

Report by the Senate Task Force on Campus Accessibility

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Introduction

The Task Force on Campus Accessibility was commissioned by the Faculty Senate in May 2013 with a one-year term. Its purpose was to “identify accessibility challenges that students, faculty, staff and community members experience while on our campus. They may survey constituent groups and hold hearings to determine whether there are specific areas of concern.” This is the final report of the Task Force on Campus Accessibility.

Composition and Structure

A call was placed to the campus to elicit potential Task Force members. It was decided early on that the Task Force membership should include faculty, staff and administrators. We particularly sought to include faculty from Physical Therapy (PHTH), Occupational Therapy (OCTH), Nursing (NURS) and Education (EDUC), as we knew we would need the knowledge those disciplines possess. Also, we sought out both full-time and adjunct faculty as well as full-time staff. We knew that we would want to include representatives from the Learning Access Program (LAP). Another important constituency to include on the Task Force was administrators from Facilities and Administration and Finance. We also knew we would want to include disabled individuals. All of these goals were achieved. We ultimately decided to represent the student voice via a former student and current adjunct faculty member because of the large amount of work which would take place in Summer 2013.

The official membership of the Task Force includes the following individuals: chair Susan Fahey (CRIM), co-chair Fran Bottone (LAP), Camille Sauerwald (professional staff; OCTH), Elizabeth Elmore (ECON), Robert Ross (LAP), Charles Ingram (Administration and Finance), Don Hudson (Facilities), Donald Woolsey (Facilities), Charles Skip West (Facilities), Debbi Dagavarian (Assistant Provost), Katherine Panagakos (LANG), William Rosche (BIOL), Carole-Rae Reed (NURS), Shelly Meyers (EDUC), Elaine Bukowski (PHTH), Nestor Smith (adjunct; SOBL), Mary Weisel (support staff; HLTH), Lydia Fecteau (adjunct; former student; GENS), and Kimberly Furphy (OCTH). This Task Force represents a mix of the constituencies and disciplines at the College.

Activities of the Task Force

As a full task force, we met in person several times and created plans for campus users to report accessibility problems. We created a specific email address through which problems could be reported to the Task Force (access@stockton.edu). We advertised this email address via specially designed posters put up around campus, on the TV screens and at the Fall Faculty Conference, as well as at the various other activities we held. We wrote and deployed a survey of the faculty and staff, which was sent out to the faculty and staff in October 2013, with additional written reminders. There were 194 responses to this survey at the time of the writing of this report. We also wrote and deployed a survey of the students in February 2014. There were 1099 responses to this survey at the time of the writing of this report.

In our Task Force meetings, we sought to represent the interests of those with all types of physical disabilities, including those in electric wheelchairs, manual wheelchairs,

those who walk with assistive devices and/or with limited mobility, those with visual impairment and those with hearing impairment, among others, and combinations of these disabilities. We were also sensitive to the notion of hidden disabilities, those with disabilities that are not easily identified by others.

We quickly determined that in general, the campus itself is reasonably accessible with several notable exceptions, and that faculty, staff and the Learning Access Program are quite sensitive and responsive to issues of ensuring open access to the campus. However, we determined that while many on campus are sensitive to the issue, some are simply unaware of the type and number of challenges and obstacles disabled campus users face. We determined that it was important to change this lack of awareness. We decided to address this by holding two campus-wide events.

Our first campus-wide event was held on October 8, 2013. It was called “Defining Disability: Student Voices,” and the purpose of the event was twofold. The first portion of the event involved presentations by our three student speakers, Brett L., Taylor C., and Elizabeth T. The students spoke to the ways in which disability framed and molded their lives and specifically, their educations. The second half involved a town-hall type open meeting during which students, faculty and staff could report accessibility issues. We requested funding for the event to pay for pizza, cookies and soft drinks, Provost Kesselman generously provided this. The event was a success and generated much discussion. We advertised this event broadly throughout campus, with posters and images on the TV screens. Some of the faculty on the Task Force offered extra credit and other benefits to students for attending. We also offered ULTRA credit.

