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“That Noisy Mess in the East Lobby”: Physical Accessibility at Chicago–Area Universities, 1970–1990

Project description

This project examines the history of disabled students and disability rights activism at the University of Chicago after the passage of Section 504 but before the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and contextualizes the protest within moments of activism at other universities like Northwestern University and the University of Illinois at Chicago, and within the broader disability rights movement. Using the lens of the 1983 protest staged by social work student Jeff Ellis and the Ad Hoc Committee on Handicapped Access, I argue that the access regulations outlined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 were largely ignored by the University, demonstrating that access was mainly a concern of affected students and their allies, and that administrators thought of disability as an individual problem to resolve, rather than a facet of societal diversity. UChicago students used tactics like direct action, petitioning, and legal means to attempt to persuade administrators to install an adequate lift. The results of their efforts are uncertain. I argue that UChicago’s attitude toward access lagged behind that of public institutions such as UIC, but that it was on par with Northwestern’s, exposing greater reticence on the part of private universities to prioritize physical access. Private universities like UChicago and Northwestern have always been slower to act, revealing that private universities did not conceive of the “elite” and worthy student as disabled.

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BA Thesis

Name and Department of course instructor/faculty supervisor for project

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“That Noisy Mess in the East Lobby”: Physical Accessibility at Chicago-Area  
Universities, 1970-1990

By

Stephanie Ban

Presented to the Department of History  
in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the BA Degree

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## Dedication

I dedicate my thesis to disabled students past, present, and future.

## Acknowledgements

I could not have written my thesis without the support of family, friends, and mentors. Thanks in particular to my parents, Mary and Dave, and my sister, Courtney, for their continual support of me throughout my life, and especially throughout my college career. My mom's (sometimes uncompensated) labor as a research assistant, transcriber, and personal care assistant made my work possible. Thanks to all of my personal care assistants throughout college, and particularly those assistants with me over the last year: musa bouderdaben, Abby Brockman, Eliza Passell and Sarah McKissock. Thanks to my wonderful girlfriend Emmalie for her edits on my draft and support of my endless venting about the state of my project and the world. Thank you to the legion of friends who kept me afloat even when the process was tough and messy. A special thanks to the members of the Disability Studies Reading Group at UChicago for giving me very helpful feedback on an early draft of my project. Thanks to my advisor, Dr. Susan Burns, for helping me keep things in perspective and for always being able to laugh with me. Thank you to my preceptor, Mariana Brandman, for giving very helpful advice and peanut butter cups. Thank you to the respective archivists and library staffs at the University of Chicago, Northwestern University, and the University of Illinois at Chicago for all of the digging they did for me so that I could strike metaphorical gold. Thank you to everyone who I interviewed: Eileen Libby, Keith Madderom, Nancy Chertok, Sandy Stein, Brian Quail, and Dr. Hanna Gray. With your insights, the story of Jeff Ellis lives on.

Abstract: This project examines the history of disabled students and disability rights activism at the University of Chicago after the passage of Section 504 but before the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and contextualizes the protest within moments of activism at other universities like Northwestern University and the University of Illinois at Chicago, and within the broader disability rights movement. Using the lens of the 1983 protest staged by social work student Jeff Ellis and the Ad Hoc Committee on Handicapped Access, I argue that the access regulations outlined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 were largely ignored by the University, demonstrating that access was mainly a concern of affected students and their allies, and that administrators thought of disability as an individual problem to resolve, rather than a facet of societal diversity. UChicago students used tactics like direct action, petitioning, and legal means to attempt to persuade administrators to install an adequate lift. The results of their efforts are uncertain. I argue that UChicago's attitude toward access lagged behind that of public institutions such as UIC, but that it was on par with Northwestern's, exposing greater reticence on the part of private universities to prioritize physical access. Private universities like UChicago and Northwestern have always been slower to act, revealing that private universities did not conceive of the "elite" and worthy student as disabled.

In April 1983, a group of about 10 students picketed outside the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration (SSA). At the center sat Jeff Ellis, a first year social work student with a sign resting on the footrest of his power wheelchair that read: “Equal Access for All SSA Students.”<sup>1</sup> Ellis had endured months of discriminatory treatment by the university, whose administration had promised that the program would be accessible to him, only to provide him first with a cramped makeshift classroom in the library and then with a lift that was two inches too small for his chair.<sup>2</sup> The administration knew of his disability when the university accepted him, and they assured him that they would modify the SSA building, including bathrooms, and would provide a parking space. However, administrators fell behind on their renovation schedule and did not make the required accommodations.<sup>3</sup> Ellis, physically and emotionally drained from months of broken promises and being denied access to his classes and the SSA faculty, had had enough, and the administration was going to hear about it.

