

Physical Accessibility at Haverford College:

An Assessment of the Campus

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Students with disabilities are incredibly underrepresented in higher education. While 19 percent of the American population had a disability in 2010 (United States Census Bureau, 2012), only 11 percent of American college students had a disability (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2016). Haverford College is no exception to this trend. While there are no available statistics about disabled students here, there has only been one student who used a wheelchair in the last 25 years, according to Access and Disability Services. There are many issues surrounding academia's intellectual and cognitive accessibility for neurodiverse and learning-disabled students, but these are often not applicable to students with mobility-related disabilities, meaning that changes necessary in these areas are not applicable to them. Thus, the lack of physically disabled students at Haverford is related to the physical accessibility of the campus and available accommodations. As a college that is dedicated to diversity, Haverford should take steps to make itself as accessible as possible to students with disabilities.

The College has proven itself to be capable of creating accessibility options for specific students who chose to attend Haverford and who have a disability. However, these students are few and far between, likely because disabled students are uninterested in attending a college that is clearly not disability-friendly. Students should not have to demand accommodations for basic aspects of college life, these should already be in place and universally designed to be accessible to as many students as possible.

Previous actions for access

Based on the 2009 Campus Master Plan, the College has made significant progress in improving access to campus over the last decade. Most notably, many more paths and bathrooms are accessible, and the addition of Tritton and Kim Halls have added to the number of relatively accessible dorms on campus.

Necessary Changes

Addition of ramps

Founders Hall

Haverford College's central building is Founders Hall, but it is minimally accessible. There is a wheelchair ramp into the back of the building which enters into a rather narrow hallway that leads to the main areas of the building. This is significantly more inconvenient for wheelchair users, as they must go all the way around the building to get inside, and even then must navigate a difficult hallway.



The accessible ramp into Founders Hall, which is hidden in the back of the building.

There is also a certain symbolism in the placement of the ramp into Founders in the back of the building. It, intentionally or otherwise, indicates that the only way to access the college is by stairs, and that disabled community members are forced to the back, out of sight. A ramp could be added to the front of Founders, along the porch, making the principal building on campus accessible, physically and symbolically, to community members with disabilities.



The inaccessible main entrance to Founders Hall, which is the main symbol of the college.

Staircase to Leeds

One of the more obvious staircases on campus that lacks a corresponding ramp is the staircase from the path past Leeds Hall and the playground up to the terrace in front of Hall Building with the sundial. This is particularly striking because this staircase goes along the path from the accessible parking spaces along Walton Lane to the main area of campus. People who use ramps must go around Hall Building to the ramp in between Hall and the VCAM, rather than going directly on the path.

While the usefulness of an accessible feature to the general public is not necessary to justify the need for a ramp, the addition of a ramp at this staircase would make the campus better for families of young children on campus. Frequently, families must leave their strollers at the top of the stairs while visiting the playground, because they cannot easily bring the strollers down with them. By adding a ramp, access to the playground for community members would be improved.



The inaccessible staircase that leads to Leeds and the playground.

Field House curb cut

Lastly, there is still one path on campus (to my knowledge) still has no curb cut. The path from Hall Drive down to the Field House is not wheelchair accessible. While there are other ways to access this space, curb cuts should be an automatic adjustment to all sidewalks on campus, especially when they lead to a space that holds many large events, including graduation.



The raised curb which makes the path to the Field House inaccessible.

Campus Event Spaces

Although the primary purpose of college is academics, the social and extracurricular components of college life are equally important to many students. Unfortunately, most spaces

for student events are inaccessible. Stokes Auditorium, Sharpless Auditorium, Zubrow Commons, and the Dining Center are all accessible spaces, which means that many large events, mainly music, theater, and dance performances, are available to all students. When Founders is returned to its standard space after serving as an interim library, it will technically be available to all students, as there is a ramp into the building, although the access to the event spaces is less than ideal, as discussed above.

Marshall Auditorium

Marshall Auditorium is theoretically accessible through the entrances at the front of the audience, but the path down to one of these entrances is steep and the doors are not very accessible. This is particularly ironic because there is a ramp to access the main door of Marshall Auditorium, but stairs directly inside that prevent this ramp from serving any real purpose. Making the front entrance to Marshall Auditorium accessible was a goal in 2009, and this has still not been achieved. This is particularly important because Marshall is used by Haverford students, faculty, and staff, but it is also one of the main buildings where community members come.

Social Spaces

While it is wonderful that so many of these large event locations are accessible, almost all social spaces are not. The basements of Lunt (including Lunt Café), Gummere, and the apartments, Drinker House, and Lunt Lounge are all inaccessible. These are the primary party spaces on campus. Again, parties are not the main focus of college, but if these spaces and social events are available to non-disabled students, they should also be available for disabled students. It may not be possible for these spaces to be made accessible, considering the age and structures of the buildings. Some of those areas that can be renovated to be accessible, specifically Lunt Lounge should have these changes made. The back entrance to Lunt Hall could be easily

modified to add a ramp, making the first floor of the building wheelchair accessible.

Additionally, new accessible social spaces must be created.



The back entrance to Lunt Hall which could easily be converted to an accessible entrance.

Dorms

The campus has four accessible dorms, with varying levels of accessibility. Leeds, Tritton, Kim, and Barclay Halls all have accessible bathrooms, dorm rooms, and entrances. However, the rooms in Tritton and Kim are incredibly small for any student, so any student would be hard pressed to navigate their wheelchair in these dorms.