Our second campus-wide event was held on February 20, 2014. At Defining Disability: *Murderball*, we showed a film and held a discussion afterwards. *Murderball* is a documentary film that follows the story of the US quadriplegic rugby Paralympic Team. Task Force member Lydia Fecteau led the discussion afterwards. The discussion concentrated on the different definitions of disability, including physical disabilities relative to cognitive disabilities, stereotyping and discrimination, and living a complete life as a disabled person. Many of the audience members expressed amazement at the brutal physicality of the sport and how it changed their mental images of paraplegia. As with our first event, Provost Kesselman generously provided support for the event. In addition, the Graduate Student Council supported our event with a \$100 disbursal, which was used to compensate Professor Fecteau for her time and work in leading the discussion. We advertised this event broadly throughout campus, with posters and images on the TV and LED screens. Again, some of the faculty on the Task Force offered extra credit and other benefits to students for attending. We also offered ULTRA credit. In addition, the event and the work of the Task Force were covered by articles in the *Argo* and *The Press of Atlantic City*.

Why is Full Access Important?

With the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the Rehabilitation Act in 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, disabled students are to be ensured equal access to education, including postsecondary education.

This is not a trivial matter. Individuals with disabilities are underrepresented in postsecondary institutions, particularly four-year colleges. Further, disabled individuals are less likely to obtain the credential/degree sought at these postsecondary institutions than able-bodied individuals. It was reported that these differences are attributable to both disability-related difficulties and other reasons reported in the able-bodied population as well, such as delaying school entrance and having a GED instead of a high school diploma.¹

Further, disabled employees ought to be able to access their workplace without obstacles. For both students and employees, this includes parking on campus, getting inside buildings, traveling within buildings, using toilet facilities and accessing classrooms. Although the financial resources of the institution are often considered when discussing architectural changes to the physical facilities, many of the problems with accessing the Stockton campus need to be addressed to allow employees and students to attain the best outcomes. We include in an appendix to this report a detailed list of problems that were reported to us. This list is long and looks a bit overwhelming. Thus, we highlight the most important domains of problems in our view. These domains are either so problematic that they demand swift remediation or they would provide a relatively easy way to increase the quality of life of our disabled employees, students and campus visitors.

Problematic Domains

Parking

As a whole, access to the main campus of Richard Stockton College of New Jersey is in many ways quite good with several notable and important exceptions. The first of these exceptions is parking. Although the campus itself meets the minimum requirements of the ADA for number of parking spots in several, though not all, of our parking lots, there are three main problems with this.

The first problem with this assertion is that although the minimum number of spots in some of the lots may be met, this assumes that our total number of parking spots meets our needs for the total number of parking spots, particularly during peak hours. In fact, this does not appear to be true. The single most reported complaint across the surveys and other solicitations was not enough handicapped parking. We simply have more demand than supply of handicapped parking spots, and it is likely that this will get worse as our employees continue to age and as our school hosts more disabled veterans as students and employees.

The second element of the parking problem is that the placement of parking spots is not ideal. The most common access point to the campus is to park in lots 1-4 and to travel through the Campus Center on to the main building. Many of the handicapped spots, especially the van-accessible spots, are concentrated in lots 1 and 2. Yet, the paths down from lot 1 toward A/B and Arts and Sciences are not properly accessible. Thus, individuals

¹ Laura Horn, Jennifer Berktold, and Larry Bobbitt. (1999). Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education: A Profile of Preparation, Participation and Outcomes NCES 1999-187. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

who cannot find parking closer to the Campus Center in lots 3 and 4 are forced to park in 1 or 2 and travel further than able-bodied individuals since they must travel through the Campus Center to get to the main building.² Further, in several of the lots, there are not enough van-accessible spots, or those that are there are not properly sized. When the van accessible spots are not of the required size, individuals who drive or are driven in a van and who require a motorized platform to lower their wheelchair to the ground are unable to use these spots as there is not enough room to do so.