Ellis and his supporters, all able-bodied social work students, picketed in front of the administration building in an attempt to convince the administration to install an elevator that, while more expensive, would be safer for Ellis and any other disabled person using it. The group’s activities attracted the attention of the *Chicago Maroon*, UChicago’s student newspaper, which published a satirical cartoon mocking the overly theoretical approach of the university and the alleged “safety” of the inadequate lift.<sup>4</sup> In a

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<sup>1</sup> SSA Protest Photos, April 1983, School of Social Service Administration. Records. Addenda. Box 219, Unnumbered Folder. “Access Committee 1977-1983”. Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago.

<sup>2</sup> Kevin Rovens, “Handicapped SSA Grad Protests.” *The Chicago Maroon*, April 20, 1983

<sup>3</sup> Rovens

<sup>4</sup> Cartoon is untitled and does not list an author, *Chicago Maroon*, May 4, 1983

fact sheet distributed to members of the SSA community, the Ad Hoc Committee on Handicapped Access, as they called themselves, derided the inadequacy of the lift. They termed it “that noisy mess in the east lobby.”<sup>5</sup>

I explore two main questions in my thesis. First, what does the SSA protest and the administrative reaction to it reveal about administration’s stance and campus climate with regard to wheelchair accessibility? Second, how does UChicago fit in with other universities in the Chicago area, both public and private? I choose to focus on the period from 1970 to 1990 in part to counter the existing historiography, which treats the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 as the crowning achievement of disability rights, with all other activism progressing in a straight line toward it. The scholarship that deals with the scope of disability rights before the ADA is limited, and that which deals with the intersection of physical accessibility and higher education is even more so. In order to address this gap, this essay explores the kinds of accommodations made in Chicago universities before the ADA, which was the most detailed law regarding accessibility but not the first.

The field of disability history has only recently emerged as a branch of historical study, with secondary literature dating back to the early 1980s.<sup>6</sup> Disability rights scholarship tends to be viewed through a certain lens, be it social (Pelka), political (Fleischer and Zames), or legal (Scotch). These approaches to the study of disability make some sense, considering the importance of both sociocultural activism and legal

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<sup>5</sup> The SSA Political Action Committee and the Ad Hoc Task Force on Handicap Accessibility, “What Is That Noisy Mess in the East Lobby?”. School of Social Service Administration. Records. Addenda. Box 219, Unnumbered Folder. “Access Committee 1977-1983”. Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago.

<sup>6</sup> Richard K. Scotch, *From Good Will to Civil Rights: Transforming Federal Disability Policy*. (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2001.) 5

precedents to the disability movement. Oral history also plays a vital role in the secondary literature on the disability rights movement, as it grants the opportunity for activists themselves to “tell their story in their own words.”<sup>7</sup> Many prominent disability rights activists are still alive today, which presents unique opportunities to gather firsthand accounts. Access to higher education has not been the singular focus of the secondary literature examined for this project. Most sources attempt to tell a broader history of disability rights, with some, like Fleischer and Zames, addressing current issues in the disability community.

Fleisher and Zames assert that “...the disability community is far from homogeneous.”<sup>8</sup> This claim is useful to keep in mind when researching UChicago because an even smaller, less representative subset of the disabled population will be found here, due to the selective nature of the school and the high tuition, among other factors. It is precisely the heterogeneity of the community that makes the notion of a cohesive “disability community” elusive, and this forces scholars to focus on issues affecting certain subgroups, like the psychiatric survivor movement or assisted suicide. There is a worrying bias by all of the aforementioned authors in favor of wealthy, white, heterosexual, physically disabled men who are thought of as the drivers of the disability rights movement. This bias is particularly evident in works that feature primary source accounts from disability activists, such as Pelka’s *What We Have Done* and author *From Charity to Confrontation*. It is vitally important to include the voices of multiply marginalized activists and recognize their significant role in the movement. In the

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<sup>7</sup> Fred Pelka, *What We Have Done: An Oral History of the Disability Rights Movement*. (Amherst: U of Massachusetts, 2012.) 113

