

# Union officials try to accommodate disabled students

By MICHELLE STARR  
Staff writer

A barrage of construction throughout UNL's campus greeted visually impaired senior Christopher Joyce when he came from Michigan to school in Nebraska.

While Joyce said he was pleased in general with the university's services for the disabled, he said: "The next time you rip up a building, keep us in mind." As construction at the Nebraska Union winds down, students and faculty members have had mixed reactions concerning the services provided for disabled students during and after construction.

Nebraska Unions Director Daryl Swanson said improving accessibility was one of the union's goals.

He said concerns about accessibility changed two projects after construction had already begun.

The original plan included a lift at the west entrance but was changed to a straight ramp because of safety concerns raised by the state fire marshal.

The second change was an additional ramp at the north exit, just east of the revolving door.

Swanson said Christy Horn, an ADA compliance officer who was unavailable for an interview, suggested the additional ramp and provided funding for the project through UNL's Americans with Disabilities Act office.

However, in some spots, Joyce, who has used a cane for nine years, had some trouble. He said the construction placed unnecessary artificial barriers in centralized locations outside of the union.

He said a fence, located to the west of the union during construction, was difficult to maneuver around and made it hard to get to the Canfield Administration building.

"I don't think these people took the time to calculate how these barriers would affect the disabled student population," Joyce said.

He was concerned that disabled students were not informed of alternative paths.

"You had no idea what they were going to do next, it made it very hard for us to calculate (the next barrier)," Joyce said.

Marie Ward, director of services for students with disabilities, said she was concerned about blind students navigating around the new Broyhill Fountain.

The previous fountain had a raised circular base and was easier for physically disabled students to distinguish its boundaries.

Swanson said he thought the new fountain would be easy to navigate around.

"The steps (of the new fountain) themselves will serve as a barrier," Swanson said. "The north stage of the plaza would also serve as a barrier."

Ward said she would have orientation sessions for blind students to help them familiarize themselves with the union plaza and in particular the fountain.

Jody Rockenbach, a junior visually impaired student, noticed her friends who used wheelchairs found the temporary wooden switch-back ramp on the west side "not wide enough to turn corners."

Rockenbach was also concerned with the amount of light and lack of contrast in the color scheme inside the union after construction.

"Everything seems to blend together," Rockenbach said.

Swanson also said he selected the interior's colors from the choices offered to him.

He said he was confident about other aspects of the outcome of the union's interior as well.

During construction, some students might have felt inconvenienced when the south elevator was out of commission, but the new north elevator was already working, he said.

The north elevator only goes to the second floor, and students can ask to use the freight elevator to get to the third floor, Swanson said.

Ward said planners did a good job with the east and west ramps on the north side of the union and "in general students seem happy with the location of the elevator."

Both Swanson and Joyce were especially satisfied with the outcome of the new first floor rest rooms.

Swanson said his instructions were for them to be of "airport quality."

Both the men's and women's restrooms have wide entrances without doors, making it easier for physically disabled students.

Other added union facilities include computers with larger images for the visually impaired, closed captioning for televisions, a hearing-impaired accessible phone at each bank of new phones and a wheelchair-accessible computer in the row of six just north of the lab.

Brad Meulhing, architect and project manager for the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, said they worked extensively to make the building accessible.

"We consider the (ADA) code as a minimum," he said, "(The union) more than exceeds requirements."

# Crib holds bands, scholars; events

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"The models were really close to the audience," Behmer said. "It was almost like having the runway in a cafe."

After this year's union renovation, the Crib is no longer the only study area in the Union. At least some students prefer the study areas near the new north entrance to the union over the Crib.

"The new areas are brighter," Luke Bossard, a senior psychology major, said.

Bossard said he "hardly ever"

spent time in the Crib since the new areas opened.

However, the Crib continues to be filled on weekdays with students eating, studying and talking to friends.

Behmer said the Crib isn't used as much as it could be, though.

"From my perspective, I think the Crib is under-utilized," Behmer said.

Although the space draws students most weekdays, Behmer said, the Crib is often empty on weekend nights.

Ultimately, student organizations will have to decide if the Crib will be the site of weekend programs, he said.

Behmer said the Crib had a great

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**BILL BEHMER**  
union operations manager

potential for weekend events.

"There are bars in town with smaller dance floors that get along just fine."

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