The Task Force suggests that the design and placement of handicapped parking spots be reworked. In addition, we need more parking in general on campus. We need more handicapped parking, specifically, and we need more properly sized, van-accessible parking spaces. It is imperative that something be done about the lack of access to handicapped parking, as it was the most voiced complaint across the different surveys, email reports and meetings. It is our suggestion that one or more members of the Accessibility Task Force be allowed to provide input or testimony on the issue of faculty and staff parking to the Committee on Administration and Finance to allow disabled voices to be heard and to be included as a part of the solution.

Although the faculty, staff, and student complaints about lack of general parking spaces is beyond the purview of our Task Force, we note it in our report to communicate the level of anger and anxiety reported to us, particularly by students, about the lack of general parking on campus. We received multiple anecdotal reports that due to lack of general parking spaces, some students had resorted to parking illegally in handicapped spaces when parking was tight on campus and that some non-disabled students borrowed hangtags from others and were parking legally in handicapped parking under these false pretenses. Thus, the lack of general parking spaces on campus has also become an issue of disabled access if these anecdotal reports are true. The level of emotion on this topic is quite high according to the student, faculty and staff survey respondents. Our suggestion is to create a campus-wide task force specifically to examine the issue of parking on campus for students, faculty, and staff and to allow one or more members of the Accessibility Task Force to serve to represent the disabled.

We also suggest that a drop-off area be designated for use by disabled individuals who are driven to campus by another person. The placement of this drop-off area should be a short distance from the main buildings and not blocking main traffic, so disabled individuals will have plenty of time to exit their vehicles safely.

Signage

Signage is another systematic problem on the campus. First, the campus often lacks signs at inaccessible areas, such as inaccessible bathrooms, directing the user to an accessible bathroom, which is generally required by law. Further, many of the signs on campus do not meet minimum requirements for the visually impaired, such as fonts of a sufficient size, centered on a plaque of a specific size with Braille. The larger issue with our

² The New Jersey Barrier Free Subcode requires that “accessible parking spaces shall be the closest parking spaces provided and those spaces shall be on the shortest route, which shall be an accessible route, to an accessible entrance” (*N.J.A.C. 5:23-7a* 2013).

signs is that they are often quite small and located in places that make them harder to see, particularly from a distance. Many campus users reported to the Task Force that when an elevator is out of service, it would very helpful nice for signs to be placed in several locations to inform them of the problem. This would keep them from having to travel all the way to the malfunctioning elevator (or inaccessible bathroom) only to find they need to travel to yet another location. This can be quite a hardship for all disabled individuals but especially those who walk with assistive devices or limited mobility and particularly in the short time between classes.

Further, at the time of the creation of the Task Force, the campus maps available via the Stockton website did not include the location of handicapped parking. We are pleased to see that at the time of the writing of this report this has been changed. We challenge the College to go one step further and to create accessibility maps, available on the website for individuals to print and bring with them, and also available at the Campus Center information desk. These accessibility maps would show all accessible routes through campus, including from the parking lots to all buildings, especially to the Performing Arts Center (PAC), the Learning Access office, and the main academic buildings in addition to accessible building entrances, the locations of accessible bathrooms, and elevators. These should be of sufficient font size to be easily readable by those with visual impairments. We believe this would be a valuable resource for all. We also suggest that the PAC provide a copy of this map in holders in the parking lot or near the entrance to the PAC so that our many disabled arts patrons are better able to access the PAC itself and be directed to needed services, such as bathrooms and accessible seating.

Proper signage, direction through campus via easily obtained accessibility maps, and warning signs when elevators are not working are a simple and cost-effective way of improving the quality of life of the disabled who use our campus.

Doors

The problems with doors on campus are three-fold. One, many of the doors on the campus require greater than five pounds of pressure to open, the relevant benchmark.³ This benchmark allows individuals with weakened arm strength to be able to pull or push open a door that is not on an automatic opener. Many of the doors on the interior of campus buildings are too heavy, including bathroom, classroom and meeting room doors. This presents a hardship for many individuals, including students, employees, and campus visitors. It forces these individuals to either attempt to open the door, possibly injuring themselves in the process, or needing to wait until an able-bodied individual is able to open it for them.