<sup>8</sup> Doris Zames Fleischer and Frieda Zames, *The Disability Rights Movement: From Charity to Confrontation*. (Philadelphia: Temple U, 2011.) xx

specific case of education, disability studies scholar Christy Oslund notes, “...current discourse on disability and higher education is driven almost exclusively by faculty members, not by students.”<sup>9</sup> The emphasis on faculty experiences over student experiences means that the narratives of disabled students have not been widely circulated. I aim to show that disabled students in the U.S. do have a history and an activist tradition worthy of study. None of this particular literature focuses on Chicago, or, with the exception of a few works, on higher education. Disabled historian Paul Longmore’s work on disability and higher education is one example. In his collection of essays, *Why I Burned My Book*, he wrote one essay about how few disabled students there were at Princeton in 2000, and one essay detailing his own experience with disability discrimination in academia.<sup>10</sup> My project will draw from histories and principles of the disability rights movement, but it will have a much narrower focus, on Chicago specifically. My project speaks to both disabled students in Chicago and to the broader context of how universities approached marginalized students. The value of my approach is that I demonstrate that even within one city, three universities took dramatically different approaches to the same issue and with the same legal requirements.

The work that speaks most directly to my research is Lyn Wilder-Dean’s MA thesis, “Why Shouldn’t We Be Angry: Values of the Chicago Disability Rights Movement in the Words of M. Ervin”.<sup>11</sup> This is the only work that deals with the Chicago disability rights movement. Wilder-Dean uses oral history, some of playwright

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<sup>9</sup> Christy Oslund, *Disability Services and Disability Studies in Higher Education: History, Contexts, and Social Impacts*. (New York: Palgrave McMillan 2015) 75

<sup>10</sup>Paul K. Longmore, *Why I burned my book and other essays on disability* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> Lyn Wilder-Dean, 2014, "Why Shouldn't We Be Angry: Values of the Chicago Disability Rights Movement in the Words of M. Ervin." BASE, EBSCOhost (accessed April 21, 2017).

Mike Ervin's writing, and transcripts from interviews with Ervin to investigate the values and experiences of the Chicago part of the disability rights movement. This is vital in understanding what shaped the movement, but there is no focus on higher education, which is the central lens of my project. While Wilder-Dean's framing of the movement around values is not particularly useful for my purposes, her articulation of the shift from "micro" personal issues to "macro" local or even federal issues resonates especially with the way that many disability rights activists made the personal political.<sup>12</sup>

My methodology draws from social, legal, and political history, and I rely substantially on oral history, news coverage, and correspondence in order to frame the specific events and issues around physical accessibility at Chicago-area universities. This project is the first attempt at documenting disability history and activism at the University of Chicago and the first to situate that activism in the context of other Chicago universities. There has been no prior examination of the 1983 SSA protest or the activities of the Ad Hoc Committee on Handicapped Access. I hope to broaden the body of knowledge of disability rights activism in Chicago, as well as comment on how universities, both public and private, thought about primarily physical accessibility before the ADA. My project also works to complicate the narrative of steady progress leading up to the ADA, where all disabled people received full rights and inclusion. On the local level, events at three universities played out differently from one another depending on administrator attitudes and student strategies. Disability can also be positioned in the broader context of marginalized identity, alongside (and sometimes co-occurring with) marginalization along lines of race, ethnicity, class, gender identity and expression, and sexual orientation, for example. Administrators throughout the period 1970 to 1990 also

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<sup>12</sup> Wilder-Dean 3

faced challenges on how best to include other marginalized students, but disability is often left out of discussions of affirmative action.

I argue that many UChicago administrators viewed wheelchair accessibility as an expensive burden that would cost too much at best, and disrupt the workings of the university at worst. Administrators knew of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which required making educational programs accessible to qualified disabled students, but were resistant to its requirements. Attempts to make the SSA building accessible were driven by Ellis and his supporters, revealing that administrators thought of disability as an individual problem to resolve, rather than a facet of societal diversity. Disability studies scholar Tom Shakespeare distinguishes the medical model of disability, which locates disability in the individual and seeks to cure or rehabilitate people, from the social model, which holds that the barriers that disabled people face originate in society, and can and should be removed.<sup>13</sup> UChicago administrators did not directly apply the medical model to Ellis, but there is a parallel in how they (reluctantly) conceptualized granting him access on an individual level. Ellis himself aligned closely with the social model, thinking of himself as a member of a disabled community who was struggling to achieve his full potential because of environmental barriers. Other protest movements on campus have entered into historical memory, while moments of disability rights activism were forgotten because administrators did not view disability as a kind of diversity. I argue that UChicago's attitude toward access lagged behind that of public institutions such as UIC, but that it was on par with Northwestern's, exposing greater reticence on the part of private universities to prioritize physical access over monetary

