



EQUAL ACCESS AND DISABILITY
RIGHTS COMMISSION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

APRIL 2019

INTRODUCTION

This document serves as an executive summary of the Equal Access and Disability Rights Commission with 5 key recommendations that, if implemented, will have a powerful positive impact on Brigham Young University. A comprehensive list of recommendations and statements, along with other research can be found at our website: www.equalaccesscommission.org.

MISSION

Our goal is to promote diversity and inclusion of disabled students at BYU and to convince administration and the University Accessibility Center (UAC) that equal access is vital. We feel that improving diversity and inclusion will greatly benefit BYU and all students who attend, especially disabled students. We understand that everyone's perspective is different and that many administrators and staff at BYU may not have had the same life experiences that have led us to see the value of equal access. Therefore, all of our efforts are directed at enhancing each person's perspective to see the important duty and vast benefit of promoting inclusion through disability rights and equal access.

SELECTED STATEMENTS

1. Amy Chapman: I have been able to go to many campuses across the country and I have to say BYU is probably one of the least accessible campuses I have been on.
2. Evan Hancock: Probably the most frustrating thing about trying to go to BYU as a disabled student is how hard it is to feel normal. Laws and ramps and elevators are great and all, but if the professors aren't willing to help, it can be so difficult.
3. Anonymous: One of the major problems with the University Accessibility Center is that the process for getting accommodations is not well-known. Many people don't know that it exists, or they don't know where it is. When they go, there is no clear criteria for what accommodations you can get for which disabilities. Additionally, to many students it appears as if the UAC is trying to not give accommodations, or trying to make it difficult for students who have obvious disabilities to receive them.

4. Grace Lester: I have moderate progressive hearing loss, and have worked with the UAC since my freshman year. I submitted the necessary paperwork and waited for them to get back to me for several weeks. I assumed that they were just processing the paperwork, but when I reached out to them several more times, they admitted that they had just forgotten about me. And all that time I had gone without services.

5. Megan McLaws: They had not cared about my request and had lost all my important documents that I needed to get accommodations. These were the only copies I had in Utah and my family recently moved so it would be awhile until I could get their copies. I entrusted them to the UAC because I thought the UAC would be professional in the way they handled them. The UAC covered its mistake by saying I wouldn't qualify for accommodations. I asked them, "What can I do from here?" They said, there wasn't anything I could do.

6. Mandi Eatough: There is virtually no training for faculty members about accommodations and accessibility. Many of my good experiences with professors involved me doing that training myself and them being willing to learn from what I was saying. Many of my worst experiences with professors involved me being accused of asking for special treatment and denied accommodations.

7. Angela Walser: I requested a notetaker for my classes, as I was unable to type or hold a pencil. I explained that I would only need it for six weeks while my wrists healed. I was never contacted by anyone and apart from a few friends I did not get any help with note taking, until my wrists were just about healed 5 weeks later. I requested that the University Accessibility Center rescind the request, because at 5 weeks, it was far too late to be helpful. It was baffling to me that it took 5 weeks for them to process my request and send out an email.

OUR GOALS

1. Change the physical environment to create equal access for students with disabilities
2. Change the cultural environment of BYU to be more accepting of students with disabilities
3. Change the social environment of BYU organizations to address the needs of students with disabilities
4. Listen to disabled students voices so they can be accurately represented as positive contributors to BYU

SALIENT RECOMMENDATIONS

1. UAC Authority: We recommend that the University Accessibility Center have the authority to speak on behalf of the university for all disability-related issues. This includes, but is not limited to: meeting with professors to discuss students' accommodation needs, enforcing accommodations when needed, and holding physical facility managers accountable for providing and repairing accessible features around campus. The UAC is responsible for the accessibility of the university, even if physical jobs are given to other organization. The UAC needs to have this level of influence and authority in order to effectively advocate for disabled students.
2. Label Accessible Features: We recommend physical facilities have accurate labeling. This includes, but is not limited to, labeled accessible restrooms, elevators, ramps, and other features that are necessary for disabled students. Signage would help keep disabled students safe, and enable disabled students to find accessible features easily and equally to able-bodied student experiences. Labels should be clearly noticeable and should identify visible and non-visible ADA features. These labels should have the appropriate braille, audio, and coloring features necessary. Currently some labels are inaccurate (e.g. wheelchair signs on bathrooms that are not accessible) and such labels should be replaced.
3. Improved Emergency Preparedness: We recommend that emergency exit plans for disabled students be created for all BYU-owned buildings. These plans should focus on those with disabilities, especially those who may need assistance during an emergency. This group includes but is not limited to those with mobility issues, those who suffer from vision or hearing impairment, and those who suffer from mental and emotional health disorders. Safety signs are retrofit items to a building and are helpful. Building staff should receive training about the location and proper use of emergency features and equipment as well as training on how to help disabled people in an emergency.
4. Transparency: Some students are bewildered when they are told that they do not qualify for accommodations, and they are unlikely to challenge the UAC's decision without receiving an explanation. The UAC should, as a policy, make the process of receiving accommodations more transparent by publishing a specific guide of how they decide which accommodations are reasonable for individual disabilities. They should also tell each individual student how they justified their decision on that student's accommodations.

5. Respectful Communication: The UAC should be accessible to students. The UAC should always maintain students' trust and confidence by responding quickly and cordially to any documentation given or request made. In order to do so, the UAC should implement an online system of contact to schedule appoints in addition to phone calls. The UAC should help students feel comfortable asking for improvements by treating each student with respect, not making them feel like a burden. The UAC must maintain close communication among its employees and with any other outside entities that involve disabled students including Physical Facilities, the Testing Center, and the HBLL Accessibility Lab.

Please contact BYUEqualAccess@gmail.com for further information.