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Creating an Accessible Campus Environment

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Creating an Accessible Campus Environment

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School of Communication

Honors Research Project

Submitted to

The Honors College

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Abstract

This project consists of a series of journalistic articles pertaining to the level of accessibility for current students, faculty, and/or visitors with physical disabilities and/or impairments at The University of Akron. Journalistic articles were selected as a method of investigating and increasing awareness of accessibility in the given situation. Interviews were conducted with members of the campus and those, in addition to press releases, were used as the basis of the content within each article. The conclusion drawn from this journalistic inquiry is that while the level of accessibility at The University of Akron is not optimal for current students, faculty, and/or visitors with physical disabilities and/or impairments based on a few emergency situations that occurred, adequate and significant steps are being taken by the Office of Accessibility to make improvements. The series of journalistic articles generated was published in The Buchtelite, the student newspaper at The University of Akron. The researcher applied concepts from Agenda Setting Theory and set the agenda through increased coverage of accessibility with the goal of increasing awareness of this topic across campus. In addition to the text of the articles, photographs were also used to provide visual framing for the stories.

Description

Based on research detailed below, journalistic interviewing and reporting were selected as a method of investigating accessibility. Based on that selection, a series of articles was generated by the author. The overall theme of this series of journalistic articles addressed the level of accessibility for current students, faculty, and/or visitors with physical disabilities and/or impairments at The University of Akron. Additionally, a sub-theme within this series of journalistic articles is actions taken by current students, faculty and/or administrative members at The University of Akron to increase the accessibility of others with physical disabilities and/or impairments. The author's overall role in creating the journalistic articles in this series has been to utilize interviewing, secondary research and photography to report on the above issues.

Based on the principles of Agenda Setting and additional theories detailed in the following sections, the articles were not only intended to investigate, but also to create awareness and community conversation in the style of problem-solving journalism. The intended audience for this series of journalistic articles not only includes current students, faculty, and/or visitors with physical disabilities and/or impairments at The University of Akron, but those without physical disabilities and/or impairments.

Based on Agenda Setting, these groups are intended as the audience in order to increase the awareness of how accessible The University of Akron for current students, faculty, and/or visitors with physical disabilities. In addition, this series of articles aims at increasing awareness of actions taken by The University of Akron to improve accessibility for those in the community. Through bringing awareness to these groups, future steps can be taken in improving the level of accessibility for students, faculty, and/or visitors with physical disabilities and/or impairments at The University of Akron in the tradition of problem-solving journalism.

Literature Review

Goal through Review of Literature

Through reviewing current literature pertaining to the topic and theme of this research project, this researcher hopes to gain an understanding of accessibility on college campuses, how legislation on accessibility impacts colleges and universities and the way accessibility is viewed throughout the United States. In addition, the researcher will review *Agenda Setting Theory* and its tenets to learn how the media can influence what society holds to be important, and ultimately learn how to set the agenda about the topic of accessibility. With this increase of knowledge in those topics, the researcher will be able to include carefully selected questions during the interview process and hopefully gain meaningful, substantial responses to use when writing the investigative articles.

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

In 1990, the United States Congress passed the Americans with Disabilities Act “to provide a clear and comprehensive national mandate for the elimination of discrimination against individuals with disabilities,” according to Section 1, subline b, line 1 the ADA of 1990. This legislation covers several realms of life within the United States for individuals with disabilities; including public transportation, private institutions, religious organizations, and several more. For the purpose of this research project, the researcher chose to analyze the sections discussing public locations: more specifically educational locations.

In Section 1, subsection 3, subline 2A, the ADA of 1990 defines the term *disability*, regarding individuals, as “a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of such individual” (ADA, 1990). Other items defined within the act include *Auxiliary Aids and Services*, which include interpreters or other methods of translating

spoken materials to individuals with hearing impairments, readers or other methods of translating visual materials to individuals with visual impairments, and equipment or devices used to assist individuals with physical impairments (ADA, 1990).

Under sec. 301 subline 7, several entities are labeled as public accommodations for use in the ADA, as the entities influence commerce among individuals with disabilities. Specifically, under sec. 301 subline 7J, the ADA names “a nursery, elementary, secondary, undergraduate, or postgraduate private school, or other place of education” (ADA, 1990). Although this researcher understands that The University of Akron is not considered a private institution, the researcher believes it is important to note the organization of such private entities under public accommodations within the ADA.

Then, under sec. 302 subline (a) of the ADA, a general rule in terms of the prohibition of discrimination by the said public accommodations is given as the following:

No individual shall be discriminated against on the basis of disability in the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations of any place of public accommodation by any person who owns, leases (or leases to), or operates a place of public accommodation.

This general rule is later broken into different categories, including *Denial of Participation, Integrated Settings, Opportunity to Participation, Administrative Methods, and Association*, where specific details about each form of discrimination are prohibited against an individual or group of individuals with disabilities and those associated with them. Within the discriminatory practices named by the ADA, sec. 302 subline 2A clause (iii) states that a specific form of discrimination is:

A failure to take such steps as may be necessary to ensure that no individual with a disability is excluded, denied services, segregated or otherwise treated differently than other individuals because of the absence of auxiliary aids and services, unless the entity can demonstrate that taking such steps would fundamentally alter the nature of the goods, service, facility, privilege, advantage, or accommodation being offered or would result in an undue burden.

This means that unless the services and goods offered by the entity would be significantly changed by taking the necessary steps to enhance accommodations and accessibility for individuals with disabilities, the entity is participating in discriminatory practices by not increasing accommodations and accessibility.

Although the ADA includes several other important factors regarding the rights of individuals with disabilities, discriminatory practices against those individuals, and the legislation requiring entities to increase public accessibility and accommodations, the researcher chose not to analyze further information. With the previous analyzed information, the researcher intends to investigate whether The University of Akron is in violation of the previously stated sections of the ADA or whether the current geographical layout of the campus meets the requirements listed.

Agenda Setting Theory and Media Influence

Because the researcher's intentions are to generate increased awareness of accessibility issues on campus, as well as inspire future improvements, the researcher explored several media theories associated with journalism. One that informed the direction of the project is known as the Agenda Setting Theory, which is usually paired with Framing Theory, and is used to examine

“both the occupational practices of media professional and the audience effects resultant from media exposure” (Wallington, Blake, Taylor-Clark, & Viswanath, 2010, p. 77).

This theory can be broken down into three different and distinct, but related categories that analyze the relationship between the media and a specific public. These three categories include “public agenda setting..., policy agenda setting..., and media agenda setting” (Wallington, Blake, Taylor-Clark, & Viswanath, 2010, p. 77). For the purpose of this research project, the first two categories of the Agenda Setting Theory will be discussed in terms of how they examine a specific relationship the media has and how the researcher intends to use the aspects of those categories to influence the research project.

First, the category *public agenda setting* pertains to “issues portrayed in the media and the public’s priorities” (Wallington, Blake, Taylor-Clark, & Viswanath, 2010, p. 77). This means that the topics or events covered by different media outlets will directly influence the priorities held by the public after viewing the coverage.

Second, the category *policy agenda setting* pertains to “media coverage and its influence on the legislative agenda of policymaking bodies” (Wallington, Blake, Taylor-Clark, & Viswanath, 2010, p. 77). This means that the topics or events covered by different media outlets will directly influence the legislative, policymaking bodies in the United States government or smaller forms of government such as a University’s Board of Trustees.

Current Literature: Individuals with Disabilities and Postsecondary Education

While there is a broad selection of previous research available regarding the way individuals with disabilities and postsecondary education relate to one another, the amount of research is still new and limited. Several of the previous examples of research in this area focused on individuals with mental disabilities, rather than physical disabilities, and quality of

education, rather than physical access to education. These examples alone are part of the reason why the researcher chose to focus on the topic of individuals with disabilities and creating an increased accessible campus environment.

One current way postsecondary education institutions follow the ADA of 1990 is through providing specific accommodations and services. At The University of Akron, individuals with disabilities receive these specific accommodations and services through the Office of Accessibility. However, several factors go into whether an individual with disabilities can receive the services and accommodations offered by the postsecondary institution.

For an individual with disabilities to have access to these services and accommodations, they are required to “disclose their disability to the institution and provide documentary evidence of the impact of the disability” (Newman & Madaus, 2015, p. 3). While self-disclosing information about one’s disability is voluntary for the individual with the disability, without the information, the postsecondary institution is not required to provide them with the services and accommodations. According to previous research, the rate of individuals with disabilities self-disclosing the information needed to receive these services is low.

Only around 35% of individuals with disabilities attending any type of postsecondary institution self-disclosed the information of their disability to the institution (Newman & Madaus, 2015, p. 3). Also, the same previous research found that individuals with disabilities attending a postsecondary institution received less accommodations and services than individuals with disabilities attending a secondary institution. From the previous research, “whereas 98% of the sample had received at least one accommodation, modification, or disability-related service while in high school, only 24% did in postsecondary institutions” (Newman & Madaus, 2015, p. 3).

From this research, three separate factors were identified to have a possible influence on the rate of which individuals with disabilities self-disclose the information on their disability and the rate of which accommodations and services are given. “These include the impact of self-determination skills, academic preparation and transition planning at the secondary level, and the student’s disability” (Newman & Madaus, 2015, p. 4).

Regarding increasing individuals with disabilities self-disclosure of information pertaining to their disability and rate of receiving accommodations and services from postsecondary institutions, previous research suggests that early exposure to such accommodations and services can directly influence those. “It is important, therefore, for [individuals with disabilities] to learn how to self-advocate by assessing campus-based accommodations and supports before they enter college” (Novakovic & Ross, 2015, p. 230). Based on the tenets of Agenda Setting, the researcher intends for the exposure of accessibility and accommodations at The University of Akron to encourage current and future students with physical disabilities and/or impairments to self-advocate their needs to adequately receive higher education.

One example of a program offering individuals with disabilities the opportunity to analyze accommodations and services available from postsecondary institutions is *College Student for a Day (CSFAD)*. “In this activity, students are invited for a daylong campus visit during which they participate in activities that introduce them to campus life” (Novakovic & Ross, 2015, p. 230).

As a result of twenty students participating in a version of CSFAD from this research, 85% said the program changed their minds and beliefs about college. Also, 80% of the twenty students who participated said “they would ‘definitely attend college’” (Novakovic & Ross, 2015,

p. 231). From the several activities offered during this activity, the mentorship component was shown by the results to have received higher value from the twenty students who participated.

In cohesion with previous research, stating that youth mentoring influences students' attitudes when a specific academic objective is provided, the "experiential learning activity... and the presence of mentors were clearly the most well-received aspects of the program" (Novakovic & Ross, 2015, p. 232). One reason listed as to why these aspects of the activity were most valued by the individuals with disabilities is that the experiential learning activity allowed for the students to visit various campus offices while the mentors had the ability to show other interesting locations on the campus.

From this research, the authors conclude that the CSFAD program can be implemented at several different postsecondary institutions with participation from surrounding secondary education institutions. "The program can be tailored to a particular college or university as a recruitment activity for [individuals with disabilities], or it can convey a general message to [individuals with disabilities] about typical resources found on any college campus" (Novakovic & Ross, 2015, p. 232).

Since individuals with disabilities are becoming a growing population at postsecondary institutions, previous research has gathered recommendations from those individuals regarding ways postsecondary education can become a better experience (Fleming, Oertle, & Plotner, 2017, p. 311). In the research study mentioned above, recommendations were taken from 132 individuals with disabilities who were also registered with a Disability Resource Center at their postsecondary institution.

Several of the responses from the individuals with disabilities focused on the current services and accommodations received from their postsecondary institution and were categorized

by the authors into three main categories. “These categories included: (a) ways to improve disability services..., (b) requests for additional resources or suggested growth areas..., and (c) increase visibility and connectedness of campus resources” (Fleming, Oertle, & Plotner, 2017, p. 314).

However, negative responses were also submitted by the individuals with disabilities. Some of the negative responses focused on “services were ‘unhelpful,’ ‘lacked individualization,’ or that staff lacked expertise in dealing with students with a particular type of disability issue or student population” (Fleming, Oertle, & Plotner, 2017, p. 315). These individuals with disabilities were noted in the results to discuss a need for more individualized accommodations and services based on their specific disabilities and needs, rather than a generalized plan that could relate to several individuals with disabilities.

Goals

Based on the above literature, there is evidence that a journalistic approach will help make the information about services and accommodations available through The University of Akron widely available to individuals with disabilities and aide the Office of Accessibility by demonstrating additional methods for informing the campus community of their services. The literature also suggests that journalistic reporting is a tested method for alerting the policymaking bodies at The University of Akron of things that are viewed as important and priorities to individuals with disabilities attending the postsecondary institution.

Additionally, based on the above tenets of Agenda Setting, the researcher plans to publish the findings of this research projects as journalistic articles in the student newspaper at The University of Akron, The Buchtelite. The researcher intends to apply the *public agenda setting* aspect of the Agenda Setting Theory with the goal of increasing the publics' prioritization of accessibility and accommodations for individuals with disabilities after the publics' exposure to the articles published from the data found during this research project. The researcher also intends to apply the *policy agenda setting* aspect of Agenda Setting Theory in order to inspire policy and physical changes to The University of Akron by the policymaking bodies that will ultimately increase accessibility and accommodations across the campus environment.