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<sup>13</sup> Tom Shakespeare, "The Social Model of Disability," in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. Lennard J. Davis, (New York ; London: Routledge, 2010), 266-7. Shakespeare uses the definition of the social model that originated from the 1970s British activist group the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation.

cost. Private universities like UChicago and Northwestern have been slower to act from at least the 1970s to the present, implying that private universities did not conceive of the “elite” and worthy student as disabled.

### Disability and the Law

It is necessary to situate administrator reactions to the increased pressure to provide wheelchair access in the context of two main federal laws. Both the Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) of 1968 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 created new opportunities for physically disabled students and placed new demands on universities.

The ABA of 1968 was the first federal piece of legislation to address architectural barriers that impede access for physically disabled people.<sup>14</sup> A disabled congressional aide named Hugh Gallagher wrote it.<sup>15</sup> Gallagher had polio and could not access much of the Executive Building where he worked. He was forced to use a coffee can in place of a urinal, as the bathrooms were inaccessible.<sup>16</sup> The ABA mandated that federal buildings, or buildings built on behalf of the federal government, be made accessible to physically disabled people.<sup>17</sup> The act did not include specific standards or guidelines as to what made a building accessible or not, nor did it designate one federal department to oversee compliance efforts. Instead, it was the responsibility of secretaries of the individual federal departments along with the Secretary of Health and Human Services to

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<sup>14</sup> U.S. Access Board, "Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) of 1968 , " Access-board.gov, accessed October 27, 2017, <https://www.access-board.gov/the-board/laws/architectural-barriers-act-aba>.

<sup>15</sup> Lindsey Patterson "The Right to Access: Citizenship and Disability, 1950-1973." Electronic Thesis or Dissertation. Ohio State University, 2012.

<https://etd.ohiolink.edu/>. 15

<sup>16</sup> Patterson 40

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Access Board

set accessibility standards for each building.<sup>18</sup> This decentralized approach unsurprisingly led to inconsistent and ineffective enforcement.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the ABA was a vitally important law, particularly as a starting point upon which later laws would build.

The most directly relevant law for disabled students in higher education before 1990 was Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 broadly regulated federal programming and technology to make it accessible to disabled people.<sup>20</sup> Section 504 is a very short paragraph, and accounts vary as to whether its authors were a small group of congressional aides or whether it was written at the request of the independent living movement (ILM) activist group The Rolling Quads.<sup>21</sup> Section 504 prohibits disability discrimination against “qualified” disabled people in all buildings and programs receiving federal funding, which extends to secondary and postsecondary schools, all types of employment, community programming, and social services. It also states that employers and directors must provide “reasonable accommodation”.<sup>22</sup> Unlike the ABA, Section 504 had a much wider scope of coverage, which was a crucial victory for disabled students and employees.

It also, at least on paper, covered more than just physical or wheelchair access. At least two Supreme Court cases, *Southwestern Community College v. Davis* in 1979 and *Southern College of Optometry v. Doherty* in 1987, involved students with sensory

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<sup>18</sup> U.S. Access Board

<sup>19</sup> Jacqueline Vaughn Switzer, *Disabled Rights: American Disability Policy and the Fight for Equality*. (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003.) 119

<sup>20</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, "Rehabilitation Act," A Guide to Disability Rights Laws, July 2009,, accessed February 26, 2018, <https://www.ada.gov/cguide.htm#anchor65610>.

<sup>21</sup> Patterson 144-5

<sup>22</sup> United States. Dept. of Health, Education, and Welfare. Office for Civil Rights. Office of Program Review and Assistance. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of

1973: Briefing Guide. [Washington: Dept. of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office for Civil Rights, Office of Program Review and Assistance], 1979-1980

disabilities in medicine-related programs.<sup>23</sup> The courts did not consistently side with disabled students. In these two cases, the final decision was not in favor of either student, as it was unclear whether they were “qualified.” Although neither student won, the fact that neither was physically disabled shows some awareness, by the plaintiffs at least, that disability is not only physical. Sally Asbell notes in her communications PhD dissertation, an analysis of the legislative hearings that influenced the writing of Section 504, that debates over the meaning of terms like “qualified handicapped individual” or “reasonable accommodation” made Section 504 difficult for courts to interpret and enforce.<sup>24</sup> With no universal, agreed-upon definitions for these terms, administrators and students undoubtedly were unclear on what the law required of them. However, Section 504 was a landmark law that opened up previously unheard of opportunities for disabled people. The disabled student activists at the three Chicago universities were protected under the ABA and Section 504, and appeals to the law would become particularly useful for the SSA protestors.

