Going Above & Beyond ADA Compliance
Edinboro U. Expands Accessibility for Students With Disabilities

campussafetymagazine.com
How Edinboro U. Goes Above and Beyond ADA Standards

This Pennsylvania institution of higher education partnered with its long-time integrator to exceed ADA requirements and provide greater accessibility and independence to students with disabilities. By Mallory Pernai

For nearly 25 years, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) has served as one of the most comprehensive articles of legislation. The law prohibits discrimination while offering a lasting promise for people living with disabilities — a guarantee that they will “have the same opportunities as everyone else to participate in the mainstream of American life.”

Today, the dream to achieve an undergraduate, and, in some cases, a postgraduate degree holds a wealth of promise for all students — regardless of disabilities. As institutions work to comply with ADA standards in order to provide a full, well-rounded campus life for all students, there are a few colleges and universities in the United States that have accomplished a quality of service to students with disabilities that remain a cut above the rest.

Unquestionably, one of those is Edinboro University (EU) in Pennsylvania.

Nested in the rural expanse of Edinboro, Pa., EU is a public liberal arts university with an enrollment of just over 7,000 undergraduate and graduate students. Boasting 80 baccalaureate degree programs and 17 graduate programs, the university provides a supportive environment that encourages excellence in all students. With developed curriculums in the sciences, graphic design, education, business and humanities, Edinboro champions students to achieve “intellectual and personal growth in an inclusive environment.”

And, it’s been this school’s pledge to uphold and maintain an “inclusive environment” that has solidified EU as a sought-after university for students with physical and cognitive disabilities. Ac-
According to Chris Wise Tiedemann, the author of *College Success for Students with Physical Disabilities* (2012), Edinboro ranks among only five universities in the country adequately equipped to meet the needs of roughly 5.9% of the U.S. undergraduate population — approximately 1.1 million students — with disabilities. In addition to its course offerings, Edinboro has created a campus environment that is committed to the success of students with disabilities, and especially those with physical challenges.

**SCHOOL EXPANDS PROGRAMS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

In 1974, EU was designated as a wheelchair-accessible campus for the state by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Over the past 40 years, the university has continually expanded its programs for students with disabilities, assuming a niche of service and responsibility to campus residents. The school currently has 574 students enrolled with disabilities, ranging from physical to cognitive, including 74 students in wheelchairs.

“This accessibility designation prompted the university to grow its programs and services to allow a student with a disability to be fully engaged in campus life,” says Kim Kennedy, director — Office for Students with Disabilities at EU. “Programs and services include attendant care, meal aides, homework aides, van transportation and on-campus wheelchair repair. All of these services go well beyond the accommodation requirements for access as outlined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA.”

In the decades since these regulations took effect, the university has aimed to not only meet the standards, but to exceed them in every facet of the campus experience. For the more than 500 students served — with disabilities of all types — EU’s Office for Students with Disabilities provides academic and life skills development through a variety of programs, offering equal opportunity for students to acquire the skills needed to manage their own care and live independently beyond the university. (See *ADA Compliance Defines Edinboro’s Campus Culture below.*)

**OTHER COLLEGES NOT AS ACCESSIBLE AS EU**

It was this same dedication that was immediately applied when Norah Scholl, a 23-year-old second-year graduate student in community counseling and graduate hall coordinator at EU, moved into the university’s Highlands residence halls.

Scholl was born with Arthrogryposis-Amyoplasia — a syndrome causing contractures and deformity in the joints, and a lack of muscle development. She is a quadriplegic and requires the use of a motorized wheelchair to get around campus and in her daily life. Scholl was familiar with the university’s devotion to serving students with disabilities.

“When I was a sophomore in high school and starting to look at options for college, my family and I visited Edinboro after researching top universities for students with disabilities. We were so impressed with the campus’ accessibility and the fact that they offered van transportation and a 24/7 personal attendant care program,” Scholl says. “I’m from Cape Cod, Mass., and when we looked at colleges that were closer to home, we were basically told we’d have to put an ad in the newspaper to find an attendant care person, and half of the buildings on other college campuses weren’t accessible to me. At Edinboro, I’ve never had to worry about accessibility; they’ve always been very focused on making me comfortable on campus.”

