

## Access Experience with Wheelchair

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## Experience Journals

**November 9, 2015**

Today was my first day using the wheelchair. To be honest, I was pretty anxious to get it because I had never used or sat in one before. I had a general idea on how to steer the wheelchair/make turns but I was nervous to take it all the way to class. I didn't want to make a fool out of myself in front of others if I couldn't get the hang of it. Because of this anxiousness, I made sure one of my friends was there with me to pick up the chair and push me to class. I imagine this anxiousness is what a lot of people who are getting a wheelchair for the first time feel too, just on a larger scale. Although it was a great help to have my friend push me to anatomy class, I know I can't always count on her to push me - she has a schedule too.

AS I was getting pushed along the sidewalk to class, it felt like everyone was staring. I noticed people who drove by stared as well as people that walked by me. One thing that surprised me was how significant the condition of the sidewalk/pavement was to my chair. The sidewalk in front of the Education Center in particular was very uneven and if my friend wasn't pushing me, I think I would have had a hard time getting over some spots. The chair is not agile, it is hard to avoid holes and bumps last minute.

One challenge I had to day was gaining access into Thomas Auditorium for my anatomy class. If I went in through Preble, it would be easier, however that would force me to have to place my wheelchair in front of the first row. This option is completely inconvenient and I'm guessing all eyes would be on "the girl in the wheelchair." There is a life, however, to get to the back row of the auditorium, in the hallway. The lift is very noisy and pretty old. I decided to go i through Ricker. There are front stairs into the building, so I did step out and carry my wheelchair

up and then wheeled myself into the auditorium. This option allowed me to sit in the back row, free from making a scene or being in the way. However, if I was truly disable, the lift would be my only option and it is not the most convenient.

Another challenge was that my wheelchair does not fit in my car (I drive a Beetle). I had to leave it with my friend on campus and come pick it up with my mom's car. This just showed me that if I was truly disable I could say goodbye to picking a car, any car, I wanted. I would need to make sure it could accommodate my wheelchair.

### **November 10, 2015**

Today was my second day with the wheelchair and it was definitely harder than the first. I start the day with Anatomy Lab at 9:50. I was still anxious to wheel myself on my own, especially because there is a slope I would have to go up between the parking lot and Preble. I made arrangements with my friend to push me to class, but hers started the same time as mine - meaning she would have to bring me to class early in order to make it to hers on time. All around it was pretty inconvenient for the both of us. I had to get up earlier and she was stressed about the possibility of being late for class.

Anatomy lab was very challenging in a wheelchair. The room itself was hard to maneuver around in and there was only one table that had a wide enough end for me to wheel up close enough to. And of course, this was the day we were dissecting sheep brains. I had a really hard time participating in my group because I could not reach across the table and fully look at the brain. I was really frustrated and my group members didn't understand my struggle. Part of the assignment was to go around and view all the other group's brains. I couldn't do this because of the way the tables were set up, I couldn't wheel between them.

On Tuesday's, I usually visit an elderly family friend who lives in the senior apartment buildings here in town. When I got there, I used my wheelchair to see how accessible the senior apartments were. I was pretty surprised. She took me to the common room which has mail and laundry. Being in the chair, I was unable to open some of the higher up mailboxes and even load clothes into the washer. Shouldn't these features be more accessible when there is probably a significant number of residents in wheelchairs?

### **November 11, 2015**

Today was my last day in the wheelchair so I only had it until 11:45.

This morning I was especially nervous because it would be the first time I would have to wheel myself from the parking lot in front of the Education Center to the building. My friend who usually pushes me had class at 8:00 am so I was on my own. I actually left my house about 10 minutes early because I was really anxious to wheel myself across traffic and up the slope. My fears came true because the slope was incredibly difficult to get up on my own. A couple times I could feel myself rolling backwards, which made me pretty embarrassed when I noticed some people watching me. It may look like a nice gradual slope to anyone who is walking but in a wheelchair it is something I wish could be avoided. Luckily, after Rehab class, Haley wheeled me back to my car.