Journalism Best Practices and Ethics

For this series of journalistic articles addressing the level of accessibility for current students, faculty, and/or visitors with physical disabilities and/or impairments at The University of Akron, there a variety of criteria set in terms of completing a successful and ethical project. These criteria were chosen based on the nature of the project being journalistic, as there are ethical standards that must be met in journalism. In addition to these standards, additional criteria used comes from the student newspaper at The University of Akron, The Buchtelite, as this was the medium where these articles were published.

First, the set of criteria set by journalistic standards comes from the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics, as most journalistic publications use these criteria (Society of Professional Journalists, 2014). First, the code of ethics states that journalists should seek the truth and report it through honest gathering and interpretation of information. Within this, a journalist must remember that neither speed nor format are a valid reason for inaccuracy, provide context for all portions of an article, clearly state who the sources are when able through providing credentials, and take responsibility for the accuracy of their work though verifying information. Another portion in the code of ethics states that journalists must minimize harm to those included in their work (Society of Professional Journalists, 2014). In this, a journalist must balance the public's right to information with the potential harm the information could pose, be compassionate to those who could be impacted by their work, understand that having legal access to information does not always align with ethical justification to publish it, and to consider the long-term impacts an article may have through the reach of the publication.

Next, other criteria used throughout this series of journalistic articles comes from The Buchtelite, the student newspaper at The University of Akron. As described in the course for the

student newspaper and policies set by the editorial staff, an article must include a few different components for it to be published by The Buchtelite. First, the article must include two or more sources of information with one of those sources being a human source. Second, when possible, an article should include perspectives from both sides of the story if dealing with more than one source, organization, and/or person. Specifically, this pertains to when there is a newsworthy issue that contains controversial or disputed information or could potentially harm one side by being covered. Not only is giving both sides a chance to comment fairness in journalism, a journalist is allowing for both sides to recognize an issue and explain their viewpoint. Lastly, the student newspaper requires that all articles include at least one photograph and caption. If this photograph is not an original taken by the journalist, then permission to use a photograph from the sources must be obtained.

The University of Akron's student newspaper, The Buchtelite, publishes articles online through online publishing tools created by the School Newspapers Online (SNO) network. In addition to its services, SNO also reviews and awards outstanding student journalism. In reviewing how this series of journalistic articles meets these goals and criteria, most were met successfully throughout the entire series; specifically, as a three of the articles in the series received the *Best of SNO* award.

However, there was one article that did not meet all the criteria set, despite being one of the articles to receive the *Best of SNO* award. Published in The Buchtelite on March 11, 2019, the article titled, "Disabled UA Student Left in Dorm Room During Fire Alarm" does not meet criteria of including perspectives from both sides of the story if dealing with more than one source, organization, and/or person. In the article, information and quotations were included from the student impacted by the fire alarm with mentions of involvement in a solution by the

Undergraduate Student Government, as well as a referral to the Office of Accessibility after the Department of Residence Life and Housing declining to comment. The Office of Accessibility was unable to comment by the deadline, so the decision was made to split the story into two parts, one from the student perspective and one from the university perspective. The reason this course of action was chosen is because the researcher felt the story was newsworthy and needed to be published as soon as possible so the campus community could become aware of what had happened to a student with physical disabilities. Unfortunately, the researcher did not make an adequate effort to inform the readers of the two-part series. A later article was published about The University of Akron's response to the situation faced by the student with physical disabilities to achieve balanced reporting, but the researcher did not take part in the writing of the article.

Goal Evaluation

Based on the literature reviewed in previous sections of this project, the researcher found evidence that a journalistic approach to this project would help make the information about services and accommodations through The University of Akron widely available to individuals with disabilities and aide the Office of Accessibility by demonstrating additional methods for informing the campus community of their services. The literature also suggested that journalistic reporting is a tested method for alerting policymaking bodies at The University of Akron of things that are viewed as important and priorities to individuals with disabilities attending the postsecondary institution.

Additionally, the researcher intended to apply the *public agenda setting* aspect of the Agenda Setting Theory with the goal of increasing the publics' prioritization of accessibility and accommodations for individuals with physical disabilities and/or impairments after the publics' exposure to the articles published in the student newspaper at The University of Akron, The Buchtelite. The researcher also intended to apply the *policy agenda setting* aspect of Agenda Setting Theory in order to inspire policy and physical changes by the policymaking bodies at this higher education institution that would ultimately increase accessibility and accommodations across the campus environment.

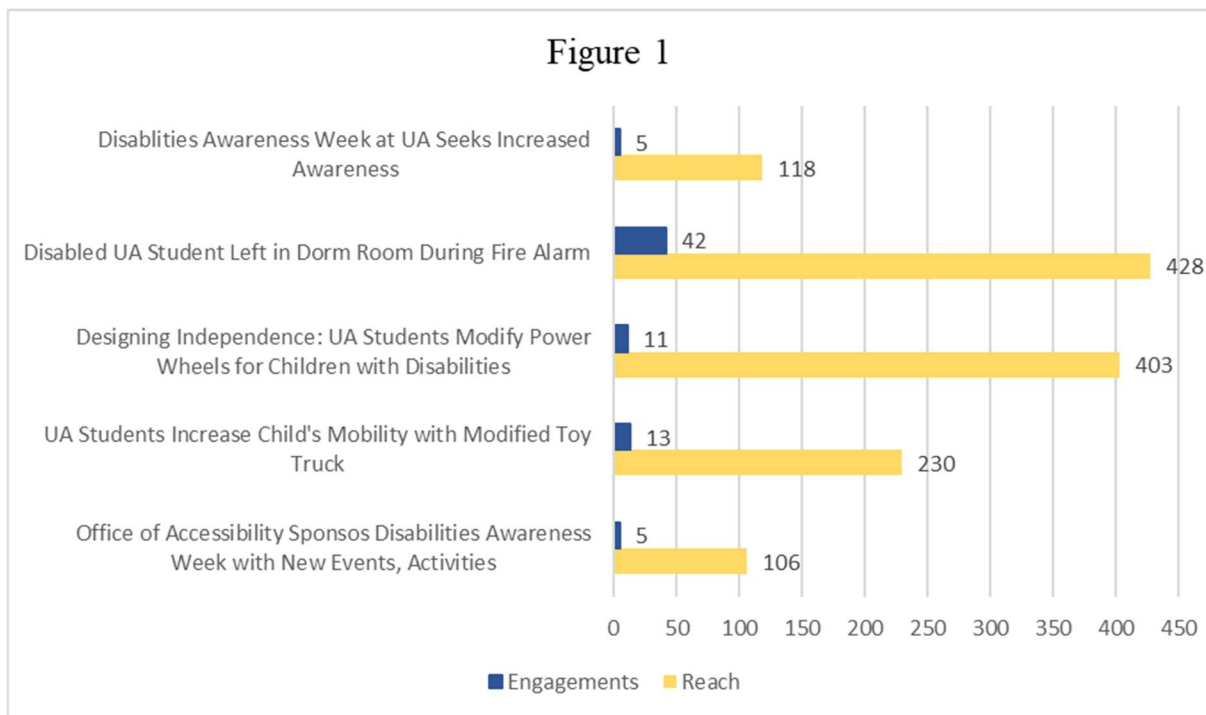
Written over a two-year period, the series of journalistic articles created by the researcher consists of seven articles total. The complete series was distributed via The Buchtelite website, in addition to five of the articles appearing on The Buchtelite social media accounts and two of the articles published in separate print editions. Through analysis of the number of print editions distributed across The University of Akron and how the articles performed on the Facebook page

for The Buchtelite, the researcher determined the goal of applying the *public agenda setting* aspect of the agenda setting theory was successfully obtained.

The articles titled “Campus Safety for People with Disabilities” and “Student Accessibility Group at Akron Acts as Social Networking, Advocacy Organization” were the two featured in the print editions of The Buchtelite. “Campus Safety for People with Disabilities” was published in the March 2018 print edition and “Student Accessibility Group at Akron Acts as Social Networking, Advocacy Organization” was published in the September 2019 print edition. Each print edition produced by The Buchtelite has a circulation of 3,000 copies that are distributed in different locations across campus with minimal returns. Based on the circulation for each print edition, the two previously mentioned articles reached almost 3,000 members of the campus community.

The remaining five articles in the series were distributed via The Buchtelite social media accounts. In order to analyze the success of these articles in the *public agenda setting* aspect of Agenda Setting Theory, the researcher used social media analytics data from The Buchtelite Facebook page for each post. Depending on the social media platform used, social media analytics measures the different ways people interact with content, including the number of likes, comments, shares and number of clicks on a link. The social media analytics system provided by Facebook measures two different forms of interactions with content: the reach and engagements. The reach of social media content refers to the number of social media users saw the content. The measurement of unique direct interactions with social media content, such as likes and clicks on links, is called engagements. On December 5, 2019, researcher recorded the reach and engagement of each article’s appearance on The Buchtelite Facebook page.

The social media post for “Disabilities Awareness Week at UA Seeks Increased Awareness” reached a total of 118 Facebook users with five unique engagements. Then, the social media post for “Disabled UA Student Left in Dorm Room During Fire Alarm” reached a total of 428 Facebook users with 42 unique engagements. Next, the social media post for “Designing Independence: UA Students Modify Power Wheels for Children with Disabilities” reached a total of 403 Facebook users with 11 unique engagements. Then, the social media post for “UA Students Increase Child’s Mobility with Modified Toy Truck” reached a total of 230 Facebook users with 13 unique engagements. Lastly, the social media post for “Office of Accessibility Sponsors Disabilities Awareness Week with New Events, Activities” reached a total of 106 Facebook users with five unique engagements (See Figure 1). Based on the reach and engagement data for each specific social media post, the researcher concludes the goal of applying the *public agenda setting* aspect of the agenda setting theory was successfully obtained.



Then, the researcher analyzed success the second goal of applying the policy agenda setting aspect of Agenda Setting Theory in order to inspire policy and physical changes by the policymaking bodies at this higher education institution that would ultimately increase accessibility and accommodations across the campus environment. Although no measurable data could not be obtained by the researcher in regard to actions taken by the policymaking bodies at The University of Akron in relation to the journalistic series, there was one measurable piece of data the researcher collected based on actions taken by the Office of Accessibility.

After the publication of the article titled “Disabled UA Student Left in Dorm Room During Fire Alarm” in The Buchtelite on March 11, 2019, the Office of Accessibility created the ***Student Accessibility Group at Akron (SAGA)***, in coordination with the disabled student left in their dorm room. Although this group did not officially meet until September 2019, the formation of this group will lead to future conversations about level of accessibility for current students, faculty, and/or visitors with physical disabilities and/or impairments at The University of Akron. Then, based on the conversations held by members of ***SAGA***, policy and physical changes by the policymaking bodies at this higher education institution that would ultimately increase accessibility and accommodations across the campus environment could occur.

Recommendations

After completing this series of journalistic articles addressing the level of accessibility for current students, faculty, and/or visitors with physical disabilities and/or impairments at The University of Akron, three clear recommendations emerged for those attempting to complete a similar project in the future. An important note in this is several of these recommendations come from both the experience of completing this series of journalistic articles, but also from the overall experience the researcher has serving the student newspaper in different roles, including as a news contributor, copy editor, and editor-in-chief.

1. In order to avoid question of conflict of interest in journalism, choose a topic for a single article or series of journalistic articles that is not personal. As the researcher is a person with a physical disability, they questioned continually whether they were able to offer objective, unbiased reporting on the topic.
2. When choosing a topic for a series of journalistic articles, ensure that there are enough possible articles/angles within the topic to fill the size of the series being planned. Although the topic of to the level of accessibility for current students, faculty, and/or visitors with physical disabilities and/or impairments at The University of Akron is broad, the number of articles possible appeared to be smaller than what the researcher had originally anticipated. This, in turn, made the number of articles within the series fewer than planned.
3. When a source requests interview questions to be sent ahead of time, only send them if the topic is complicated or requires research. Although sending questions is not generally done by journalists, the action may be needed for a source to be able to research things they do not know off the top of their head. An example of something that would require research is how many students registered with the Office of Accessibility.

Reflections

When I first started at The University of Akron in 2017, my mindset was that all the skills and knowledge I needed for a successful career in journalism would come from classroom lectures and professors with real world experience. Then, after starting this project in 2018 with the overall goal of increasing the awareness of accessibility on campus, I thought reaching my goal would be an easy task due to my experience with accessibility issues and my will to promote change. However, once I started gaining more experience as a journalist through my different roles within The Buchtelite and completing each article within this journalistic series, I realized there are so many learning opportunities outside of the classroom that have to happen in order to truly understand what is being taught inside the classroom.

