

Leveling the playing field

Augie infrastructure and attitudes aren't accessible
for all students



Photo illustrations by Thea Gonzales

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Education should be for all. Any student who wishes to go to a certain college that they work hard to get into, should be able to go there. Neither ethnicity, gender, religion, sexuality nor disability should block a student from pursuing their educational career at college of top choice.

Augustana seems to welcome students from different religions, sexualities and ethnicities, but when it comes to disabilities, it doesn't do the best job.

On Friday, April 12, guest students applying to be part of Augustana's honors program came to Augie for their honors orientation. During the orientation, the guest students attended a

regular honors class with current students. When the class was done, my classmate and I offered to walk the students to the Gerber center for the next part of the orientation. I walked next to one of the students who was in the wheelchair, who I will refer to as "Emma" in the article instead of using her real name.

My classmate walked next to the other students and they went ahead of us up the stairs to the fourth floor. The students walked in front of us and didn't even bother to look back to make sure we were doing okay. When Emma and I got to Gerber, I realized that we would be needing to take an elevator because Emma was in a wheelchair and couldn't walk up.

I went to the side of the building but the door that led to the elevator was locked. I asked Emma to wait for me as I went up to the library to ask a person who worked there to unlock the door for us. When I went upstairs, the librarian told me that none of the elevators in Gerber were working. I asked her what to do and she just shrugged. I asked her again and she apologized and told me that she didn't know what we should do.

I realized I was on my own, so I went down to Emma, explained the situation and told her that

we'll be taking a different route.

I decided that the best way to go was down the Slough. As many of you know, there are many parts of the Slough that go uphill.

It took us about 20 minutes to go through the Slough path. When Emma would try to wheel herself up the hill, she got really tired and told me to help her. As we were going up the hill, we saw two students walking from a distance who looked at us and saw that we were struggling but decided to look away and didn't offer to help.

I was shocked and ashamed to say that these two student went to the college that Emma was considering to come to. After what seemed like forever, we were finally able to make our way up the slough. We walked through Westerlin halls and as we were walking from Westerlin to Gerber, there were many holes and cracks on the sidewalk. Not only did Augustana make it harder for disabled students by not providing an alternative ways to get up stairs, but they also don't fix their cracked sidewalks. Emma's wheelchair kept getting stuck in these cracks.

By the time we made it to Gerber, we were both a mess and very exhausted. When we finally made it, Emma gave me a hug and thanked me for staying with her even though I had a class that I had to get to.

I apologized for what she had to go through and wished her luck with the rest of her honors orientation.

After leaving her, I started thinking about my classmate who just left

and didn't even look back to see if Emma would be able to make her way up. I started thinking about the librarian who didn't help me find a solution and kept shrugging and telling me that she didn't know how to help me. I started thinking about the two Augie students who were walking down the Slough path, saw us struggling, and didn't offer to help.

I felt ashamed. I felt ashamed of this school that I went to. If I were Emma, I wouldn't want to come to a school that doesn't try to help others who have disabilities. Augustana is definitely not wheelchair friendly.

Since most of the school is hilly, Augustana should be providing alternative ways to get to places. A school where people with disabilities aren't treated fairly, isn't a school that I would want to encourage my friends to come to.

Last year, Brady Johnson wrote an article about accessibility at Augie. He wrote about how students think that "Augustana is still having a hard time being accessible to students who have a physical disability, both permanent and temporary."

Sometimes it's not just about being accessible. Sometimes it's the way our students treat those with disabilities.

It would've made such a big difference if my classmate stayed with us to make sure Emma was able to get up the fourth floor.

It would've made such a big difference if the worker helped me more than just shrugging. It would've made such a difference if the two students came and helped me push Emma up the Slough path.