modifications.

The DRC is one of the largest in the nation, with 44 staff members — including five wheelchair users — and 30 volunteers dedicated to providing services to students with disabilities. Adaptivity is something the Center has worked tirelessly on, according to Kraus. Besides heading up the DRC, she is also executive director for Housing and Residential Life. "It's our goal for disabled students to have an identical experience



Alex Spartz, who studies aerospace engineering, says the housing process was easy with the Disability Resource Center's help.

Amen Ali Alyasriy majors in electrical computer engineering.



to that of their nondisabled peers. And if it's not identical, we want it to be as similar as possible."

The DRC offers numerous services to students with disabilities, including a wheelchair maintenance and repair shop. Also offered are peer support programs for learning independent living skills, a tutoring program called Think Tank and an accessible study-abroad program. The Center also provides a space for students, faculty and staff to examine and honor disability identity, culture and community and has become a welcoming place for all students, disabled and nondisabled.

Senior men's wheelchair basketball player Amen Ali Alyasriy, an L1-2 paraplegic, majors in electrical computer engineering at the University of Arizona College of Engineering. He utilizes a manual wheelchair to get around campus, taking advantage of the relatively flat layout. "When it comes to fitness, mental health, whatever it may be, whenever I needed something, anytime I had a problem, I always thought to go to the DRC," he says.

## Sense of Community

Tucson's Sun Tran bus system, which includes on-demand shuttle bus service, was named Best Transit System by the American Public Transportation Association in 2005. The Sun Link streetcar line connects the university with numer-



ous destinations and also connects the campus with CatTran shuttles, Amtrak and Greyhound intercity bus service.

It is well-known nationally that the University of Arizona is an attractive destination for incoming students with disabilities due to its warm weather, accessibility on and around campus, adaptive athletic programming, and the DRC's integration in everyday academics and student life. But one thing that sets the university apart, according to many students, including Alex Spartz, is the sense of community.

Spartz, who uses a manual wheelchair and is a C6-7 quadriplegic, was attracted to the school in 2015 to get his undergraduate degree in aerospace engineering. "When visiting," he says, "I was really impressed with the DRC, the accommodations that they do, and the formal and informal help of the wheelchair community at the resource center. Also, around campus, everyone was being really friendly to each other, like at the adaptive gym at the disability center. I saw that there was a good sense of community."

Spartz has lived on campus for all of his nearly five years there. From his very first on-campus tour and meeting with the DRC, Spartz and staff members discussed housing. "Basically, the DRC just took care of it all," he says. "I didn't have to do much besides tell them what I needed. They showed me the setup, and they were just like, whatever you need, just let us know."

The DRC and residential housing have a close working relationship. "Our staff has access to the housing assignments database," says Kraus, "so they're able to enter information about the accommodations. Then housing, from there, will make the assignment. We've tried to streamline the housing assignment process by incorporating it into the DRC process." If a student indicates that they'd like to live on-campus, the DRC provides images and dimensions of rooms available around campus within the student's price point. The information and types of accommodations needed are then input into the housing system to find the best place available.

The commitment to make every student's college experience uncomplicated is nothing new. "What's the nondisabled student experience?" asks Kraus. "That's what we're trying to ensure and trying to put in place for students with disabilities. If there's an effective solution, then really, the institution should do anything, right? Sometimes we're able to put really creative solutions in place and then kind of change things from then on. Adaptability is a creative problem-solving process."

That process is one the university is willing to do over again and again. The DRC has worked with architects, designers and building planners to ensure accessibility for wheelchair users and has sent access consultants on field trips for assistance. Technical experts have also been brought in to consult on technology accessibility as the school transitioned to online-only classes while dealing with the pandemic.

As of late summer 2020, the university was putting into place a multi-option plan that includes both online and on-campus classes and campus residential living for those who do not have suitable housing off-campus. It also has its own unique testing process and lab facilities under the direction of both the university and local public-health experts.

## Erin Thomson: Every School Can Learn from Disabled Students



“In high school, I knew I wanted to go somewhere warm for college,” says Erin Thomson, 23, who grew up in the suburbs of Minneapolis. “I knew it would be best for my health as well as accessibility.” She considered Arizona State, Arizona, UCLA and the University of Houston and visited all but Houston. “UCLA and Arizona State didn’t feel right — so many people on campus in large cities. But there were so many others with disabilities at the U of A. I felt normal there, especially at the Disability Resource Center. I wasn’t worried about academics, more about barriers that could get in the way.” Thomson was injured in a diving accident at the age of 12 and was paralyzed at the C4-5 level.

She ended up spending all of her college time in Tucson but took more than four years to complete her studies since

she had to take a semester off for medical reasons. She majored in journalism, but took a lot of related classes — “anything that replicated what real life is like, and a lot of junior and senior classes that had strict deadlines you had to meet.” In one class, she had to go to a school district meeting and sit there for two or three hours taking notes. “I got down accurate quotes according to journalism standards, and had to have it handed in 24 hours later, so the reality part was helpful.” Another class she took was photography and multimedia, where she learned important skills. “I had to get an action shot of swimming and practiced getting other kinds of photos they wanted. It was a lot of how-to that supports social media.” For her final project in multimedia, she chose an access topic for community awareness. “I ended up mounting my phone on my wheelchair and going to a basketball game at McKale Center and filming everything from my viewpoint. It was horrible, beginning with just finding a seat. At the entrance there was a huge flight of stairs. I had to use the other entrance. When they scanned my ID, they told me to go back and enter at the student entrance that wasn’t accessible. I told them this, so they scanned my ID and said it probably wouldn’t work and I would get penalties on my student card. It turned out there was no way they could scan my card without the tech there. The lack of awareness was shocking even though Arizona is one of the best colleges for wheelchair users.”

The video is proof that the needs of

wheelchair users are not always high on others’ lists. “That was part of why I chose to do an Access Guide for Tucson for my products class in journalism,” she says. “A lot of us in chairs have problems because of all the glitches there are in general with restaurant accessibility. People need to know what to do to fix these problems, and do it, and be held accountable.” Plus the access guide gave specific information to other wheelchair users and people with mobility impairments, so it was a useful tool.

“Disabilities are all different, so you try to find a way to increase understanding, like universal design.”

She and her project partner, another wheelchair user, did empathy interviews for the project. “They are different from normal interviews. You talk to others about solving a problem that affects a lot of people. Disabilities are all different, so you try to find a way to increase understanding, like universal design. It was huge knowing this could help a lot of people. It motivated me to work for nonprofits.”

When Thomson graduated she returned home to Minneapolis. “No one wanted to hire me. I lacked experience. But I finally got an internship with PACER, a nonprofit that does a lot of work for people with disabilities, mainly kids — youth, teens, young adults.”

She’s still interning but with COVID-19, she works from home. “As a communications intern, I created a video talking about what you should do when you go to a doctor for the first time — how to be prepared. I’m still applying for jobs dealing with communications, so my college skills are definitely helping.”

# UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Whitewater

## AFFORDABLE, ACCESSIBLE CAMPUS WITH A SMALL-TOWN ATMOSPHERE

Photo © UWW-Whitewater/Craig Schreiner



**Location:** Whitewater, Wisconsin, small town, population 15,137; 400-acre campus  
**2020 tuition and fees: in-state:** \$7,695; out-of-state: \$16,416  
**2020 undergraduate enrollment:** 10,747; student-faculty ratio: 20:1  
**Popular majors:** accounting, marketing, finance, elementary education  
**Ranked #25** in online MBA programs, #19 in online MBA for veterans (*U.S. News & World Report*)  
**Number of registered wheelchair-using students in 2020:** 58  
**Center for Students with Disabilities:** 262-472-4711, [csdat@uww.edu](mailto:csdat@uww.edu); [www.uww.edu/csd](http://www.uww.edu/csd)

By Mike Ervin

The scenery along the roads leading to Whitewater, Wisconsin, is primarily miles and miles of farmland. In winter, when snow covers everything, it can appear forbidding. But for college students who are wheelchair users, the Whitewater campus is known for its culture of disability inclusion that has recruited, accommodated and welcomed students with disabilities for 50 years. According to the UWW official website, 98% of graduates are either employed or in graduate or post-graduate programs.

Whitewater itself is no bustling metropolis. Downtown is about two blocks long. Everything in town is about five minutes away from everything else by car. But the compact campus is ideal for wheelchair users. All buildings are designed, modified or connected with universal design principles.

“Our efforts began in the late 1960s,” says Elizabeth Watson, director of the Center for Students with Disabilities from 2006 to 2019. “Our new special education department was contacted by admissions to see if the school of education could support a student with a disability, a wheelchair user. The faculty said yes. This involved carrying the student and their chair up and down stairs all year. It started a small committed movement at the university.”

Debbie Reuter, interim director of CSD in 2020, says the attraction is more than just physical access. Besides the small-town atmosphere, she says a big attraction for wheelchair users has been UWW’s stellar wheelchair basketball teams.

That’s what lured John Boie, a UWW alum, class of 2014, and a T4-5 paraplegic who hails from nearby Milton, Wisconsin. He was injured in a farm accident at age 2 and zips around in a manual wheelchair. “UWW is an incredible school in terms of accessibility,” he says. “There are ramps and elevators in every building, and when snow is cleared, they even get it all taken out of the curb cuts.”

Boie attended a wheelchair basketball camp at UWW when he was 11. Seven years later he was playing for the Warhawks. He refers to the program as “the Kentucky of wheelchair basketball.” The men’s team has won 13 national championships since 1983, and Boie was on three of those championship teams. He will also be a member of the U.S. basketball team that will play in the next Paralympics.

Boie stuck around UWW to earn his MBA in 2018 and now works as an academic advisor, helping about 200 students transition to college, explore majors and careers, and connect with tutors and

Lyndsey Zurbrugg studies health and human performance.



Photo © UWW-Whitewater/Craig Schreiner

John Boie earned a bachelor's degree and an MBA from UWW.



Photo © UWW/WhiteWater/Craig Schreiner

student organizations. His office is in Roseman Hall, where the physical therapy gym is located along with its wheelchair accessible exercise equipment. There is also a campus physical therapist available to disabled students free of charge.

Lyndsey Zurbrugg is a paraplegic and wheelchair user majoring in health and human performance who wants to be a personal trainer. She came all the way from the outskirts of Portland, Oregon, in 2016 to play for the UWW women's basketball team. She considered going to the University of Texas at Arlington, which also had an elite team, but would have needed a car to drive across campus. "At Whitewater, if I have a class on one side and I need to get to the other, I can make it in time in my chair. "Besides," she says, "I loved the small-town atmosphere and the friendliness of the people."

When it snows an excessive amount, sometimes the sidewalks aren't as clear as she would like. "But," she says, "the university does an excellent job of providing transportation for wheelchair users in snowy times." She's referring to Warhawk Wheels, a fleet of three wheelchair accessible vans operated by the Center for Students with Disabilities. It's essentially a paratransit service, about the only way for a student using a wheelchair to get around town, especially in inclement weather, unless they're lucky enough to have a personal vehicle. Warhawk Wheels operates on weekdays and by appointment on Saturdays and charges a yearly fee that ranges from \$900 to \$2,400 per year, depending on which service option the student chooses. It can be used on-campus as well.

## Whitewater Also Appeals to Non-Athletes

Lydia Dawley came to UWW for reasons that have nothing to do with basketball. Her hometown is Decorah, Iowa, about a four-hour drive from Whitewater. She has cerebral palsy and communicates by using an iPad that rests on her lap. She tightly grips a stylus that looks like a small, upside-down microphone, and she intently punches the keys with it.

Dawley graduated from UWW in May of 2020 with a degree in liberal studies and a special interest in communication sciences and disorders. She wants to become a licensed speech pathology assistant so she can work with people who need communication devices like hers.

In 2013, when Dawley was a junior in high school, she attended a camp on the UWW campus called Authentic Voices of America, for people who use speech devices. "I fell in love with the college because I could go everywhere," she says. When she was accepted, "it was the best day of my life."

Following her first semester in 2015, she attended the Summer Transition Program, a month-long orientation for students with disabilities that began in 1983 as a federally-funded program to help people with learning disabilities transition into college. CSD has expanded it to serve all incoming students with disabilities. The curriculum consists of a course in study and campus living skills and a college credit course called Disability in Society. Participants are matched with student mentors, but the program isn't free. Participants pay four weeks of the regular fee for tuition, housing and meals plus an additional fee. Dawley says, "It got me ready for my real classes because I learned to manage classes and make sure my personal caregivers showed up."

She stayed at Starin Hall during her orientation and lived there in her junior and senior years in a four-bedroom suite she shared with three roommates. In her first two years, Dawley lived in two other dorms where she had a single room, and the accessible bathrooms were down the hall.



Lydia Dawley participated in a month-long orientation program that prepared her for managing classes and caregivers.

A lot of people using wheelchairs buzz around the Andersen Library Building, where the CSD office is located. Reuter says CSD employs 15 people, six with disabilities. The office is a busy place, the campus focal point for students like Dawley who use its supports and services. She liked using their computers for homework because she found them to be more accessible than those in the regular computer lab. She also took tests at CSD so she could have extra time and the assistance of a scribe. CSD

also set her up with classroom aides to help with note taking.

She also was supported in less tangible ways. "Two years ago my dad passed away unexpectedly. I went back to Whitewater eight days after he died, and my CSD coordinator and professors worked with me to make sure I was OK and I passed all of my classes. Whitewater helped me grieve my dad and get back to 'regular life.'"

## A DIVERSE STUDENT POPULATION IN A WHEELCHAIR-FRIENDLY SETTING



**Location:** Northridge, California, small city, population 70,000; 356-acre campus  
**2020 tuition and fees:** in-state: \$6,972; out-of-state: \$17,622  
**2020 undergraduate enrollment:** 38,000; student-faculty ratio: 27:1  
**Popular majors:** business, management, marketing, social sciences  
**Ranked** in top five universities in research and science graduates (National Science Foundation)  
**Wheelchair-using students registered in 2020:** 100  
**Disability Resources and Services:** 818-677-2684; dres@csun.edu; www.csun.edu/dres

By Ellen Stohl

California State University, Northridge, is situated in the heart of Southern California’s bustling San Fernando Valley, near Dignity Health Northridge Hospital — the only spinal cord injury rehab hospital of its size and complexity in northern Los Angeles County. CSUN enrolls about 38,000 students, as many as 40% of Hispanic ethnicity. It offers a disability studies course, bachelor’s degrees in 68 disciplines, master’s degrees in 69 fields and doctorates in audiology, educational leadership and physical therapy, as well as 17 teaching credential programs.

The campus is well-served by numerous transportation options, including accessible city buses, a free shuttle between campus and the Northridge Metrolink Station, and dedicated stops for Access Services throughout campus, including one at CSUN’s internationally recognized Center of Achievement for Adapted Physical Exercise. The COA offers both aquatic and land-based therapeutic exercise programs for students and community members with disabilities and training for students and professionals in health and rehabilitation related fields.

The COA, the College of Health and Human Development, and the campus Veterans Center often partner with Southern California’s Triumph Foundation to provide adaptive sports and recreation opportunities, which include an arm-cycle clinic, kayaking events, and two annual adaptive sports festivals. Triumph also holds weekly SCI support groups at Northridge Hospital.

Nathan Lehmann, 36, a business law senior and C5-6 incomplete quadriplegic due to a surfing accident eight years ago, was first introduced to CSUN through the COA. “I got a Nielsen Scholarship for the fitness program two semesters prior to attending CSUN and am so grateful,” he says. “I get to continue an exercise program that helps reduce my pain and maintain my endurance.” Lehmann

uses a power chair on CSUN’s 356-acre campus and finds navigation easy and the campus relatively flat.

Lehmann also appreciates the Klotz Student Health Center. “The nurses are great. They’ve helped with foot adjustments or catheter bag issues. That’s important when you’re a quad on campus without a caregiver,” he says. Klotz and the student Oasis Wellness Center also offer chiropractic, acupuncture and massage therapies with knowledgeable practitioners well versed in SCI. Both centers have adjustable tables, and the Oasis even has an accessible nap pod.

Residential living at CSUN includes wheelchair-friendly



Nathan Lehmann studies business law and plans to become an ADA lawyer.

tours and housing, but Lehmann chose housing at the Freedom to Live Foundation near campus. FTL provides a campus independence training program for spinal-cord-injured individuals who desire to achieve independence and a better quality of life. Lehmann also utilizes the Disability Resources and Educational Services on campus for support. “I would have never been able to do as well without them. I was not a techie, being so late to the game, and I was scared when I first started. The DRES tech advisor held my hand the first semester and helped me dictate text, find and manage notetakers as well as turn my textbooks into PDF format so I could search, highlight, and interact independently.” He is pursuing his goal of becoming an ADA lawyer.

DRES believes in an individualized approach. “One-size-fits-all does not work even by disability categories,” says Director Jodi Johnson. “We provide an academic coach to any new student, including veterans and graduate students. The coach works with the student for one to two semesters to help them acclimate to campus life, hone their socialization skills, and navigate their courses so their career stays on track.”

DRES also works with employment agencies, campus entities and internship programs to help students get the experience they need to find employment after graduation.

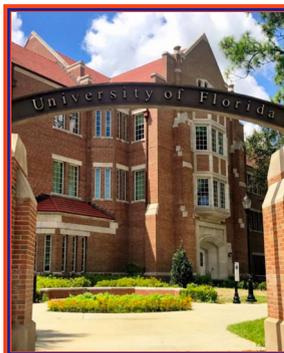
Azmi Shatela, 19, a sophomore pursuing an exploratory major, has cerebral palsy. He is a regular at DRES. “They really encourage me,” he says. Because autonomy is important to him, Shatela advocated to get a lip on a curb fixed so he could navigate it independently in his manual wheelchair. He also uses the COA and the newly constructed Student Recreation Center on campus weekly. “I get an individualized program so I can strengthen my whole body, and I also get camaraderie. Access could be better at the SRC, but it is decent, and I enjoy working out with other students.”

Lehmann and Shatela appreciate the accessible buildings, tables with cutouts, and accommodations by faculty and staff. Both have found every building on campus usable but think they all need more than one automatic door button on each floor. Overall, they agree that CSUN’s resources and commitment to accessibility makes it a very wheelchair-friendly campus.

# UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

Gainesville

## A TOP-VALUE MAJOR UNIVERSITY WITH EXCELLENT ACCESSIBILITY



**Location:** Gainesville, Florida, medium-sized city, population 140,000; 2,000-acre campus  
**2020 tuition and fees:** in-state: \$6,380; out-of-state: \$28,658  
**2020 undergraduate enrollment:** 35,491; student-faculty ratio: 18:1  
**Popular majors:** engineering; business, management, marketing  
**Ranked #7 (tie) nationally in Top Public Schools (Best Colleges 2020, U.S. News & World Report)**  
**Wheelchair-using students registered in 2020:** 50  
**Disability Resource Center:** 352-392-8570, DRC@ufsa.ufl.edu; disability.ufl.edu

By Steve Wright

**T**he University of Florida is unique in that it has the fifth largest undergraduate enrollment in the nation but is situated in Gainesville, a suburban area of approximately 140,000, not a huge population to draw from locally. Yet, Ben Griffin Stadium holds more than 88,000 spectators, which says volumes about the popularity of the Gators football team. But sports is not all that is notable about this university. It is also among the top 10 public colleges and universities in the nation, according to *U.S. News & World Report*. The physical and programmatic accessibility for wheelchair users ranks highly, as well.

