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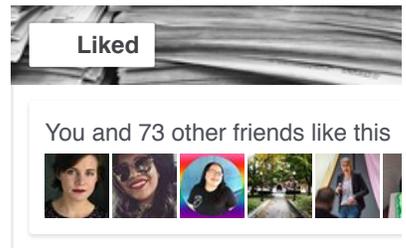
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Weighing the standards

🕒 March 1, 2018 👤 Erica Irish 📁 IN THE SPOTLIGHT, News
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Duckpin bowling to make debut in downtown Franklin

Photo by Erica Irish.



Campus leaders make accommodations, but struggle with aging campus

As a historical campus, Franklin College offers sights marked by generations of students and years of academic growth. But for those who face physical disabilities on campus, either as visitors, students, faculty or staff, some say the age of the campus poses obstacles.

The Americans with Disabilities Act was enacted in 1990—more than 150 years after Franklin College opened in 1834.

With over a century between the college's existence and a federal policy that mandates certain accommodation requirements for new building construction, some say much of campus is not designed with physical disabilities in mind.

Now, students with and without mobility impairments are taking notice.

Senior Sadie Stokes went to Twitter to ask for student experiences and observations that relate to accommodation issues on campus. With that information, the Best Buddies treasurer and former president wants to compile a report to send to school administrators.

She said the sidewalks crossing Dame Mall are not wheelchair-accessible due to cracks and uneven pavement.

Additionally, in Dietz Hall, she noted that while a "handicap accessible" sign hangs outside a second-floor bathroom, none of the stall doors are wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair or similar needs.

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“It needs to be addressed,” Stokes said. “If no one has this mindset, then they’re not going to realize it’s a problem or want to do anything about it.”

Justin Gash, associate professor of mathematics, said there are multiple areas on campus that offer little to no accommodations.

The Old Main ramp, for example, is too steep for wheelchairs and powered scooters to travel in a comfortable and efficient way, he said. He also noted Old Main’s interior, where there is only one passenger elevator with limited size and monthly maintenance checks that close it off to the public.

Gash was diagnosed with two disabilities at birth. The professor has multiple epiphyseal dysplasia, a genetic disorder that prevents the ends of his bones from growing to their full length. Gash also has hypochondroplasia, or what he described as “fake dwarfism.”

As a result, Gash faces a lifetime of surgeries, trouble walking and limited control of his joints.

“I know if I want to be the best husband I can be, be the best educator I want to be, be the man that I want to be, I’m going to have to push myself,” Gash said. “But I cannot do it alone.”

Gash said the college has provided him with innovative solutions. His classes are often scheduled near each other so he doesn’t have to walk long distances. On icy mornings, facility employees will meet with him personally to de-ice his path to Old Main.

“We have a good campus and people who care and want to include others,” Gash said. “That doesn’t mean challenges don’t exist and that doesn’t mean we punt our responsibility to be better in the future.”

Macy Huff, a former sophomore, said the college’s lack of accommodations led to her eventual withdraw. Huff is continuing her education in the fall at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis.

A Golden Bond: Britta...



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DISABILITY STATISTICS
AT FRANKLIN COLLEGE



RECENT ACCOMMODATIONS FOR PHYSICAL IMPAIRMENTS INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

- Specific dorm room assignments
- Digitally projected microscope
- Reassignment of classroom locations
- Electronic submissions of academic work
- Accessible desks or other furnishings
- Access to speech-to-text software
- Textbooks in electronic format
- Relocation of co-curricular events to accessible spaces

KATIE WEHNER | SOURCE

When Huff was in high school, she dislocated a vertebra during a cheerleading accident. The injury paralyzed her from the chest down. As a result, she uses a wheelchair every day.

Although the college installed a handicap push button at the entrance of Barnes Hall so she could access her classes, Huff said the college was not prepared or acting quickly to meet physical accommodations.

“Nothing was very urgent for them like it was for me,” she said.

As a member of Pi Beta Phi, Huff was actively involved in campus Greek life. But, because the Panhellenic House lacks a ramp, she could not attend certain events with other Greek women.

Katie Wehner, assistant dean for academic affairs and director of the Academic Resource Center and Disability Services, said she typically interacts with more students who have intellectual or developmental disabilities. At

this time, only one student reports a physical disability, she said.

Overall, 4.2 percent of the college’s student population are registered with Disability Services, Wehner confirmed in a statement. There are likely more who have not registered, and students may

notify Disability Services of a need at any time during their college career, she added.

Wehner said she was not aware of Huff's or other students' opinions on accessibility.

"I regret to learn that a student would find our efforts at ensuring his or her access to be unsatisfactory," Wehner said. "Franklin College is committed to supporting students with disabilities and ensuring that no individual with a disability is excluded from participation in college-sponsored programs or activities. Any student who feels he or she has not been awarded reasonable accommodations is encouraged to communicate his or her concerns and allow the college an opportunity to address the issue."

Director of Residence Life Jacob Knight said his department has options for those with temporary or long-term disabilities.

In Dietz Hall, there are handicap suites with "semi-private" bathrooms inside, he said. Elsey Hall provides two rooms with those accommodations, along with handicap accessible stalls and showers in communal restrooms.

If athletes injure themselves, they can also request to move to a lower level of their residence hall until they recover.

Gash, Huff, Stokes and Wehner all pointed to Hoover-Cline as a problematic area. The building has no entrance ramps and no passenger elevator for student use in the building.

Gash, who has taught at the college since 2008, said the community he works in does its best with what it has. With students, faculty and staff who care, the problems posed by a historic campus can be managed without drastic changes or construction projects, he added.

"It's better to be good than to be right," Gash said. "As someone who lives with a disability, there are times where I wish things were different, but I am more inclined to figure out how to solve the problem, and I have found the Franklin community always willing to troubleshoot that."

(Visited 118 times, 4 visits today)



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DISABILITY SERVICES

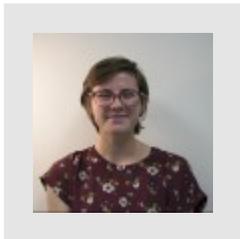
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Erica Irish is opinion editor of The Franklin, Franklin College's student-run news source.

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