To give my wheelchair back, I made arrangements with a friend to have her push me. She lives in Stone, so I met her there. The first thing I realized was that the entrance only has stairs - so I couldn't go in. Instead I had to wait for her in front of the building. A lot of people walked by me and probably wondered why I was just sitting there, but no one said anything to me. It was

an odd feeling not having the ability to access the building. It somewhat felt like I wasn't allowed.

When my friend came out she pushed me to the Education Center and I returned the chair.

## ADA Recommendations

**206.2.4 Spaces and Elements:** At least one accessible route shall connect accessible building or facility entrances with all accessible spaces and elements within the building or facility which are otherwise connected by a circulation path

There was very limited circulation in the anatomy lab room in Preble. Although I could get in the room fine, the way the seats were set up, the circulation path was narrow and sometimes obstructed.

**221.2.2 Integration. Wheelchair spaces shall be an integral part of the seating plan.**

In my anatomy lecture in Thomas Auditorium, there are no wheelchair accessible chairs in the auditorium like seating. The only “available” seating was in the front of the room, by the professor and projector, completely separate and ultimately a distraction.

**227.2 Check-Out Aisles. Where check-out aisles are provided, check-out aisles complying with 904.3 shall be provided in accordance with Table 227.2.**

I went to Dollar Tree in Jay with my mom. The check out aisle is barely wide enough for a wheelchair and the space where you slide your credit card or write checks on is too high to reach or appropriately use.

**611.4 Height. Top loading machines shall have the door to the laundry compartment located 36 inches (915 mm) maximum above the finish floor.**

As mentioned in my journal, the washing machines in the senior apartments I visited in Farmington are top loading, making it almost impossible for me to load or unload my wash if I wished to. I would not be able to reach in and collect my wash for the dryer.

**Advisory 603.3 Mirrors. A single full-length mirror can accommodate a greater number of people, including children. In order for mirrors to be usable by people who are ambulatory and people who use wheelchairs, the top edge of mirrors should be 74 inches (1880 mm) minimum from the floor or ground.**

The mirrors in most bathrooms around campus do not have a full length mirror. When in the bathroom in the Education Center, there was no full length mirror, making it hard for me to check myself. Other mirrors aren’t equal for people with limited height or wheelchairs.

**216.6 Entrances. Directional signs complying with 703.5 that indicate the location of the nearest entrance complying with 404 shall be provided at entrances that do not comply with 404.**

While visiting my friends dorm in Stone, the front entrance is not accessible for someone in a wheelchair and there are no directional signs providing any alternative routes or access elsewhere in the building.

**208.2.4 Van Parking Spaces. For every six or fraction of six parking spaces required by 208.2 to comply with 502, at least one shall be a van parking space complying with 502.**

At the senior apartments here in Farmington, there were no van parking spaces for non-residents. There was one disability parking space, but it did not allow proper space for fold out ramps for wheelchairs and other devices.

**403.3 Slope. The running slope of walking surfaces shall not be steeper than 1:20. The cross slope of walking surfaces shall not be steeper than 1:48**

I park in the parking lot in front of the Education Center and the slope of the sidewalk from the parking lot to the Education Center is quite steep. I had a hard time getting up it and sometimes felt myself rolling backwards.

**302.1 General. Floor and ground surfaces shall be stable, firm, and slip resistant and shall comply with 302.**

Part of this refers to the ground outside and there were many times rolling to class that the sidewalks and ground were not stable. There were many cracks and dips in the pavement that made rolling very difficult, even when I had someone pushing me.

**403.5.3 Passing Spaces. An accessible route with a clear width less than 60 inches (1525 mm) shall provide passing spaces at intervals of 200 feet (61 m) maximum.**

I found some of the hallways to be narrow and not allow adequate space. For example, bringing my wheelchair back to the third floor of the Education Center, it seemed as though I was taking up a significant portion of the hallway, not enough room for others to pass.