Gerry Altamirano, director of UF’s Disability Resource Cen-

ter, is a proactive and outspoken champion for social equity who has built a team that delivers world-class support to about 3,000 students with disabilities. About 50-70 DRC clients each year are students who use wheelchairs.

“Our institution as a whole strives to be the best. If we want to be the best, we have to have the best, and that includes people with disabilities,” says Altamirano. “People with disabilities have ideas and create innovations — but to be successful, we have to shift how our system works, or they won’t get through the front door in reality and metaphorically.”

Reitz Hall, the student union that was renovated in 2016, added 138,000 square feet of space for student organizations, includ-

ing the DRC. It also has lounges, study spaces, a game room, a dance studio and an arts and crafts center.

UF residence halls throughout the campus can be made accessible upon request. But the ground floor of Cypress Hall features state-of-the-art-technology that allows students as much autonomy as they want. SureHands track lift systems transport students from chair to bed to bath. Blinds and doors can be controlled with an iPad. Bathrooms have ample turn-around dimensions and roll-in showers. And there are spaces for personal care attendants to assist with laundry and cooking food, without disturbing studying students.

The University works through an attendant care agency in Gainesville to provide PCAs to students. While there are accessible municipal transit options for reaching off-campus venues, UF's on-campus Gator Lift provides free paratransit to disabled students, faculty, staff and visitors. And if a student has a lift/ramp-equipped van for off-campus mobility, each residence hall has assigned parking spaces striped for accessible vans.

Tamia Robinson, a junior criminology major with spina bifida who uses a manual chair, says one of the biggest barriers to college for a student with a disability is finding an inclusive dorm, but Cypress Hall delivers with wide hallways, adjustable beds and dozens of other technologies.

"The amount of programs my university has is amazing, too," she says. "We have wheelchair basketball, an honor society for students with disabilities, a study abroad program that includes disability studies, accessible yoga and an amazing disability studies department."

Delaina Parrish says Cypress Hall is one of the most innovative ADA dorms in the country. "It offers the best accessibility and safety features for students with significant challenges who have still met all the rigorous entrance requirements," she says. Parrish is a graduating senior majoring in marketing at UF's Warrington College of Business and cofounder of Fearless Independence, LLC ([fearlessindependence.com](http://fearlessindependence.com)), a website devoted to promoting



Tamia Robinson, Bradley Minotti and Delaina Parrish say it with their shirts: The Future is Accessible.

inclusivity and body confidence for people of all abilities.

"Cypress is also connected, literally, to the Disability Resource Center, and is really convenient for exam taking," says Parrish, who has cerebral palsy and uses a power wheelchair and augmentative communication technology. "For four years, I had my own room and shared a private bathroom, which was also full of accessible features."

Gainesville's year-round warm weather means no maneuvering through ice and snow, plus no shivering in the freezing cold while rolling between buildings. Most of the city of Gainesville is intertwined with UF, so essential shopping, services, and medical and rehabilitation resources are very close to the large campus.

"Our students are brilliant, they are advocates who want to share their experience," Altamirano says of the DRC-supported student ambassador program. "The Ambassadors hold panels and educate UF faculty and partner with physical therapy and occupational therapy practitioners and students."

The DRC links students who can critique the accessibility of products with major companies such as Proctor & Gamble — creating the ability for a graduate to become a consultant who is paid well for unique expertise. Besides also offering internship opportunities to wheelchair users, another influential factor that attracts students, especially from Florida, is the low in-state tuition charge of approximately \$6,500 yearly.



Students enjoy accessible yoga.

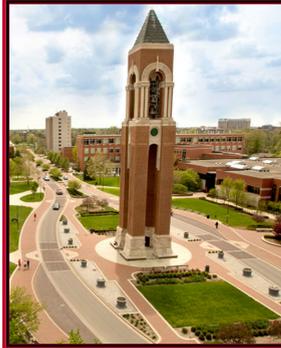


Cypress Hall features SureHands lifts.

# BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

Muncie, Indiana

## BUILT RIGHT FROM THE BEGINNING



**Location:** Muncie, Indiana, small city, population 70,000; 1,140-acre campus

**2020 tuition and fees:** in-state: \$10,080; out-of-state: \$26,984

**2020 undergraduate enrollment:** 17,000; student-faculty ratio: 17:1

**Popular majors:** business, marketing, journalism/telecommunications, nursing

**Ranked #53, Top Performers in Social Mobility (Best Colleges 2020, U.S. News & World Report)**

**Wheelchair-using students registered in 2020: 25**

**Office of Disability Services:** 765-285-5293, dsd@bsu.edu; bit.ly/30iWQxv

By Tim Gilmer

**B**all State University, located in Muncie, Indiana, made a commitment to serve students with disabilities in 1973. Originally known as Eastern Indiana Normal School and contained in a single building in 1899, the property was purchased by the Ball brothers in 1917. A science hall, a gymnasium and a fine arts building were added by 1935. The property was renamed Ball State College in 1961 and attained university status in 1965. Numerous campus buildings were constructed from 1960 to 1972, and again in the early 2000s.

Due to the relevant modernity of most of the campus, Ball State has consistently been suitable for wheelchair users.

*College Magazine* ranked the university number one for students with physical disabilities in 2020. BSU also ranks highly in social mobility and commitment to social justice. The Miller College of Business's entrepreneurial management program has been ranked among the top 15 colleges in the nation for the past 20 years. The university is also recognized as a leader in online learning.

Courtney Jarrett, only the third disability services director since 1973, says one of the main reasons for the high ranking in disability services can be traced back to the original director, who recognized the importance of involving all departments on campus in taking responsibility for providing needed services. In this way, her office has been able to function very efficiently with only three staff members serving over 1,300 registered full-time students with disabilities. "Richard Harris, our first director, made all the contacts needed with other departments on campus, so I can easily make connections for facilities, grounds, new construction needs, renovating issues and programming services," says Jarrett.

Another important factor for Ball State's success is continuity and reliability in service delivery. Harris served from 1973 to 2004, when his assistant took over and stayed through 2017. Jarrett also had experience as assistant director under the second director before she took over in 2018.

As a senior in high school, Georgana Nichols chose Ball State with plans to concentrate on music and creative writing. "As a wheelchair user, I knew the campus had a good rep for access, but I made a 180 in my first semester and decided to study to be an accountant instead," she says. She lived on campus in a dorm, but chose to not live in the most accessible dorm, Noyer, which had bigger, nicer rooms. "I wanted to try a traditional dorm room, normal size, detached bathroom,



Lizzie Ford, right, loved Ball State, earning both a bachelor's and a master's there.

very cramped, but I made it work.” It was a social choice rather than one of accessibility. “I wanted to meet all kinds of people,” she says. “Every dorm has some accessible units so you can live where you want.”

Lizzie Ford, 25, spent six years on campus, got a B.A. in psychology and a master’s in clinical mental health counseling, but recently chose to enter her first year of law school. “I want a job that is social justice-oriented,” she says. She has cerebral palsy, uses a power wheelchair and needs personal care attendants. Her family provided her care before she enrolled. “At Ball State, the Office of Disability Services has a list of agencies within a 30-mile radius. They told us which agencies usually came to campus. As an undergrad, I lived in Noyer in a double with a roll-in shower on the first floor. Attendants could come and go, and check in at night to stay with me.” As a grad student she chose to live in an on-campus apartment with two beds. “I liked the apartment better than the dorm,” she says, “but the dorm was a good transition between family and apartment.”

Both Nichols and Ford appreciate the convenience, reliability, and courtesy of campus transportation, as well as the 100% wheelchair-accessible campus. “Ball State has on-

demand shuttles — just call ahead 30-45 minutes and schedule,” says Ford, “and they keep the lifts in order. I’ve never had a problem. There are multiple shuttles, so they could always switch them out if necessary. I’ve had drivers apologize for being five minutes late.”

Nichols’ decision to attend BSU was also influenced by the adaptive recreation program. “They have a wheelchair basketball program and provide the chairs,” she says. Ball State was also the first in the nation to offer power soccer. “It really excited me to go there. I grew up in a rural farming community with only 12,000 people in the county. From an early age I wanted to go somewhere else because I couldn’t do these things.”

“Power soccer is big among power chair users,” says Jarrett. “BSU won the national championship two years ago. On adaptive rec nights, a wide variety of students play wheelchair basketball as well, both disabled and nondisabled.”

In addition to a full range of accommodations available to students with disabilities, Ball State’s Office of Disability Services provides personal aides to help students in labs and field trips if needed, help in navigating campus during inclement weather, physical therapy services, and connections to wheelchair repair services off-campus.

# UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

Seattle

## A SPRAWLING URBAN UNIVERSITY WITH ON-CAMPUS TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS



**Location:** Seattle, Washington, large city, population 780,000; 634-acre city-campus

**Tuition and fees, in-state:** \$11,465; out-of-state: \$38,796

**2020 undergraduate enrollment:** 31,000; student- faculty ratio: 19:1

**Popular majors:** social sciences, business, management, marketing

**Ranked #22 (tie) in Top Public Schools (Best Colleges 2020, U.S. News & World Report)**

**Number of registered wheelchair users in 2020:** 30

**Disability Resources for Students:** 206-543-8924; uwdrs@uw.edu; depts.washington.edu/uwdrs

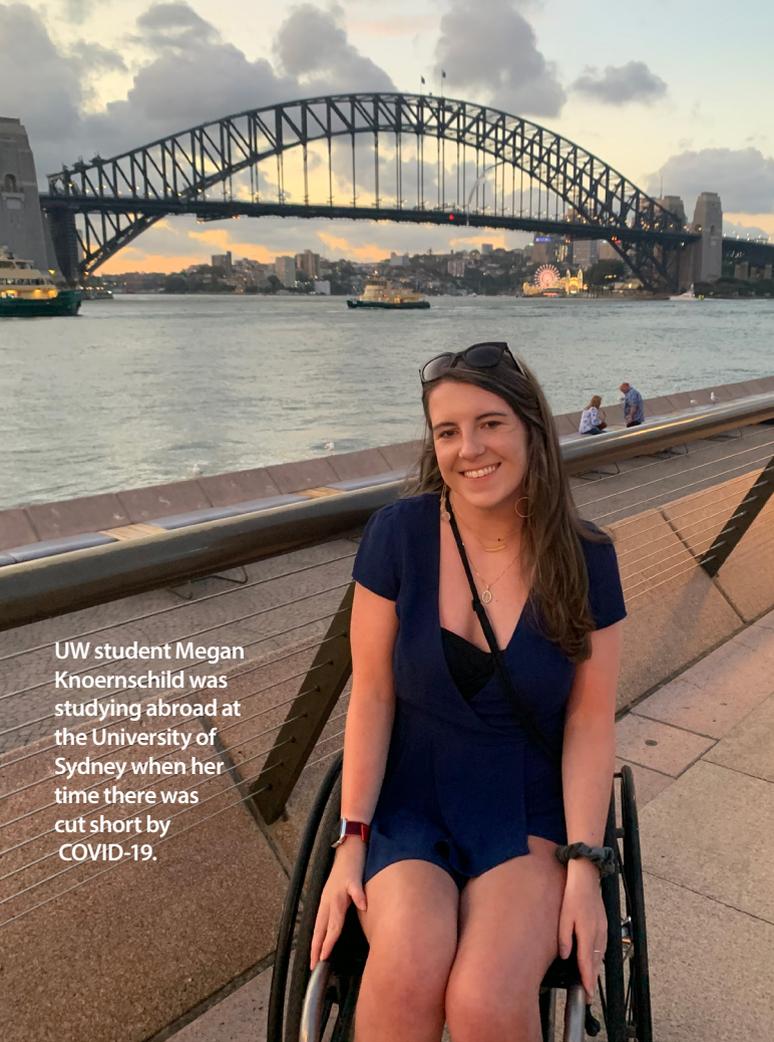
By Teal Sherer

**L**ocated minutes from downtown Seattle, the University of Washington is a large, cutting-edge research institution with over 180 majors and top-ranked programs in medicine, engineering, nursing, law, business and social work. It is also home to a renowned medical center with one of the top rehabilitation programs in the nation.

Founded in 1861, the University’s 634-acre campus is known for its majestic cherry blossoms that fill the quad every spring and the neo-Gothic buildings, like the Suzzallo Library, which looks straight out of Harry Potter. From the re-

cently remodeled outdoor Husky Stadium, you can not only catch a NCAA division football game, but also enjoy the scenic views of Lake Washington and the Cascade Mountains, including Mount Rainier.

Megan Knoernschild, 21, a T12-L1 paraplegic, is a senior biochemistry major who is interested in a career in health care. As a member of Alpha Omicron Pi, Knoernschild lives in the sorority house. “It has an elevator and an accessible door with a push plate opener,” she says. The bathroom also has a roll-in shower and a lowered bed. In addition to the so-



UW student Megan Knoernschild was studying abroad at the University of Sydney when her time there was cut short by COVID-19.

cial activities of Greek life, Knoernschild likes the companionship. “After a long day it’s nice always having people there to sit around a table and talk to and have a meal with.”

Knoernschild is registered with Disability Resources for Students, which makes sure there are height-adjustable desks for her to roll under in each of her classes. The DRS also provides services like note takers, recording devices, personal aides and class location changes.

Macy Westrick did her undergraduate studies in psychology and master’s in social work at the University of Washington and now works as an access coordinator in the DRS office. As a student, she found the assistive technology, specifically accessible textbooks, helpful. “We have a team of about 40 people who put books in an accessible format,” says Westrick, 26, who has cerebral palsy. “It was approved for me because I have trouble getting books out of my backpack. So, they gave me textbooks that I could have on my iPad.”

The DRS works closely with the housing department to coordinate each student’s accommodation needs, like specific furniture requests or considerations for a personal care attendant. “One of the nice things is that our housing has over the last eight years been fully rebuilt, building by building, so our accessible dorm rooms are impressive.” They have features like keyless entry and roll-in showers, says

Westrick, who lived on campus when she was a student. A wheelchair repair service is available on campus.

Referred to as a city within a city, the University of Washington’s campus spans approximately 15 blocks north to south and 25 blocks east to west, with steep inclines. To help students who use wheelchairs navigate the hilly areas, Dial-A-Ride, a free accessible shuttle service, is available. The DRS also provide students who drive with priority parking spots in locations closest to where they need to be. Despite the hills and rainy Seattle days, Westrick and Knoernschild prefer to roll. “I use a power chair, and when I was a student, I drove it around campus, sometimes clocking up to 10 miles a day,” says Westrick. “I’ll take elevators to travel through campus in some places,” explains Knoernschild, who uses a manual wheelchair. “Like if there is a building in the middle of a hill, I’ll take an elevator up a few flights to save time and energy.”

The D Center, which is University of Washington’s disabled and Deaf cultural center, is a place where students can study, organize, socialize or rest. Some of the amenities include couches, a mini-fridge and microwave, and a library containing more than 200 books, zines, and DVDs on Deaf/Disability Studies. “It’s a space that a lot of people find home in,” says Westrick. Throughout the year, the D Center hosts many events and workshops featuring disability issues and activism.

Although there is no sports program for wheelchair users, Seattle Adaptive Sports, a nonprofit organization recognized as a Paralympic Sports Club, offers wheelchair basketball, tennis, sled hockey, power soccer, and track and field. Seize the Oar, an adaptive rowing team that Knoernschild is a member of, is also an option. “It’s really amazing to get out on the water like that, and it’s such a great workout and community of people.”

University of Washington is home to the DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology) Center, a global effort that is dedicated to empowering people with disabilities through technology and education in the classroom and workplace. With over 800 student organizations on campus, like the Student Disability Commission, there are lots of ways to get involved. “Because it’s a big school, there are lots of opportunities,” says Knoernschild.



Grad Macy Westrick, pictured with service dog Destry, is an access coordinator at DRS.

# AUBURN UNIVERSITY

Auburn, Alabama

## A TOP-RANKED UNIVERSITY IN A HISTORIC COLLEGE TOWN



**Location:** Auburn, Alabama, population 66,000 in the metro area; 1,875-acre campus  
**2020 tuition and fees:** in-state: \$11,492; out-of-state: \$31,124  
**2020 undergraduate enrollment:** about 25,000; student-faculty ratio: 19:1  
**Popular majors:** business, health professions, social sciences, biomedical engineering  
**Ranked #44 nationally in Top Public Schools (Best Colleges 2020, U.S. News & World Report)**  
**Wheelchair-using students registered in 2020: 21**  
**Office of Accessibility:** 334-844-2096; [accessibility@auburn.edu](mailto:accessibility@auburn.edu); [accessibility.auburn.edu](http://accessibility.auburn.edu)

By Steve Wright

**A**uburn University is in Auburn, Alabama, often rated among the best places to live in the United States. It's a premier public university with roots dating back to 1856, top-ranked architecture and industrial design departments, as well as impressive rehabilitation counseling and international studies programs. Approximately 60% of first-year students receive scholarships.

Trace Donald, director of the Office of Accessibility, manages a team that works closely with administrators, faculty and staff across campus to ensure that students with disabilities receive the same opportunities to succeed as their peers without disabilities. The OA established the jAUnT door-to-door golf cart service for students, employees and visitors with disabilities. It also founded the Auburn University wheelchair basketball program.

Donald says although the AU campus is hilly, all transit systems are lift-equipped and all academic and residential buildings have accessible drop-offs. The year-round pleasant Alabama weather is also welcoming to wheelchair users, and several dorm units feature a suite of four rooms. "We put in an accessible restroom and made common areas accessible," says Donald. "This way, a student who uses a chair for mobility can have roommates — nondisabled or disabled — like everybody else. We didn't want to say all students who use wheelchairs must be all grouped together."

Ranley Clayton is a senior majoring in physical education. She has used a manual wheelchair since 2014, when an accident caused a T9 complete spinal cord injury. She gives high praise for continual renovations that add more access to buildings, including automatic door openers that can be activated anywhere within a 36-inch range. Also, extra accessible restroom stalls have been added, along with upgraded seating access in auditorium-style classrooms.

"Before college, I strictly went to work and the gym. I

didn't really have much of a sense of freedom in the terms of getting out of my comfort zone and meeting new people or trying new things," said Clayton, who lives off-campus. "Since moving to Auburn, I have grown as a person and have found my voice. I'm willing to talk to strangers, challenge myself with trying new things, and ultimately I am able to give people exposure to someone with a disability."

Clayton plays on the coed Auburn wheelchair basketball team with Logan Caudle, a graduate student majoring in clinical rehabilitation counseling. Caudle experienced trans-



**A gently-graded ramp provides universal access to the main concourse through campus at Auburn University.**



Logan Caudle (number 25) and Ranley Clayton (number 40) play together on Auburn’s coed wheelchair basketball team.

verse myelitis at age 13, which damaged his spinal cord at the T11 level. He praised the OA for assisting with technology in classes and housing, arranging extended time on any exam and providing accessible transportation to the entire campus. “During my first year at Auburn, I had to do a project that

had us find a place on campus that wasn’t very accessible. I found a building that had an old ramp on the outside that was made of wood and was rotting,” Caudle says. “This was a very important building on campus for students. I brought this up to my professor and told him how dangerous and inaccessible this building was. I noticed shortly after telling my professor this, they had torn down the old ramp and built a new one outside of this building.”