---

**ADA Compliance Defines Edinboro’s Campus Culture**

Edinboro University (EU) aims to exceed all Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards in every facet of a student’s life, both on campus and off.

For example, the school provides a fully accessible apartment located in the occupational therapy offices on campus, where students with physical disabilities are encouraged to live for a few days prior to graduation to experience and prepare for a more independent existence outside the safety of Edinboro. The university boasts a robust wheelchair athletics program, with alumni that have gone on to compete in the Paralympic Games. For the university’s students with visual impairments, EU’s geosciences department has even constructed a diorama of the night sky and its constellations with Braille and other tactile qualities. The campus grounds prominently feature students’ artwork and sculptures — a few depicting the positive experience had by students with disabilities — providing a view into their individual realities.

This all-encompassing, encouraging environment is what defines Edinboro’s culture, an attitude that remains at the foundation of the design of campus facilities.

“In developing new projects and renovation plans for facilities, we seek to incorporate broader, more widespread inclusion of universal design in campus structures, beyond the requirements of the ADA,” says Kim Kennedy, director — Office for Students with Disabilities at Edinboro University. “This allows for the creation of facilities with a design that works well for all students, faculty and visitors, rather than a modification that only works for some.”

The university’s commitment to universal design has elevated EU to a leadership role among higher education institutions in the state of Pennsylvania, and the country, as a prime example of providing successful service to students with disabilities.

“Our approach is, and always has been, to view the ADA compliance standard as the minimum qualification when providing students access to classrooms, residence halls, and co-curricular and extracurricular activities. At Edinboro, we’ve made it our mission to surpass those standards wherever we can because we have such a strong commitment to our students and others with disabilities,” Kennedy says. “We’re unlike so many universities; this is an attitude that’s just been woven into our culture, and is a founding philosophy we stand by.”

“Edinboro’s commitment reflects a ‘can do’ approach for all, looking toward solutions that impact lives and benefit students. This has always been what’s separated our university and local community from others,” Kennedy says.
Campus at a Glance

CAMPUS: Edinboro University (EU) in Edinboro, Pa.

NUMBER OF STUDENTS: 7,100, including more than 500 students with physical and cognitive or learning disabilities, with 74 in wheelchairs.


SYSTEMS INTEGRATOR: Stanley Security

INTEGRATOR DESIGNS, INSTALLS SPECIALIZED DOOR SOLUTION

Throughout Scholl’s tenure at the university, administrators have been dedicated to finding ways to allow her — and other students — to be as independent as possible on campus. She has taken advantage of the university’s 24/7 attendant care program, and has used the accessible transportation services regularly for trips to the pharmacy, grocery store or to attend her Greek society’s formals and functions.

The recent opening of a wheelchair accessible, indoor bridge, connecting buildings over some of the campus’ busiest intersections and steeper hills has made cross-campus travel much easier for Norah and other students. Most recently, EU enlisted the expertise of its trusted security partner, Stanley Security, to develop a solution that would allow Scholl to open and close the door to her room in the residence hall independently and automatically.

“No matter where Norah was — whether or not she was in her room — she had to have her door propped open with a chair, or required assistance to open or close it,”

Protecting Students with Disabilities — A History

1973: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 takes effect, stating that “No otherwise qualified person with a disability in the United States shall be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.” (Sec. 504(a))

Under this legislation, higher education institutions are required to: (a) make programs and services physically accessible to all students, (b) provide certain auxiliary aids, such as readers, note-takers, extended exam periods and other offerings when necessary to enable a student with disabilities to aptly participate in courses and activities and (c) accommodate the academic participation of qualified students with disabilities without changing the essential requirements of the program.

1990: The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is signed into legislation, providing anti-discrimination provisions and civil rights protections for individuals with disabilities in all areas of employment, public accommodations, state and local governmental services and telecommunications. Titles II through V of the Act apply specifically to students who attend higher education institutions.

2008: The ADA Amendments Act (ADAAA) is passed, effective Jan. 1, 2009, and included a more inclusive definition of the term “disability” in regards to employment, transportation and access to services. Under the amendment, the term “disability” — with respect to an individual — is defined as:

- A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such individual;
- A record of such an impairment;
- Being regarded as having such an impairment.