One of the biggest learning experiences I had in completing this project came from writing the article titled “Disabled UA Student Left in Dorm Room During Fire Alarm” that was published in The Buchtelite on March 11, 2019. As stated previously, I included information from the student impacted by the fire alarm and mentioned involvement by the Undergraduate Student Government, as well as a referral to the Office of Accessibility. When the Office of Accessibility couldn’t comment by the deadline, I decided to split the story into two parts, one from the student perspective and one from the university perspective. Unfortunately, when I did not clearly state these intentions, representatives from The University of Akron responded directly to The Buchtelite about the article appearing biased and unethical due to my personal connection with the topic and lack of representation of the university.

This had been the first instance throughout my time with the student newspaper that an article I wrote was being viewed as unethical and biased: I was devastated. Although this article informed the campus community of an important issue, I did not do my duty as a journalist to

properly inform the campus community of all the necessary responses to this issue. Despite seeing this event as a failure at the time, I have grown to see it as an important steppingstone on my path to becoming a journalist because of the things it taught me. First, it taught me the importance of clarity for readers as they do not know a journalist's plans unless they are directly stated. Although the other student members of The Buchtelite and myself knew the story was going to be split into a two-part series, the readers could not have known unless specifically told. Then, I learned the importance of providing perspectives from both sides of the story if dealing with more than one source, organization, and/or person. Not only is giving both sides a chance to comment fairness in journalism, a journalist is allowing for both sides to recognize an issue and explain their viewpoint.

Then, there were several things I learned through positive experiences in writing this series of articles. When I first started writing for The Buchtelite, my goal was to write as much about accessibility and related issues as possible because I knew the topic and felt others needed to be aware of it. However, as I wrote articles for the student newspaper, both related to this project and related to my weekly requirements, I found that there were far more topics I enjoyed writing about most and sharing than just accessibility. Several of my articles that have been published in The Buchtelite cover campus news and events, student organizations, the politics within a university and even some sports. Many of these topics, such as the politics and sports, were things I told myself I would never write about because I was simply not interested in them or didn't think others would be interested.

The most interesting part of all this is that these were things I was being taught inside the classroom but didn't quite understand until gaining personal experience with them. I had learned about the ethics of journalism and providing all perspectives through my media courses. I was

being taught that I should not focus on one area specifically in writing because of all the possibilities available. And most importantly, I had learned the importance of clarity with every course I had taken. But these lessons did not truly impact me until I was outside of the classroom and dealing directly with them in a real-world setting.

Overall, I am grateful for this series of journalistic articles addressing the level of accessibility for current students, faculty, and/or visitors with physical disabilities and/or impairments at The University of Akron. I am especially grateful for having completed this series as my honors project and experiencing both positive and negative results as a student rather than having those experiences after graduation. By having these experiences as a student, I had my professors and fellow students help me understand what could be learned or changed for the future. If these experiences would have happened after graduation, I don't think I would have been able to see them as important learning opportunities on my own.

Appendix

Campus Safety Interview Notes

- **Ashley Poulos, Disability Specialist & Service Coordinator**

- Biggest Take away from Safety Meeting
 - “It seems like one of the biggest things is getting that information out to students. We service students who come to us and register with us as a student with a disability. But if are students out there; which there are a number of students out there on campus who have some kind of mobility concern or maybe a physical issue that prevents them from being able to exit a building quickly, use the stairs, or whatever that might be, but if they are not registered with us, we don’t have a way of getting them that information. And they are not required to register with us. A student with a disability is not required to register with our office unless they want some kind of classroom accommodation. So, the more students that we can reach by getting the information out there, the more informed the campus community will be as well.
- Safety Exits during Campus Walk-Throughs
 - “I’m happy to. When we do campus walk-throughs, we can do them for any multitude of reasons. Some students might need to see the most accessible routes between classes. Some students just need to really know where they are going before the first day of class, before the mad rush of students coming in. Some students want to see where they are in relation to bathrooms, exits, elevators or things like that. Some students just want to see the setup of the

classroom so they have an idea of what that looks like or for when we're placing furniture, so they can say 'I would like this table to be in that part of the room and that chair to be in this part of the room'."

- "So if a student wants to see where their classroom is and see where that stairwell would be; knowing that it really is any stairwell in the building, but especially if we can find the ones that have the specific fire doors and emergency exits that are there, I would be happy to show students that."
- "But again, getting the word out there is even more important because then it is not just our responsibility to know where those are. Instructors that are walking up and down the stairs in that building might notice that and then think about it when they are in their classroom. If there is some kind of drill, emergency or evacuation, the more information that we can get out to the campus community as a whole, the more people will think of those things in the moment."
- "But in terms of what we can do in our office, we are happy to put the language in our handbook. I'm happy to show people on their walk-throughs, if they request a walk-through."
- Getting Students to be Aware of those with Mobility Issues
 - "I would say be aware of your surroundings. If there is somebody who is having, especially an obvious, physical limitation that is causing them to need to use the elevator, consider that when you are getting on it."

- “I understand everybody wants to get to class. I understand there are only 15 minutes, and everybody is in a hurry. But you have to consider that while you have the option to take the stairs, not everybody has that option.”
- “So, it’s really the polite thing to do, but it’s also good educate to allow people with more need to use the elevator actually use it. Allow everybody to get off before getting on. Allow the doors to open all the way before you start feeding through. Just be aware of other people.”
- “I know we are in a rush. But not everybody has the same abilities to get around and you want to be conscientious of those students.”
- Accessibility Week
 - “It’s every year. It’s every year during the first week of November. It is disabilities awareness week and we start planning for that early. Around March or April is when we start throwing out ideas and we are always welcoming student input on activities and events that we do. So, if anyone has specific ideas that they want to bring to us, just contact our office and we can certainly talk about that.”
 - “I will say our Disabilities Awareness Week, especially within the last couple of years, it grows every year. So, I think every year, for the past 2 or 3 years, it has been more successful than the year before.”
 - “So, the events are being well attended. We are getting information out to [the campus community]. We are getting a lot of interest from the faculty and staff to be a part of it, from student organizations. So, I anticipate that there is going to be more student participation.”

- “The bigger we can have the events and the more participation we can have in the events, the more awareness that people will have around campus.”
 - Safety Plan Recommendations
 - “Having that information ahead of time, before the semester even begins: the better prepared that you can be going into a semester, the more confident you can feel if something were to happen. But I think it really does come down to, especially for students with disabilities or for staff and visitors with disabilities, is a part of what we call disabilities management. Knowing your surroundings, having a plan for any scenario and having that awareness so if something were to happen, you would know where to go.”
 - “And for people who want to help, I think first consider we greatly appreciate that everyone wants to help, but having that information is important for them as well.”
 - “We don’t want anybody to be taking any unsafe risks that aren’t necessary. If there’s already plans and protocols in place that the university has set up and there is no need to risk anybody’s safety to get them out of a building, we don’t want other people taking on that risk.”
 - “Knowing what campus resources to call or to text in that moment and having those numbers plugged into your phone, before you take on an unnecessary risk that could put yourself or somebody else in danger.”
 - “Those are the emergency responders, that’s their job. In the moment, it’s very stressful. So, the more that you can prepare ahead of time or even the student knowing who to call, that way if someone says they want to help, you

can say ‘This is how you can help.’ Having the information is key and being able to communicate that as well is key.”

- “In general, we have a very accessible campus. We have safety protocols and procedures in place that work really well. So that’s something I want everyone to consider when these things come up. Somebody has thought of this and somebody has planned for it. When they are thinking about fire drills, fire alarms or any kind of emergency evacuation, there is a plan in place to help students, faculty, staff or visitors who might have some physical limitations. The more that people can be aware of that, the less risk anybody is at. The more that you as the student who might need assistance knows and the more that other people around campus understand, the more safe everybody is in the long run.”
- Link to the National Fire Protection Agency
 - <https://www.nfpa.org/public-education/by-topic/people-at-risk/people-with-disabilities>
 - Emergency Evacuation Planning
 - “NFPA's Emergency Evacuation Planning Guide for People with Disabilities provides information on the five general categories of disabilities (mobility, visual, hearing, speech, and cognitive) and the four elements of evacuation information that occupants need: notification, wayfinding, use of the way, and assistance. It also includes a checklist that building services managers and people with disabilities can use to design a personalized evacuation plan, as well as government resources and text based on the relevant code requirements and ADA criteria.”

- Big meeting
 - David Tiller, Director of Environmental and Occupational Health and Safety
 - Mark Beers, Emergency Management Coordinator
 - Jessica DeFago, Associate Director for the Office of Accessibility
 - “It’s gonna depend. I’m not sure exactly. It’s all going to depend on when it happens and if a person who has special needs is in the building or not. More likely, a lot down in Polsky. There are several people that have access needs, PTSD and other things like that down there. Leigh Hall: that was the first time that we had that over there.” MB
 - “I think another thing to keep in mind, as we are talking about this, is that there is definitely an internal process for individuals that are registered with our office that may need assistance for evacuation. However, everybody that may need assistance with evacuation, they are not required to get registered with our office. So, they have outstanding procedures of how to scan those buildings. So just to his point, that is how they may not always know who is in those buildings or not.” JD
 - “We just go to the fire alarm and if we are told ‘hey, there is a person in a wheelchair’, we make sure to send someone that way.” MB
 - “This is what I strive on: public education and public safety. Knowing two ways out. Anybody needs to know two ways out of a building or a room. Whether or not it’s the general population, folks with accessibility issues or those traveling, know the two ways out. If we are looking at a multistory building, stairwells. The majority of the stairwells are safe construction and

rated construction. It has a self-closing door. There is no storage in stairwells, so it gives you an area to seek refuge in. So that's what I stress, whether or not it could be navigating stairs. But it gives you a nice spot to wait for rescue. A lot of buildings do not have two-way communications or are not required to have two-way communications. But in today's society, get into a stairwell and [call] 911. They can try to get you assistance. Sometimes the assistance is going to be 'if there is a fire down here and you are safe in there, we may communicate with you or come up and see if you have somebody with you', but the biggest emphasis on getting you safe is 'hey, let's get the fire out'. Hazards done, you are safe, and everything is okay. But knowing where stairwells are." DT

- "The hardest part of your guy's job is you don't know what you are walking into." JD
- "Right, seeking shelter. Get to a safe area. Whether or not it's in our building here, when you are traveling, when you are out anyplace: just knowing where a safe area is." DT
- "One thing I would say is get to that area, where you can get into that stairwell, once everybody gets out of that stairwell. Because if you get in there and it is small, you are going to clog up the whole area. So, if we can get you to that area, once everybody gets out, then get into that stairwell. That's a big thing I see a lot of times because our landings aren't as wide as they should be. And if you get into that person in there in a wheelchair and you get all

these other people coming down through there, it could clog up the stairwell.”

MB

- “We are fortunate. Some of our buildings, we have positive pressure fans in the high-rises. They have a fan blowing clean air in to keep any smoke from coming into the stairwells. But again, we are only responsible for the buildings we have here on campus. So, spreading the education to those who may not be in campus settings. Get to the stairwell, we keep the stairwells clear of any storage and keep the fire doors closed. That’s one of my constant battles. I have great allies that are keeping the fire doors closed. That’s the main message to get out: know where the safe spot is.” DT
- “Sometimes we have buildings here that have multiple levels that you can get outside on. Polsky is a great example.” MB
- “You don’t want to use an elevator in a fire situation. I want you to use the elevator if there is a tornado warning or something going down. The person in the wheelchair should be the one using the elevator. Able-bodied people should be walking down the steps. The biggest thing is not to use it in a fire.” MB
- “The problem with a fire is the way there with set up with smoke detectors. Smoke detectors will not let you out on the fire floor. It will go to an alternative floor. Also, it can shut down if there smoke in the elevator room or any water flow in the elevator room.” DT

- “It is important for you to use [elevators] inside and there is a tornado warning. I can’t have you up on the fifth floor, you have to get down to the first floor or the basement. The lowest level possible.” MB
- Don’t move people in wheelchairs
- “Let’s not add to the potential emergency. If we can get somebody to a nice safe area, let’s take care of what the emergency is. That person is in a nice, safe cocoon.” DT
- “That’s one thing the able-bodied person may not know. We want you to be in that area because it is the safest spot to be in. They don’t know that.” MB
- “We are fortunate here. The majority of our buildings pretty much have state-of-the-art fire alarm systems, mass notification systems from dispatch and sprinkler systems. We have a lot of safety features built in. Non-combustible construction: drywall, metal studs and concrete. Very little wood is used in campus buildings as opposed to other occupancies. We have a lot of regulatory requirements we do. Not just because it’s good business, not just because it’s good regulatory, but because it’s the right thing to do.” DT
- People who leave buildings, should tell the emergency response team if there is someone with a disability still in the building. MB
- “Able-bodied people see that as an easy way of getting into the building. They can push a button and [the door] opens. They don’t have to pull it open. So, they want to try to get in there as quickly as possible. I don’t know if they are always being rude, but it seems to be portrayed that way. Personally, I don’t

try to use handicap doors or anything like that because that's what it's for:
they are there for you guys to use it." MB

- "Until somebody spends time in that perspective, they just don't think about it." DT
- "Be aware of your surroundings and be aware of if there is a person that has special needs and they need to take priority over these doors and elevators."