Robb Taylor, an assistant coach of the gold medal-winning Men’s U.S. Paralympic Basketball Team, was recruited by Donald a decade ago to be the first full-time coach of the coed wheelchair basketball team. Taylor and Donald are quick to

“A student who uses a chair for mobility can have roommates — nondisabled or disabled — like everybody else.”

point out that the team is far from a feel-good program, but rather is a recruiting tool that brings the best and brightest student athletes who are able to meet Auburn’s high academic standards.

AU also is well-known for its disability studies courses that cover the foundation and history of the disability movement. The program, along with rehabilitation courses, prepares students to become professionals in the fields of disability studies, rehabilitation counseling, case management, human services, as well as allied health fields such as occupational and physical therapy.



JAUnT features modified large golf carts for accessible transport on the AU campus.

# Community Colleges: Where Creating a Unique Path Begins

The beauty of community colleges should be self-evident — almost every sizable community has at least one. And yet we often overlook their importance, maybe because they are ubiquitous, always there, right under our noses. But in addition to their easy access, they offer a range of classes and programs that serve the widespread needs of diverse communities and students of all ages and abilities. Each community college is unique, not only in the classes and programs it offers, but also in the character of the campus, the demographics served, and its specific mission.

It is common for community colleges to employ a wide range of qualified adjunct faculty to teach classes designed to serve specific groups at varying age levels. Students as young as 15 or 16 can take basic education classes, and middle-aged parents and seniors starting new careers late in life also can be found on a typical campus. Workers with skill sets that have become less relevant can find retraining programs aimed at their occupational niche. Some larger community colleges have several branches throughout sprawling metropolitan areas that serve millions, each campus serving a targeted demographic; suburban and rural campuses may offer programs tied to industry, farming, or whatever the prevailing local economy needs. And not only are community colleges relatively affordable, it is likely that one day students will be able to enroll and embark on their chosen path tuition-free. This is especially important to those seeking to transition out of minimum or sub-level wage jobs.

In short, the role of community colleges in training skilled workers and getting students from all walks of life off to a good start in higher education is absolutely indispensable. Best of all, wheelchair users, no matter their age or level of experience in dealing with life on wheels, have access to disability resource offices to help them find their way in a world of possibilities.

A person can become a wheelchair user for any number of reasons, and at any age. Often such a profound change is life-altering and extremely disruptive. A community college is a relatively safe place to take the first step in rebuilding a life. It is an environment where people can search out new possibilities or resume their chosen path in a deliberate and not overly ambitious way that allows time to adjust and adapt, to “begin again.”

Starting over is exactly what artist Mariam Paré had to do when she sustained a spinal cord injury as a college student.



## Success Comes in Many Colors

Paré is a visual artist who became paralyzed and lost the use of her hands while she was attending college. After a period of adjustment, she taught herself to paint by holding brushes in her mouth. Today, Paré is a well-recognized creative talent celebrated for her colorful portraits and multimedia works. Her paintings have been exhibited in galleries worldwide as well as in many notable private collections. Her list of venues include the St. Petersburg Museum of Art, the Museum of Vancouver, and the Maritime Museum of Barcelona, Spain. Some of her major commissions include pieces for the Craig H. Neilsen Foundation, the University of Utah and Omorose Cosmetics.

“College is where I learned to be a disabled person,” she says. Paré, now 44, has also learned to be — following a traumatic event that could have ruined her life — a successful artist whose work is in demand, has attracted the attention of famous actors and landed her an interview with Katie Couric on *The Today Show*, among other things.

She was already on an artistic path by the age of 20 when

she was injured by gun violence and became a C6 quadriplegic. She says she was lucky to have been born with an artistic eye, and she sees college as an all-important springboard to self-realization. “Had I not been in college, it would have been different,” she says. “I didn’t have the environment, otherwise, where I could test out all these things — problem solving, navigating about, learning how to be resourceful — so many lessons involved in experiencing the college atmosphere that were integral to my being able to deal with the world, so many resources. Nowhere else are there so many people gathered together who are there to help you succeed.”

At the time of her injury, she had finished a few semesters of college already. Her being shot as an innocent bystander was not only traumatic, it was life-changing. “I had to come home to be close to my family, and almost had to go to a nursing home. All I had for family was my dad. He didn’t have a lot of money, and we lived in an inaccessible home, but my dad set me up so I could live there, where I still live today. Seven or eight months later I went back to college.”

She lives in Naperville, northwest of Chicago — not in the exact same apartment, but in the same apartment building. “When you find a place that feels comfortable and works ...” She attended the College of DuPage, a community college that has a collaborative partnership with Benedictine University, which had a four-year degree program that could be satisfied by taking specialized classes at DuPage. “I was able to take upper level drawing and other courses there, and ended up getting a bachelor’s degree in studio arts.”

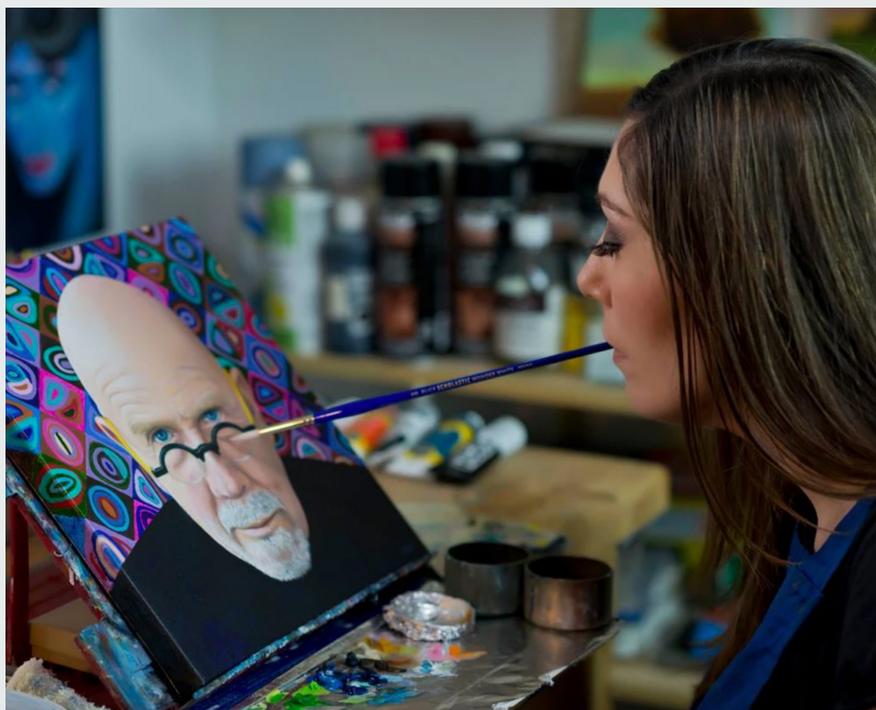
She kept going to school as much as she could. It was expensive, but she got certified in a number of areas. “I worked on the side as a graphic designer, to pay the bills and keep going to school,” she says. Besides getting a B.A. in studio arts, she got an associate degree in graphic design and a web design certificate. “Maybe this was only relevant to me,” she says, “but I learned I could still do a lot of things I never thought I could do — with the help of others. Just doing something physical beyond my limits, like making three-dimensional art. I learned how to communicate with and direct people. I am so limited in my arm and hand use — I had to go beyond that.”

She employs a personal attendant for two hours in the morning and one to two hours at night. “During the day I have an art assistant, friend, or boyfriend to help. But not so someone is with me all the time.”

She learned not only how to paint with her mouth, but how to write as well. “It took a great deal of practice and patience, and I was surprised that I could write just like I did with hands,

but at first I was not good at painting. I got excited that I could do it, but I was not very good,” she says. “A lot of the process of relearning happened at school. Thank God I had that. If I couldn’t paint, I wouldn’t have known what I could do.”

Real progress didn’t come easily. “At first, following my injury, I wasted too much time not wanting to be where I was. I was causing myself so much pain by not accepting myself, worrying about what people thought about me. Worrying about being judged,” she says. Then, somehow, with time passing, she learned to be gentle with herself. “The moment I started being nice to myself, everything changed. I stopped putting up my own barriers and started letting people get to know me more. When you are young, you have so much vanity, insecurity, shame. The moment I started letting people get to know my art, I started getting more opportunities. People are really nice when you let them be.”



Paré paints a portrait of the famous quadriplegic artist Chuck Close.

Was there an *Aha* moment? “No, I just got sick of it. It wasn’t an event, it was more like, oh my God, I am so unhappy, I have to let it go. I got angry with myself. Anger can be a great motivator.”

It took years of learning, studying and practicing her art to get to the point of being an acclaimed artist. And like many who must overcome profound personal loss and reinvent themselves over years of adapting and perfecting their skills, that moment came when her art was recognized in and of itself. “It was when I was interviewed by Katie Couric,” she says. “She invited me because of my talent.” After that came my first major commission to paint a portrait — for the Neilsen Foundation. “It will hang in a newly built hospital, dedicated to University of Utah Rehabilitation Hospital.”

See more at [www.mariampare.com](http://www.mariampare.com).

# The Importance of HBCUs

*Wheels on Campus reached out to nearly 50 top historically Black colleges and universities in our initial survey in late 2019. Four completed the survey, but reporters were unable to make contact with key staff at Texas Southern University, which scored the highest among HBCUs. This is likely due to the pandemic and the upheaval it has caused in education communities. We will keep trying and hope to include at least one HBCU in future editions of Wheels on Campus.*

*To inform readers about the importance of HBCUs and encourage students to consider them, we spoke with Carmen Daniels Jones, a successful entrepreneur, wheelchair user, and fourth-generation alumna of — and strong believer in — HBCUs.*



Carmen Daniels Jones, founder of Solutions Marketing Group, is well-known among wheelchair users as an entrepreneur and disability advocate. At the age of 20, while attending Hampton University in Virginia, she sustained a lower thoracic spinal cord injury that resulted in paralysis below the waist and the need to use a wheelchair for mobility. “I grew up in very white settings,” she says. “In the third grade I was the only Black kid in my class. I enrolled at Hampton for two reasons: First, I wanted to be part of a majority for once. It was important to me to have that experience.”

Her second reason was her family’s history in attending HBCUs. Her great-grandmother, grandmother, mother and father all got their educations at HBCUs. “At that time, as a Black woman, I wasn’t deep in knowledge like I am now — but at Hampton my eyes were opened to the richness and depth of my own history, and the history of Black people.”

A great deal of personal growth takes place when students go to college away from familiar settings while becoming young adults, and not all of it comes from textbooks or classes. A lot of it comes from the cultural milieu of the campus. “At Hampton I

It is well accepted among people with disabilities that a welcoming environment is key to being able to compete and succeed in any endeavor. Many Black students have chosen HBCUs for essentially the same reason — the need to feel welcome, to be recognized and appreciated.

developed pride and a keen sense of awareness ... and left my naiveté behind,” says Jones. As this was happening, she also became a wheelchair user in her junior year. It is well accepted among people with disabilities that a welcoming environment is key to being able to compete and succeed in any endeavor. It is a theme that runs throughout *Wheels on Campus*. Many Black students have chosen HBCUs for essentially the same reason — the need to feel welcome, to be recognized and appreciated. “For the first time in my life, at Hampton,” says Jones, “I felt relaxed in whatever I did. You know that everyone — professors, staff, administrators and fellow students — are there to support you.”

Historically, HBCUs have graduated a significantly higher percentage of Black teachers, doctors, engineers, entrepreneurs and other professionals than other colleges. Why? Several studies suggest that the HBCU culture itself contributes to the likelihood of succeeding. And Black students who use wheelchairs or have other serious disabilities belong to at least two minority groups with histories of being discriminated against, so they must find colleges that have a proven record of dealing successfully with those dual disadvantages.

At the time of acquiring her disability, Jones had already learned an important lesson that many young Black people must learn. “All my life,” she says, “I’ve heard parents and friends tell me, ‘You have to work twice as hard, because we are competing against people who don’t have to do that. They are born into a culture where they have a huge head start in the race, and we are way behind the starting line.’”

Following her experience at Hampton, where she earned a bachelor’s in marketing, Jones began to find her way to success. She founded Solutions Marketing Group, a consulting firm based in Washington, D.C., with exclusive expertise in helping companies and government agencies build deeper,



“The greatest gift my father gave me and my two siblings was a tuition-paid college education. There is nothing like an HBCU experience. It changed my life.”

profitable brand relationships with the nation’s 56 million people with disabilities. With over 20 years of strategic consulting experience, Jones is a leading expert on the dynamics and nuances of disability-focused branding and marketing, employment and customer service.

From 2009 until 2016, as an Obama appointee, she served as senior advisor and director of the Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization. Her territories covered Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia and Texas. You might say that’s when she got an up-close look at the South, with all its historic significance to not only Black Americans, but the entire nation. Midway through her government service, her outlook was deeply impacted by a 2013 movie — *12 Years a Slave*. “It changed my life about my understanding of all that. It makes *Roots* look like *Sesame Street*,” she says. “I had to be ready to cover my face so I couldn’t see some of it. It was a visceral as well as a visual experience. That and *Selma*,” which screened in 2014.

Since leaving her position in the Obama administration, she has returned to her leadership role at Solutions Marketing Group as president and CEO. And she has never forgotten the importance of her days at Hampton University.

“The greatest gift my father gave me and my two siblings was a tuition-paid college education,” she says. “There is nothing like an HBCU experience. It changed my life.” That was 30 years ago. “Today I’m still close with my class. Every five years we can’t wait until our next reunion.”



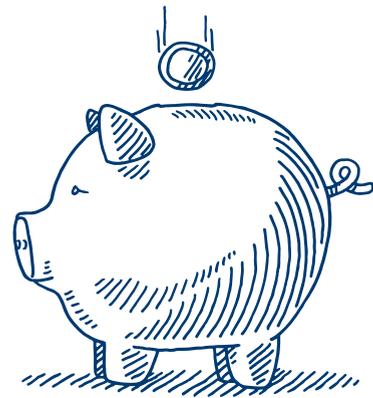
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# Choosing Academics Over Accommodation

While much of *Wheels on Campus* is dedicated to identifying wheelchair-friendly public colleges and universities, it is worth noting that some students will want to choose a school's reputation for academic excellence over an environment known for welcoming wheelchair users. Success is quite possible at these elite institutions, as the following graduates prove.

## Valerie Piro: Pursuing Her Passions at Harvard, Cambridge and Princeton

Valerie Piro grew up in Brooklyn, New York, and went to top-rated schools in preparation for college — Mark Twain Intermediate School in Brooklyn and Stuyvesant High School in New York. She was a highly successful student. But her challenge to live up to her own expectations became complicated when she sustained a C7 spinal cord injury in 2008 as a high school junior. She adjusted and went on, graduated high in her class, and enrolled at Harvard for her undergraduate studies, but not before running into numerous obstacles in her college search.

At Harvard she earned a B.A. in history with an emphasis on medieval studies. She then attended Cambridge University in England, where she earned a master's of philosophy in medieval history and wrote her dissertation on perceptions of disability in the eighth and ninth centuries. Largely as a result of her encountering numerous physical barriers in her graduate studies, she returned to Harvard to get her master's in higher education, focusing on inclusive education for students with disabilities. Today she is in her third year of doctoral studies at Princeton, researching and writing about the early medieval social history of Western Europe, once again centering around the history and perceptions of disability. She currently lives in an apartment in New York City while she works on her Ph.D.

As a high school student, following in the footsteps of her older sister, Piro was driven to excel. En route to a track meet, she was paralyzed in a vehicle accident. During subsequent stays in the hospital and at rehab, she had time to slow down and think, but not for long. When she graduated, she set about choosing a college and decided to visit Washington University in St. Louis.

"Our family often took road trips to cities that had baseball stadiums," she says. "We love baseball, my dad loves it. We combined college visits with baseball stadiums. Since elementary school, I knew college was expected. On one trip we saw a Cleveland game and a Pittsburgh Pirates game, and then we went to St. Louis to drop my sister off to college at Washington University."

It was a natural decision to revisit the campus as a wheel-



**Valerie Piro successfully advocated for herself on three historic campuses.**

chair user when she graduated. As described in an article she later wrote that appeared in *Inside Higher Ed* (originally published online in *The Establishment*), she was shocked at what she found:

"The visit was a disaster. Multiple entrances to the main campus included staircases, and I had to circle around the campus before I found a flat entrance. Once I made it to the main campus, I wheeled over an unstable wooden plank placed over a short staircase. This, a tour guide explained, was a ramp.

"I needed to use an elevator to get to another part of the campus, which was fine, except that the elevator was locked,

and campus security had the key. I pressed a button calling for security that was located by the elevator and waited about 15 minutes before a security guard who was doing his rounds showed up. He said the button I had been pressing was broken.”

There was more. Another elevator was too small for her wheelchair, and cobblestones on campus were difficult to navigate.

At Harvard she found improved willingness among disability services staff and others to accommodate her needs, but to get what she needed, she had to speak up. When she went to Cambridge University for her master’s, she was in for a shock: “They were not prepared for me. They told me, ‘We are renovating our facilities.’ They said, ‘Next year we will be ready for you.’ This is where disability services came into play for me.” Through a series of complaints and negotiations, she managed to make a largely inaccessible environment work for her.

Socially, as well, she had to adjust to a new culture that was not as advanced as she was used to. “Two nights a week I went to the pub with my study group. It was the only one that was wheelchair accessible; the medievalists didn’t want to leave me out. I could get in and use the bathroom, but it was stressful, a bit of a culture shock. I didn’t have my whole cathing situation figured out at first,” she says. The intermittent cath kit she used at home wasn’t available in England. “My parents would send them, and Customs would hold them hostage until I paid a high tax to get them released. I had to meet with a special nurse to get a cath prescription. It was a learning curve. Cambridge was not as transparent as Harvard. Not many automated doors before I got there.”

Throughout her graduate studies, her passion for medieval history drove her to find ways to succeed, usually by strongly advocating for her needs.

Throughout her graduate studies, her passion for medieval history drove her to find ways to succeed, usually by strongly advocating for her needs. The experience taught her a valuable lesson that administrators and educators need to respect and incorporate into their respective cultures.

“The mainstream attitude toward applying to college dictates that students with disabilities are responsible for finding an institution that accommodates them,” she writes. “Currently, students with disabilities must visit every college campus they’re seriously considering — a costly endeavor — and although some may have never had to advocate for themselves before, they must navigate university bureaucracies and vet disability services offices to ensure a good fit. Even if the disability services office is on top of its game, students may still encounter issues with a lack of services or general ignorance of their condition among faculty members and others. This reality is completely unacceptable.”

“The support I needed as an 18-year-old living independently on a college campus for the first time was extremely different from the support I needed as a 30-year-old on the verge of navigating the world as a professional economist,” says Allison Thompkins.



## Allison Thompkins: Achieving True Inclusion at Scripps and MIT

Allison Thompkins, 40, graduated from Scripps College in California with a B.A. in mathematical economics in 2004. She did her graduate and post-graduate studies at MIT, where she earned a Ph.D. in economics in 2011. While writing her dissertation, she worked as a consultant to The World Bank doing economic analysis of a microlending program for people with disabilities in India (a first-of-its-kind program that The World Bank hoped would improve disabled people’s access to mainstream microlending programs). During her last year of grad school, she was hired by Mathematica Policy Research as a researcher. She conducted economic analysis, wrote policy briefs, met with stakeholders and gave presentations on various policies and pilot programs meant to improve the lives of those with disabilities. She has since “retired” from that role due to health complications but still occasionally provides subject-matter guidance to various entities. In her own words:

I was born with quadriplegic athetoid cerebral palsy. In both college and grad school, I used a motorized wheelchair for all of my mobility in the community. I have classic “CP speech” and began using an assistive communication device in grad school on an as-needed basis. My swallowing and breathing are also impacted, and I have extremely limited use of my hands, so my power chair joystick was heavily modified. I used Dragon Dictate to access my computer in college

“I attribute my collegiate success to a trifecta of habits: I prioritized my health needs above all else. I chose a major that I was passionate about. I always did my best in every class I took and every extra curricular activity I participated in.”

and most of grad school. When Dragon could no longer reliably understand my speech, MIT provided someone to type for me. Throughout college and grad school, I used PCA services for all of my activities of daily living.