It is important to evaluate issues of physical access at each of three major Chicago-area universities: UChicago, Northwestern, and UIC. Placing access issues at each of these universities in dialogue with each other illuminates ways to compare their climates and approaches to physical access. I chose to focus on these three universities because of their location in Chicago, often considered a minor disability rights hub among disability rights activists but almost never addressed in the mainstream disability

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<sup>23</sup> On *Southwestern Community College v. Davis*, see "Supreme Court to Consider Whether Nursing School Can Bar Deaf Student." The Washington Post. (April 22, 1979, Sunday, Final Edition): 650 words. LexisNexis Academic. Web. Date Accessed: 2017/10/27. On *Southern College of Optometry v. Doherty*, see 659 F. Supp. 662; 1987 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 7011. Date Accessed: 2017/12/09. [www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic](http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/lnacademic).

<sup>24</sup> Asbell, Sally Lyn. "Understanding the Rehabilitation Act of 1973: A Rhetorical Analysis of the Legislative Hearings." Order No. 9000650, The University of Utah, 1989. 25

rights literature.<sup>25</sup> I attend UChicago, and I was originally drawn to examining disability activism based both on personal experience as a disabled student and on photos of the 1983 protest that I found on a frustrated whim in the photo archive. Northwestern, as a Chicago-area “peer school” of UChicago with a reputation for selective admissions, serves as a natural point of comparison to UChicago. I chose UIC because of its relative geographical proximity to UChicago and Northwestern, but also because it is a public school with a much better reputation for wheelchair access and a graduate disability studies program.

The University of Chicago, founded in 1890, is a private university that is considered very selective. UChicago is known for “the life of the mind” and valuing theoretical aspects of knowledge and inquiry. UChicago was founded in part by wealthy donors like John D. Rockefeller, and at present has an endowment of 7.5 billion dollars.<sup>26</sup> Their formal student disability services office was established in 2012, 22 years after the passage of the ADA.<sup>27</sup> Northwestern University, also private and funded by wealthy businessmen, was founded in 1851. Northwestern is similarly known for being elite and intellectually oriented but it is also a Division one athletics school. Northwestern’s endowment as of 2017 is 10.5 billion dollars.<sup>28</sup> Their student disability services office was established some time between 1987 and 1990.<sup>29</sup> UIC is a public college founded in 1965. It is less selective than UChicago or Northwestern and has Division one athletics.

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<sup>25</sup> Wilder-Dean 1

<sup>26</sup> University of Chicago, "Annual Report," The University of Chicago, 2017, accessed February 27, 2018, <https://annualreport.uchicago.edu/page/endowment>.

<sup>27</sup> Stephen Denyul "A Culture of Ability: A Qualitative Study of the Lived Experiences of Students with Disabilities at an Elite University." 2013 MA Thesis

<sup>28</sup> Northwestern University, "Growth of the Fund," Northwestern University Investment Office, 2017 , accessed February 28, 2018, <http://www.northwestern.edu/investment/growth-of-the-fund.html>.

<sup>29</sup> Michelle Tirrell, "NU Campus Challenging for Disabled Students." *The Daily Northwestern*, February 12, 1990

Its disability services office was established in 1975.<sup>30</sup> I offer this information as a way of contextualizing the three schools as they exist presently and briefly tracking a relationship between past and present attitudes toward disabled students.