The second main problem with the doors are the timers on many of the campus doors, particularly many doors that lead into or out of the exterior of the building. Many of the timers are set to close too quickly, in less than five seconds, the relevant benchmark.⁴ The Task Force has received multiple reports of doors closing on individuals as they travel

³ Americans with Disabilities Guidelines 2.45 & 3.11

⁴ ADA Guideline 2.46

through the door. We even received reports of individuals being trapped between double doors where there is only a push-button opener on the *outside* and not *between* the doors. Adjusting the timers on the doors to the required five seconds will help avoid incidents of this nature.

Third, the wing doors, particularly in the unrenovated parts of the main building (B-D; F), are problematic in several respects. These doors are not on automatic openers and require greater than 5 pounds of pressure to open, and in places are not wide enough to allow access for wider wheelchairs. As these wing doors provide access to classrooms, faculty offices and essential offices, like Computer Services and the computer labs, it is exceedingly important to provide open and easy access to these areas. We suggest that the wing entrances be renovated similarly to renovations in H and J-wings, where the door opening was widened and the doors are held open on magnets.

A final note on the doors on campus applies mostly to the unrenovated portions of the campus. Doorknobs are now required to be operable by an individual who is not able to form a rounded grasping motion.⁵ Thus, round doorknobs ought to be replaced with lever-style doorknobs or other suitable replacements in all locations on the campus.

Performing Arts Center and Experimental Theater

The PAC, the Experimental Theater and the L-wing art gallery represent an important opportunity to interface with the public and provide a positive image of Stockton to visitors who come on campus to enjoy the artistic performances and other events scheduled in this area. However, we believe that this opportunity is being squandered due to the accessibility challenges in this area.

Among the issues on this part of campus, there is not enough handicapped parking outside the PAC to meet demand during performances. Further, the existing parking is quite far away from the building itself and the outside paths from the parking lot into the PAC vestibule area are graded too steeply and need handrails. Two of these paths have stairs. This area also lacks an area for disabled individuals to be dropped off by their companions, who would then park the car in a location too far for the disabled individual to travel easily to the PAC itself.

Getting into and situated in the main theater itself can be difficult given the steepness of the seating area and stairs. The bathrooms in this area do not meet some of the requirements for accessibility, particularly the unisex, single-user bathroom which could be used to great effect by disabled individuals who are accompanied by an opposite-sex companion, like husband-wife pairs. The doors in the L-wing art gallery areas do not have push-button openers, making it difficult for individuals who lack the mobility or arm strength to pull the door open and enter through it at the same time.

There is no easy access to the Experimental Theater, the dressing rooms, or educational spaces in that area of the building. The stairs are not usable for individuals who use wheelchairs, and the open chair lift does not fit individuals who use larger electric

⁵ ADA Guideline 2.43

wheelchairs nor does it meet the minimum requirements for accessibility. In addition, we received a report that riding on the chair lift is a “terrifying” experience.

The Task Force thinks ensuring our performing arts spaces are easily accessible presents an important opportunity to reach out to the Stockton community as well as the external community. Creating a drop-off area, outfitting the L-wing art gallery doors with push button openers, installing an elevator in this area to allow access to the lower portions of the building, fixing the bathrooms in this area to bring them up to accessibility standards and providing more handicapped parking and better external access to the PAC will go a long way in establishing that goodwill and community outreach.

Other Reported Campus Problems

Through our surveys, town hall meeting and email solicitations of access issues, we were able to collect many reports of accessibility problems. Although not all of these are required by law to be addressed, fixing these problems will likely improve the quality of life on the campus for the disabled members of the College community.

One issue that was raised a great deal in the surveys was the lack of push-button door openers on bathroom doors. Within the bathrooms, there are many large and small issues which make several of the bathrooms on the campus inaccessible to many disabled individuals. This is particularly true of the bathrooms closest to the Learning Access Program, between H and J-wing, where the door is heavy and difficult to open, the handicapped stall is not wide enough to accommodate many wheelchairs or an attendant, and where the placement of the toilet is quite high. Although there are other, more accessible bathrooms elsewhere on the campus, it makes disabled persons’ lives more difficult if they are forced to travel excessively to find an accessible bathroom, especially if the individual is limited to the time between classes and signs are not provided with the location of the more accessible bathroom, as is required by law.