I attribute my collegiate success to a trifecta of habits. First, I always prioritized my health needs above all else. We all think better when we are well-rested, pain free and healthy. Taking care of my health meant taking fewer classes, resting throughout the day as needed, keeping up with my home therapy program to minimize spasticity and tone, and communicating my temperature needs to those who controlled the temperature of classrooms.

Second, I chose a major that I was passionate about. If you're going to spend upwards of four years studying various aspects of a particular subject, being passionately interested in the topic is extremely helpful in maintaining one's motivation to continuously study.

Third, as cliché as it may sound, I always did my best in every class I took and every extra curricular activity I participated in. I found that the only way for me to achieve excellence is to put forth excellence.

At Scripps College, all freshmen and first-semester sophomores had to take three courses in the core curriculum, which focuses on the history of culture, representation and knowledge from the neo-classical era through post-modernity. I enjoyed the first two semesters but noticed a glaring omission from the curriculum: disability theory. For my final semester, the final project for a film class was a student-organized film festival for the entire college community. I suggested we include a film with a disabled lead character in the festival. We did. After we showed the film, we held a discussion about the film and disability theory. Subsequently, a few professors in the core program decided to permanently include disability theory in their syllabi.

Another academic accomplishment I'm proud of is writing a chapter of my dissertation at MIT that focused on economic opportunities for those with disabilities in the field of development economics. In development economics, issues facing people with disabilities are rarely included in research papers; however, the prevalence of disability in developing countries is extremely high. Once I realized that research about people with disabilities in development economics was almost nonexistent, I wanted to do my part to correct this. Finding economic data about people with disabilities in a developing country was quite challenging. My research was among the first of its kind.

Both Scripps and MIT were extremely welcoming and

supportive, but in vastly different ways. The support I needed as an 18-year-old living independently on a college campus for the first time was extremely different from the support I needed as a 30-year-old on the verge of navigating the world as a professional economist.

One of the most important characteristics that Scripps and MIT had in common was that they adhered to the spirit as well as the letter of ADA law. As a wheelchair user who required classroom accommodations, I'm extremely grateful for certain mandatory laws. However, for someone with my complicated level of disability to excel academically and be fully immersed in the life of an institution, universities must be committed to providing extra support services that aren't required by law.

The success of students with disabilities in a college setting requires a partnership between the student and the university. I found that with creative problem solving and galvanizing my community of friends, I was able to successfully handle most issues. However, there were situations that I simply could not resolve myself, so I asked for assistance from the appropriate staff members. If a student cannot independently resolve a situation and needs assistance, he or she should absolutely ask for help from the college's administration. After all, equal access laws exist, in part, so students with disabilities can participate in college and graduate school to the fullest extent of their desire, regardless of disability.

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# Finding Your Future

*Many college students find their way into careers that seemingly have little to do with their major fields of study. This is where the college experience is invaluable. It is a process of self-discovery, not a degree factory. Here are two college graduates who have embarked on nontraditional paths to find their future.*

**R**yan Gebauer, 41, a C4-5 complete quad, was injured in 1995 after leaping from a three-story tree into a canal. He fell wrong and broke his neck, becoming a sip-and-puff power wheelchair user. He later enrolled in Florida Atlantic University and earned two bachelor's degrees in 2004, one in criminal justice, another in political science, making good use of his 30 electives to give him wide latitude in finding job opportunities. He minored in business administration, a wise move that eventually paid off.

Upon graduating, his plan was to go to law school, but after being put on a waitlist, he took a real estate course, got interested, and wound up instead getting an MBA at Florida Atlantic University in 2008. While there, he volunteered to work for the disability services office and got involved in a support group, where he became aware of how housing issues were a major problem for disabled people. He realized he might be able to make a difference in the lives of other people with disabilities by going into the real estate business.

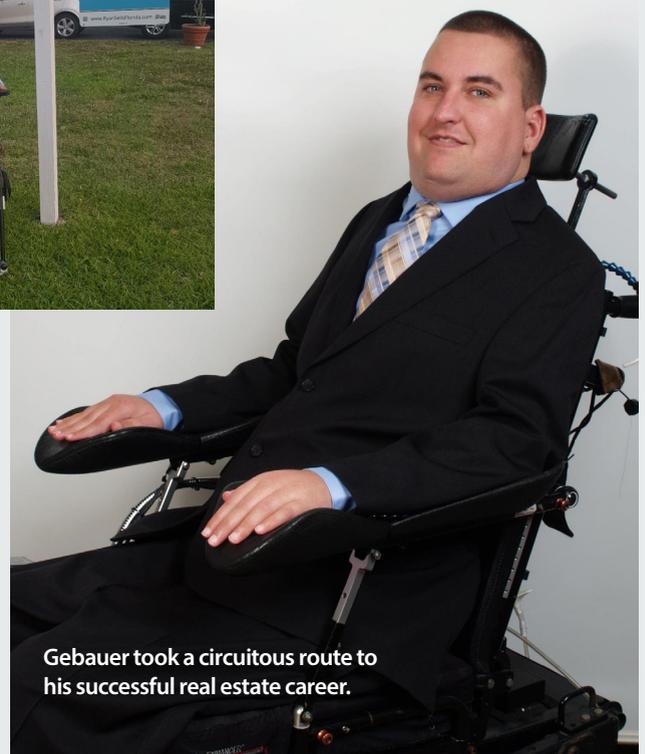
After a brief stint as an independent real estate agent, Gebauer went to work for Keller Williams Realty in 2011. "My niche was seniors and disabled clients," he says, "but I wanted to expand into foreclosures and selling to minorities and women, so I left and formed my own brokerage, Ryan Realty Group, in 2015. I found that to do what I wanted, I had to create my own situation, which allowed me to freelance and make my own decisions."

At a time when face-to-face communication and travel have been difficult due to the pandemic, especially in Florida, which was hard hit in late summer when Gebauer was interviewed, it seemed selling real estate would not be a lucrative business. "Believe it or not," he says, "it has been insanely crazy. I was working with a couple earlier in the year — they were both amputees — in Palm Beach, and we just did a Zoom closing. They were at my office with an attorney, and I was at home. There's been no slowdown in South Florida. I've had multiple offers. Real estate is an essential business so we never shut down. In April there was big demand and low supply. I did another closing on Mother's Day, and last week I did another, and just now got a phone call on a property."

He does most of his showings personally and lets the interested parties have the run of the house while he waits outside. "A lot of these houses I can't even get into, without help."

He says about 40% to 60% of his business comes from non-disabled clients. He has a modest staff of a handful of people. His father sometimes shows properties, but Ryan always does all the "paperwork" — which is considerable. "I'm 100% digital. I do everything by myself. I scan all the docs — contracts, research, specs and technical stuff — and stick it up in the cloud." Besides his father, he employs a paraplegic real estate agent full-time, has a 65-year-old agent who is very busy and two part-time employees who are both 80. Sound like a low energy group? Not at all. The real estate market in South Florida is driven by retirees and elderly couples, and they feel comfortable among agents their age.

Gebauer says that real estate is on the verge of a pandemic-driven boom. "A lot of people are feeling tired of being cooped up in high-rise condos and are looking for more space — single family residences and places on acreage. It's probably the best



**Gebauer took a circuitous route to his successful real estate career.**

kind of living situation you can find during this scary time, especially if you are older and can afford it."

If you think it sounds like Gebauer is in it for the money, you would be mistaken. "It's all about networking and doing the right thing, helping people find what they want. That's my return on my investment. Also, because of what I'm doing, others like me are getting into this business. I know of

nine people with disabilities who now have real estate licenses, and 35 of my friends from college are doing the same.”

He’s not getting rich, but he is meeting his needs while employing others, and he pays his personal attendants out of his own pocket. At 16 hours a day for help with his activities of daily living and other needs around his home, that adds up to a sizable chunk out of his income.

“I’m fortunate to be where I am, doing what I love. When I look back, a lot had to do with the decision I made in college to take a lot of electives that were useful,” he says. “That is what ultimately led to my career path.”

Jason Keatseangsilp has plenty of time to explore his passions and potential.



A couple of years after sustaining a T11-12 spinal cord injury in 2011 at the age of 17, Jason Keatseangsilp enrolled in college and graduated from the University of Arizona with a B.A. in biomedical engineering in 2017. During his senior year he designed a lightweight exoskeleton for a student who has cerebral palsy that improved the student’s ability to stand and walk with greater stability as well as with a proper gait pattern.

He also worked as a tutor in the university’s Strategic and Alternative Learning Techniques Center, a nationally recognized model of comprehensive enhanced services for students with learning and attention challenges, earning his master tutor certification in 2019 with more than 500 hours of tutoring experience. Concurrently, he pursued a career in wheelchair tennis, one of the only sports where adaptive divisions compete professionally at major international competitions alongside their nondisabled peers. He is currently ranked fourth nationally in both men’s singles and doubles and plays for Team USA.

Keatseangsilp started playing wheelchair tennis after graduating in 2017. “I used to play a lot before my injury, so it was quite the transition going from standing to sitting. I’ve worked my way up in the rankings. Right now I’m not too involved in biomedical engineering,” he says. “That exoskeleton was the highlight of my undergraduate career. It wasn’t just about making

it — it was about the journey I had as team leader of the project. I was managing material science and other engineers. I had the responsibility of doing the project, pricing it, raising funds and justifying their use — a real world business experience.”

Since then, tutoring and tennis have been his focus. “Tutoring is my work. There is also prize money for wheelchair tennis.” But his future as a wheelchair tennis player was in doubt for a long time. Following his 2011 spinal cord injury, persistent neuropathic pain was his constant nemesis. This kind of continual nerve pain is experienced by a significant percentage of SCI survivors. “It was one of the more severe cases the docs had seen,” he says. “The pain was too much and started to bleed into other relationships in my life. I took a ton of meds — Lyrica, gabapentin, neurontin, and some narcotics, but none of them helped much.”

After learning about wheelchair tennis legend Randy Snow’s battle with pain and how he handled it, Keatseangsilp decided to take a gamble and have the same risky operation — called dorsal root entry zone surgery — in hopes it would stop his pain. He went to the recognized surgical expert for DREZ, Dr. Scott Falci, of Craig Rehabilitation Hospital, to have the procedure done.

“I had some post-op complications, but they were insignificant. The surgery took care of almost all my pain. That led me to wanting to play tennis again,” he says. He worked his way into playing in competitive tournaments in the states. “Since then I have been very thankful to play a lot of places, Canada, Mexico, then progressed, and in 2019, I went to Argentina.” Twice in 2019 he played in Israel, in addition to North America.

“Tennis is a very special sport. I think it is one of the safest sports to play involving social distancing, so I’ve been able to play in 2020 domestically, but international competitions haven’t resumed yet,” he says. “I don’t see tournaments coming back any time soon. Other sports, rugby and football, are not safe yet. No sense having tournaments now, since it wouldn’t be fair to block certain countries.”

So how is success in college related to playing wheelchair tennis? Obtaining meaningful work is not a given upon graduation. It often takes trial and error, and time, to find what works in the everyday world. Keatseangsilp’s success in doing a real-world engineering project as a senior at the University of Arizona paid off in improved confidence and a positive outlook for his future. As did his success in professional wheelchair tennis competition.

“I’m not comfortable with all I have done,” he says, “but I think I’m living life to the most I can right now. I have done well. Almost nine years injured, and I’ve had some nice achievements. It really does help with your identity and self-worth.”

His future plans? “I love tennis so much, I will try to play as long as I can. I’ve been fortunate to have been healthy,” he says. “I would like to get back to engineering, maybe graduate work to further my education. I know I can’t do tennis forever, so I will need to do other things. That is why school was my number one priority.”

Now 26, with time to gain more experience, he sees tutoring as his current job, and he’s enjoying it. “I could see myself doing tutoring a long time,” he says. “It has grown into a genuine passion. I love working for the University of Arizona, the rewarding feeling, seeing progress come from helping others.”

# Study Abroad Programs: 'People with Disabilities Encouraged to Apply'

By Susan Sygall

**W**ho would have thought so few words could change my life? I wouldn't have, but they did.

I was in my 20s, a fairly new wheelchair rider about to graduate from the University of California, Berkeley. While sitting in a café eating, I noticed a small ad in the student newspaper: "Be an ambassador of goodwill, all expenses paid. Study for a year in another country." It never once crossed my mind that people who are wheelchair users would not jump at the chance. I applied through my local Rotary Club for a full scholarship to study a year at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia. I was ready for adventure in another culture, and there was no need to learn another language.

My potential dorm in Australia had accessible bathrooms with handrails. My vocational rehab counselor offered to pay for a golf cart so I could get around the hilly campus by stowing my lightweight wheelchair on the back of the golf cart. The Rotary Foundation would pay for just about everything else: airfare, food, insurance. After a fairly competitive process, I was accepted and ready for what would become the adventure of a lifetime.

In 1975 I was one of only three students with disabilities at the campus and the only international disabled student. I want-



MIUSA director Susan Sygall

ed to meet other disabled people, so I joined the men's wheelchair basketball team, which suddenly became a coed basketball team at my insistence. I took a variety of courses for fulfilling credits for my graduate degree and spoke at various Rotary Clubs during my time in Australia, part of my commitment to be a goodwill ambassador. On my off-time, I had the time of my life.

I took a camping trip by bus for 30 days through the Outback. I was the only person in a wheelchair, which my driver did not appreciate, but I forged ahead, seeing camels, visiting the Kimberley and its canyons, sleeping in a tent.

As the only person with a disability, I had to be assertive in making friends. My being the only international disabled student gave me a unique advantage.

During the six-week break for summer, I did what most of the nondisabled students did: I went to New Zealand and hitchhiked around in my wheelchair, staying with families and individuals who picked us up during our travels. I traveled with my then-boyfriend, also a wheelchair user, and much to everyone's surprise we had no trouble hitchhiking for the entire six weeks. I am still in touch with some of the families who picked us up during those times.

At the end of my year, I traveled with another woman who was on a similar scholarship who did not have a disability. We took local buses through Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand. You have to have a great sense of adventure, a desire for the unexpected, and a willingness to accept unfamiliar situations. Every day for a year was an adrenaline rush, from the food, the geography, the friends, the romance, the accomplishments, and the disappointments. I can truly say it was a year of living life to its fullest.

I learned much more than book knowledge during that year. I learned how to push the boundaries of what should be possible for people with all types of disabilities. I learned not to always accept it when told that a trip, excursion or experience was not possible for someone using a wheelchair. I met people with disabilities from all over the world who seemed to yearn to be part of a global family, to learn about their



Christina Chambers participated in a four-week Spanish-language program sponsored by the Council on International Educational Exchange.

rights, to strategize, to feel connected to one other. That yearning is even stronger now than it was then.

I brought those deep experiences, conversations, and moments back with me when I returned to the United States and cofounded an organization whose mission is to empower people with disabilities to achieve their human rights through international exchange and international development — Mobility International USA.

It all started with reading that handful of words and thinking, why wouldn't I try this?

Have you thought about volunteering abroad, doing research abroad, going on a professional exchange or getting a Fulbright or other scholarship? These amazing experiences are available to everyone, even those of us with physical disabilities.

As you're deciding which university or community college to attend, or where you might go for graduate studies, imagine what your life would be like in another culture, what you would study there, what your surroundings would be like. You make the choice. It might be for two weeks, a month, or a year. Think of what you have to gain and where it could lead. The possibilities are many, and even though I write this at a time when it is not safe to travel internationally, I am confident that day will come again, perhaps sooner than we think.

For more information on scholarships and other funding sources, tips on traveling and more, contact Susan Sygall at Mobility International USA — [miosa.org](http://miosa.org). To read more about the adventures of Jake Robinson and Christina Chambers, see [www.newmobility.com/2020/10/access-the-world-via-international-exchange](http://www.newmobility.com/2020/10/access-the-world-via-international-exchange).



Jake Robinson, who participated in a Semester at Sea, leans back against a stone wall of the Castle of Sao Jorge in Lisbon, Portugal.

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# Going Beyond the ADA

*Tom Webb, disability services director at Wright State University, who has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair, has a long history with the Americans with Disabilities Act, beginning in his pre-ADA childhood. Wheels on Campus talked with him about his early experience and what he has learned about the importance of going beyond the ADA as the head of student disability services at one of the nation's best campuses for wheelchair users (see Wright State University's profile, page 16).*

## **Q. How did your experiences as a person with a disability shape your attitude toward the ADA and compliance?**

A lot of it had to do with society's expectations of me — the bar was low. I now think that not only can one person have a significant effect on advocacy, they can transform where they are heading. Without having a disability I wouldn't have that point of view. Wright State University was a college name that came up many times when I was interning [as a Kennedy Fellow] in Washington, D.C., so I filed it in the back of my head. When the position came open, well, I'm an East Coast guy, never considered the Midwest, but I took it. I think a lot had to do with WSU's reputation. I started there in February 2014. Their reputation went back to before the 1973 Rehab Act. We really didn't become a university until '67, so we had the luxury of planning ahead. The Air Force Base there lent a military presence, and a lot of Vietnam vets were coming there. A lot of buildings went up after that. In the late '60s, there were only a total of four buildings on campus. It has expanded a great deal right up until 2016.

## **Q. Why is it important to go beyond ADA guidelines?**

It's not just about buildings and accommodations. We want to build a culture, and the ADA is just a building block, a kind of foundation. That was many years ago. It has grown in its application so all with disabilities are welcome, and this is normal. It's important from a student's point of view — quite a few have

struggled in high school, so we give them an opportunity to start fresh, and many times they didn't think that would be an option. That is key — the reshaping of their attitude. Going beyond, creating a welcoming culture, no matter the disability background. That is what has allowed me to feel connected, and it makes a difference in terms of retaining students rather than them dropping out or leaving. Access and inclusion are woven into every part of the university. Absolutely we have to go beyond the law. When you look at a lot of disability services offices, it is a very transactional, superficial process. In my experience, accommodations are a small part — maybe 30%. There's housing, tech, friends, relationships, we look at the whole student and their full experience. I've seen that in a number of places, the need to go beyond. Even here, we installed brand new elevators where the arrangement of call buttons met the letter of the law, but they didn't meet everyone's needs. So that's why we installed different elevators with lower buttons and footplates.

## **Q. Was that easy to do? How did you become aware of the need?**

Well, it's kind of a building block process. Here our entire student body is involved — the students were saying that we are seeing too many students waiting in front of elevators, waiting for someone to come along and push a button for them. So the student body association contracted out the manufacturing of stickers that said "please give consideration to all of our students," with three or four emblems: the international wheelchair logo, blind, others, pregnant women, universal design. It's a lot easier to put yourself in someone's shoes when you look at it from a universal design approach. But still, the overriding principle is to create that welcoming culture.