2018 Disabilities Awareness Week Interview Notes

● **Tess Miller, Disability Specialist and Service Coordinator for The Office of Accessibility**

- “The goal of disabilities awareness week, is to spread awareness about disabilities and disability related service. The events are planned with the intention of connecting with the university community, including both students and faculty. The week provides the opportunity for members of the university community to engage with The Office of Accessibility as they gain a better understanding of the purpose of our office and the services we provide, as well as develop working relationships among the various university departments.”
- “Typically, Disabilities Awareness Week is planned over the course of several months. The planning process often begins a year before the event.”
- “While everyone in The Office of Accessibility is looking forward to the entire week and each of the events, I personally am most excited about our Grow Acceptance event. This fun event will provide the opportunity for our office to interact with many members of the university, as they share what acceptance means to them by adding to our Office of Accessibility acceptance tree. I am looking forward to providing event participants with a grow acceptance reminder succulent, to take home. Growing acceptance is a priority of the Office of Accessibility, so I am happy to have the opportunity to generate disability awareness and acceptance among the university community.”
- “For students who are unable to attend the events, I would want them to know that as the Office of Accessibility, we provide services to student with disabilities. Whether or not a student has a disability, the OA feels it is important for them to not only be

- familiar with our office and the support we provide to students, but to be comfortable sharing the information with individuals who may benefit from the services we provide. Our events give us the opportunity to increase disability awareness and acceptance in general, so for those who cannot participate in Disabilities Awareness Week, I encourage them to take advantage of opportunities to learn more about disabilities and the abundance of resources available, outside of these events.”
- “As the Disabilities Awareness Week coordinator, I plan all of the events for the week. However, The Office of Accessibility encourages students who are interested in DAW to reach out to our office. Ideas and suggestions for future events are welcomed, and we extend the opportunity to students who would like to get involved, to contact our office to sign up on a Disabilities Awareness Week volunteer list.”

Zipmail Information

- "Disabilities Awareness Week will be held Oct. 29 to Nov. 2. Activities are sponsored by the Office of Accessibility, Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs, Counseling and Testing Center, Residence Life and Housing, and WagTime Therapy Dogs.”
- Monday, Oct. 29: Photo Booth
 - “Grab a prop, strike a pose and share on social media!”
 - Student Union Piano Lounge
 - 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
- Tuesday, Oct. 30: Comedian Samuel J. Comroe
 - Sponsored by Residence Life and Housing
 - E.J. Thomas Hall
 - 9:09 p.m.

- Wednesday, Oct. 31: Let's Talk About Disabilities... There's Nothing Spooky About It
 - "Pull a fact and pick a pumpkin to decorate."
 - Simmons Hall, Outside the Front Entrance
 - 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
- Thursday, Nov. 1: Grow Acceptance
 - "Come and share what acceptance means to you by adding to the Office of Accessibility acceptance tree. Participant[s] will receive a free succulent, to serve as a reminder to continue growing acceptance and spreading awareness."
 - Student Union Trapezoid Lounge
 - 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.
- Friday, Nov. 2: WagTime Therapy Dogs
 - "Take a break in your day and destress with therapy dogs!"
 - Bierce Library Lobby
 - 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Student Left in Dorm Interview Notes

● **First Interview: Hannah Laudo, Senior, Social Work, Cerebral Palsy**

- The incident happened on Feb. 23
- Has stayed in the Spanton dorm building her entire time at Akron on the first floor
 - From Parma, Ohio
- First reaction was to “open up the door and scream for somebody to come. Because any other time it has happened, somebody has heard me screaming and they come. That’s the thing that is most frustrating: how did nobody hear me.”
- “I was in bed. It was at 7:30 in the morning.” Does not have an aide stay in room overnight
- “Nobody came. Nobody came to check on me or nothing. So, all I heard was that the alarm went off and then it said the emergency situation has been cleared on the emergency indoor speaker. Making me think that there was a real fire and I didn’t know until around 2:30 that afternoon that it wasn’t a fire.”
- “Yeah. Nobody knew what I was talking about when I went to the front desk to ask what happened, like why didn’t anybody come to see if I was okay. We had to go to another building to even file a complaint.”
- Is registered with the Office of Accessibility
 - Did not tell her safety procedures
 - “And even if they did, I don’t remember them since it’s been so long.”
- “I tried to go to the head of residence life and housing and she basically said they did all that they could do, which I feel is not enough. I understand that they’re students, but it doesn’t take more than a second to run down the hall to make sure that I am

- okay. Cause I could have fell. I could have been startled from the alarm and fell out of my bed. You don't know what happens. And if that would have happened, I would have been screwed.”
- In terms of accessibility, would rate UA: “I would say a four or five.” On a scale of one to ten
 - “It was a night where it was snowing light, but it was continuously snowing. The whole sidewalk was covered in snow and we were off campus. So, we literally had to go in the street because the sidewalks were so bad. When we got by the REC center, I got stuck in by where those trees come out of the sidewalk. And Halle had to press one of the blue buttons to have a police officer come and get me unstuck.”
 - “I just hope that more people are held accountable and that this isn't just forgotten because I don't feel that they did everything that they could have. I know that I am graduating in May, so I won't have to deal with this, but that doesn't future people won't have to deal with something like this.”
 - “I not completely sure yet, but I know that I either want to go into something with the developmentally disabled or children.”
 - “I mean like what you would expect: people parking in the lines or handicap parking spots and parking in front of ramps. Stuff like that but nothing super major or crazy.”
 - “I think just ask and don't assume please.”
- **Second Interview: Hannah & Nisya Hunter, Freshman, Nursing Major, USG Residence Life Senator**
 - Nisya “I think it was last week that a fellow senator of mine sent me a link to [Hannah's] twitter post, where [she] had shared the story of what happened. It was

- really important to me to reach out to [Hannah] no one should have to go through that ever. It was totally unacceptable.”
- HL “When you first get accepted, you have to contact the Office of Accessibility and you get, I think it’s called a case specialist or something like that. You set up a meeting with them before you start and that’s where if you have any accommodations, the accommodation letter gets set up. They get to know you. When I went through the evacuation procedure that they told me I didn’t follow, it was not given to me. And if they did tell it to me, I don’t remember it because it was four years ago. It was not something I remember them telling me.”
 - Office of Accessibility did, however, help find a residence hall to best accommodate Hannah
 - HL “The RAs did, but he seemed completely clueless. He had no idea how to help me. My mom told him that ‘when she’s in bed, she can’t get up and her chair is across the room, so somebody has to come and find her.’ The first year, I had trouble getting aides set up, so my mom was here a lot. And conveniently enough, a fire alarm went off in the middle of the night. My mom was waiting to see if somebody would come find me and try to get me out. Finally, she just got me up and the RA was standing there, just holding the door open and smiling.”
 - Hannah’s mom spoke with the RLC, but it has changed since that time. Three different times
 - NH “I can only imagine how you guys must feel. I can imagine it was pretty scary because you didn’t know it was a false alarm.”

- HL “Yeah. Everybody that I have talked to has said there was no smoke and are acting like it isn’t a big deal, but I didn’t know that for hours.”
- ZH “I was looking into [Hannah’s] situation and it was something like you are supposed call UAPD.”
- HL “Yeah, but with the alarm being so loud, how can they hear me?”

Designing independence: Student engineers modify cars for children

03/22/2019

It was the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. who asked, "Life's most urgent question is: What are you doing for others?"

Ingenious student engineers from the Biomedical Engineering Design and NASA Robotics teams in our College of Engineering are providing their answer in the form of customized electric toy cars fitted for area youngsters with physical disabilities. The students, representing several academic majors, redesigned the controls, settings and other features of eight off-the-shelf Power Wheels vehicles for children whose physical limitations leave them unable to operate the cars with their factory settings.

The vehicles were modified as part of the Adapt-A-Car workshop put on by Inclusioneers, a Summit County-based nonprofit organization that provides independence and mobility to individuals with developmental disabilities. The children were presented their new toys on March 15 at Lock 3, near the Akron Children's Museum, during the organization's Adapt-A-Car Inclusion Day event.

Sophomores **Hanna Mackey**, of Seville, and **Megan Bruns**, of Brunswick, contributed work to all eight adapted vehicles, each one needing to fit the specific needs and capabilities of the child who would receive it. Some adaptations had to do with range of motion. For example, limited movement in the arms or legs proved a need for modified seating, steering, or acceleration. Other disabilities required more support in some areas than a standard car would provide (such as leg or forearm support).

Team effort = results

The pair consulted with physical therapists to develop the desired adaptations. Some vehicles are now accelerated and steered with a joystick, others are accelerated by buttons on the steering wheel and push-buttons. Desktops with the controls were installed on two vehicles to give an easier reach to the drivers. Seating for the young drivers was customized by Miller's Rental and Sales, Inc. and Numotion, wheelchair and mobility equipment companies.

"Having this opportunity to help children with disabilities in Akron has been so rewarding and it is great to feel like a part of the community that my university is in," said Bruns, a second-year biomedical engineering major. "Watching this project help children has shown me that pursuing biomedical engineering is the right track for me. Being able to help solve or better medical problems for people is what I want for my future career and Adapt-A-Car helped me realize that."



Sophomores Hanna Mackey (left) and Megan Bruns contributed work to all eight adapted Power Wheels vehicles, each one needing to fit specific needs and capabilities. For the vehicle pictured here, they built a desktop with a push-button that controls the vehicle. It was customized for Oscar, seen here with them.

“Working on the Adapt-A-Car team has been one of my favorite parts of my college career so far,” said Mackey, a second-year exercise science major. “This project has helped me realize my passion for rehabilitation and pediatrics, and has led me to pursue physical therapy school upon graduation. I have loved having the opportunity to be involved with The University of Akron and the Akron community as a whole, and am so thankful for the opportunity. This project has not only been fun, but has furthered my development in skills such as communication, work ethic and dedication.”

Putting skills to the test

A group of three students from UA’s NASA Robotics team worked together to customize a Power Wheels “Wild Thing” vehicle, a 360-turning model that features a two-wheeled designed with the operator sitting in a seat between each tire, controlling the vehicle with two joysticks. The “Wild

Thing” was adapted for Akron-based Cub Scout Pack #3310 to be used by any scout with a physical disability.

The team gutted the vehicle’s controls system and modified it into a 3D-printed single joystick control from the original dual joysticks for easier control. The team even developed its own programming for the vehicle with additions that included a proximity alarm (with its own on/off switch) to warn the user and others if a collision may occur and a speed control dial to speed up and slow down as needed. A five-point harness was installed to the modified 3D-printed seat donated by Fisher-Price.

Team members were **Shawn Sharratt**, a third-year biology major from Medina; **Kelly O’Neill**, a fifth-year electrical engineering major from Greensburg, Pa.; **David Klett**, a fourth-year computer engineering major from Wooster; and **Seth Carpenter**, a fourth-year computer engineering major from Medina. **Luke Schmitt**, a fifth-year mechanical engineering major from Chicago, Ill., helped to coordinate the effort between Inclusioneers and the engineering students.



Team members David Klett (left), Shawn Sharratt, Seth Carpenter, Kelly O’Neill and Luke Schmitt adapted a Power Wheels “Wild Thing” vehicle, a 360-turning model that features a two-wheeled design with the operator sitting in a seat between each tire, controlling the vehicle with two joysticks. The “Wild Thing” was adapted for Akron-based Cub Scout Pack #3310 to be used by any scouts with a physical disability.

Klett said he enjoyed being able to directly use the skills he learned in the classroom to help someone else.

“I learned that I can directly use my engineering skills to help someone else, and I believe as engineers, we have a duty as the builders/innovators to contribute directly to the benefit of our local community, not just our own checking accounts.”

Carpenter, who was in charge of logistics for the team and served in an advisory role, said the project was “a great experience as an opportunity to be able to reach out to the community.”

Projects offer many lessons

“Throughout the development of the project, I was blessed to gain a better understanding of the problems that are faced by those less fortunate than myself,” he said. “After all the work that the team put into the project, there are times where you still wish you could do more.”

Inclusioneers has been partnering with UA students on various projects since 2015, and since 2017 for the Adapt-A-Car workshop. The organization was founded by UA alumnus **Mike Firtha ’76**. The Adapt-A-Car program involves mechanical and electrical adaptations to off-the-shelf Power Wheels cars designed for typical children ages 1-6 years old. The cars are modified to account for the unique mobility requirements of children with developmental disabilities.

“Inclusioneers has a charitable mission to provide inclusive engineered solutions to help the disenfranchised enjoy the same facilities, events and activities that are commonly taken for granted by the mainstream population,” said Firtha.

Learn about other collaborative projects between UA students and Inclusioneers online, including such as a [tandem wheelchair \(https://www.uakron.edu/im/news/students-design-tandem-wheelchair\)](https://www.uakron.edu/im/news/students-design-tandem-wheelchair) and an [adaptive bicycle with 3D-printed parts \(https://www.uakron.edu/im/news/students-design-bike-with-3d-printed-parts-for-boy-with-rare-condition/\)](https://www.uakron.edu/im/news/students-design-bike-with-3d-printed-parts-for-boy-with-rare-condition/).

