The ADA is levelling the playing field for all students

All over campus, work is going on continually to bring the University into compliance with the requirements of the Americans With Disabilities Act, which went into effect last July.

According to Rob Cunningham, associate director of affirmative action/disability resources, 10 percent of incoming freshmen will have some type of disability, either physical, mental or learning. The task of opening access to everyone is a large one, he said.

"We're making very good progress. I'm pleased with the cooperation of the University community in taking an active interest in making programs and services accessible," said Cunningham.

He said the purpose of the act is to "level the playing field and allow the same level of participation for individuals with disabilities as for those without.

We need to minimize as much as possible the impact of the disability on a person's experience.

To that end, he has been working since long before the ADA took effect with other University staff to find out where problems lie and how to solve them.

Since 1990 the office has been conducting surveys and last year, Jim McArthur, assistant University architect, and a group of students, both disabled and not, traveled around campus in wheelchairs to see what obstacles exist. "Just to get a grasp of the difficulties, a little crack or depression can make a big difference to a person in a wheelchair," said McArthur. "We had been hearing about a crack that was causing a problem and when I tried to get across it, it almost threw me right out of the chair."

McArthur's office has been very active in the past few years insuring that all new construction on campus is accessible and that renovations continue in existing buildings to improve access.

Glock Hall, scheduled to open this fall, will have state-of-the-art physical access features such as automatic door-opening devices, lowered phones and drinking fountains.

According to a report prepared by the disability resources office, Founders Hall is completely accessible and offers in-room visual alerting systems upon request. Many other residence halls are being or have recently been upgraded for ease of access.

But ADA covers much more than physical barriers. Access to programs must also be maintained for all individuals, which means allowing everyone to participate "in as independent a way as possible," Cunningham said.

For the hearing impaired, his office offers assisted listening devices which operate on an FM wavelength and cut down on extraneous noise. These devices are also available in some movie theaters, he added.

The University continues to purchase computer hardware and software to help with "a range of disabling conditions," said Cunningham. For those with visual or fine-motor problems, there are devices that enlarge the screen or contain a speech synthesizer or steady a hand, for instance. "These are not prescription devices," stressed Cunningham, "but generic items that permit general access to the computers." The ADA does not say the University is required to supply these computer devices in every computer lab, but simply to make sure they are available and accessible to those who need them.

The oxus of the ADA, he said, is to provide "reasonable accommodation" for those who request it. This means that if a visually impaired person calls the registrar, for example, and informs the office that he or she will be on campus in a couple of days to go over course descriptions, an effort must be made to accommodate that person. This may be done in various ways, either by supplying large-print catalogs, making an audiotape, or if these are not available, having someone there to verbally give the needed information.

In the area of programmatic access, there are few specific requirements. The mandate is to make a good-faith effort to assist as much as possible. However, in the physical access side of ADA, there is a great deal spelled out about the removal of architectural barriers. There are specifications for everything from height and type of door handles to how many handicapped-designated parking spaces must be provided, to how many fully accessible hotel rooms there are.

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Orphan chemical program noted for its innovation

The University's orphan chemical recycling program is garnering some national attention. It recently received the National Safety Council's Award of Distinction in the council's Unique and Innovative Program Competition. The University's entry was displayed at the International Conference on Campus Safety held at West Virginia University June 19-24.

Dave Heinlen, environmental health and safety, said the program is gaining recognition among other institutions and has the potential to be implemented across the country.

An orphan chemical is any chemical substance that has been used in experiments or research, is no longer needed by that researcher but is still in good, usable condition. Most often these chemicals are disposed of because people don't know what to do with them.

Heinlen said he originally devised the University's orphan chemical recycling program in 1991 as an in-house method of reusing chemicals that had been returned for disposal. He developed an inventory of used chemicals from areas such as the biology and chemistry departments and let other offices know what materials were available.

In the first year, approximately 700 pounds of solids and 50 gallons of liquid chemicals were transferred for use in other departments.

"After seeing how well that worked, we thought we could do even better," Heinlen said. The program was expanded to outside the University to include science departments in junior high schools, high schools and area colleges. The schools are invited to compile lists of the materials they would like to send to Heinlen. He then puts together a complete list of available chemicals and where they are located.

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Lois Howe (left) and Cathy Kutzu, both of the physical plant, box some of the food items collected at their building for the Administrative Staff Council and Classified Staff Council second annual summer food pantry drive. Employees across campus were asked to bring a nonperishable food item to work on July 27. More than 1,000 jars, cans and packets of food went to the Bowling Green Food Pantry located on Pike St. Becky Cheney, a volunteer at the pantry, said the collection was greatly appreciated as their stock has been particularly low this summer.
Sociologist receives grant to study mentally ill offenders after prison

Dr. Joseph E. Jacoby, sociology, has received a $49,124 grant from the Ohio Department of Mental Health to conduct research on how mentally ill offenders make the transition from prison to community life. The pilot study, thought to be the first of its kind, is expected to take about two years to complete.

Researchers are targeting between 10 and 15 percent of the nation's prison population who suffers from serious chronic mental illness.

"Prison life is very stressful. Many offenders, who might be described as fragile when they enter prison, develop mental disorders while in prison," Jacoby noted.

Right now relatively little is known about what happens to the mentally ill offenders as they leave prison. Developmental disorders, crime and violence, and their relationship to mental illness are among the topics the study will examine.

The grant will fund a total of six research assistants. The study is planned to begin in the summer of 1988.

The grant is the result of a cooperative effort between the Ohio Department of Mental Health, the State Department of Mental Health, and Bowling Green State University (BGSU). The grant is part of a larger $150,000 study of mental illnesses among Ohio's prison inmates. The study is being conducted by BGSU sociologist Carol Heinlen.

The study will provide valuable data about the interaction between criminal behavior and mental illness. For example, the study will attempt to identify the role that stress plays in the criminal behavior of those with mental illness.

The research will also provide valuable data about the functioning of correctional institutions, including the hospitals, mental health centers, and prisons that are involved with the mentally ill offenders.

The study is expected to have several positive outcomes for society.

First, it will help to develop better methods of treatment for mentally ill offenders. Second, it will provide valuable data about the interaction between criminal behavior and mental illness. Finally, it will provide valuable data about the functioning of correctional institutions.

The study is funded by the Ohio Department of Mental Health through a cooperative agreement with the State Department of Mental Health and BGSU. The grant is part of a larger $150,000 study of mental illnesses among Ohio's prison inmates. The study is being conducted by BGSU sociologist Carol Heinlen.

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