## **Q. Can any college create that kind of culture?**

You have to rely on accommodations, but you have to go beyond that. A lot of it is finding the right people on campus, the champions who see the need, so you try to involve the entire college campuswide — allies, experts, cheerleaders, legal, classes, communications — all departments have to be involved in order to create sustainable change.

I know how hard it is to replicate that culture and keep it going — it is no small feat. It involves a lot of intentionality, recruiting the helpers, a lot of volunteers. That is one thing about WSU: The leadership on campus always keeps in mind the needs of students with disabilities. My office is seen as a trusted resource and a genuine and trusted advocate on campus. It's not about being purely compliant — it is bigger than the ADA. This is one of the pillars of WSU pride and legacy. The first step is awareness, the second is reaching out to those who do it well, the pioneers and leaders, and learning from that — and using the Association of Higher Education and Disability. AHEAD is key. But the national scene is changing. You have to look beyond the pioneers as well. Some have had to scale back over the years.



Photo by Erin Pence

**Tom Webb and Gina Oswald, program director of rehabilitation services, organized a study abroad trip that compared accessibility in England and the United States.**

# WHEELCHAIR FRIENDLY COLLEGES 11-20



# UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Twin Cities

## A MAJOR UNIVERSITY SOLIDLY COMMITTED TO INCLUSIVITY



**Location:** Minneapolis, large city, population 1,284,000; 1,204-acre campus

**2020 tuition and fees:** in-state: \$15,000; out-of-state: \$33,300

**2020 undergraduate enrollment:** 34,600; student-faculty ratio: 17:1

**Popular majors:** biological and biomedical sciences, engineering, business, social sciences

**Ranked #27** nationally in Top Public Schools (Best Colleges 2020, *U.S. News & World Report*)

**Number of registered wheelchair-using students in 2020:** 45

**Disability Resource Center:** 612-626-1333, [drc@umn.edu](mailto:drc@umn.edu); [disability.umn.edu](http://disability.umn.edu)

By Linda Mastandrea

**T**he University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, situated in an urban area in the midst of rolling hills, lakes and nature trails, takes pride in being welcoming. “We want to do the right thing,” says Donna Johnson, director of the Disability Resource Center. “We want to go beyond the letter of the law and really implement the spirit of the law.”

Johnson readily admits the campus is old and there are challenges. It gets a lot of snow — it is Minnesota, after all. But for the 11 years Johnson has been at the DRC, she has worked to create a “one-stop shop” for students, faculty, staff and guests with disabilities to get what they need — to learn, to live, to play, and to take advantage of all the campus has to offer. Roberta Kehne, the physical access coordinator, works to relocate classes when necessary and make sure new construction and renovations meet Minnesota code.

Community partnerships, says Johnson, are a strength of the DRC. Megan Welty, manager of the sports and recreation department at Courage Kenney Rehabilitation Institute — a leading outpatient facility for wheelchair users — agrees. Her staff is working on the campus’ new fitness center concept and advising on the types of equipment to procure as well as on how to create an accessible and welcoming environment. Courage Kenney also offers internships to the university’s physical therapy, occupational therapy and exercise

science students. “We want to work with the university to create that inclusive atmosphere, give students with disabilities what they need, and give them a reason to stay in-state,” says Welty.

One such student is Janet Scanlon. As a young girl with cerebral palsy, she started playing wheelchair basketball and other sports. She came to Minnesota pursuing her dream of going to medical school and volunteering at Courage Kenney to help teach other young people with disabilities. She had a car on campus, but paratransit, shuttles and city buses are available for students as well. Janet graduated in spring of 2020 with a degree in human physiology. She plans to take a year to teach English in South Korea and hopes that a lingering pandemic will not cancel that plan. “I was adopted from there, and I’ve been studying the language.”



Janet Scanlon works out on a NuStep at the RecWell Center.

Oliver Brunson, a wheelchair user due to multiple disabilities, is a cultural studies and comparative literature major. The DRC arranged for Brunson to receive accommodations for testing, physical location of his classes and for his sensory disorders. They also helped him with housing and his search to identify accessible off-campus apartments that would meet his needs. Now, he works at the DRC part time as an access assistant, taking notes, doing audio description or handling testing accommodations for students. “My accessibility consultant was great in help-

ing me become comfortable with my disability and learn how to advocate for myself. Now, I want to do that for others.”

Rob Wudlick, a C4-5 quad and full-time power wheelchair user from a rafting accident in 2011, joined the university’s rehabilitation medicine department in November 2019. He’s employed as project manager and director of a number of spinal cord injury clinical trials, researching epidural stimulation, pain, adaptive fitness and other SCI-related subjects. “They’ve been really accommodating,” he says, “providing me with computer technology, an accessible desk and a parking spot near my building.”

Neal Binsfield works in the DRC on employee accommodations, but his connection to disability — with 11 children, most of whom have disabilities — led him to be a strong advocate for creating inclusion on campus for students. He has been heavily involved with Dr. George Brown, who the university recruited

from Alabama to run its RecWell Center. Together, they plan to expand adaptive sports program offerings on campus for students, including men’s and women’s wheelchair basketball.

As its name implies, the RecWell Center has a strong focus on recreation and wellness. “During the pandemic closing of the campus, our partnership with Courage Kenney enabled us to offer virtual programming for students and others with disabilities, like adaptive fitness, yoga and wellness programs.” During regular times, they also offer an aquatics program, golf, climbing walls, sport courts, outdoor programs, fitness classes and wellness offerings.

The major drawback of the campus is approximately 80-89% of the buildings are not accessible, according to DRC Director Johnson, which is far from ideal. However, the high number of wheelchair-using students enrolled, and their seeming satisfaction, may be a more important factor to consider.

# PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY

Portland, Oregon

## A CITY CAMPUS WITH AN INCLUSIVE, DIVERSE CULTURE



**Location:** Portland, Oregon, medium city, population 653,115; 50-acre city-campus

**Tuition:** in-state: \$9,600; out-of-state: \$28,500

**2020 undergraduate enrollment:** 21,000; student-faculty ratio: 20:1

**Popular majors:** business, management, marketing, social sciences

**Ranked #9** in Service Learning among National Public Universities (*U.S. News & World Report*)

**Number of registered wheelchair users in 2020:** 40

**Disability Resource Center:** 503-725-4103, DRC@pdx.edu; pdx.edu/disability-resource-center

By Tim Gilmer

**A**t first glance, the Portland State campus looks indistinguishable from downtown Portland. The city’s main street, Broadway, runs one-way through a cluster of buildings. Only one feature makes it clear you are passing through a university: Two skybridges connect university-owned buildings on either side of Broadway, the first bearing a large gold-plated motto: “Let Knowledge Serve the City.”

Portland State is recognized nationally for its programs emphasizing volunteering and learning-by-doing — a natural connection since the university is seamlessly integrated into city life. It has also placed in the top 10 most innovative universities in multiple years. Recently Portland State teamed with Oregon Health Sciences University to form the OHSU-PSU School of Public Health. Portland State offers undergraduate degrees in applied health and fitness or health studies, while OHSU administers graduate degrees. The program is known for research opportunities and internships that encourage students to join

with local and regional health resources, clinics and nonprofits for hands-on learning and service.

The downtown location has much to offer students, who enjoy convenient access to all the city has to offer through light rail, streetcar, buses, cars, on foot or by power wheelchair. Easily reachable within a 10-mile radius are four major hospitals, the Rehabilitation Institute of Oregon, professional soccer and basketball, concert venues, movie theaters, and restaurants of all types. Most central classroom buildings connect with the skybridges, anchored on the east by parking structures, perfect for commuter students and vans with wheelchair lifts.

Lori McCloskey, 51, a returning student with cerebral palsy, uses a power wheelchair. “From the parking garage, it’s easy in a power chair. Any building is OK,” she says. She’s earning a bachelor of fine arts with an emphasis on creative writing. She likes to use the dedicated drop-in space in the Disability Resource Center because it is quiet, has computers loaded with adaptive

software, a lounging couch, iPads, and a charging station for her power chair.

Manual chair users have it harder than power chair users since perfectly flat ground is hard to find. But just west of the central cluster of buildings that house most undergraduate classes, a green space on campus — Park Blocks — offers decent independent rolling. On dry and sunny days in spring, summer and fall, it's a popular place to hang out in between classes. On weekends, except for during the dead of winter, Portland's popular farmer's market sets up in this space to serve the community and surrounding suburban area.

Jake Wheeler, 29, a C6 quadriplegic, plans to teach high school health and physical education classes. He commutes, parks in one of the structures and wheels across the skybridge using a manual chair. He also finds the DRC helpful. "I like the digital textbooks they provide. Better than lugging heavy books around all day." While a few buildings can be hard to get to, he says he's had just three classes outside the main cluster of buildings. "I had some science labs on the other side of Park Blocks, but I got there OK. I chose not to struggle with the test tube thing in the lab with my quad hands. I'm more of a spreadsheet guy, and we worked in a lot of groups, so that worked out, no problem."

Training classroom aides is a specialty of the DRC's Jewels Griesmeyer Krentz. She teaches the importance of striking a balance between assisting students and respecting their auto-

my and independence. Aides mostly help in the classroom or class-related activities. "But," she says, "we are here to help according to each student's individual situation. We can arrange for aides to be used in whatever ways fit students' needs."

What if a student needs a personal care care attendant? "We have accessible housing on campus, and we work closely with students to help get them what they need, including PCAs," says Krentz. "We can also arrange for the PCAs to stay in student housing."

Students have plenty to do on campus besides study. Smith Memorial Student Union has multiple levels. The Viking Game-room occupies a corner of the basement floor and features a bowling alley, pool tables and video games. The Union's coffee shops and restaurants are also popular.

Wheeler likes to spend time in the student recreation center. "After I was hurt, I got into quad rugby, and it was a lifesaver. At the rec center I can use a lot of adaptive exercise equipment to keep in shape," he says. Outdoor recreational opportunities are also available for wheelchair users and others with disabilities.



# TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

College Station

## A MASSIVE CAMPUS, MOSTLY FLAT, WITH WIDESPREAD ACCESSIBILITY



**Location:** College Station, Texas, medium city, population 121,526; 5,200-acre city-campus

**Tuition and fees:** in-state: \$11,232; out-of-state: \$37,726

**2020 undergraduate enrollment:** 53,743; student-faculty ratio: 20:1

**Popular Majors:** engineering, business, interdisciplinary studies, agriculture

**Ranked #27 in Top Public Schools (Best Colleges 2020, U.S. News & World Report)**

**Number of registered wheelchair users in 2020:** 25

**Department of Disability Resources:** 979-845-1637, [disability@tamu.edu](mailto:disability@tamu.edu); [disability.tamu.edu](http://disability.tamu.edu)

By Steve Wright

**T**exas A&M University at College Station, with nearly 54,000 undergraduate students — the largest student body population in the U.S. — is spread over a campus of more than 5,000 acres. A paratransit system that runs on campus is widely praised by wheelchair users. As the first public university in Texas, founded in 1876 as the Agriculture and Mechanical College of Texas, the original campus has grown to

include several state branches with a wide array of both undergraduate and graduate degree programs as well as global prominence as a research institution. Students may at first seem overwhelmed with options, but 92% of freshmen undergraduates at TAMU successfully complete their first-year studies, one of the highest retention rates in the nation.

TAMU's wheelchair-using students are served by the uni-

versity's Department of Disability Resources. Kristie Orr, DDR's director, oversees 17 staff members and about 15 student workers. For 22 years, she has advocated for the social model of disability on the TAMU campus — emphasizing that a disability is part of an individual's identity, not a problem or something to be fixed. She says there are accessible rooms in more than a dozen residence halls on the TAMU campus, which she favors versus clustering all students with disabilities in only one or two dorms. For students who use wheelchairs, this approach opens many doors that in years past created barriers instead of opportunities.

"We have learning communities, one for engineers, another for leadership, other themes — and they are very popular," says Orr. "With our system, you can live anywhere you like on campus, at any price point, and you are not precluded from being in one of the learning communities because you use a wheelchair."

Taylor Sutton, a junior majoring in agricultural leadership and development, serves in TAMU's Corps of Cadets, has spinal muscular atrophy and uses a power wheelchair.

"Being a cadet with a physical disability, I participate to the best of my ability in every event — from morning and evening formations to corps runs, where I run my wheelchair as fast as it can go alongside my nondisabled buddies, to Corps marches, and many other activities," she says. "I do it all, and do not allow my disability to define what I can do. I want to show others that these tasks can still be done in a different and innovative way." Sutton says she is also allowed to live in an on-campus apartment — rather than the required Corps dorms — that accommodates the space she needs for medical devices and an attendant.

Katherine Vacek, a junior studying history at TAMU, has a T6 spinal cord injury and also uses a manual wheelchair with a SmartDrive power assist. Vacek, who wants to go to graduate school to become a history teacher, rehabbed at TIRR in Houston, one of the nation's leading rehab hospitals. She says many of her therapists were TAMU grads who spoke highly of the school, which influenced her decision to enroll there.

"At TAMU, all sorority houses are required to be wheelchair accessible. Each one has at least one accessible entrance, accessible parking, and accessible bathrooms on the first floor," Vacek says. "Part of the reason I wanted to pledge Delta Zeta was the fact that I found their house to be more accessible and better for me than other houses. However, they do not have an accessible living situation so I am not able to live in the house. Disability Resources called ahead and communicated with the Panhellenic head of recruitment to ensure that everything would be accessible and running smoothly throughout rush week."

Regarding classroom building access, restrooms have been built with wide, winding hallways to provide privacy with no cumbersome doors. Some buildings have push button entrances, but most have motion-activated sliding doors for ease of access. Auditorium/stadium seating-type classrooms have been retrofitted to ensure there is accessible seating in the front, middle and back sections.

TAMU is also known for its aerospace engineering program — as well as having ongoing projects funded by the Na-

tional Aeronautics and Space Administration, the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation and the Office of Naval Research.

Kaki Kaki, a quadriplegic and a senior in aerospace engineering, uses a manual wheelchair with power assist wheels. He is pleased with TAMU's international studies program, through which he spent a month in Brazil for foreign study, staying in a small town a few hours outside of São Paulo. He says lodging, buses and sidewalks were not accessible, but fellow students helped him negotiate barriers.

**"At TAMU, all sorority houses are required to be wheelchair accessible," says Katherine Vacek. "Part of the reason I wanted to pledge Delta Zeta was the fact that I found their house to be more accessible and better for me than other houses."**



"I would recommend going to A&M because the disability staff and testing services are some of the most motivated and helpful individuals I've had the pleasure of working with," he says. "They promptly respond to all my emails and are always willing to help. They're constantly trying to be active within the disability community, and anyone can tell that they truly enjoy what they do."

## Brianna Bazan: Ready to Give Back



“When I went to visit the campus, there was something that made me feel so welcome.”

But things are not as safe as they used to be.”

Starr County has one of the highest rates of COVID-19 cases in the nation, and in late summer of 2020, Starr County Memorial Hospital was overwhelmed, having to fly critical cases to distant locations because of a shortage of ICU units, medical supplies, and staff. As of early August, none of the patients that had to be flown out returned alive. The individual stories are heartbreaking.

Bazan, a wheelchair user who sustained a T4 spinal cord injury when she was just a toddler, has warm memories of her childhood. “It was always

**B**rianna Bazan, a junior at Texas A&M, College Station, majoring in biomedical sciences with a double minor in public health and entomology, plans to pursue a medical career. Her circumstances have placed her in an area of critical need. “I grew up in Rio Grande City, not really a city — the population is about 14,000 — about five minutes from the Mexican border,” she says. Her hometown is the county seat of Starr County, which has the highest percentage of Hispanic people in the nation, about half of them living below the poverty level. One hospital serves the county population of 61,000.

“I love the valley where I grew up. The river flows right next to my hometown at the very tip of Texas. I have family in Mexico, friends that used to cross border back and forth to Mexico.

just me and my brother, but when I was 13, my younger sister was born. It was almost like being a second mom,” she says. “My mom had a daycare. We would pick up my sister from school, and I would help mom out. I’ve been busy with children a long time. My parents were super supportive — they never made me feel like I couldn’t do something. I felt very unconditionally loved, with the closeness of people who really care about you. That is a major part of why I want to come back to the community that was so supportive of me.”

Those feelings played an important role in her choosing TAMU. “I live seven hours away. I’ve never lived so far from home. No one from my high school went there, but when I went to visit the campus, there was something that made me feel so welcome, espe-

cially because most of the bus drivers had no trouble or questions about how to hook up my chair. I had always been the only one with a disability, and I needed an accessible bus, but sometimes the buses wouldn’t work or drivers or teachers didn’t know how to operate the equipment.”

Bazan knows firsthand that there’s a real need to bring medical services to Starr County. “People don’t understand how dire it is,” she says. “Our diets are a little fattier, we have increased issues like diabetes and heart disease, and a lot of people don’t have the resources to keep up, to battle the virus. Big cities like Houston get most of the supplies, and even they are having problems. People don’t have insurance, can’t pay for meds and treatment, and there are hardly any specialty resources if you have an uncommon situation, like SCI.”

Her first career goal is to become a physician’s assistant and help children who are living with chronic illnesses and disabilities live independently, so that they, too, can follow their dreams. She is bilingual, which puts her in the perfect position to succeed. “Eventually, I would love to specialize in physical medicine and rehabilitation and take my personal experiences of living with a disability to serve as a mentor for children who are currently going through the same difficult experiences that I did growing up.”

She has returned to campus for the fall semester as a full-time student, and all of her classes are online except for one. “I am trying to stay as healthy as possible. My family is doing well — thankfully no one has gotten sick, although there are still a lot of cases down in the Rio Grande Valley.”

# UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA

Las Vegas

## A UNIQUE UNIVERSITY IN A WHEELCHAIR-FRIENDLY SETTING



**Location:** Las Vegas, Nevada, large city, population 644,000; 358-acre campus

**Tuition and fees:** in-state: \$7,852; out-of-state: \$22,904

**2020 undergraduate enrollment:** 25,282; student- faculty ratio: 20:1

**Popular majors:** business, psychology, law enforcement, visual and performing arts

**Ranked #115 in Top Performers on Social Mobility (Best Colleges 2020, U.S. News & World Report)**

**Number of registered wheelchair users in 2020:** 20

**Disability Resource Center:** 702-895-0866, drc@unlv.edu; unlv.edu/drc

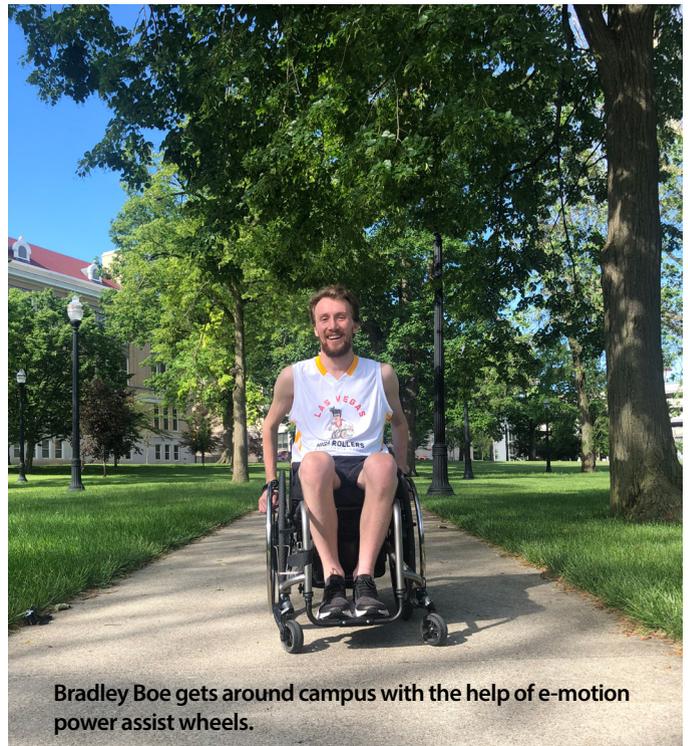
By Ellen Stohl

**F**ueled by an innovative frontier spirit, University of Nevada, Las Vegas is a doctoral-degree-granting institution uniquely situated within a large metropolitan area that is in itself a desert-like oasis. The campus is just a few minutes from the heart of a city that hosts nearly 49 million visitors a year. The city's reliance on tourism means physical accessibility is always at the forefront, with curb cuts on every corner and over 100 accessible taxis in a relatively modest space.