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SHARE

Powering through: UA students help child get mobile with toy truck

04/16/2019

Nathan Ramey is a busy 4-year-old.

Since September 2016, the youngster has been going once a week to Akron Children's Hospital for a series of occupational, physical and speech therapy sessions. For 24 months, he received chemotherapy treatments at his home in Green and in the hospital, taking his last dosage on Jan. 18.

Nathan has Down syndrome and is in remission from leukemia, and experienced *Clostridium difficile* — an unfortunate side effect from his chemotherapy treatments. Like any kid his age, Nathan finds a Power Wheels car to be quite the appealing toy. But because of his illnesses, Nathan has stunted growth and low muscle tone. Even walking can be tricky for Nathan, but he uses a gait trainer to help him be mobile.

So, a team of our biomedical engineering students in the College of Engineering (<https://www.uakron.edu/engineering/>) stepped in to adapt an off-the-shelf Power Wheels kid-sized vehicle (donated by Fisher-Price) to meet Nathan's challenges and give him additional mobility.



Check out the smile on Nathan Ramey as he tools around in his very own Power Wheels truck.

The faux blue Ford pickup truck now features:

- An accelerator pedal redesigned to be within Nathan's reach and requiring less force to activate;
- A seat modified to be slightly higher, with stronger seat belts and extra cushioning;
- A front bumper to help take away most of the impact if Nathan strikes an obstruction; and
- A remote-control kill switch that allows Nathan's parents to instantly turn off the vehicle's battery if the youngster is headed in a dangerous direction.

"This project has been an excellent opportunity for the team to get practical engineering experience," said project leader **Christopher Halley**, a fifth-year biomedical engineering major from Canfield, Ohio. "It's extremely satisfying to know that once this vehicle is presented to Nathan, it will improve his life. The adapted Power Wheels truck is going to be able to expose Nathan to a part of his life that he wasn't able to reach before. Once I see the smile on his face and how he's going to be able to truly utilize the toy vehicle, that will make all these months of work worth it."



Mom and Dad, AmyAileen and Joseph Ramey, are pictured here with Nathan and his older brother Trent, along with College of Engineering students Steven Innocenzio, Reid Polis and Christopher Halley, who adapted the truck for Nathan; and Heather Demor, senior design engineer for Air Enterprises, who aided with the project.

The team is also comprised of fourth-year student **Reid Polis** of Poland, Ohio; and third-year student **Steven Innocenzi**, of Solon, Ohio, both biomedical engineering majors. The group was mentored by an engineer from [Air Enterprises](http://airenterprises.com/) in order to complete the project, which began in 2017. The project was originally proposed to UA's [Biomedical Engineering Design Teams](https://www.uakron.edu/engineering/beyond-the-classroom/student-design-teams/) by the [Summit County Developmental Disabilities Board](http://www.summitdd.org/), which has offered project ideas to engineering students in the past.

RELATED: Learn more about all of our [Student Design Teams \(https://uakron.edu/engineering/beyond-the-classroom/student-design-teams/\)](https://uakron.edu/engineering/beyond-the-classroom/student-design-teams/) in the College of Engineering.

"We were very excited to see the adaptations to the Power Wheels toy and how well Nathan did with it," said **AmyAileen Ramey**, Nathan's mother. "His activities are limited because of his illnesses; he can't go to a lake, play in sand, or be around large groups of people for too long. Now that the weather is getting warmer, Nathan will be able to enjoy his new truck more often, especially since because his treatments for leukemia ended three months ago."

Nathan received his truck at his home in February, but a brief illness kept him from driving it outside. On April 12, Nathan and his family met with the design team at East Liberty Park in Green where Nathan was able to drive the truck outdoors for the first time.



Nathan Ramey gives older brother, Trent, a ride in his newly adapted Power Wheels vehicle.

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Student Accessibility Group Interview Notes

● **Kathleen Kulick, Director of the Office of Accessibility**

- “Director, Office of Accessibility. I have held this position at The University of Akron since October 2012.”
- “The idea of starting a student group came from a conversation I had with a student in the spring 2019 semester. The student, now a graduate of UA, felt that as a student with a disability, her voice was not being heard. Her idea was to get students with disabilities together i.e. start a student organization. The group would provide students with a place to discuss issues they are facing as well as meet others on campus interested in issues of disability.”
- “In order for us to know if other students registered in the OA would be interested in starting a student group, the OA sent out a survey in April 2019. The completed surveys told us a few things: (1) of the students who responded to the survey, the majority thought forming a group for students with disabilities registered in the OA was a good idea. The responding students were split in what they wanted the group to look like. The responders were split between having the mission of the group being advocacy based while others wanted to see a more social networking group.”
- “My goal for the group is that they find their voice and feel empowered to express their concerns in a respectful, solution-based manner. I am there to offer my help, as needed.”
- “As the group grows, my hope is that students with disabilities will be present at the table when issues of disability come to the forefront. Offering solution-based

- assistance and real-world insights will add to any conversation when issues to disability are discussed.”
- “The question came up in our first meeting if able-bodied students should be invited to be part of the group? When posed to the group at the September 11th meeting, everyone liked the idea of opening the group to all interested people. One new member said (paraphrasing) the more people understanding the needs of students with disabilities, the better the outcome.”
 - “The one thing I would like everyone on campus to know is the staff in the Office of Accessibility believes in the mission of equal access for all. We work with faculty, staff and others on campus to ensure that students with disabilities are provided with full access to and the opportunity to fully participate in the academic environment at The University of Akron. We want the Office of Accessibility to be the go-to place on campus when issues of disability are discussed and explored. Whether working as advocates or providing assistance with the coordination of accommodation, the staff in the Office of Accessibility is here for students with disabilities.”
- **Jack Wolf, Sophomore, Marketing and Sales Technology**
 - “It had a program that I was interested in and the building that most of my classes are in has an attached parking garage for easy access.”
 - “An emailed survey was sent out seeing if people were interested in starting a club to allow for students with disabilities to socialize and talk about different issues related to having a disability on campus.”
 - “I look forward to improving campus for everyone and being able to meet new people that share common goals with me.”

- “I want to help bring about changes to The University of Akron to make the whole college experience better for everyone, not just people with disabilities.”
- “My main goal for the group is to have fun while making changes on campus that will improve the experience of everyone who comes to The University of Akron.”
- “Having people from different backgrounds will help us to come up with different solutions to problems that are brought up through SAGA.”
- **Breanna Sprenger, Freshman, Biology and Child Development Major, Vice President of S.A.G.A.**
 - “I chose the University of Akron because I love the small campus size and academic and social opportunities.”
 - “I first learned about SAGA through the Office of Accessibility.”
 - “I’m looking forward to all the progress and awareness this group will bring.”
 - “I wanted to be Vice President to serve and use my experiences to help others.”
 - “My goals as VP are to be a leader, increase the group size and spread more awareness.”
 - “All students, whether able-bodied or disabled, should attend S.A.G.A. because it provides awareness and education that is greatly needed. Everyone will encounter a person with a disability or disability issues.”
- **Grant McConnell, Sophomore, Business Data Analytics, USG Senator for the College of Business Administration**
 - “I first learned about SAGA at the beginning of this year. Following up from last year, former Senator Hunter and myself were looking to help create such a group like

- this to bring awareness to issues here on campus. Once I was informed that such a group was being created, I was ecstatic.”
- “After the first meeting I am hoping that more awareness is spread about this empowering group. I’m sure that the University cares about those who have accessibility problems, but they might be unaware of what those problems are. I would love to see awareness spread and communication between the University and this group strengthens to address such issues.”
 - “My goal as the USG representative of the group is to help in as many ways as I can. USG’s main goal is to build community and enhance experience, so anything I can do to promote that for SAGA would be optimal.”
 - “All students should get involved with SAGA, disabled and abled bodies alike. When we unite together to fight a common cause, we can tackle all challenges that face us a community.”

2019 Disabilities Awareness Week Interview Notes

● **Tess Miller, Disability Specialist and Service Coordinator for the Office of Accessibility**

- Disabilities Awareness Week (DAW) began in 2006 and the Office of Accessibility has hosted eleven weeks since the first year.
- Disabilities Awareness Week aims to educate, nurture disability advocates and promote inclusiveness. Disability is a natural part of the living process – and we strive to help our campus be as knowledgeable about disabilities and potential impacts, as possible. Individuals with disabilities can be thought of as a similar group, but in fact, each type of disability has unique characteristics that require specific strategies to ensure access to public and private spaces. It is best practice to focus on a person’s strengths, talents and individuality rather than on a medical diagnosis or perception of a lack of ability. Furthermore, while there are disability-specific categories (e.g., mobility, sensory, mental health, cognitive), it is important to recognize that each individual’s experience of their disability is unique to that person.
- As the coordinator of Disabilities Awareness Week, I am looking forward to each of the events, equally. When planning the week, the goal is to offer a variety of events uniquely planned to address different areas of interest and disability related topics. For this reason, I look forward to seeing diversity in the members of the campus community who participate in the events. Each year it is exciting to see individuals from different backgrounds and different university affiliations, come together to experience and benefit from the events in ways that are unique to them. When planning DAW events, the goal of the Office of Accessibility is to plan educational and interactive activities that everyone can enjoy, while learning something new.

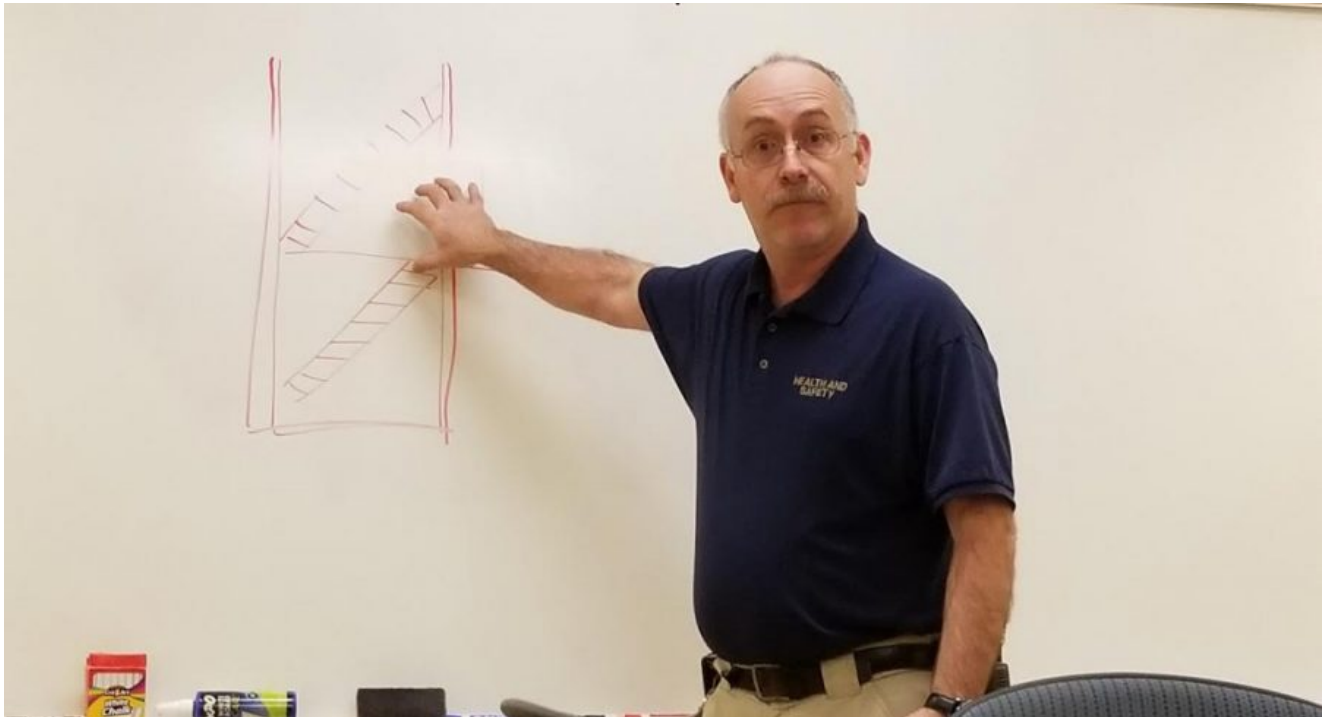
- The Office of Accessibility has been offering Disabilities Awareness Week for 11 years. Each year DAW is offered we strive for diversity in our programming while still offering high participation events that have not previously been offered in past years. Our goal is to provide students, faculty and staff with experiences that are both educational and interactive. Some years we offer more traditional educational programs and presentations. Other years we offer programs that are more in style events, including popular activities. Because coordination for DAW starts in early summer, we attempt to research various trends and interests in the disability field, that may reach and impact as many participants as possible. We welcome campus partners and students to make suggestions to the DAW coordinator about events they might like to see in future years.
- Our hope is that individuals in our campus community consider and view inclusion of individuals with disabilities as a cultural shift. Inclusion can be an all-encompassing practice. It can guarantee that people with varying understandings of disabilities are engaged in and are actively connected to the goals and objectives of the whole community, as opposed to placing labels or making assumptions about individuals with disabilities. We also hope that students could self-identify as being an advocate for individuals with disabilities. An advocate can present themselves in a variety of ways, such as becoming more knowledgeable through self-study and reflection, participating in an organization which supports individuals with disabilities, or seeking out inclusive practices to incorporate in their daily lives.
- “The Office of Accessibility welcomes members of the campus community, including students, staff and faculty to share their ideas for future events. Our goal is

to add a survey to our DAW page on our site, where suggestions can be shared. We value the opinions and input of the University community and for that reason we charge ourselves with the task of considering the event feedback we receive when planning DAW and strive to plan a beneficial and inclusive week that offers something for everyone.”

