

EMU elevator to improve access

A rise in incidental fees will provide more than half of the funds for the elevator project

By Scott Pesznecker
Freelance Reporter

In the last ASUO election, a ballot measure was passed that will put an elevator in the EMU, making the second and third floors accessible to the disabled.

ASUO Executive coordinator Cheryl Hunter said students will pay \$22 more in incidental fees for one year to fund the project. The elevator will cost \$550,000; \$330,000 will be provided by the measure.

"The EMU has problems right now, and it has a legal responsibility to make it accessible," said Hilary Gerdes, counselor for students with disabilities and associate director of Academic Advising and Student Services.

"[The EMU elevator] needs to be done, and we all have a responsibility to make it happen," she said.

EMU director Dusty Miller said the remaining funding for the project could come from the Incidental Fee Reserve Account, provided University President Dave Frohnmayer approves access to the reserve funds.

"What has to happen is that the ASUO president has to request that the president of the University approve of an ASUO Student Senate resolution for \$200,000," Miller said. "If the president approves that, then the \$330,000 ballot measure will get added to the \$200,000."

The EMU board provided the first \$25,000 for the project. Miller said that money will be used for hiring an architect, reviewing the site and organizing fund raisers.

"We would like to start trying to hire an architect sometime this summer," Miller said.

The need for the elevator arose last spring when the stair-lift was deemed nonfunctional, making the International Lounge and the Art Gallery inaccessible to disabled students.

"We had a person attempting to use that lift in a motorized chair, and the individual got stuck," Miller said. "There is a history of these lifts, which are older and were not built for mechanized electric chairs."

The passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990 called for institutions and programs across the country to provide accessibility for disabled



LAURA GOSS/Emerald

This stair-lift on the first floor of the EMU was deemed nonfunctional, making the International Lounge and the Art Gallery inaccessible to people in wheelchairs.

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Mary Feldman
Human rights specialist

people. Miller said the need to meet ADA specifications "heightened the need" for an elevator in the EMU.

"[The ADA] took away desired space from international students who did a lot of programming in the lounge," Miller said. "It is illegal to do that programming in the lounge now."

The ADA requires that all new structures, facilities and remodel projects be accessible to the disabled. In the case of buildings that were not accessible before 1990, the ADA requires that alternative means of accessibility be provided. The ADA also said the disabled must have equal opportunities to participate in all programs and activities.

"If there are things on the second or third story of a building that are inaccessible, disabled people need to be provided with an alternative way of accessibility, like a store taking merchandise downstairs to show someone who is disabled," said Mary Feldman, a Eugene human rights

specialist.

"Helping the disabled is no longer just the right thing to do morally and ethically — it's also the law."

In the past decade, the University has taken steps to increase accessibility to the disabled and meet ADA specifications by making the campus more accessible. Johnson, Deady and Villard halls have all been made accessible. Recent renovations at the EMU also have made it more accessible.

But there are buildings on campus that are not accessible to the disabled. Fred Tepfer of the University Planning Office said the University Annex, which contains offices, is inaccessible. He also said the Collier House is accessible only by way of an unreliable stair-lift while Friendly and Fenton halls only have accessibility for the disabled on their ground floors.

Gerdes said the University is in "good shape" in terms of barrier awareness for a campus as old as it is, but she added that "with a campus that is 100 years old, there are many challenges."

"The way buildings were constructed 50 to 100 years ago, people did not consider issues of accessibility at all," Gerdes said. "It wasn't important to think about people not being able to walk up stairs or go through a door. Inclusion of all people on campus is important. All people need to be able to feel fully integrated into the life on campus."

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