UNLV capitalizes on the city's unique connections to industry, technology and leadership exclusive to the city and surrounding areas and is driven to become one of the nation's top public research universities. It was recently elevated to R1 "very high research activity" status by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. The commitment to drive economic activity through increased research and community partnerships underscores UNLV's goal to transform their five healthcare professional schools into the first academic health center for Southern Nevada, which would include an adapted gym.

The campus is located on 358 predominantly flat acres that are relatively easy for both manual and power chair users to navigate. Most doors have access buttons, and lunch tables have cutouts for chairs. Designated a "Tree Campus USA," the campus provides respite from the hot Nevada sun. Bradley Boe, a kinesiology major and C4 incomplete quad, enjoys studying and hanging out in the shady groves. "My spinal cord injury means my thermoregulation is messed up and the air conditioning can get too cold. It's nice to find a place in the shade to work, socialize and get some fresh air."

Boe, 28, a junior, uses a manual wheelchair with e-motion wheels to get around. One of his biggest motivators for choosing UNLV was receiving a full scholarship from the Craig H. Neilsen Foundation. "The scholarship has been huge," he says, "but UNLV's focus on community health, and my in-



**Bradley Boe gets around campus with the help of e-motion power assist wheels.**

volvement with Las Vegas High Rollers Wheelchair Rugby really made it a no-brainer." Being a part of the High Rollers not only feeds Boe's competitive spirit, it also creates a source of camaraderie. His motto is, "Once you find the right people, you can build a support network for success." His passion to support others is clear. He established an outreach program for individuals who recently sustained spinal cord injuries and seeks to support anyone experiencing disability (for more details on Boe's life, see next page).

After meeting Pearl Beck at UNLV, Boe recruited her to the High Rollers. Beck, 21, is a sophomore also majoring in

## Bradley Boe: Coming Full Circle to Find a Fulfilling Life

He calls Las Vegas home, but it took a life-changing traumatic accident to bring Bradley Boe to that realization. After graduating from high school in Vegas, he traveled to New York and joined the Merchant Marine, thinking he wanted to get away from the extreme heat and isolation of the gambling mecca in the desert. On a visit to Reno, Nevada, to see friends, he sustained a

C4 spinal cord injury and ended up in a local hospital on ventilator support for four months. "I was paralyzed, lost motor function and had breathing problems but never lost sensation. I got a bad case of pneumonia, relapsed, got worse. They didn't know what to do with me," he says.

His doctor wanted to send him to hospice, as if his life was over. His parents would not let it happen. They found out about Craig Hospital in Denver, contacted them, and Craig sent someone to Reno to evaluate him. "They said I was a perfect candidate, but the doctor wouldn't ship me there because he thought it wasn't safe. It took my parents intervening to get another doctor to OK the trip. The change was immediate. I went from being stuck in a nightmare to getting the best care possible."

Upon release from Craig several months later, he moved in with his parents back in Vegas and spent two years working on how to manage his life from a power wheelchair. That's when he learned who his friends were.

"It got worse at first. I was used to ideal conditions at Craig. At home I was dependent on others for everything. I was in a bad way." He wouldn't talk to friends, but they kept after him, and finally, at the one-year anniversary of his accident, he came back home, so to speak. "I made new friends who were also quads, and

they shared their knowledge and techniques from experience. I got more independent," he says, "moving to a manual chair, gaining strength and upper body function. Quad rugby was key to making that change."

Two years post-injury he enrolled at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. In the Merchant Marine he was on track to be an engineer, but he changed to a pre-med path at UNLV, mainly because of his Craig experience. "I got to know a doctor there, not my doc, but he was a wheelchair user, and everyone really appreciated him. I figured my ultimate goal might be to become a rehab doctor, like him."

In the beginning of his second year at UNLV, after learning from Disability Services that a Neilsen Foundation scholarship was possible, he applied and was accepted. "I got very lucky. It could've been very different."

He gained confidence and independence and took a leap of faith that resulted in his becoming the founder of the High Rollers quad rugby team. But his sights are set on building a future for rehab in the Vegas area. "There's a relatively new med school, here. I'll look into it but may have to go to med school somewhere else, get some experience and then come back. I'd like to be a physiatrist," he says, "and maybe get a rehab community going here."



Bradley Boe, shown with his fiancée, Megan, wants to be a doctor.

kinesiology. She was born with spastic diplegia CP and uses a manual wheelchair. Beck likes UNLV because of its exceptional programs, flat terrain, warm weather and location. She is very active in sports and often visits the student recreation center on campus. She's also a regular at Progressive Force CrossFit, a local gym with certified adaptive coaches and adaptive equipment. Her main interest is in becoming an adaptive coach or recreation therapist to help other athletes, like herself. The UNLV recreation sports staff creates partnerships with the cities of Las Vegas and Henderson to promote adaptive sports and recreation events. "The whole campus is inclusion oriented," she says. "All professors and staff at UNLV are very helpful. The easy-to-navigate campus and a ton of resources help ensure everyone succeeds."

Both Boe and Beck frequent the Disability Resource Center, where they find the personalized support an essential

part of their college success. "If I need something changed," says Beck, "there is a discussion about what I can do and what can be changed."

DRC Director Bryan Hilbert has CP himself and truly understands the benefits the DRC can provide. "In college, success is not the school's responsibility — it's the individual's," he tells students. "And our goal is to provide every individual the support they need to achieve success."

The DRC at UNLV has a robust assistive technology and alternate format program and aids college learning through the provision of academic adjustments, accommodations, auxiliary services and advocacy. "UNLV is one to watch," he says, because its mission is to address the diverse needs of students and create a culture that supports universal access to quality education and exceptional healthcare programs as a top tier research university.

# HOFSTRA UNIVERSITY

Long Island, New York

## A LEADER IN ACCESSIBILITY FOR PRIVATE SCHOOLS



**Location:** Hempstead, Long Island, New York, large city, population 768,000; 244-acre campus  
**2020 tuition and fees:** \$47,510; average cost after aid: \$32,000  
**2020 undergraduate enrollment:** 6,701; student-faculty ratio: 13:1  
**Popular majors:** marketing/management, psychology; accounting, community health  
**Ranked #32** in nation for best undergraduate engineering programs (*U.S. News & World Report*)  
**Number of registered wheelchair users in 2020:** 13  
**Student Access Services:** 516-463-7075, SAS@Hofstra.edu; hofstra.edu/studentaffairs/stddis

By Aaron Broverman

**H**ofstra University, in Hempstead, New York, on Long Island, is one of the oldest and longest-running barrier-free universities in America. “Our campus was the first private university in the country to become fully program accessible,” says Julie Yindra, Hofstra’s director of Student Access Services. Yindra, who has spina bifida, oversees a staff of eight plus 30 volunteers and interns.

Hofstra began in 1935 as Nassau College, a satellite campus for New York University. By the 1960s, it had already left its NYU affiliation, aspiring to become a full university. A capital campaign began to expand the campus across the Hempstead Turnpike. The three men leading the campaign all had some personal connection to disability. “They said, ‘Look, if we’re going to build all of this, why don’t we make it accessible to everyone?’” says Yindra. For wheelchair users, the campus is entirely flat with three massive pedestrian overpasses, called Unispans, which connect both social and academic sides of campus.

“The Unispan is great,” says Peyton Tansey, 19, a power wheelchair user with spinal muscular atrophy studying computer science. “I can go up with everyone else — my nondisabled friends don’t have to wait for me. I can get everywhere, there’s no limiting where I can go.”

It was the commitment to accessibility that initially put Hofstra on Tansey’s short list of universities. That and the people, the friendly atmosphere, and a \$30,000 scholarship. “Could the accessibility be even better?” he asks. “Of course, but in the outside world it’s really annoying to try and get somewhere only to realize you can’t. That doesn’t happen at Hofstra. I don’t actually leave the campus that much because I have everything I need there,” he adds.

Tansey likes to grab a meal at Bits and Bytes — “the best food on campus” — or he might be playing video games in the game room at the Sondra and David S.

Mack Student Center on the north side of campus. He also feels comfortable in his dorm room. Hofstra provides him a remote device to open his door hands-free. “That was huge,” he says.

Hofstra features accessible transportation on and off-campus, an Olympic-sized swimming pool and gym, internships, and an international studies program that includes wheelchair users. The history of the disability rights movement is also front and center at Hofstra as part of its focus on disability studies, and students can learn how disability affects all citizens and impacts broader public issues like abortion, capital punishment, health care and genetics. Students can also get digital textbooks, test scribes and notetakers through SAS, and they are free to record lectures as long as they sign an academic honesty contract.

“Hofstra’s willingness to accommodate students with physical disabilities is fantastic,” says Rachel Gross, 24, a wheelchair user with a rare form of congenital muscular dystrophy who graduated in 2018 with a degree in public relations and a minor in civic engagement. “SAS does a great job at making sure we get what we need to succeed. But I have had a few problems with professors who had a general lack of understanding of my need for accommodations.”

There are options for those who want to live on campus and require attendant care. PCAs receive keycard access so they don’t have to sign in, and students requiring attendants can get a larger private room without paying the usual premium. “Not all the dorms are accessible, though, which limits housing options. I was forced to live in a freshman dorm even though I was an upperclassman,” says Gross.

Both Tansey and Gross picked Hofstra in part for its legacy of accessibility, which Yindra admits has yet to be perfected. “I am employed because no matter how good you get, there are always places to do better,” says Yindra. “This legacy is ongoing, but it has been a part of our campus culture for decades.”



# MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

East Lansing

## A SPRAWLING CAMPUS WITH A LONG HISTORY OF DISABILITY INCLUSION



**Location:** East Lansing, medium city, population 118,427; 5,200-acre campus

**Tuition and fees:** in-state: \$14,460; out-of-state: \$39,766

**2020 undergraduate enrollment:** 39,400; student-faculty ratio:16:1

**Popular Majors:** business, communication/journalism, biomedical and social sciences

**Ranked #34** in Top Public Schools (Best Colleges 2020, *U.S. News & World Report*)

**Number of registered wheelchair users in 2020:** 12

**Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities:** 517-884-7273, [mjh@msu.edu](mailto:mjh@msu.edu); [rcpd.msu.edu](http://rcpd.msu.edu)

By Teal Sherer

**F**ounded in 1855 as the nation's pioneer land-grant university, Michigan State University is a renowned research institution that offers more than 200 undergraduate, graduate and professional study programs and has graduated 20 Rhodes Scholars. Located in East Lansing, three miles from the state capital, the 5,200-acre campus is one of the largest in the country. It's known for its world-class museums and beauty, as the Red Cedar River flows through the entirety of the campus. There are also art galleries, concerts and restaurants.

MSU has a long history of disability inclusion, starting with providing accommodations to blind and low-vision students in the 1930s. In the 1940s and 1950s, the university accepted students with polio at a time when fear of contagion was running high. "A lot of neighboring universities and colleges were saying no — you use a wheelchair, crutches, walker, an iron lung — you are not coming," says Virginia Martz, an ability access specialist in the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities. "We were like, sure. You meet our criteria for admissions, come on along."

This inclusive, willing-to-adapt outlook drew Clay Martin, a senior human resources and labor relations major, to the school. "It's part of the reason I fell in love with the campus when I first visited, how included I felt," he says. "I was also impressed with what RCPD could offer me."

Freshmen are not allowed to have a car on campus, but the RCPD arranged for Martin to override the system, a major help since the campus is so sprawling. "That created a sense of independence and freedom for me," he says. Martin also uses



**Kathryn Mahoney returned to school soon after her injury — maybe too soon.**

the bus system, which is run by Capital Area Transportation Authority. "All of CATA's buses are kneeling, so I can roll right on. That's really nice." Also, students with disabilities can reserve paratransit ahead of time to take them to and from classes and around campus. This is particularly helpful during icy and snowy winters.

Because of the harsh winters, MSU has a robust snow removal system as well, and students can notify the landscape crew if there is an area they need priority in clearing. There are also infrared sensors for power activation doors — more reliable in the cold than standard push plates.

Kathryn Mahoney, a standout gymnast, was injured during her senior year at MSU in a vaulting accident at a gymnastics team practice.

She returned to finish her studies in chemical engineering as a C6 quadriplegic who uses a power wheelchair. With three semesters to finish degree requirements, she took less than a full load and finished in four. "First I lived with friends in an off-campus apartment that was so new the interior hadn't been finished," she says. "There was no carpet and no closet door, so we got some fixes in there — the kitchen sink area left open so I could roll under and an accessible bathroom they converted to a roll-in shower. Since I was injured in gymnastics practice, MSU helped with the cost of add-ons."

When she returned the following school year to complete her studies, she moved to a mid-campus apartment — now one of a hundred newly renovated wheelchair accessible units — and lived by herself, with help from personal attendants. "I wanted

to be on my own, and most of my friends in my college class had moved on," she says. She had one lab to finish and wondered how she would manage without dexterity in her hands. "It turned out I managed OK. But if I had needed a lab assistant, the RCPD would have provided one."

The RCPD also arranges for note takers, recording devices, and adaptive furniture, like adding a height-adjustable table to classrooms, and more. "I signed up for a class that turned out to be in a building that didn't have an elevator," says Martin, "so I was able to get that class rescheduled for the following semester in a building that was accessible."

MSU has an impressive Adaptive Sports and Recreation Club with a wide range of wheelchair sports and adaptive recreation options. They also host and participate in disability sports clinics, like sled hockey, water skiing and kayaking, community organized events, and wheelchair sports

tournaments (see sidebar, page 54).

Scholarships are available for wheelchair users, like the Education Abroad Scholarship for Students with Disabilities, which gives \$2,000 awards for those enrolled in a credit-granting study abroad program. MSU has more than 900 student organizations. The Council for Students with Disabilities, whose vice president is Martin, is one of them. "We are an advocacy group that works with administration to make sure the campus is as inclusive and accessible a place as possible."



Rugby helped Mahoney build strength.

## Kathryn Mahoney: First Things First

Sometimes when a student sustains a disabling condition just prior to entering college or while enrolled as an active college student, a sense of urgency often dictates a return to studies as soon as possible. The feeling of not wanting to be left behind is a strong motivator. Kathryn Mahoney, a C6 quadriplegic from a gymnastics accident late in her junior year, experienced just that. She went back to Michigan State soon after her injury, eager to finish her degree. Now, looking back, she realizes she was not ready for the workaday world even though she had graduated with a degree in chemical engineering.

She returned to her parents' home in 2013 after graduating and began to take much-needed time to improve her strength and learn how to be truly independent. She had physical therapy three times a week with a goal of being able to live by herself without personal attendants. She also got involved in quad rugby and handcycling, both of which helped, but something was still missing. "I think the thing that bothered me most was my inability to manage my bathroom situation. I used to spend way too much time and get frustrated at the whole process, so I had a Mitrofanoff bladder procedure done so I could cath myself," she says. "It really helped with independence. I had talked with several

women who had it, and it turned out to be a big, life-changing thing."

The procedure involves the surgical creation of a reservoir and a channel and valve arrangement that prevents leakage and makes cathing much easier, especially for a low quad. "I no longer have to struggle with taking off clothes and making a difficult transfer to a toilet. It frees me up, takes very little time and is safer."

The surgery, combined with her newfound strength and stability, meant she was almost prepared to re-enter the workforce. "But first I had to figure out what I could do." Now, after a few years of not working, she was ready to return to Michigan State with a clear goal. She moved into a new on-campus apartment with roll-in shower, lower countertops and easy accessibility. "I could now live by myself independently. I decided to get a master's in business analytics. It got my interest and only took one year. Those words — business analytics — are buzz words," she says. "It means there is about a 99-100% chance of job placement when you have a master's."

With her earlier background in math and science, she got her master's in December 2017. "I had accepted a job offer before graduating, working with digital marketing on an analytics team. We serve all industries, helping clients understand how their business campaigns

are performing. I started in January 2018, and I'm still there."

Her ultimate goal was to return to her home in Chicago and live independently. Now she lives alone in an apartment downtown, where she works. An aide comes to help her three times a week in the evenings, but she does all her personal care herself. For now she is where she wants to be. Her advice to others navigating the college experience in wheelchairs? "Most campuses have resources on campus. It's important to connect with them. They help you help yourself to succeed."

She also credits the SCI community. "The SCI community is very open. It took me a while to know I can ask anyone anything. People are willing to share their experience — you don't have to reinvent the wheel. A lot comes down to I just have to try this on my own. I had to realize, you are re-learning everything for the daily things, you have to start over. It is easy to get frustrated in the beginning," she says. "You have to allow yourself the time to know it won't be easy the first time, but give it time. And keep at it."

# Importance of Sports and Recreation for Students with Disabilities

A relatively small number of U.S. colleges and universities compete with each other in intercollegiate adaptive sports (see sidebar), but on a broader level, the number of non-competitive adaptive sports and recreation programs for disabled students is on the increase. One such program that has gotten off to a promising start, Michigan State's Adaptive Sports and Recreation Club, founded by a graduate student, Piotr Josef Pasik, shows how adaptive sports and recreation can be

an important learning and growing experience for disabled and nondisabled students alike, not to mention interested people in the community.

Pasik, born with cerebral palsy, emigrated from a small village in Poland in 1994 with his parents when he was 11 years old. "They felt the United States would give me more opportunities to thrive than Poland," he says. In 2002, after visiting the Michigan State campus in East Lansing, he immediately applied to MSU's James Madison College and in 2002 began his studies in international relations. "At the time I was not into recreation or sports, not one bit." He graduated with a B.A. in international relations and added a second B.A. in social relations and policy.

His plan was to go to graduate school and study political science, but he later became interested in rehabilitation counseling, applied, and was accepted to the master's program. "I decided I wanted to help others like me." Along the way to earning his advanced degrees at Michigan State, through fundraising, connections he made in the process and a lot of hard work, he eventually founded the MSU Adaptive Sports and Recreation Club in 2014. "In getting involved in sports and recreation, everyone, disabled or not, goes through the same kind of experience," he says. "We learn the importance of self-determination. It unites us and keeps people coming back." It also fosters perseverance, a sense of achievement, and improved

health, both physical and mental.

Michigan State's ASRC emphasizes inclusiveness and a sense of belonging in the community, something that many people with physical disabilities feel is lacking in collegiate life. From its founding in 2014 until spring of 2020, the ASRC has offered 204 disabled athletes from 11 countries spanning six different continents multiple opportunities to practice, play and participate in a range of activities, tournaments and clinics. Sports include wheelchair tennis, wheelchair rugby, wheelchair basketball, wheelchair hockey, sled hockey, adaptive skiing, handcycling, track (distance running, walking, rolling, racing), field events, adaptive rowing, boccia and table tennis.