Campus Safety for People with Disabilities

buchtelite.com/34762/showcase/campus-safety-for-people-with-disabilities/

Increasing awareness towards the plans set in place to keep people with disabilities safe during emergencies.



David Tiller, Director of Environmental and Occupational Health and Safety, explains why stairwells are a safe place for people with disabilities to seek refuge.

Megan Parker

During a false fire alarm instance in Leigh Hall, I was on the third floor wondering how to get out of the building. As a student with physical disabilities, I started thinking about what other people with disabilities should do in emergency events.

Mark Beers, Emergency Management Coordinator, said safety services do not always know how many people with disabilities are in a building during an emergency. Although Beers receives a list of students with disabilities from the Office of Accessibility, the list only contains those who have registered with them.

Jessica DeFago, Associate Director of the Office of Accessibility, said students with disabilities are not required to register or release information to the Office of Accessibility.

“There is definitely an internal process for individuals that are registered with our office that may need assistance for evacuation. However, everybody that may need assistance [is] not required to get registered with our office. That is how they may not always know who is in those buildings or not,” DeFago said.

David Tiller, Director of Environmental and Occupational Health and Safety, said campus education on safety protocols and exits is extremely important because not everyone knows where exits or safe places may be.

Senior Stephanie Vaughan-Fanizzi said that she normally does not think about safety and accessibility because she can reach safety easily if something happens on campus. However, her friends with mobility issues do not have the same opportunity to get to safety.

“Navigating the campus with a friend in a wheelchair made me very aware of the accessibility on campus,” Vaughan-Fanizzi said. “I feel that at every level, accessibility should be discussed more.”

When asked about what students with disabilities should do first during a fire alarm, Tiller said the student should head to a stairwell.

“The majority of the stairwells are safe construction and rated construction. It has a self-closing door and there is no storage in stairwells, so it gives you an area to seek refuge in,” Tiller said.

However, Beers said the student should wait before heading to the landing area by the stairs until all students have cleared the stairwell because the landing area is not always big enough to fit a lot of people.

“That’s a big thing I see a lot of times because our landings aren’t as wide as they should be. And if you get that person in there in a wheelchair and you get all these other people coming down through there, it could clog up the stairwell,” Beers said.

Beers said a person with disabilities should never use the elevator when a fire alarm is going off, even if it is a false alarm. In order remain the safest and be the most prepared, people should treat each alarm as if it were a real emergency.

Tiller said during a real fire, the smoke detectors will keep the elevator from taking a person to the floor where the fire is located. Also, the elevators could shut down if smoke or water gets into the elevator room.

Tiller said once the student is in the stairwell, they should call 911 to give emergency responders their location and to receive assistance. If they are on a safe floor, assistance could simply be communication because “the biggest emphasis on getting [someone] safe” is putting out the fire or stopping the hazard in the building, Tiller said.

Ashley Poulos, Disability Specialist and Service Coordinator, believes getting this information out to able-bodied students is also extremely important so they can help in the most effective way during emergency situations.

Able-bodied people may not understand that students with disabilities should seek refuge in stairwells. These students can help by telling emergency responders the location of the student with disabilities, Beers said.

“Let’s not add to the potential emergency. If we can get somebody to a nice safe area, let’s take care of what the emergency is. That person is in a nice, safe cocoon,” Tiller said.

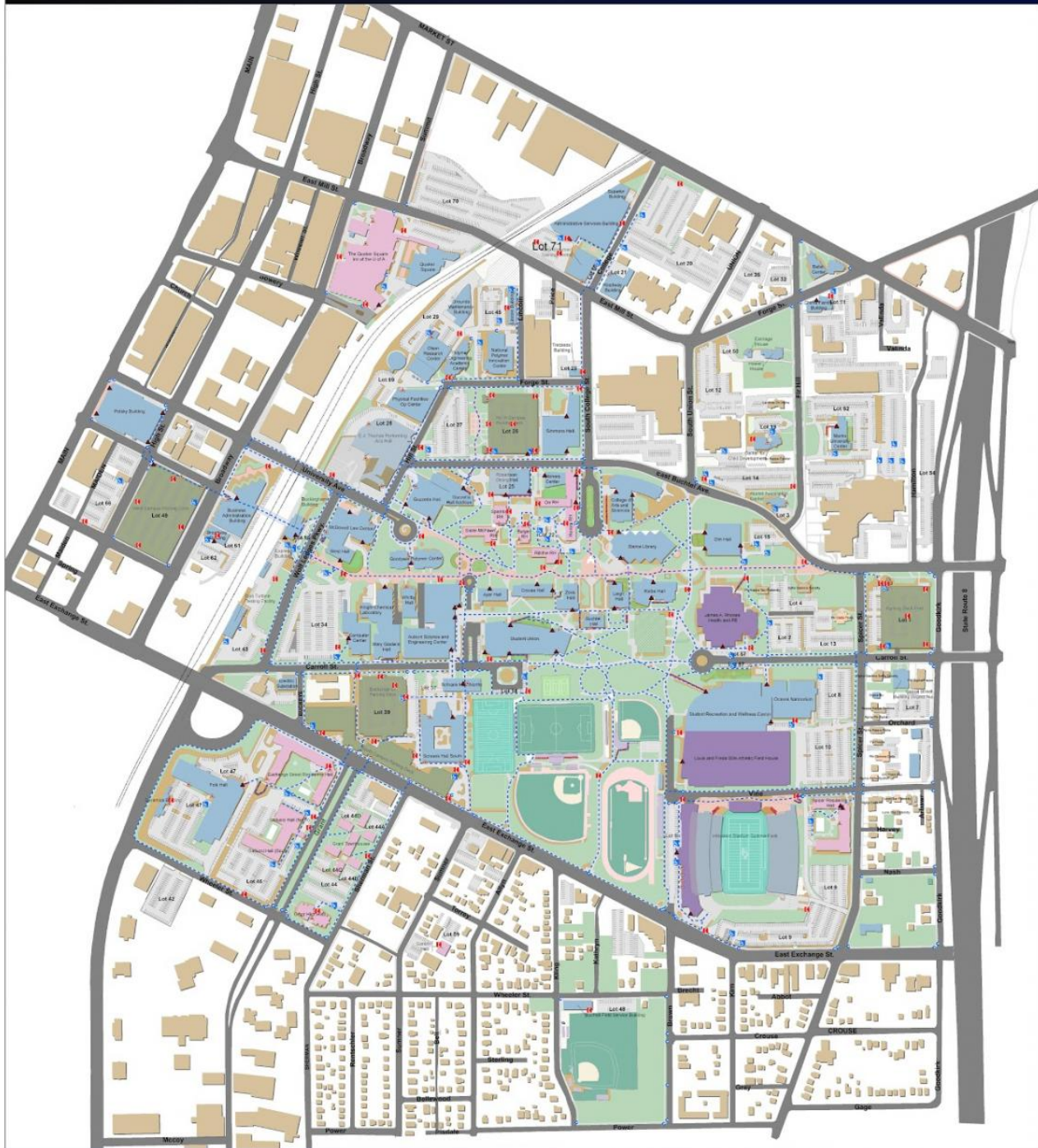
Although no one knows when or where these emergencies may happen, Tiller believes the most important thing a person with disabilities can do is to have a safety plan set, no matter if traveling, going to school or staying home.

Tiller said the National Fire Protection Agency lists multiple emergency planning guides for evacuating people with disabilities. According to the [NFPA website](#), these provide information on “the five general categories of disabilities... and the four elements of evacuation information” people will need.

Having a safety plan, before the start of the semester, helps all students feel more confident and prepared if something were to happen on campus, Poulos said.

THE UNIVERSITY OF AKRON

Office of Accessibility



- | | | |
|--|---|---|
|  Handicap Parking |  Accessible Door |  Handicap Ramp |
|  Curb Cut |  Manual |  Accessibility Route |
|  Emergency Phone |  Automatic | |

Prepared By: The Department of Physical Facilities,
The University of Akron
Date: January, 2011

The Office of Accessibility provides a map to students showing handicap accessible routes, doors and parking on campus. (Photo courtesy of The University of Akron Office of Accessibility)

"I think it really comes down to, especially for [people] with disabilities, is... disabilities management. Knowing your surroundings, having a plan for any scenario and having that awareness so if something were to happen, you would know where to go," Poulos said.

Vaughan-Fanizzi believes that although the University is doing a great job with the safety of all students, the safety of students with disabilities should be more discussed across campus so people will feel better informed on the topic.

"Safety is a huge concern. But if we all took the time to fully think about how our daily lives would be if we had mobility issues and what obstacles we might face, we could start there and try to remove those obstacles for our peers and friends who have to deal with them," Vaughan-Fanizzi said.

Disabilities Awareness Week at UA Seeks Increased Awareness

buchtelite.com/36172/news/disabilities-awareness-week-at-ua-seeks-increased-awareness/

The Office of Accessibility will be hosting several events beginning Oct. 29 to help the campus community become more aware and accepting of disabilities.



The Office of Accessibility hosts Disabilities Awareness Week every year in October. (Photo courtesy of the Office of Accessibility)

The Office of Accessibility is hosting Disabilities Awareness Week from Oct. 29 to Nov. 2 at The University of Akron to increase awareness of disabilities and related services on campus.

Tess Miller, a disability specialist and service coordinator for the Office of Accessibility, said the events throughout the week were planned with hopes of reaching out to members of the campus community.

“The week provides the opportunity for members of the University community to engage with The Office of Accessibility... as well as develop working relationships among the various University departments,” Miller said.

In order for the events throughout the week to happen, the Office of Accessibility begins planning a year in advance. Miller said students are also welcome to share ideas for future events.

According to [Zipmail](#), several events will be taking place throughout the week where students and faculty members can learn more about disabilities and the Office of Accessibility.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 29
Photo Booth
Grab a prop, strike a pose and share on social media!
Student Union Piano Lounge
10:00am – 2:00pm

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 30
Samuel J. Comroe, Comedian
Sponsored by Residence Life and Housing
Student Union Starbucks
9:09pm

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 31
Lets Talk About Disabilities... There's Nothing Spooky About It
Pull a fact and pick a pumpkin to decorate.
Simmons Hall
Outside Front Entrance
10:00am – 2:00pm

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 1
Grow Acceptance
Come and share what acceptance means to you by adding to the Office of Accessibility acceptance tree. Participant will receive a free succulent, to serve as a reminder to continue growing acceptance and spreading awareness.
Student Union Trapezoid Lounge
10:30am – 2:30pm

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 2
WagTime Therapy Dogs
Take a break in your day and destress with therapy dogs!
Bierce Library Lobby
10:00am – 2:00pm

Sponsors:
Office of Accessibility, Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs, Counseling and Testing Center, Residence Life and Housing, and WagTime Therapy Dogs

campus mailing section

The location listed for the event on Tuesday, Oct. 30, has been changed to the E.J. Thomas Performance Arts Hall. (Photo courtesy of the Office of Accessibility)

On Monday, Oct. 29, the week of events will begin with a Photo Booth in the Student Union Piano Lounge from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. where people are encouraged to take a picture and share it on social media.

Then on Tuesday, Oct. 30, comedian Samuel J. Comroe will be performing his routine at 9:09 p.m. in the E.J. Thomas Performance Arts Hall. This event is free, open to the public and does not require prior registration.

According to his [website](#), Comroe is a stand-up comedian who has performed at more than 100 clubs and colleges with comedy comprised from “the trials and tribulations of living with Tourettes Syndrome...” and other life experiences.

For Wednesday, Oct. 31, the Office of Accessibility will be hosting “Let’s Talk About Disabilities... There’s Nothing Spooky About It” outside the front entrance of Simmons Hall from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Participants will have the opportunity to “pull a fact” about disabilities and then “pick a pumpkin to decorate,” according to Zipmail.

Then on Thursday, Nov. 1, is “Grow Acceptance” where people can share their meaning of acceptance “by adding to the Office of Accessibility acceptance tree,” according to Zipmail.

This event will take place in the Student Trapezoid Lounge from 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Participants will get a free succulent as a reminder to continue acceptance and awareness.

To end the week, the WagTime Therapy Dogs will be in the Bierce Library Lobby on Friday, Nov. 2 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Although the Office of Accessibility is excited for all the events taking place, Miller said she is most looking forward to “Grow Acceptance” because the topic is important to the office.

