

# **Making the University of Iowa more accessible and inclusive to individuals with disabilities: Lessons from top ranked accessible campuses**

Michael Penniman, B.B.A., ILEND Community Trainee

## **Research Mentor, Core Faculty, and other collaborators**

Judy Warth (ILEND Discipline Training Director & Research Mentor), Justin Jensen (Research Mentor), Kelly Von Lehmden (Iowa LEND Training Director)

## **Objective:**

As a student with disabilities who transferred to the University of Iowa, lived in student housing, used student disability services for academics, and got involved in advocacy and making changes for a more accessible and inclusive campus during my years, I would like to continue my work through this platform of a ILEND research project. The purpose of this research poster and project summary is to improve disability accessibility on University of Iowa campus for any students or community members. To improve current resources, practices, and activities offered by the University of Iowa so any student with any disability is included and more aware of and able to access them. Additionally, through researching the best practices of top ranked accessible colleges for individuals with disabilities, I can apply their practices to the University of Iowa. Understanding the barriers to accessibility on college campuses for individuals with disabilities is necessary to devise ways to overcome or remove them.

Summarize research findings into an analysis with recommendations that lists changes University of Iowa can make to its campus. Share analysis and develop insight with the University of Iowa Student disability services and School of Planning and Public Affairs into the most beneficial changes that could be made on the University of Iowa campus to improve campus accessibility, inclusiveness and resources for any student or individual with a disability.

## **Methods:**

The first step of this project was to research which post-secondary institutions succeed at providing an inclusive and accessible campus for their students with disabilities. The schools selected were from the top 50 best disability friendly colleges and universities according to [www.collegeconsensus.com](http://www.collegeconsensus.com). Surveys were sent to five university/colleges. Only three returned completed surveys. A resource review was conducted using websites to explore accessibility on the other top recommended accessible and disability campuses.

Four students with disabilities that have gone to or graduated from University of Iowa were contacted for an informal interview to hear insight into successes, failures, and ideas for change from their college experience. I have also included my own lived experiences as a University of Iowa student with a physical disability.

## **Results:**

The following are some examples of how the universities studied handle accessibility on their campuses. Examples are from Ball State University (BSU), University of Arizona (AU), and University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). Insight from University of Iowa students with disabilities lived campus and college experience is included below.

### **Researched Best Practices**

- College campus, building, classroom, and lecture hall accessibility for students with disabilities.
  - BSU: Designated accessible classroom seating. When it snows, routes used by students in wheelchairs get cleared first.
  - AU: Easily navigable accessible campus and buildings meet ADA standards with year-round nice weather.
- Transition to college guidance and assistance.
  - AU: Strategic Alternative Learning Techniques Center. This center creates an individual education plan for every student with a disability, boosting each student's chance of success.
- Accessible on-campus living and support
  - UIUC: Nugent Hall dorm includes daily room service that assists with making beds, cleaning rooms and bathrooms, and emptying the garbage. On and off campus accessible busing.
  - BSU: Students get assigned housing based on need. Help students find local personal care attendants to assist in daily activities such as cleaning, cooking, showering and more if needed. On-campus accessible shuttles.
- Advising and disability accommodations received from the University.
  - UIUC: Faculty and staff provide accommodations so that a student can study abroad.
- Adaptive disability activities and community involvement
  - UIUC: offers men's and women's wheelchair basketball. Delta Sigma Omicron (DSO) fraternity of rehabilitation service dedicates itself to education, research, and service in rehabilitation.
  - BSU: offers adaptive wheelchair basketball and power soccer programs.
  - AU: Access vs Inclusion workshops for student clubs and organizations.

### **Lessons from Lived University of Iowa experiences (5 students):**

*Positive Experience:*

- Student Disability Services Advising and Accommodations
- Bionic Bus for students with disabilities and accessible on campus CAMBUS use
- Accessible classroom and sports event seating

*Negative Experience:*

- Inaccessible University buildings, lecture halls, classrooms
- Tough to connect with fellow college students and make friends living off campus or at home
- Student Disability Services location in a basement is tough to access and isolating
- Not many personal care or life assistance resources for students with disabilities, primarily academic focused
- Lack of snow removal during winter for wheelchair users

**Conclusions:**

The University of Iowa can begin implementing changes now and, in the future, to improve accessibility, involvement, and inclusiveness across campus for students and individuals with disabilities. The top recommendations for the University of Iowa to address changing from this project are:

- Assess overall campus accessibility and implement changes using universal design to meet and exceed ADA standards.
- Improve college transition, orientation, and personal and life resources. Promote UI's population-specific clinical services (e.g., Center for Disabilities and Development) as valuable resources.
- Review on-campus living options for students with disabilities. Designated housing with accommodations based on need.
- Develop extracurricular sports and activities for college students and community members with disabilities.
- Create snow routes to clear specified students with disabilities campus travel pathways.