Barclay Hall has larger rooms, but it lacks a common space for the whole first-year hall. As a result, many Customs groups use the hallway as a makeshift common room. This kind of social space would be only minimally wheelchair accessible, because the wheelchair-user would occupy up most of the hallway's width, making the hall difficult to navigate.

Leeds Hall has accessible rooms and bathrooms on the first floor of the singles section. These dorm rooms are spacious, and the bathrooms are fully accessible. However, these rooms are singles on a long hall. This means that there are no options to live in a suite, or to guarantee living with friends at all. This means that students are guaranteed to live in dorms where they have shared bathrooms and no common rooms. Accessible suites should be created so that disabled students have the same shared housing options as the rest of the student body.

Bathrooms

Accessible Bathroom Design

The College has many wheelchair-accessible bathrooms across the campus at convenient locations. However, the designs of the bathrooms are, while technically ADA-compliant, not accessible. The placement of the toilet paper and seat cover dispensers are difficult, sometimes nearly impossible, to reach, in order to accommodate the grab bars along the wall which are necessary to make the restroom accessible. However, the existence of a handrail and the ability to reach the toilet paper dispenser should both be present in a fully accessible bathroom. This issue could be remedied by shortening the grab bar, and placing the dispenser at the end of the bar where it can still be reached, or by using smaller toilet paper dispensers that can still be reached if they are placed underneath the handrail. Additionally, more accessible bathrooms should have automatic doors or accessible door handles.



The accessible bathroom in the VCAM where the toilet paper is difficult to reach. (right)

The accessible bathroom at Bryn Mawr Rehab Hospital, which is fully accessible. (left)

Adult Changing Tables

For some people with disabilities, they do not use a toilet but instead require an adult-sized changing table. Students who need a changing table for personal care would almost certainly have more needs than the college would be prepared to provide for without tailoring services to the individual student. However, the addition of at least one adult changing table on campus, possibly in the Campus Center, would be an important step in making Haverford more universally accessible. This would make visiting campus an option for community members and families of students who have more extensive personal care needs. While some individuals can get by with changing on a towel on the floor, changing tables afford significantly more privacy, safety, and comfort. It is quite possible that this table wouldn't be extensively used, but they can be made very inexpensively and take up minimal space.



One of many adult changing tables at my place of work, which can be folded up when not in use.

Classrooms

The College has made great strides in making almost all academic buildings accessible to students. However, the actual classroom spaces leave more to be desired. Students generally sit in either combination chair-desks or at tables and chairs. The College should make an effort to shift towards tables and chairs in classrooms, as this makes the room more universally accessible. The room can be configured specifically for the class at hand and the students in the class by moving the tables and chairs into the desired arrangement. This is more inclusive of disabled students, who are able to sit in the same place as other students when seated at tables, rather than having to sit at a table alone while their classmates sit in desks.

Additionally, Woodside Cottage and Strawbridge Observatory remain inaccessible. Woodside has numerous entrances that could be modified, such as the easy addition of a ramp on the open side of the front porch. The observatory either needs the addition of an accessible path to the back of the building, where a ramp could be added to the back door, or the main entrance must be modified. These are the last fully inaccessible academic buildings on campus, to my knowledge. Other academic buildings may need modifications as well, but they are at least partially accessible.



The inaccessible main entrance to Woodside Cottage, and a possible location for a ramp.

Dining Center

The Dining Center at Haverford is one of the busiest spaces on campus, and can thus be difficult to navigate. At Edinboro University, one of the most accessible college campuses in the country, the dining center has meal aides who are available to assist students in getting their food, finding a table, and if necessary, assisting the student in eating their meal (Edinboro University, n.d.). The Dining Center could mimic this model by having one or two meal aides available per meal period, which could even be a joint position in which the staff performs this duty if needed but also has a primary responsibility, such as drink runner or wiping tables. Meal aides would be important for students with disabilities and temporarily injured students, both of whom at present have to rely on friends or strangers who are entering the DC at the same time, unless a DC worker takes it upon themselves to assist a student.

Due to the heavy traffic that the DC has on a daily basis, the space is generally very accessible in terms of space to navigate by necessity. However, creating larger aisles simply by rearranging the tables in the dining areas would improve the general accessibility of the space.

Additional Future Steps

Information Resources

Beyond physical modifications to the campus, there need to be more resources for information about the campus's accessibility available online. While there are an access map and guide, these are in some cases contradictory and out of date. By updating these resources, people visiting campus are better able to prepare for their own access needs. These resources, and additional information about accessibility on campus, perhaps including future plans to improve access, should be available in a central location on the Haverford website so that they are easy to find. Additionally, adding a page on the Residential Life website about accessible dorms and

their specific features would provide far more concrete information to prospective and current students.

Professional Assessment

To my knowledge, the last time the College assessed its accessibility was in the Campus Master Report in 2009. While the present paper indicates many areas where significant changes are needed, I am not an architect and I am not an ADA compliance expert—I'm a disability services worker and future occupational therapist who has taken disability studies courses. The campus should be evaluated by experts to identify more subtle ways that it is inaccessible, such as the kinds of door hinges and carpeting used in buildings, and the angles of ramps and maneuverability of entrances.

Additional Access Needs

The College should also consider further ways to make itself accessible, beyond physical accommodations. This includes making spaces sensory friendly, improving assistive technology for those who are D/deaf and hard of hearing and those with visual disabilities, and working with professors to improve intellectual accessibility. The College might also consider expanding its availability of disability studies, as academically addressing disability is an important aspect of access at a college. Additional possibilities include creating programs for students with intellectual disabilities interested in pursuing academics, and creating connections with the local disabled community.

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