In cooperation with MSU's College of Engineering, students have designed or built an athletic walker, an inclusive wheelchair, a sled hockey transfer platform and various handcycle adaptations. The ASRC also partners with MSU's department of kinesiology by providing internship placements for kinesiology students to do fieldwork that offers valuable hands-on experience in assisting students in achieving health-oriented goals and becoming more independent. Over its six-year span, in addition to athletes and recreational participants, the ASRC has involved more than 800 volunteers, donating more than 27,000 hours of their time to support a program that serves MSU students, employees, alumni and community members.

## ADAPTIVE SPORTS RISING

Adaptive sports are on the rise. At least 30 colleges offer intramural or club play. Besides wheelchair basketball and tennis, adaptive sports include track and road racing, swimming, power soccer, quad rugby, power lifting, golf, boccia, table tennis, rowing and handcycling. Each university has its own program, some limited to a single sport, others with more offerings. For details, contact the disability services office of each university. For National Wheelchair Basketball Association info, see NWBA.org.

Arizona State

\*Auburn (NWBA Men)

Ball State

Boise State

Eastern Washington (NWBA Men)

Edinboro (NWBA Men)

Grand Valley State

Indiana-Purdue University-Fort Wayne

\*Michigan State

Ohio State

Oregon State

Penn State

\*Portland State

San Diego State

\*Southern Illinois

Southwest Minnesota State (NWBA Men)

\*Texas A&M

U. of Alabama (NWBA Men, Women)

\*U. of Arizona (NWBA Men, Women)

UCLA

U. of Central Florida

\*U. of Florida (NWBA Men)

\*U. of Illinois (NWBA Men, Women)

U. of Missouri (NWBA Men)

U. of Nebraska, Omaha (NWBA Men)

U. of New Hampshire

U. of Texas, Arlington (NWBA Men, Women)

\*U. of Washington

\*U. of Wisconsin, Whitewater (NWBA Men)

\*Wright State

*\*universities profiled in this guide*



For a short video on Pasik's programs at Michigan State, see [bit.ly/2G2Deqi](https://bit.ly/2G2Deqi).

# UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

Eugene

## A FORWARD-LOOKING UNIVERSITY EMPHASIZING INCLUSIVENESS



**Location:** Eugene, Oregon, medium city, population 178,329; 295-acre campus  
**Tuition and fees:** in-state: \$12,720; out-of-state: \$36,615  
**2020 undergraduate enrollment:** 19,101; student-faculty ratio: 16:1  
**Popular majors:** business/commerce, social sciences, economics, psychology  
**Ranked #44** in Top Public Schools (Best Colleges 2020, *U.S. News & World Report*)  
**Number of registered wheelchair users in 2020:** 10  
**Accessible Education Center:** 541-346-1155, uoaec@uoregon.edu; aec.uoregon.edu

By Teal Sherer

Whether studying in the Knight Library (named after NIKE's founder, Phil Knight, a major donor of the University of Oregon), attending a Ducks football game at Autzen stadium, or admiring the campus arboretum, Oregon students have the benefits of a big research university combined with a liberal arts institution. The 295-acre campus, located in the city of Eugene in the fertile Willamette Valley, a two-hour drive south of Portland, is a mix of modern architecture, historic buildings and ample green space.

Known as a quintessential college town, Eugene is alive with music, culture, art, food and outdoor activities — an easy drive to both the Pacific Ocean and Cascade Mountains, where there is plenty to see and explore.

For over 30 years, Hilary Gerdes, senior director of the Accessible Education Center, has worked with University of Oregon students on issues of access, inclusion and academic planning. "There is a lot of support here for students," says Gerdes. "We work with housing, we work with parking — we are here to be a safety net for anything that needs to be addressed."

The Accessible Education Center offers services like priority class registration, class location changes, note takers, recording devices, obstacle removal and adding adaptive furniture. "If I can't get my wheelchair under a desk, they bring in a height-adjustable one for me," says Grace Kurlychek, a senior majoring in planning, public policy and management. "And they always ask for my input, like what side of the room I want to sit on, which is really helpful."



Grace Kurlychek appreciates the Accessible Education Center's attention to detail.

Kurlychek, who has cerebral palsy and lives off campus, also appreciates the ability to drive her car to her classes. "I can park really close to where I need to be," she says. In addition to accessible parking spaces throughout the campus, the university provides Access Shuttle, a free ride service for students, faculty, staff and visitors with limited mobility. Students also have free access to Eugene's public transportation system, which is wheelchair accessible.

Matthew Howard, a T0 paraplegic who graduated from the university in 2014 with a degree in human physiology, lived on campus in a dorm while attending. "Options like having my bed lowered or desk raised were available," says Howard. "The bathrooms had a large accessible stall and a shower that you could roll into with a fold down shower bench and a removable shower head."

With newer residence halls and ADA accessible room options, the housing department works with each student on individualized modifications, like additional space for equipment or considerations for personal care attendants.

Howard, who now works as a research coordinator for the Veterans Affairs Health Care System in Portland and coaches CrossFit, also worked as a personal trainer in the university's recreation center for three years when he was a student. "I thought it was pretty cool they gave me a shot as a trainer," he says. "The staff and faculty are always willing to make things work for you."

Since Howard graduated, the recreation center has been expanded and updated to include accessible features like a pool chair lift and adaptive equipment, including arm cycles, elevat-

ed mats and multi-functional machines that can be used for a variety of strength training exercises from a seated position. The locker rooms have accessible private changing areas, and weight and cardio rooms are equipped with automatic doors and wide aisles. The center also has adaptive rock climbing and other inclusive recreational opportunities, like wheelchair basketball.

There are over 300 student groups on campus, among them the AccessABILITY Student Union, which is made up of disabled students and nondisabled allies. They hold regular meetings to socialize and plan disability awareness events that involve films, panels, and inviting locally and nationally recognized disabled speakers to campus. In addition, the university has a disability studies minor and a Student Voices Panel — a rotating group of disabled students who share their experiences to educate the community. “The University of Oregon has built a culture of inclusivity that creates a great atmosphere for someone who uses a wheelchair,” says Howard.

The emphasis on inclusivity for students with disabilities transcends the boundaries of the campus. Susan Sygall, an internationally-recognized expert in the area of international development, educational exchange and leadership programs for people with disabilities, teaches a class on Global Perspectives on Disability. Sygall, a wheelchair user herself, is better known as CEO and cofounder of Mobility International USA (see story on page 40).

To round out the services the school has to offer, the Uni-



“The University of Oregon has built a culture of inclusivity that creates a great atmosphere for someone who uses a wheelchair,” says graduate Matthew Howard.

versity Health Center has physical therapy, primary care, and other services like dental, psychiatry and acupuncture, as well as a pharmacy. A map is available on the University of Oregon website that shows accessible routes, parking, and elevators: [map.uoregon.edu/accessibility](http://map.uoregon.edu/accessibility).

## UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Ann Arbor

### A TOP-FLIGHT UNIVERSITY COMMITTED TO PROVIDING EQUAL OPPORTUNITY



**Location:** Ann Arbor, Michigan, medium city, population 121,890; 3,207-acre city-campus

**Tuition and fees:** in-state: \$15,558; out-of-state: \$51,200

**2020 undergraduate enrollment:** 30,318; student- faculty ratio:15:1

**Popular Majors:** business administration, computer science, economics, psychology

**Ranked #3 in Top Public Schools (Best Colleges 2020, U.S. News & World Report)**

**Number of registered wheelchair users in 2020: 7**

**Services for Students with Disabilities:** 734-763-3000, [ssdoffice@umich.edu](mailto:ssdoffice@umich.edu); [ssd.umich.edu](http://ssd.umich.edu)

By Teal Sherer

**F**ounded in 1817, the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, offers a rich tradition of academic excellence, attracting top students and faculty from all over the world. In 2019, students enrolled in the University of Michigan hailed from all 50 states and 139 countries. It ranks very highly in business and undergraduate engineering programs. With two-thirds of undergraduate students receiving finan-

cial aid, the university is ranked seventh in best colleges for veterans (tie) and 44th among the best values nationally, according to *U.S. News & World Report's* 2020 rankings. Ann Arbor, a 45-minute drive from Detroit, is considered one of the nation's best college towns with a vibrant mixture of restaurants, music, theater, museums and parks.

Kayla Blackburn, a T4-5 para, was drawn to the Univer-

sity of Michigan because of the Services for Students with Disabilities. “Once we started talking about the programs they offer and the help that they were willing to give,” says Blackburn, “I was sold.”

Services include changing class location, providing note takers and recording devices, removing classroom obstacles, and providing adaptive furniture, like a height-adjustable desk or the right chair if you prefer to transfer out of your wheelchair. The university also offers on-campus accessible living accommodations.

Blackburn, a psychology major, lived close to her classes in an accessible dorm with a private restroom that had a roll-in shower, bench and a removable shower head. She also had a remote control that opened the main door to the residence hall as well as to her room. The housing department works with each student to meet individual accommodation needs, whether it’s help purchasing a hospital bed or considerations for a personal care attendant.

SSD encouraged Blackburn to apply for the Craig H. Neilsen Scholarship Program that supports students with spinal cord injuries at select colleges and universities. “Before receiving the Neilsen scholarship, every semester I used to worry whether I’d have enough money for the next one,” says Blackburn. “Just knowing that I wouldn’t have that stress anymore completely changed my whole college career.”

Megan Marshall, coordinator of services for students with mobility impairments, attended University of Michigan as an undergrad and used many of the services her department offers. Paratransit, a free transportation service available for students, faculty, and staff who have mobility concerns, is a particularly noteworthy service. “It was a lifesaver, especially in the cold months when we have ice and snow,” says Marshall, whose congenital disability makes it hard to do certain physical tasks, like walk long distances. “It would pick me up from my residence on campus and take me to my first class, then my second one, and so on.” Paratransit can take students anywhere on campus — the University Health Service, which provides physical therapy, a pharmacy and other medical services; the University of Michigan Hospital for a doctor’s appointment; and to the University’s MedRehab Outpatient clinic, a cutting-edge facility specializing in treatment of spinal cord injuries.



Kayla Blackburn says UM’s customized housing options were a big seller.

In addition to paratransit, the University of Michigan and Ann Arbor buses are wheelchair accessible. Charlotte Devitz, who has Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, and her service dog, Fish, used a combination of buses, paratransit, and her own vehicle to get around campus — there are accessible parking spots in every lot and in front of some of the buildings. She also liked to push herself. “I have power assist built into my wheelchair, and Fish loves to help pull,” says Devitz, who got her master’s in ecology and evolutionary biology. “The campus is flat and the sidewalks are well maintained. Pretty much every building has a push button to open the door.”

The University of Michigan has a therapeutic adaptive sports program through the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation and is currently developing a top-flight adaptive sports program with an initial focus on basketball and tennis to appeal to elite student-athletes with disabilities. Dr. Oluwaferanmi Okanlami, a medical doctor and wheelchair-using athlete himself, will oversee the adaptive sports program as well as serve as interim director of SSD.

The University also hosts an annual Army-Navy wheelchair basketball game and has wheelchair basketball drop-in games for both disabled and nondisabled students.

With more than 1,500 student organizations, including general disability and disability-specific groups, there are many ways to get involved, find community and locate resources. “We are always looking for ways to better support students with disabilities who are coming into our campus, while they are here, and further out,” says Marshall.



Charlotte Devitz, with Fish, says UM access is top-notch.

# SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

Carbondale

## A SMALL-TOWN UNIVERSITY KNOWN FOR WELCOMING DISABLED STUDENTS



**Location:** Carbondale, Illinois, small town, population 24,730; 1,136-acre campus

**Tuition and fees:** in-state: \$14,904; out-of-state: \$29,360

**2020 undergraduate enrollment:** 9,552; student-faculty ratio: 13:1

**Popular majors:** business, education, engineering, health professions

**Ranked #72 in Best Education Schools (Best Colleges 2020, U.S. News & World Report)**

**Number of registered wheelchair users in 2020:** 8

**Disability Support Services:** 618-453-5738, [disabilityservices@siu.edu](mailto:disabilityservices@siu.edu); [disabilityservices.siu.edu](http://disabilityservices.siu.edu)

By Mike Ervin

**W**hen I attended Southern Illinois at Carbondale from 1974 to 1978, it was a wheelchair mecca of sorts, one of the few campuses and college towns accessible enough to accommodate someone who used a power wheelchair like me. Today there are only eight students who use wheelchairs enrolled, according to Lisa Caringer, director of Disability Support Services. “But students can now go to almost any campus they like [nationally], so it’s not a bad thing that students have other options. Students will find fewer attitudinal barriers here, though. There is a level of acceptance where community can grow.”

Getting around town and campus in a wheelchair is much easier than when I attended. Back then, you either rolled your wheelchair everywhere or occasionally hustled up a ride in a lift-equipped campus van that ran for limited hours over a limited area. Now there’s a fixed-route, lift-equipped bus service called Saluki Express that makes regular stops around campus, Carbondale and surrounding areas. Saluki Express also operates a free paratransit service that disabled students can use.

Thompson Point is nestled in the Thompson Woods part of the campus. When I was here, I remember taking many a pleasant roll along the paved paths in the woods going to classes or taking a stroll around Thompson Lake. But I also remember some killer steep hills along those paths and stretches of rough pavement that were impassable. Caringer says in recent years the paths in Thompson Woods have been redone to make them more ADA compliant. The 1,200-acre main campus landscape features nearly 5,200 trees consisting of 155 species.

Caringer touts the Student Recreation Center as a big attraction for students in general. She says the Access Inclusive Recreation program is designed to make everything at the facility more accessible for disabled students. AIR staff members work with disabled students to help them get comfortable with and best utilize everything at the center. “It has an adaptive workout program, sport chairs and equipment, and in con-



**Garrie Wilson enjoys the accessible, tree-lined campus.**

junction with our outdoor rec area offers accessible recreation experiences for students, including hunting, rafting and bowling,” she says. “With a therapeutic rec academic program as well, our campus is an excellent choice for students who are outdoor and rec enthusiasts and/or majors.”

Garrie Wilson just finished his junior year majoring in social work. He has spinal muscular atrophy, uses a power wheel-

chair and began attending classes in 2019 because Carbondale is a short commute from his family home in Mount Vernon, Illinois. “I have found the students and staff very welcoming,” he says. The campus, for the most part, is accessible. “All the doors are powered with buttons near the ground and roughly arm height. The disability services staff is always willing to provide necessary accommodations.” He has a personal attendant who goes to classes with him. But if he needs an accessible desk, he says they bring very large ones that are difficult to position so he can part of the class. “However, I’ve had teachers tell me to put them anywhere that made me feel comfortable.”

Mikhail Komlatski is a graduate student who pushes a manual wheelchair and frequents the recreation center. He says he mostly plays tennis solo by hitting a ball against the wall. Komlatski, a paraplegic from a car accident as a teenager in Krasnodar, Russia, came to SIU in January 2020 to work on his Ph.D. in history after getting his master’s degree from Ar-

kansas State University. Komlatski lives at Evergreen Terrace, an apartment complex Caringer says was renovated a few years ago to meet ADA standards. Shortly after he came to campus, everything shut down due to the coronavirus pandemic. So, like everyone else, he switched to taking online classes — and worked as a teaching assistant online.

Caringer says the sudden emphasis on remote learning has caused everyone at SIU to rethink disability accommodations. “It has been difficult on staff to pivot and provide additional accommodations, but we have met the needs of our students. The university built in lots of tolerances and support for all students, and we educated departments about the potential need for technology and other accommodations.”

Komlatski says SIU and Carbondale are a good place to be if you use a wheelchair. “I do love Southern Illinois because the university is compact and easy to get around in a wheelchair, and Carbondale is a small college town.”

## MIAMI UNIVERSITY

Oxford, Ohio

### A BEAUTIFUL TRADITIONAL CAMPUS WITH MODERN ACCESSIBILITY



**Location:** Oxford, Ohio, small town, population 22,885; 2,100-acre city-campus

**Tuition and fees:** in-state: \$15,232; out-of-state: \$34,307

**2020 undergraduate enrollment:** 17,326; student-faculty ratio: 17:1

**Popular majors:** business, marketing, social sciences, communication/journalism

**Ranked #39 in Top Public Schools (Best Colleges 2020, U.S. News & World Report)**

**Number of registered wheelchair users in 2020:** 5

**Student Disability Services:** 513-529-1541, sds@MiamiOH.edu; miamioh.edu/student-life/sd

By Derek Mortland

**M**iami University, founded in 1809 in Oxford, Ohio, is known for academic excellence and a four-year graduation rate that is ranked first among Ohio public universities. It has also been recognized as the number one public university in the nation for its commitment to undergraduate education. In 2020, it was ranked eighth in best undergraduate teaching by *U.S. News & World Report*.

The campus, distinguished by its colonial-style red brick buildings and stately towers, covers a five-by-15-block space with abundant mature shade trees and is bordered on the east by Four Mile Creek. Outdoor areas and trails are easily accessed from the campus. Nearby High Street is home to quaint family-owned shops, restaurants and small businesses, where it isn’t unusual to hear music from outdoor concerts in spring, summer and early fall. Beloved poet Robert Frost once called Miami “the most beautiful campus that ever there was.”

Derek Melton agrees. Now a senior at Miami, he is a familiar sight on campus with his trained service dog, Rome. Not long ago he was a star college baseball player at Evansville University. While there, he sustained a C4-5 spinal cord injury during a recreational swim at a beach. After completing a five-year year SCI research project through the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation, Melton began assistant coaching with a local youth baseball team and felt inspired to explore teaching as a profession. With three years of college at Evansville already under his belt, he had to switch majors from business to education to achieve his goal and wavered between enrolling at Wright State or Miami to get his bachelor’s degree.

Melton’s ultimate choice was strongly influenced by Dan Darkow, coordinator in the Miller Center for Student Disability Services at Miami and a power chair user as a result of spinal muscular atrophy. “I chose Miami because of its academic

reputation and closer commute,” Melton says, “but what really sealed the deal was talking to Mr. Darkow and seeing how willing the university was to go above and beyond in providing supports and accommodations.” In student housing, for instance, each student is treated according to their needs. Customized single dorm rooms with attached accessible bathrooms for wheelchair-using students are available.

Darkow also mentors students in the Action Project, a barrier removal program to improve access around campus and in Oxford. Participating students assess and prioritize locations where access can be improved. Endowment funds for approved barrier removal provide micro-grants for accessible renovations that contribute to Miami’s universal vision of access, which is continuously evolving.

Melton’s limited dexterity made it difficult to operate the elevators around campus. After he discussed this problem with Darkow, universally designed elevators were installed in Shriver Center, home to Student Disability Services and the Armstrong Student Center. Besides standard pushbutton controls inside the car, the new elevators have larger oversized buttons mounted six inches above the floor that can be operated with the footplate of a wheelchair. Lowered call buttons are also available on each floor. Darkow says the only other location in the country to possess a similar elevator is the Ed Roberts Campus in Berkeley (for more on the ERC, see page 15.)

“It means a lot to me to be able to roll up there by myself with all the confidence and surety that I’ll be able to take care of what needs to be done and get where I need to go by myself,” says Melton.

A third elevator was recently modified for the College of Education in McGuffey Hall, which is also home to a univer-



**Derek Melton, with Rome, feels genuinely cared about at Miami.**

sally designed classroom that features automatic push button doors and an adjustable height touch teaching station. Light switches, computer ports, power terminals and window shade controls are all accessible.