“I am looking forward to providing event participants with a grow acceptance reminder succulent,” Miller said. “Growing acceptance is a priority of the Office of Accessibility, so I am happy to have the opportunity to generate disability awareness and acceptance among the University community.”

For those who are unable to attend events, Miller said it is important to know what services the Office of Accessibility offers and to be comfortable talking about the services with others who may need them.

“Our events give us the opportunity to increase disability awareness and acceptance in general,” Miller said, “so for those who cannot participate... I encourage them to take advantage of opportunities to learn more about disabilities and the abundance of resources available, outside of these events.”

Students can contact the Office of Accessibility by email at access@uakron.edu or by phone at 330-972-7928 for more information about the services offered or to volunteer for future Disabilities Awareness weeks.

Disabled UA Student Left in Dorm Room During Fire Alarm

buchtelite.com/38228/news/disabled-ua-student-left-in-dorm-room-during-fire-alarm/

Best of SNO

Hannah Laudo, a senior at The University of Akron with Cerebral Palsy, was screaming for help when the fire alarm went off in Spanton Hall. No one came.



Hannah Laudo (left) tells copy editor Megan Parker (right) about her experiences with accessibility at The University of Akron.

Megan Parker

This article is part one of a two-part series. Part one covers the incident from the perspective of the student.

Part two covers the response from different departments at The University of Akron.

A University of Akron student with disabilities was left in her dorm room despite yelling for help due to a fire alarm that went off in Spanton Hall on Feb. 23.

Senior Hannah Laudo, a social work major about to graduate in May, requires a wheelchair for mobility, along with physical assistance with transferring into and out of her wheelchair, due to Cerebral Palsy.

Outside of those times where Laudo has assistance, she is completely independent in terms of getting across campus, attending classes and sleeping throughout the night, thus being able to be left without an aide.

Throughout her entire college career at UA, Laudo has stayed in the same dorm room on the first floor of Spanton Hall, where she is able to exit a building without worry of emergencies situations as long as she is psychically in her wheelchair.

While this is not the first time that Laudo has dealt with a false fire alarm in Spanton Hall while in bed, this is the first time the incident could have been worse had there been an actual fire.

According to Laudo, the fire alarm went off around 7:30 in the morning, a few hours before her aide would arrive to help her get out of bed for the day.



Megan Parker

Hannah Laudo enjoys driving around campus when the weather is nice with a drink from Starbucks in her hand.

Once the alarm went off, Laudo said her first reaction was to “open up the door and scream for somebody to come. Because any other time it has happened, somebody has heard me screaming and they came.”

With a button provided by accommodations from the Office of Accessibility, Laudo is able to open and close the door to her room without having to physically push the door.



Megan Parker

When Laudo is resting in her bed, her chair is parked across the room next to the door in order to charge for the next day.

Unfortunately, no one heard Laudo yelling for help, which resulted in no one checking on her during what appeared to be an emergency, or even afterward when the loudspeakers had announced that the situation was cleared.

“All I heard was the emergency situation has been cleared on the emergency indoor speaker,” Laudo said, “making me think that there was a real fire. I didn’t know until around 2:30 that afternoon that it wasn’t a fire.”

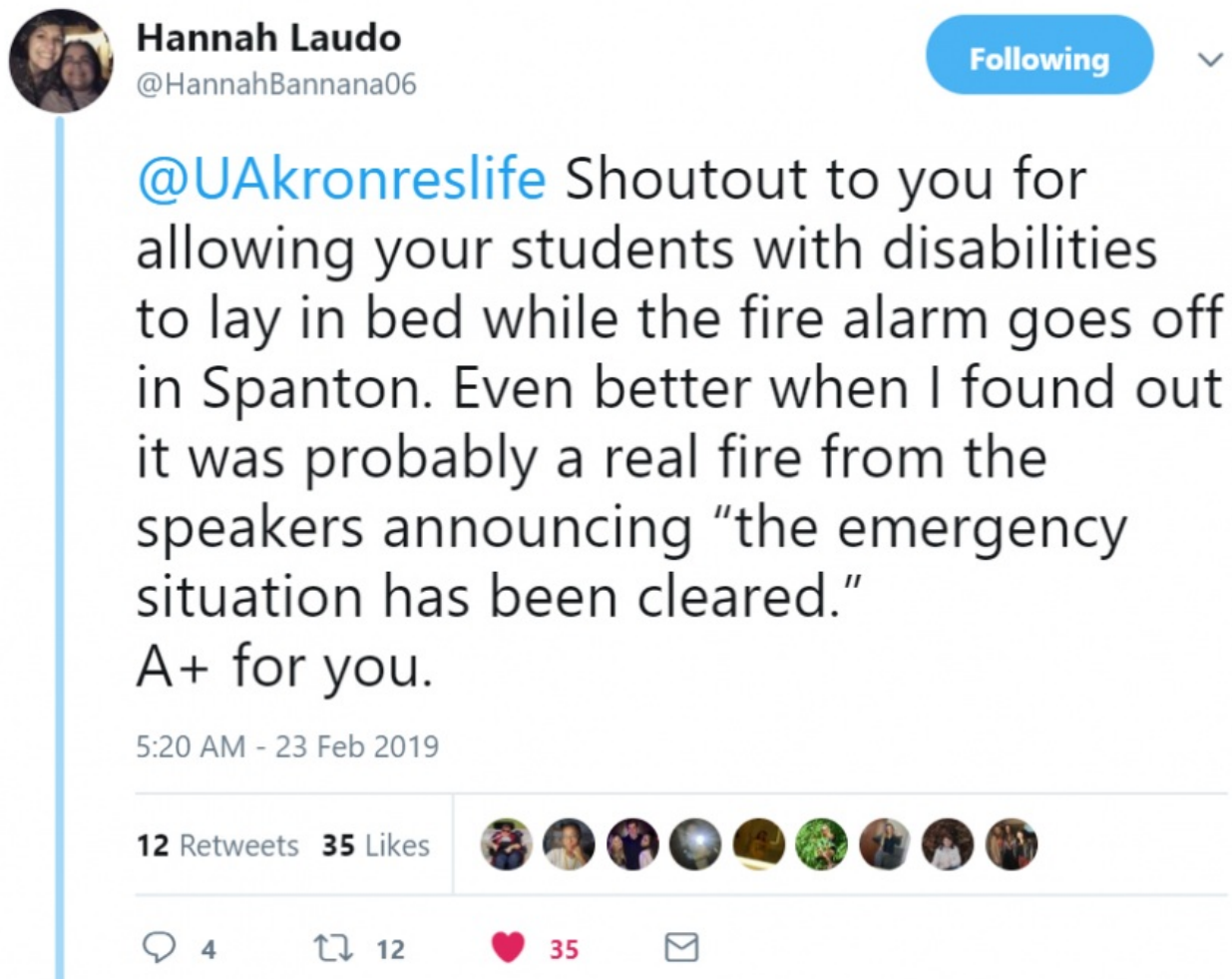
Later that day, Laudo said she went to the front desk in Spanton Hall to ask what happened and why no one checked to see if she was safe, but the people at the desk had no idea what she was talking about.

In order to file a complaint about the situation, Laudo had to go to a completely different building on campus: where she was met with apologies but no solutions or answers on what had happened.

"I tried to go to the head of Residence Life and Housing and she basically said they did all that they could do, which I feel is not enough," Laudo said. "I understand that they're students, but it doesn't take more than a second to run down the hall to make sure that I am okay."

Laudo later learned that officers from The University of Akron Police Department were actually inside the building but was told that they did not hear her.

She also took to social media to air frustrations on UA's handling of the incident and shed light on her experience.



A similar situation occurred during Laudo's freshman year while her mother was on campus due to difficulty finding aides to cover all the shifts required for Laudo to live independently.

Before moving into the dorm, Laudo said her mother informed the resident assistants that if an emergency situation were to arise, someone would need to see if she was safe or not.

One late night while Laudo and her mother were in the dorm, the fire alarm went off. Laudo said her mother waited for a minute to see if someone was going to come to the room: again, no one did.



Megan Parker

Hannah Laudo's dorm room in Spanton Hall is set up similarly to a traditional dorm, with extra room for her wheelchair to freely move about.

"Finally, she just got me up and the RA was standing there, just holding the door open and smiling," Laudo said.

After this incident, Laudo said her mother went to the residence life coordinator. Since then, the person holding that position has changed three times and may not have been made aware of the situation.

In general terms of campus accessibility, Laudo said she rates UA four out of ten due to this situation and previous issues she has had with getting around on campus.

One instance of difficulties getting around on campus occurred after snow left the sidewalks covered to the point she had to drive her motorized wheelchair on the street, Laudo said.

“So we literally had to go in the street because the sidewalks were so bad. When we got by the Rec Center, I got stuck by where those trees come out of the sidewalk,” Laudo said.

Laudo’s friend had to leave her in order to find the nearest blue emergency call kiosk to call UAPD to help. An officer eventually arrived and was able to help get Laudo’s chair unstuck.

Since the false fire alarm on Feb. 23, Laudo has been in contact with members from the Undergraduate Student Government and the Office of Accessibility.

When asked to comment on the situation, the Department of Residence Life and Housing declined and instead referred The Buchtelite to the Office of Accessibility.

Overall, Laudo hopes that the University will listen to her story and make changes for future students with disabilities so they don’t have to go through a similar trauma in emergency situations.

“I just hope that more people are held accountable and that this isn’t just forgotten,” Laudo said. “I know that I am graduating in May, so I won’t have to deal with this, but that doesn’t mean future people won’t have to deal with something like this.”

The Buchtelite will follow up on the University’s response to the incident and report on steps UA is taking to prevent such instances concerning students with disabilities from occurring in the future.

Designing Independence: UA Students Modify Power Wheels for Children with Disabilities

[buchtelite.com/38473/news/designing-independence-ua-students-modify-toy-cars-for-children-with-](https://buchtelite.com/38473/news/designing-independence-ua-students-modify-toy-cars-for-children-with-disabilities)

Best of SNO

Students from the Biomedical Engineering Design and NASA Robotics teams worked with Inclusioneers to provide children with toy car adapted to their physical capabilities.



Sophomores Hanna Mackey (left) and Megan Bruns contributed work to all eight adapted Power Wheels vehicles, each one needing to fit specific needs and capabilities. For the vehicle pictured here, Mackey and Bruns built a desktop with a push-button that controls

the vehicle. It was customized for a child named Oscar (center).

(Image via The University of Akron)

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once asked, “Life’s most urgent question is: What are you doing for others?”

Students from the Biomedical Engineering Design and NASA Robotics teams at The University of Akron answered this question through customizing electric toy cars for local children with physical disabilities.

According to a University [press release](#), the student teams from the College of Engineering redesigned controls, settings and more features of eight Power Wheels vehicles as part of a workshop called “Adapt-A-Car” by [Inclusioneers](#).

Inclusioneers is a nonprofit organization in Summit County that works toward providing mobility and increased independence to individuals whose disabilities otherwise hinder those areas.



(Image via The University of Akron)

Team members David Klett (left), Shawn Sharratt, Seth Carpenter, Kelly O’Neill and Luke Schmitt adapted a Power Wheels “Wild Thing” vehicle, a 360-turning model that features a two-wheeled designed with the operator sitting in a seat between each tire, controlling the vehicle with two joysticks.

“At Inclusioneers, we envision a place where people of all abilities can enjoy public facilities, events and activities with their families, enlarging their social community,” their [website](#) said.

The eight adapted Power Wheels cars were given to local children on March 15 at Lock 3 Park in Downtown Akron during Inclusioneers Adapt-A-Car Inclusion Day event.

According to the press release, the Adapt-A-Car program focuses on making mechanical and electrical modifications to Power Wheels cars that are originally designed for children ages 1-6 without disabilities.

Team Efforts Lead to Results

Sophomores Hanna Mackey of Seville and Megan Bruns of Brunswick worked with physical therapists to design the best adaptations for each car in order to fit the capabilities of the children receiving them, according to the press release.

“For example, limited movement in the arms or legs proved a need for modified seating, steering, or acceleration. Other disabilities required more support in some areas than a standard car would provide (such as leg or forearm support),” the press release said.

Other modifications that needed to be made include steering and acceleration through a joystick or buttons on the steering wheel, desktop controls for easier to reach controls and adaptive seating.

Wheelchair and mobility equipment companies Miller’s Rental and Sales, Inc. and Numotion customized the adaptive seats used for the Power Wheels cars.

Bruns, a second-year biomedical engineering major, said it was amazing having the ability to help Akron children with disabilities as part of her career at UA.

“Watching this project help children has shown me that pursuing biomedical engineering is the right track for me,” Bruns said. “Being able to help solve or better medical problems for people is what I want for my future career and Adapt-A-Car helped me realize that.”

Mackey, a second-year exercise science major, also said she enjoyed the experience of working with the Adapt-A-Car and is thankful for having the opportunity as a UA student.

“This project has helped me realize my passion for rehabilitation and pediatrics, and has led me to pursue physical therapy school upon graduation,” Mackey said. “This project has not only been fun, but has furthered my development in skills such as communication, work ethic and dedication.”