This broader definition has allowed individuals with disabilities to more readily seek protection under the terms of the ADA.

Sources: Kim Kennedy, Director — Office for Students with Disabilities, Edinboro University; U.S. Department of Education.
says Jim Miller, director — Office of Facilities Management & Planning for Edinboro.

“Obviously, we were aware of the safety concerns and the challenge presented in finding a solution that would work for Norah. We’ve had a great relationship with Stanley Security for years, using their BEST products for keys, locks and access control, so we sat down with them to discuss the uniqueness of the situation and to hash out a few ideas.”

Stanley Security is a global manufacturer and integrator of comprehensive intrusion, fire, video surveillance, access control, monitoring applications, mass notification, door hardware, automatic entrances and more.

“From day one, Stanley just got it,” Miller continues. “We have such a close-knit, distinct community here, and it can be hard for vendors to connect with that sometimes. Stanley was on board from the very beginning, and was so enthusiastic when developing and implementing the solution.”

**SCHOLL, EU PROVIDE INPUT ON SOLUTION DESIGN, INSTALLATION**

In order to ensure that all of Scholl’s needs were being addressed, the integrator met with her to discuss the intricacies of the installation and allowed her full input in the design of the solution.

“Stanley made sure I was very involved in the process, having conversations and asking me questions about how the solution could be adapted to best accommodate me and others in the future,” Scholl says.

Ultimately, the integrator partnered with Scholl and the EU team to devise a solution that allows Scholl to control her door via a completely custom application that can be readily accessed from the main screen menu on her phone and the desktop of her laptop. Scholl manipulates her phone — fastened to her motorized wheelchair by a metal arm at face level — through voice activation software and physically with her chin and nose. With this device, she is able to enter a passcode through the app in order to unlock or secure her door. Once activated, the app fires an electric strike that engages the accessible door operator, so that it opens automatically. The app, created by Stanley Security’s Software Solutions Group, uses the same interface on both Scholl’s laptop and phone, changing colors when the room is locked and unlocked, so that she’s able to know at a glance whether or not her room is secure.

Stanley also outfitted the door with a proximity reader that will register Scholl’s credentials from three feet away when approaching the inside of the door, so she only has to wheel up with her affixed card for the door to open automatically. In the event of an outage, Stanley included a wireless door operator at a level that was most convenient for Scholl — at her feet; without the use of her hands, Scholl cannot press automatic door operator switches often installed at the minimum ADA standard height of 28-32 inches. The component is movable, able to be adjusted for any future residents, whose needs might differ from Scholl’s.

For Stanley Security, it was a particularly eye-opening project.

“Working with Norah and EU has been one of the most gratifying experiences of my professional career,” says Kyle Gordon, director of higher education for the integrator.

“Norah wanted to be part of something that could help improve the lives of people like her, and hopefully in the process, would lead to the development of elevated standards for individuals with disabilities. She wanted to act as an ambassador, bringing awareness to students with disabilities and the common obstacles they face on a daily basis.”

**OPENING DOOR FOR 1ST TIME ‘PRETTY AWESOME’**

Scholl was thrilled with the solution and its potential to improve not only her quality of life at the university, but those of others as well.

“Opening the door on my own for the first time was pretty awesome. Since then, it’s significantly and positively enabled me to be far more independent in my day-to-day activities and in my role as a graduate hall coordinator,” she says. “I hope solutions like this — customized to the needs of the individual — can be adopted by other universities across the country, and outside of campus environments, to be used in people’s homes, apartments and workplaces. I obviously think about my future, going out and into the work field — and the lack of accessibility is eventually something I, and so many others, may be up against. It’s great to know that there are supportive solutions available.”

For Edinboro, Stanley’s dedication to and enthusiasm for the project really set the organization apart — completing the design and installation in a short four months.

“At Edinboro, we are always going to go above and beyond for our students, and it’s great to have found Stanley as a partner who really understands that,” Miller says. “They really worked with us to find a solution that was cost-effective and could be implemented in a timely manner. They really put themselves in her position, learning how to experience life the way she does — and how well she accomplishes that — on campus.” CS

MALLORY PERNAI is a writer for the security industry.