

The process I chose to conduct my research was a focus group in a forum setting. The object was to be a discussion of the topic of how the campus could be improved to most benefit students in general, and more particularly those who are mobility restricted, from limited funding that could be made available through a Grad-class or similar project. I hoped to achieve from the discussion a recorded session directed to the problems, that could then be used to influence decision makers with qualitative evidence.

Attempts were made to identify, seek out and invite people using wheelchairs to the forum. This was a more difficult process than anticipated, as those who dealt with the targeted people professionally were not disposed to give out names of their clients, and likewise the Canadian Paraplegic Association does not give out members' names. The University of course, does not keep track of its students with any such categorization. I had placed an advertisement in the Brunswickan, which drew no response. After much travelling I did manage to find students who were on the campus, and former students who were willing to participate. I was helped in this by Chris McAloon, a former student at St. Thomas who had been involved and provided input on behalf of wheelchair users in St. Thomas' new building and exterior garden landscaping.

By November 18, the date of the forum, I had contacted or attempted to contact thirteen people who qualified for the forum. Of these, five had agreed to meet. Tilley hall, Rm 300 was set up with a video camera for the session, the room rearranged, and overheads and maps of the campus were made available. Only one person came.

In thinking about the response, I realized that something had gone wrong in my assumptions concerning the forum-focus group method. Perhaps the most obvious now is that all along the way I found that people were reluctant to give others' names and more than twice it was men-

tioned that individuals with disabilities had different needs from others with disabilities; that needs were very individual. This was from both those in the targeted group, and from those that dealt with them professionally. While I understood this, I think now that the point I may have missed is that these individuals don't want to be thought of as a group, they prefer to think of themselves as individuals, who manage in spite of the problems they have encountered, and don't want to seem to be an imposition on others. While each is candid in discussing the issue of accessibility for themselves one on one, they don't wish to come forward as a group because they do not think of themselves as a group and do not wish others to classify them as a part of a group. Ideally then, the research would have been carried out on a one to one basis and possibly recorded in a different way than video taping.

I spoke with several people who are involved with the issue as part of their work. In speaking with the Dean of Students I found that there had been a report done over the summer 1991 through the Challenge program, titled "Accessibility and Services for Students with Disabilities," which outlines the areas of the current issue currently being covered by the university, but adds few insights on planning. I contacted the English Department in Carleton Hall which is inaccessible, to help me in my search. They know the people with mobility restrictions as they must make arrangements to change classrooms in the instance needed. Dinah Stocker who works in bio-medical prosthesis was interviewed. She had recently been commissioned by Dr. Travis, Vice President Academic, to do a report on "The Access to University Services for Students with Disabilities."

Betty Atkinson, an interior designer who had just completed a course in new design guidelines set out by the Provincial government, pointed out that in design it may be necessary to consider restrictions other than mobility. For instance, properly designed walkways for the blind use a different material along the edge than in the middle, the different material providing a

# Campus Accessibility



By Frank McCullough

different sound or feel, thereby providing a guide. There may also be conflicts created by design. For instance, to those in wheelchairs curbs are a barrier; the blind depend on curbs to define streets, and provide safety.

Dr. Garland, Associate Vice President of Administration, who is in charge of physical aspects of the campus, spoke with me by phone and provided maps for overheads. I gathered from him that their policy was to plan for new buildings to be designed to

made. Perhaps the most noticeable is the recent installation of an assisted door at the Harriet Irving Library this fall. Interestingly, this change was made with little fanfare.

Still, there are problems that need to be addressed. There is only one room on campus, in Lady beaverbrook Residence, that has been fitted for wheelchair use. For residence meals, the student who would reside there would have to climb across in front of the Old Arts Building, and then up to McConnell Hall.

In the area between the Harriet Irving Library and the Student Union Building, the terrain along the walkways follow a twisted route, till sideways, fall off and ascend abruptly, have potholes, cracks and curbs. In wet weather puddles and ice form, making the route unpleasant at best and possibly dangerous for anyone. I have appended some photographs to illustrate my point, but must mention that they were taken in dry conditions and do not fully show the problem.

An important part of accessibility awareness involves educating members of the public who otherwise might never give the issue any thought. In this article, Frank McCullough describes his experiences of trying to develop a qualitative analysis of UNB's inaccessibility problems.

connect by enclosed walkways and elevators. Until the new buildings are built, the policy is one of accommodating the student by changing classrooms when buildings are inaccessible and rearranging parking when necessary. The university has provided temporary ramps in certain cases.

One who I would have liked to interview and was not able to contact was Joanne McLeod, a lawyer who graduated from law at UNB in a wheelchair and has since earned an Order of Canada.

While real problems do exist, the administration has paid better than lip service to the situation and strides are being

Unless they were in Engineering or Computer Science, the library and most of their classes would be an up and down commute, several times a day. From the front door of the residence, all directions slope and the parking area is sloped, making it nearly impossible to use. If one of the residences up the hill had been fitted instead, the effort would be greatly reduced. Obviously, given such circumstances, few people that are not already residents of Fredericton would feel welcome to study at UNB.

The second general problem for the mobility restricted on the campus is evident in the walkways, which seem to be built as an after-thought. For example,

A look at this area is practical in that there are currently two wheelchair users in the Business Administration Program, centered in Singer Hall. The area could be improved dramatically in several ways:

1) The route from the SUB cafeteria level should be straightened and properly graded with a continuous slope to a level crossing at Pacey Drive. At the Pacey Drive end the path would "Y" with an upper route crossing at the Library entrance elevation and the lower route continuing its slope toward the entrance to Singer Hall.

one level.

3) There is an opportunity to make Kierstead Hall, which contains audio-visual services and computer labs as well as classes, better accessible from the east end, by a permanent ramp from the elevation of the library walk. Kierstead Hall is currently wheelchair accessible only from the northside basement level and not at all from the Main level.

4) Recent renovations to the southern side of the western wing of the SUB in which the basement was dug up to repair a drainage problem, indicate the opportunities missed by the lack of awareness in planning. The paved path which follows along the wall was replaced as it had been before. A little forethought at the time could have extended the path toward Pacey Drive and improved its grade. This would have been an improvement as people in wheelchairs in the SUB must have a key or call the SUB

security to use the elevator to get to the cafeteria level. When arriving at cafeteria level, the elevator opens into the kitchen.

In conclusion, the overall implied policy of the University is a re-active rather than a proactive stance on the issue of campus accessibility. While this is perhaps understandable to some extent, the lack of taking care of some of the smaller details, in comparison to the planning of grand designs for capital expenditure in a time of restraint, is disturbing. Both the Student Union, with its plans for expansion, and the Administration, with plans for more buildings, may be missing a point; that accessibility to a university education, not grand capital construction, is the issue of the nineties.

This article was originally researched and written by Frank McCullough as part of a UNB course, BA 4319.



These photos demonstrate the problem of inaccessibility at one of UNB's many trouble spots. The photo above shows the sloping of some of UNB's paths and walkways which makes them prone to cracks, potholes and ice patches (note particularly the dip in the walkway leading towards Kierstead Hall, immediately in front of the Harriet Irving Library). The photo below shows the curb and upward-sloping sidewalk which wheelchair users would run into going towards the SUB.

