

Accessibility at UO improved with Lillis, new space designs

New buildings and additions such as automatic doors are making the campus better for people with disabilities

By Chelsea Duncan
News Reporter

The University is well-known for its accessibility to people with physical disabilities, but many agree there is still some work to be done.

Freshman Ingrid Ioan, who uses a wheelchair, said she still faces challenges from time to time even though most buildings on campus are accessible.

Ioan — who works with Mobility International USA, an organization that supports the rights of people with disabilities — said she has had difficulties with opening doors on campus and using equipment, such as overhead projectors in class.

"Some of the doors are very hard to open in some of the buildings," she said. "They are very heavy."

She said she recently gave a presentation in class and needed to use the overhead, but it was too high for her to reach. Another student helped her use it, but that made her feel dependent, she said.

"That person does not always exist there," she said.

Overall, Ioan said her experience on campus has been positive, adding that she considers about "90 percent of the campus" accessible.

"There's still a little bit to do," she said. "But it can be done."

University Planning Office Planning Associate Fred Tepfer said the University complies to more regulations than federally required, and things are always being upgraded to create a more accessible campus.

"The University of Oregon is seen around the country as an example of universal design," he said.

He said one thing that needs to be considered when designing new buildings or spaces is how welcoming they are to people with disabilities.

Tepfer cited the plans for the new federal courthouse, which initially created an uproar in the community because of its lack of accessibility, as an example of this concept.

He said the main entrance in the original courthouse designs, which is accessed by stairs, was not welcoming to people with disabilities. Although there are plans for an elevator entrance, there was no ramp in

the original design.

"It's not just the accessibility of (buildings), it's the look and feel," he said. "Do you feel welcome there?"

Tepfer added that standards for accessibility also change over time, which means continuous upgrades in older buildings around campus, such as adding automatic doors and ramps.

Disability Services Counselor Molly Sirois said this often means buildings are upgraded in accordance to requests from people with disabilities.

"Buildings have been retrofitted to be accessible," she said. "It's an afterthought."

Tepfer said new buildings, such as the Lillis Business Complex, apply smart design for accessibility. Even though the building is a couple of blocks long, with elevation changes and an uneven middle, it was made into one of the most accessible buildings on campus, he said.

"By accessibility standards, the Lillis building is tremendous," he said.

Sirois agreed that the Lillis Business Complex is welcoming, but she said the rest of the campus is only "fairly accessible."

She said people designing campus buildings are often unaware of how someone with a disability might view the final product.

"There aren't many buildings on campus that were designed by individuals who have physical disabilities," she said.

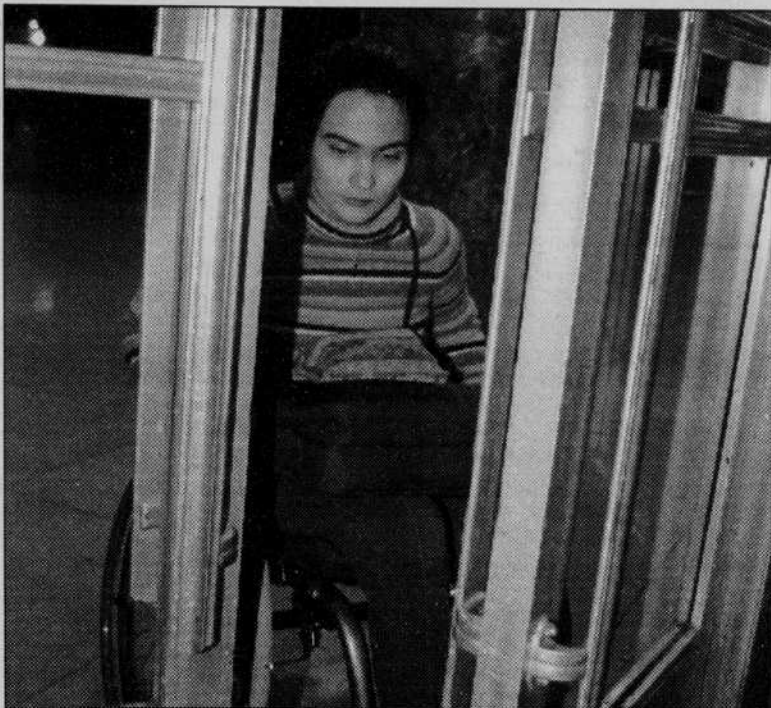
But that could change this year. Sirois said Disability Services Director Steve Pickett, who uses a motorized wheelchair, is serving on the Campus Planning Committee, and his perspective aids in the design of new buildings and spaces on campus.

"They're going to be getting the perspective and the input of someone who on a daily basis has to confront physical barriers," she said.

Sirois said when people with disabilities find things inaccessible, it can lead to feelings of loneliness and frustration. She said she would like to see classroom furniture "revamped" to be inclusive to all individuals, not just those in wheelchairs, but students who have large body sizes, chronic pain or are left-handed.

"I think the more we can start to think more broadly about the range of differences in physical movement of individuals, the more we'll be able to provide a more equal opportunity in the classroom," she said.

Contact the higher education/
student life/student affairs reporter
at chelseaduncan@dailyemerald.com.



Tim Bobosky Photographer

Freshman Ingrid Ioan, an international student from Romania, said the campus is fairly accessible, but added that she has had difficulties using some equipment on campus.

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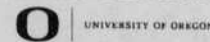
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