Putting Skills to the Test

Three students from UA's NASA Robotics team adapted one of the Power Wheels "Wild Things" vehicle for any person with a physical disability in Akron-based Cub Scout Pack #3310, the press release said.

"Wild Thing" car is a two-wheeled design controlled by two joysticks with a 360-turning radius, with the operator seat between each wheel. The two joysticks were replaced with a single 3D-printed joystick for easier control.

"The team even developed its own programming for the vehicle with additions that included a proximity alarm (with its own on/off switch) to warn the user and others if a collision may occur and a speed control dial to speed up and slow down as needed," the press release said.

Efforts between Inclusioneers and the engineering students were coordinated by:

- Shawn Sharratt, a third-year biology major from Medina.
- Kelly O'Neill, a fifth-year electrical engineering major from Greensburg, Pa.
- David Klett, a fourth-year computer engineering major from Wooster.
- Seth Carpenter, a fourth-year computer engineering major from Medina.
- Luke Schmitt, a fifth-year mechanical engineering major from Chicago, Ill.

According to Klett, the ability to use skills from the classroom to help another person was an amazing opportunity, as well as "a duty as the builders/innovators to contribute directly to the benefit of our local community."

Many Lessons Offered through Projects

Carpenter, who served in an advisory role for the team and led logistics, said the project helped him learn more about the difficulties faced by people with disabilities and hopes he could do more to help.



A member of Akron-based Cub Scouts Pack #3310 test drives the Power Wheels "Wild Thing" vehicle student engineers redesigned with controls that make it easier to drive, along with a new seat.

UA students and Inclusioneers have been partnering on projects since 2015 and the Adapt-A-Car workshop since 2017, the press release said. Mike Firtha '76, a UA alumnus, founded the organization.

"Inclusioneers has a charitable mission to provide inclusive engineered solutions to help the disenfranchised enjoy the same facilities, events and activities that are commonly taken for granted by the mainstream population," Firtha said.

UA Students Increase Child's Mobility with Modified Toy Truck

buchtelite.com/38810/news/ua-students-increase-childs-mobility-with-modified-toy-truck/

Biomedical engineering students adapted a Power Wheels Truck for a boy with Down Syndrome.



Nathan Ramey gives older brother, Trent, a ride in his newly adapted Power Wheels vehicle.

(Image via The University of Akron)

Since September 2016, 4-year-old Nathan Ramey has attended occupational, physical and speech therapy at Akron Children's Hospital.

Nathan has Down syndrome and is currently in remission from leukemia, after taking his last dosage of chemotherapy on Jan. 18, according to a University [press release](#).

“Like any kid his age, Nathan finds a Power Wheels car to be quite the appealing toy,” the press release said. “But because of his illnesses, Nathan has stunted growth and low muscle tone.”

This is where a team of biomedical engineering students in The University of Akron’s College of Engineering stepped in and modified an off-the-shelf Power Wheels for Nathan.



(Image via The University of Akron)

Check out the smile on Nathan Ramey as he tools around in his very own Power Wheels truck.

Originally proposed to UA’s Biomedical Engineering Design Teams by the Summit County Developmental Disabilities Board, the team began working on the adaptations in 2017.

Four main modifications were made to the Power Wheels vehicle donated by Fisher-Price, according to the press release. These include:

- An accelerator pedal redesigned to be within Nathan’s reach and requiring less force to activate.
- A seat modified to be slightly higher, with stronger seat belts and extra cushioning.
- A front bumper to help take away most of the impact if Nathan strikes an obstruction.
- A remote-control kill switch that allows Nathan’s parents to instantly turn off the vehicle’s battery if the youngster is headed in a dangerous direction.

While Nathan received his modified truck at home in February, he wasn't able to drive it outside until April due to a brief illness that kept him inside, according to the press release.

The design team met with Nathan and his family at East Liberty Park in Green to see Nathan drive the truck outdoors for the first time.



(Image via The University of Akron)

Mom and Dad, AmyAileen and Joseph Ramey, are pictured here with Nathan and his older brother Trent, along with College of Engineering students Steven Innocenzio, Reid Polis and Christopher Halley, who adapted the truck for Nathan; and Heather Demor, senior design engineer for Air Enterprises, who aided with the project.

AmyAileen Ramey, Nathan's Mother, said everyone had been excited to see the adaptations working well and Nathan's ability to drive despite having his illness limit his abilities.

"Now that the weather is getting warmer, Nathan will be able to enjoy his new truck more often, especially since because his treatments for leukemia ended three months ago," AmyAileen said.

Project leader Christopher Halley, a fifth-year biomedical engineering major from Canfield, Ohio, said the project had been a great way for the team to gain real-life experience and see the results of their work.

“This project has been an excellent opportunity for the team to get practical engineering experience,” Halley said. “The adapted Power Wheels truck is going to be able to expose Nathan to a part of his life that he wasn’t able to reach before.”

Along with Halley, the team was comprised of Reid Polis, a fourth-year student from Poland, Ohio; and Steven Innocenzi, a third-year student from Solon, Ohio. An engineer from Air Enterprises also mentored the group.

Student Accessibility Group at Akron Acts as Social Networking, Advocacy Organization

buchtelite.com/39410/news/student-accessibility-group-at-akron-acts-as-social-networking-advocacy-

Best of SNO

This group was created by the Office of Accessibility in response to a situation last semester involving a student with disabilities.



Those at the first S.A.G.A. meeting include (left to right) Jack Wolf, Ekena Poole, Breanna Sprenger, Kathleen Kulick, USG Senator-at-Large Isaiah Smith and Megan Parker.

Megan Parker

Editor's Note: Megan Parker was elected President of the Student Accessibility Group at Akron. This article was written strictly based on information from other group members.

The Office of Accessibility created the Student Accessibility Group at Akron (S.A.G.A.) in response to a previous campus incident and as a way to provide students with a place to discuss issues of accessibility.

Last semester, a student with physical disabilities was left in their dorm room during a fire alarm. Although the situation turned out to be a false alarm, the student did not learn of this until later the same day.

As the initial response to the situation, the Office of Accessibility sent out an email outlining a new evacuation memo that tells students the steps to take in emergency situations.

Additionally, the Office of Accessibility Associate Director Jessica DeFago and Director Kathleen Kulick expressed that while it is not required, students should register with them in order to receive accommodations and other assistance.

The Undergraduate Student Government also got involved after the incident, as former residence life Senator Nisya Hunter and other senators worked with the student and Office of Accessibility to find solutions.

Since the incident, the student has graduated from The University of Akron. Nonetheless, their mark has been left on campus as they helped in the creation of S.A.G.A.

Current USG Senator for the College of Business Administration, Grant McConnell; a sophomore business data analytics major, said he first learned of S.A.G.A. being formed at the beginning of this year.

"Former Senator Hunter and myself were looking to help create such a group like this to bring awareness to issues here on campus," McConnell said. "Once I was informed that such a group was being created, I was ecstatic."

According to results from a survey sent out by the Office of Accessibility, students interested in the group thought it was a good idea and wanted the group to be focused on social networking and advocacy.

After the group's first meeting on Sept. 11 in the Jean Hower Taber Student Union, Kulick hopes that those involved will eventually feel empowered enough to share their experiences on campus.

"My goal for the group is that they find their voice and feel empowered to express their concerns in a respectful, solution-based manner," Kulick said.

Of the students involved, sophomore Jack Wolf, a marketing and sales major, decided to join S.A.G.A. in order to be a part of bringing changes to campus for the improvement of all students' lives, not just those with disabilities.

Wolf is looking forward to working with S.A.G.A. throughout the semester, as it also gives him a chance to meet new people on campus with common goals and experiences on campus.

Breanna Sprenger, a freshman biology and child development major, is also looking forward to working with others in the group. However, Sprenger will be working with them as the Vice President of the group.

Sprenger first joined S.A.G.A. to help raise awareness for issues of accessibility on campus. Then, when she learned the group needed a Vice President, she took the position to use her own experiences to help that awareness.

"My goals as VP are to be a leader, increase the group size and spread more awareness," Sprenger said.

As for USG's representation in the group, McConnell hopes to help S.A.G.A. grow as much as possible on campus as part of USG's main purpose of building community and enhancing the college experience.

During the group's first meeting, topics of discussion included issues with various elevators on campus, parking troubles and the evacuation procedures in place for students with disabilities.

Of all the topics discussed, one important item was opening the group to invite students without disabilities to attend meetings in order to offer different viewpoints and learn about accessibility directly from those impacted by it.

"Having people from different backgrounds will help us to come up with different solutions to problems that are brought up through S.A.G.A.," Wolf said.

As the semester continues and more meetings are held for S.A.G.A., Kulick hopes more students, with and without disabilities, will get involved with the discussions of accessibility and disabilities arise.

“Offering solution-based assistance and real world insights will add to any conversation when issues to disability are discussed,” Kulick said.

The next meeting is scheduled for Oct. 16 at 6 p.m. in Bierce Library by Starbucks. Future meetings for the fall semester are still being scheduled.

Office of Accessibility Sponsors Disabilities Awareness Week with New Events, Activities

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Running from Oct. 30 to Nov. 7, a wide variety of events will be available for campus community members to participate in.



The Office of Accessibility's window decorated with Zippy and characters from the movie "Up" to inspire students on campus.

Megan Parker

By Megan Parker, Editor-in-Chief
October 29, 2019

Sponsored by the Office of Accessibility, Disabilities Awareness Week is returning to The University of Akron with a variety of events from Oct. 30 to Nov. 7 to promote inclusiveness and education about disabilities.

Disabilities Awareness Week originally began at UA in 2006. Since the first year, eleven of the weeks have been sponsored by the Office of Accessibility.

Tess Miller, a disability specialist and service coordinator for the Office of Accessibility, said this week aims at increasing campus knowledge of disabilities and the ways each type has unique characteristics.

For students who may not be able to attend the events for Disabilities Awareness Week, Miller said the Office of Accessibility's hope is that the campus community understands the importance of inclusion.

"Inclusion can be an all-encompassing practice," Miller said. "We also hope that students could self-identify as being an advocate for individuals with disabilities."

When putting the calendar of events together each year, Miller attempts to offer diversity in the types of activities offered while also including some that have not been offered in the past.

Through offering a different set of events and activities each year, the goal is to give students, faculty and staff at UA educational and interactive experiences related to disabilities.

"When planning the week, the goal is to offer a variety of events uniquely planned to address different areas of interest and disability related topics," Miller said.

This year, the events are promoting interaction between those with and without a disability, as well as ways to manage stress and mental health on campus.

"Bury It! Therapeutic Potting Event" kicks off Disabilities Awareness Week on Wednesday, Oct. 30, in the Jean Hower Taber Student Union Piano Lounge from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Attendees will get to "reflect on what is causing negative emotions in their life, and then therapeutically release those feelings by writing it on seed paper and burying the plant seeds in a pot," the Office of Accessibility website said.

Then, Spoken Word Artist Carlos Andres Gomez will perform that night in the student union Starbucks as one of the [7:17 events](#) sponsored each semester by the [Residence Hall Programming Board](#).

For Oct. 31, the Office of Accessibility invites campus members to "Ready, Set, Relax" in the

piano lounge from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Participants will learn about the benefits essential oils and aromatherapy have on health and wellness, as well as be able to make a few aromatherapy products.

The next event is “Strike A Pose – Chair Yoga and Yoga Basics Demonstration” on Nov. 4 from 1 to 2 p.m. in Studio A of the Student Recreation and Wellness Center.

For Nov. 5, campus members will have the chance to learn the alphabet and basic phrases in sign language during “American Sign Language (ASL) Learning the Basics” from 2 to 4 p.m. in room 310 of the student union.

Then the WAGtime Therapy Dogs will be in Bierce Library on Nov. 6 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. in order to help campus members de-stress.

To end Disabilities Awareness Week, the Office of Accessibility is sponsoring “Outside the Lines – Mindful Coloring” on Nov. 7 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. in the student union piano lounge.

“The event encourages attendees to express their individuality as they practice the art of mindful coloring and learn the positive health impacts of coloring and mindfulness,” the Office of Accessibility website said.

Although there are several events planned for Disabilities Awareness Week this year, Miller isn’t looking forward to one event over the other. As coordinator of the week, Miller is excited to see the diversity in campus members participating.

“Each year it is exciting to see individuals from different backgrounds and different university affiliations, come together to experience and benefit from the events in ways that are unique to them,” Miller said.

According to coverage of Disabilities Awareness Week 2018, planning for the week of events begins a year in advance.

One way the Office of Accessibility plans to increase future involvement in creating the week’s events is to add a survey on their website where members of the UA campus community can make suggestions.

“Our goal is to provide students, faculty and staff with experiences that are both educational and interactive,” Miller said. “The Office of Accessibility welcomes members of the campus community... to share their ideas for future events.”

Students can contact the Office of Accessibility by email at access@uakron.edu or by phone at 330-972-7928 for more information about the services offered or to volunteer for future Disabilities Awareness Week events.

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