Other services and accommodations are available: personal aides to help with labs and field trips, fitness facilities, accessible transportation services, physical therapy services, adaptive recreational opportunities, off-campus wheelchair repair service and off-campus accessible housing. Computer labs have adaptive applications for students with limited dexterity.

Melton views Miami as an escape from the everyday world where social awkwardness and uncertainty from others often greet a wheelchair user. “Everyone on campus seems genuinely nice. I’m not treated any differently because of my disability. I get the feeling that they actually care about me as not only a student, but a person as well,” he says. He adds he has been challenged by Miami’s academic rigor but has welcomed it and is benefiting from a very informative education. As he graduates, he’ll begin student teaching in the fall and welcomes that challenge, too.



**Dan Darkow shows off the new elevator controls that can be operated with the footplate of a wheelchair.**

# Resources

## GENERAL

**Campus Disability Resource Database**, a searchable database of college disability resource offices: [www.cedardatabase.org](http://www.cedardatabase.org)

**National Center for College Students with Disabilities Clearinghouse**, a searchable database of resources about disability and higher education: [www.nccsdclearinghouse.org](http://www.nccsdclearinghouse.org)

**The DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking and Technology) Center**, dedicated to empowering people with disabilities through technology and education: [www.washington.edu/doit](http://www.washington.edu/doit)

## HEALTH, WELLNESS AND SUPPORT

**Centers for Independent Living**, organizations run by people with disabilities to support other disabled people in every state: [www.ilru.org/projects/cil-net/cil-center-and-association-directory](http://www.ilru.org/projects/cil-net/cil-center-and-association-directory)

**United Spinal Support Groups**, peer support from people with SCI/D across the country: [unitedspinal.org/peer-groups](http://unitedspinal.org/peer-groups)

## INTERNSHIPS

For college-specific lists of internships, contact the disability resource office on your campus.

**American Association of People with Disabilities**, a cross-disability civil rights organization placing college students, graduate students, law students and recent graduates with all types of disabilities in paid summer internships with congressional offices, federal agencies, nonprofit and for-profit organizations within the Washington, D.C., area: [www.aapd.com/summer-internship-program](http://www.aapd.com/summer-internship-program)

## SCHOLARSHIPS

*This is a partial list of scholarships available to students with physical disabilities, according to United Spinal Association. For more possibilities, contact the disability services offices of the colleges that interest you; also check with the institutions' financial aid offices. For a fuller description of each scholarship, application process and award amounts, visit [bit.ly/2HSAxIG](http://bit.ly/2HSAxIG).*

**180 Medical:** For those with spinal cord injuries, spina bifida and transverse myelitis. 877-688-2729; [www.180medical.com/scholarships](http://www.180medical.com/scholarships)

**1800wheelchair.com:** Preference given to students with mobility disabilities. 800-320-7140; [1800wheelchair.com/Scholarship](http://1800wheelchair.com/Scholarship)

**ABC Medical:** Semi-annual scholarships in three categories: Adaptive Sports, Scholar Athletes, and Making a Difference. 866-897-8588; [www.abc-med.com/scholarships](http://www.abc-med.com/scholarships)

**American Association on Health and Disability:** Awarded annually to a student with a disability pursuing studies related to overall health and disability that will impact quality of life of people with disabilities. 301-545-6140; [www.aahd.us/initiatives/scholarship-program](http://www.aahd.us/initiatives/scholarship-program)

**Appel Law Firm Auto Accident Survivor Scholarship:** For survivors of car accidents who have overcome their injuries. 925-938-2000; [www.appellawyer.com/scholarship](http://www.appellawyer.com/scholarship)

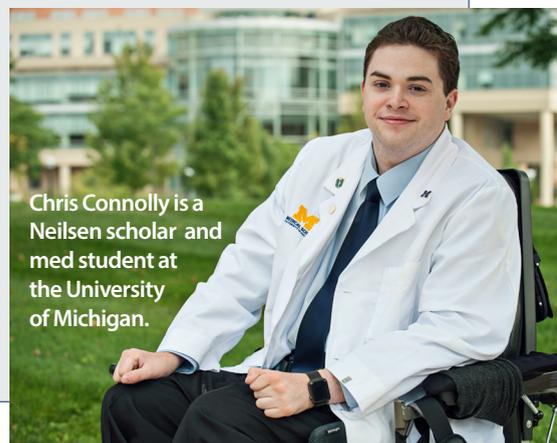
**AvaCare Medical Scholarship:** For students in the medical and healthcare field with preference given to students with a physical disability. 877-813-7799; [avacaremedical.com/scholarship](http://avacaremedical.com/scholarship)

## Craig H. Neilsen Foundation Scholarship Program

The Neilsen Foundation supports programs and scientific research whose purpose is to improve the quality of life of those affected by and living with spinal cord injury. Its vision is to enable individuals with SCI and those who care for them to live full lives as active participants in their communities. The Neilsen Foundation Scholarship Program funds selected colleges, universities and community colleges in the awarding of scholarships that cover tuition, fees and financial support for students to pursue an education in their chosen degree program. Both undergraduate and graduate students are eligible. Applications are by invitation only, and are usually initiated by the disability services offices of each Neilsen college and university that is supported.

The following institutions are currently participating in the scholarship program. The Neilsen Foundation also funds certain college programs that have a proven record of supporting its mission.

Hinds Community College (Mississippi)	University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign
Portland Community College (Oregon)	University of Michigan
Georgia Institute of Technology	University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Pennsylvania State University	University of Pittsburgh
University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa	University of Texas at Arlington
University of Arizona, Tucson	University of Utah
University of California, Los Angeles	



Chris Connolly is a Neilsen scholar and med student at the University of Michigan.

# Accessible College: When You Need Help Transitioning

Transitioning to college as a wheelchair user can be challenging and confusing, whether you are entering from high school or somewhere later in life. Some mobility disabilities, like spinal cord injury, transverse myelitis, multiple sclerosis and others, can strike in adulthood. When they do, your life is unavoidably thrown into disarray, and your need for health care services, hard-to-navigate government programs and re-education becomes paramount. Once daily living activities become stabilized, a college education, at whatever level, may be the best path forward to deal with your changed circumstances. That's when you have the greatest need for services such as Accessible College has to offer.

Annie Tulkin, founder of Accessible College, says AC offers consulting services to students and prospective students with many types of physical disabilities. While the services AC offers originally targeted incoming students of high school age, Tulkin has recently expanded her outreach to people with paralysis "wherever they are" in their life journey. She has partnered with the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation, which supports a limited number of free consultations to

prospective students. A full range of consultation topics is available, and includes, but is not limited to:

- Considerations for college based on healthcare needs
- College accommodations
- Medication management
- Healthcare management
- Hiring and managing a personal care attendant
- Continuity of care
- Self-advocacy skills
- Disability disclosure
- Disability documentation review and development
- Communicating with the college's disability resource office
- Disability specific questions for college tours and tour debriefs
- Study skills and time management

The cost is not insubstantial, so the Reeve-sponsored consultations available on a limited basis through June 2021 are an excellent choice for those who need information and guidance to get started on a new path. Also, some students have secured funding for AC services through other disability organizations. If you have to pay out of pocket, you may want to ask about a customized program that only includes your most pressing concerns, or

LIVING WITH PARALYSIS

## Navigating and Transitioning to College with Paralysis



 CHRISTOPHER & DANA  
REEVE FOUNDATION  
TODAY'S CARE. TOMORROW'S CURE.®

to get an overview of what needs to be done to make your re-entry easier.

Another resource for transitioning to college is Tulkin's comprehensive 32-page booklet that is free and available online at [bit.ly/363bfjs](http://bit.ly/363bfjs). For more information on consultation opportunities, visit [accessiblecollege.com](http://accessiblecollege.com).

**Birth Trauma, Neonatal Injury and Disability scholarship:** Awarded each year to a high school, undergraduate or graduate student who is influenced by birth trauma, neonatal injury or disability. 248-593-5100; [abclawcenters.com/birth-injury-caring-for-life-scholarship-2](http://abclawcenters.com/birth-injury-caring-for-life-scholarship-2)

**The Bryon Riesch Paralysis Foundation:** Awarded to two or three individuals with neurological disabilities, or the child of such a person, for post-high school education. Applicants with spinal cord injury/disease resulting in paralysis are given first priority. Priority also given to Wisconsin residents. 262-547-2083; [brpf.org/scholarship](http://brpf.org/scholarship)

**Buckfire & Buckfire, P.C. Disability Scholarship:** Open to students with any type of disability. 800-606-1717; [buckfirelaw.com/library/disability-scholarship-2020.cfm](http://buckfirelaw.com/library/disability-scholarship-2020.cfm)

**Craig Hospital Alumni Scholarship:** For rehab graduates of Craig Hospital in Denver. 303-789-8236; [craighospital.org/resources/alumni-educational-scholarship](http://craighospital.org/resources/alumni-educational-scholarship)

**Harris Personal Injury Lawyers Scholarship:** A scholarship for students who have sustained a serious injury and are committed to rebuilding their lives by attending college. 877-231-9970;

[harrispersonalinjury.com/injury-scholarship](http://harrispersonalinjury.com/injury-scholarship)

**Independence Foundation Scholarship:** For three individuals with physical disabilities. 716-685-3976; [theindependencefoundation.org/programs/independence-foundation-scholarship](http://theindependencefoundation.org/programs/independence-foundation-scholarship)

**Karman Healthcare Scholarship:** Opportunity to earn two \$500 scholarships per year for students who have a mobility disability, a regard for disability awareness in America, and who have excelled academically. 626-581-2235; [www.karmanhealthcare.com/scholarships](http://www.karmanhealthcare.com/scholarships)

**Michigan Auto Law Scholarship:** For college students who survived car accidents and who have overcome their injuries. 888-995-6680; [www.michiganautolaw.com/scholarships/car-accident](http://www.michiganautolaw.com/scholarships/car-accident)

**NBC Universal Tony Coelho Media Scholarship:** Eight scholarships of \$5,625 to second-year associate students, undergraduate sophomores, juniors, and seniors, and graduate students with disabilities interested in pursuing a career in the communications, media or entertainment industry. 202-521-4316; [www.aapd.com/nbcuniversal-tony-coelho-media-scholarship-program](http://www.aapd.com/nbcuniversal-tony-coelho-media-scholarship-program)

**Patient Care Medical Scholarships:** Three \$1,000 scholarships for prospective or current students with spinal cord injuries or mobility issues. 888-726-5066; [patientcaremedical.com](http://patientcaremedical.com)

**Premier Catheter Supplies Scholarship:** Two \$1,000 scholarships to U.S. students in 2020; essay required. 866-206-8846; [premiercathetersupplies.com/scholarships](http://premiercathetersupplies.com/scholarships)

**Rehabmart.com \$25,000 Scholarship Fund For Students With Disabilities, Health Science Students, or Special Needs Education:** \$25,000 scholarship fund for students with disabilities, students pursuing a college degree in a health sciences/healthcare-related field, and students pursuing special education degrees. 800-827-828; [www.rehabmart.com/scholarship](http://www.rehabmart.com/scholarship)

**Shook & Stone Scholarship:** \$2,500 scholarship for students with a GPA of 3.0 or higher. Personal injury-related essay or video response required. 702-766-6380; [www.shookandstone.com/scholarship](http://www.shookandstone.com/scholarship)

**SpinLife Innovation in Motion Scholarship:** One \$1,000 scholarship and one \$500 gift card to Spinlife.com open to students who are manual or power wheelchair users enrolled at an accredited four-year institution. 800-850-0335; [www.spinlife.com/scholarship](http://www.spinlife.com/scholarship)

**Swim With Mike Physically Challenged Athletes Scholarship Fund:** For athletes who participated in organized competitive youth, high school or collegiate athletics and subsequently have sustained a life-changing accident or illness, 213-740-4155; [www.swimwithmike.org/about-2/history](http://www.swimwithmike.org/about-2/history)

**Swope, Rodante Award for Philanthropic Efforts:** Two \$2,500 student scholarships every year awarded for giving back to the community through philanthropy and impacting the lives of people living with a disability. [www.spinalcord.com/scholarship](http://www.spinalcord.com/scholarship)

**Zivadream/Scholarship:** \$1,500 scholarship awarded to students with mental or physical disabilities. [www.zivadream.com](http://www.zivadream.com)

## Spinal Cord Injury Model Systems Hospitals

A national system of centers supported by National Institutes of Health funding provides the best rehabilitation and outpatient care for survivors of spinal cord injuries in the nation. These centers use best-practice models and share valuable research with each other, which other rehab and outpatient facilities can then put into practice. It may be worth considering these locations when balancing health considerations with other criteria for choosing a school, as it would be hard to overstate the value of easy access to specialists who truly understand spinal cord injury and its complications.

### Atlanta, Georgia

Southeastern Regional Spinal Cord Injury Model System, Shepherd Center, [www.shepherd.org/resources-healthcare-professionals/research/model-system-of-care](http://www.shepherd.org/resources-healthcare-professionals/research/model-system-of-care)

### Birmingham, Alabama

University of Alabama at Birmingham Spinal Cord Injury Model System, [www.uab.edu/medicine/sci](http://www.uab.edu/medicine/sci)

### Boston, Massachusetts

Spaulding New England Regional Spinal Cord Injury Center, [snerscic.org](http://snerscic.org)

Community College of Denver is near Craig Hospital.

### Chicago, Illinois

Midwest Regional Spinal Cord Injury Care System, [www.sralab.org/conditions/spinal-cord-injury](http://www.sralab.org/conditions/spinal-cord-injury)

### Cleveland, Ohio

Northeast Ohio Regional Spinal Cord Injury System, Case Western Reserve University, [www.metrohealth.org/rehabilitation](http://www.metrohealth.org/rehabilitation)

### Columbus, Ohio

Ohio Regional SCI Model System (ORSCIMS), Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center, [wexnermedical.osu.edu/neurological-institute/departments-and-centers/research-centers/spinal-cord-injury-model-systems](http://wexnermedical.osu.edu/neurological-institute/departments-and-centers/research-centers/spinal-cord-injury-model-systems)

### Englewood, Colorado

Rocky Mountain Regional SCI System, Craig Hospital, [craighospital.org/programs/research](http://craighospital.org/programs/research)

### Houston, Texas

Texas Spinal Cord Injury Model System at TIRR, [tirr.memorialhermann.org](http://tirr.memorialhermann.org)

### Miami, Florida

South Florida SCIMS, University of Miami, [scimiami.med.miami.edu](http://scimiami.med.miami.edu)

### New York, New York

Mount Sinai Hospital Spinal Cord Injury Model System, [icahn.mssm.edu/research/spinal-cord-injury/about](http://icahn.mssm.edu/research/spinal-cord-injury/about)

### Northern New Jersey

Northern New Jersey Spinal Cord Injury System, Kessler Foundation, [kesslerfoundation.org/NNJSCIS](http://kesslerfoundation.org/NNJSCIS)

### Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Regional SCI Center of the Delaware Valley, Thomas Jefferson University Hospital and Magee Rehabilitation Hospital, [www.spinalcordcenter.org](http://www.spinalcordcenter.org)

### Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

University of Pittsburgh Model Center on Spinal Cord Injury, UPMC Rehabilitation Institute (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), [www.upmc-sci.pitt.edu](http://www.upmc-sci.pitt.edu)

### Southern California

Southern California Spinal Cord Injury Model System, Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center, [www.ranchoresearch.org](http://www.ranchoresearch.org)



Universities are fast-paced environments these days – and students with physical disabilities use a host of adaptive technologies to succeed in school. Voice dictation software, which started out by just writing documents, can now navigate an entire desktop and many programs. Eye-control technologies enable users to move cursors just by looking at different areas on the computer screen. For folks who have a hard time reading books or turning pages, audiobooks and e-books are other great ways to learn in class. Classes and labs are more accessible and inclusive. Finally, universities' disability service programs can often record lectures and even add captioning.

Voice dictation software is the most well-known type of adaptive technology. The programs started out relatively simple. The user would speak into a microphone and the software would write a sentence. The accuracy wasn't great early on, but it has improved. For students using Windows PCs, the popular program Dragon NaturallySpeaking now lets users navigate their entire computer by voice, and it works with a range of software. Many students use the \$150 Dragon Home. Upgrading to the \$300 Professional version lets students use even more programs, such as Microsoft Excel spreadsheets for more math-heavy courses. KnowBrainer, a lesser-known company, sells add-on software that makes Dragon more powerful and efficient.

Apple owners will find built-in voice recognition and navigation just by saying "Siri, Turn on Voice Control," so they can navigate the screen and applications without extra software. The controls aren't always as powerful as a Dragon-KnowBrainer combo, but work plenty well for most students. Chromebooks also have built-in dictation and navigation, while practically all smart phones have voice dictation for people on the go (or students lounging around the dorms).

Adaptive equipment and software are especially useful for upper-extremity bilateral amputees and others with paralyzed limbs and limited finger dexterity. Although Dragon software can navigate a desktop and programs, many people with spinal cord injuries use other technology instead of – or in addition to – voice navigation. Some quads and paras may be able to use a laptop or tablet with a trackpad and/or touch screen, or perhaps a well-positioned desk or even a raised "standing desk" at home.

Advanced eye-tracking software can hook up to either conventional or specialized webcams, letting students move a tracker by looking at different parts of the screen. Options are plentiful; for example, IMOTIONS is a popular manufacturer of a dozen different pieces of specialized cameras and hardware, which can pair up with paid software or free open source programs. Other quads with higher spinal cord injuries often use sip-and-puff systems to navigate their computer, as well.

Even in a high-tech world, plenty of learning comes through printed pages, whether in a small novel or a large textbook. However, some paralyzed students have a hard time handling or carrying books. Fortunately, university libraries include e-books that can be read on a computer, tablet or smart phone, and most also subscribe to audiobook services that cover some, but not all, university materials. When e-books and audiobooks aren't available, universities' disabled students programs can often scan an entire book into a PDF for computer-based reading.

Students on a budget might be unable to afford high-speed internet and just use Wi-Fi at school or cafés instead.



Getty Images

In the age of COVID-19, high-speed internet at home is a must-have. Luckily, many companies have discounted internet service for people with disabilities, people with low income or people who receive government benefits. Cash-strapped students needing to study from home can still do so. All it takes is some research and a little extra paperwork on the application.

*For further reading on technology, check out New Mobility columnist Todd Stabelfeldt ([newmobility.com/author/toddstabelfeldt](http://newmobility.com/author/toddstabelfeldt)) or search [newmobility.com](http://newmobility.com).*

## Resources

- DO-IT, [www.washington.edu/doit](http://www.washington.edu/doit)
- Dragon speech recognition systems, [nuance.com/dragon.html](http://nuance.com/dragon.html)
- IMOTIONS eye-tracking hardware and software, [imotions.com/eye-tracking](http://imotions.com/eye-tracking)
- KnowBrainer speech recognition software and hardware, [knowbrainer.com](http://knowbrainer.com)
- OptiKey, open-source software for eye-tracking devices, [github.com/OptiKey/OptiKey/wiki](https://github.com/OptiKey/OptiKey/wiki)
- Origin Instruments, hands-free technology, [www.orin.com](http://www.orin.com)
- Reviews of note-taking apps, [collegeinfo geek.com/best-note-taking-apps](http://collegeinfo geek.com/best-note-taking-apps)

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## United Spinal Association

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www.unitedspinal.org/pathways-to-employment/

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