Yet another issue raised with bathrooms is the arrangement in the A-D area of the main building, in which only the female bathroom is on the ground floor closest to D-wing (with the male restroom upstairs) and only the male bathroom is on the ground floor (with the female upstairs) on the Alton Auditorium side.⁶ This requires that individuals use stairs to get to the alternate sex restroom or else travel about the length of a football field to get to the correct restroom. We are troubled by the idea that a disabled person is forced to travel further to get access to a working, appropriate restroom.

Another problem that faces the campus is the distance that disabled individuals must travel to gain access to the main academic building from the handicapped parking spaces. This is often much longer than able-bodied individuals.⁷ Even for those who obtain handicapped parking spaces, the trip up the ramps to an accessible door into the Campus Center and then, travel to an accessible door out of the Campus Center and into the main building or the other buildings on the campus is often quite long and longer than able-

⁶ This is also true of the restrooms in the renovated section of F-wing, near the Institute for Faculty Development.

⁷ See Note 2 on this point.

bodied individuals must make. More and closer handicapped parking ought to be set aside for disabled members of the campus community in an area that streamlines and shortens their trip to the main buildings.

Finally, another issue raised was the generally problematic character of the elevators in the main building. These elevators are old, prone to malfunctioning, lack Braille or audible sounds upon arrival at floors, and some are not large enough to accommodate large scooters or wheelchairs. Survey respondents noted that many break often, particularly the elevator between H-wing and J-wing and the elevator in F-wing. They also reported that some smell poorly, causing respiratory problems, and that some bounce and move unpredictably during the trip, triggering vertigo in the rider.

Raising Awareness

Although the work of this Task Force will end in May 2014, we recommend that the awareness campaign be continued. Specifically, we suggest that posters be designed by Graphics in the Office of External Affairs. We envision posters that would share a similar concept as the poster campaign currently directed at promoting responsible drinking by students. Like the drinking campaign, we suggest that the disability awareness campaign posters be placed in high-trafficked areas, such as near the osmosis water fountains and vending machines.

We recommend that these posters be designed to address disabled awareness etiquette in many domains. For parking, we recommend that posters be designed to discourage parking illegally in handicapped spaces or borrowing a handicapped hangtag from a family member to park in handicapped spaces under false pretenses. These posters could also be designed to discourage Stockton employees and students from parking in front of curb cuts and on sidewalks. Further, we suggest that posters be designed to encourage proper door etiquette, including allowing disabled persons into the stream of pedestrian traffic when there is a line of individuals traveling through a door, to allow disabled persons to pass through a door without being cut off, to hold doors open for disabled persons and to decrease casual usage of the automatic door openers by individuals who do not need them to access the door. In addition, posters could be designed for the theater spaces on campus that would discourage individuals from placing chairs or strollers in spaces reserved for wheelchairs. Posters addressing other problematic domains should also be considered.

Final Thoughts

The work of this Task Force has been met with much acceptance and affirmation. The Stockton community at large is one that wants to meet and exceed accessibility standards. We have encountered little resistance to our work, and we would like to thank our fellow employees, students and the community at-large for this support and acceptance.

As the College continues to grow and serve an aging constituency, the Task Force recommends follow-up research in five to ten years to gauge the degree of compliance with the recommendations, as well as any emerging issues.

We would like to thank President Saatkamp for supporting our work and for commissioning an accessibility assessment to evaluate the main campus. We would also like to thank the administration for allowing the Chair of the Task Force, Susan Fahey, access to the report and to meet with the architects themselves. We publicly acknowledge Task Force member Charles Skip West for granting us this access.

Further, we would like to thank Provost Kesselman and the Office of the Provost for providing support for our work and our events. We would also like to thank the Graduate Student Council for supporting the most recent event. We also acknowledge the support of the Stockton Federation of Teachers and the Faculty Senate, especially Mike Frank and Rodger Jackson, for recognizing the importance of this issue. Finally, we would like to extend our recognition and gratitude for the work of Task Force co-chair Fran Bottone and her Learning Access Program in ensuring that our students are equipped to succeed in their classes, despite the challenges.