### **The Protest at UChicago**

The first point of entry is the case of the Ad Hoc Committee on Handicapped Access (AHCHA) and its leader, Jeff Ellis, at the University of Chicago. Ellis entered as a graduate student at the School of Social Service Administration (SSA) in the fall of 1982. He used a large power wheelchair for mobility, a fact that the administration may or may not have been aware of prior to his arrival.<sup>31</sup> Ellis soon discovered that he could not access any of his classes, as there was no lift.<sup>32</sup> At the time of Ellis's arrival, the SSA had seven floors total, with a large lobby and a library on the first floor. Classroom spaces were on four floors at both ends, and there were faculty offices on the other end of all of the floors except the first, as well as in the basement, where the restrooms were located.<sup>33</sup> There were only stairs between the floors, and the only entrance without steps was the back entrance, which required navigating through "a large grass patch," according to former SSA librarian Eileen Libby.<sup>34</sup> While the administrators frantically worked on constructing a lift, their solution in the meantime was to partition the SSA library, using some of the space there to fashion a first floor classroom for Ellis, where

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<sup>30</sup> Oscar Miller to Peggy LaPlante, July 7, 1975, UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES, Office of the Chancellor, Chancellor's Central Files, Series: IV, Folders: 450-458 Box 35 Records Group: 003/01/02. FOLDER: COMMITTEE- FACILITIES FOR DISABLED STUDENTS 3-1-2 Series 4 (35-456), Richard J. Daley Library, University of Illinois at Chicago

<sup>31</sup> Brian Quail (classmate of Jeff Ellis) interviewed via FaceTime by author, November 21, 2017. Quail says that he does not believe administrators knew about Ellis's disability, but Ellis claims that administrators did know he used a wheelchair (see footnote 48). Perhaps administrators knew that Ellis used a wheelchair, but not what kind.

<sup>32</sup> Brian Quail interview

<sup>33</sup> SSA Student Association, Ad Hoc Committee on Handicapped Access, "FACT SHEET", March 14, 1983, School of Social Service Administration. Records. Addenda. Box 219, Unnumbered Folder. "Access Committee 1977-1983". Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago.

<sup>34</sup> Eileen Libby (former SSA librarian), interviewed by author in person June 1, 2015 in Chicago, Illinois

some of his classes could be held.<sup>35</sup> For classes too large to be held in the library, Ellis sat at the bottom of the stairs with a speaker while his professor on the top floor shouted into a microphone.<sup>36</sup> At some point between the fall and early spring, a lift was constructed, but it was too small for Ellis to use safely. He got trapped inside it several times, including once for several hours.<sup>37</sup> Ellis held several meetings with administrators, who promised swift action, but plans dragged with no clear solution.<sup>38</sup> He and some supporters from the SSA formed the Ad Hoc Committee for Handicapped Access (AHCHA), in part to argue specifically for the installation of an elevator and in part to pressure administrators to make physical accessibility at SSA a high priority.<sup>39</sup> Ellis and the AHCHA began protesting in April, and activities continued through the end of the spring 1983 quarter.<sup>40</sup> Due to health issues, Ellis never returned for his second year at SSA, and by all accounts the AHCHA dissolved without achieving any concrete commitments from administrators.

The case of the AHCHA's weeks-long but ultimately ineffective protest merits a closer examination of its rhetoric and tactics in order to determine how the students thought about physical access and how they sought to persuade administrators to consider it. Although the physical demonstration outside the SSA was the most visible form of protest, the AHCHA also utilized petitioning, outreach to social work students and faculty at other schools, and coverage by local media as forms of amplifying the lack of access at SSA. The main physical demonstration occurred in April 1983. Students made

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<sup>35</sup> Brian Quail interview

<sup>36</sup> Eileen Libby interview

<sup>37</sup> Brian Quail interview

<sup>38</sup> SSA Student Association, "Students Demand Access for Disabled", April 18, 1983, School of Social Service Administration. Records. Addenda. Box 219, Unnumbered Folder. "Access Committee 1977-1983". Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago.

<sup>39</sup> Rovens

<sup>40</sup> Charles Bloom, "Not Good Enough for the Handicapped." *Hyde Park Herald*, June 8, 1983

signs and marched to the administration building on the main quad, where they formed a picket line.<sup>41</sup> One illuminating aspect of the physical demonstration was the rhetoric of the signs. Some focused only on the inaccessibility of the SSA, for example “SSA: No Handicapped Need Apply” and “Equal Access for All SSA Students.”<sup>42</sup> These signs also positioned Ellis as both deserving of the same treatment as any nondisabled student and as part of the larger community of “handicapped” students. The SSA’s denial of his rights meant a denial of any other disabled student too. Other signs targeted the University as a whole, for example: “U of C says Civil Rights for Handicapped Cost Too Much” and “U of C Violates Civil Rights of Disabled.”<sup>43</sup> It is striking that as the rhetoric expanded to the university instead of only the SSA, the students invoked civil rights language. The AHCHA believed that disabled students possessed civil rights that the university failed to protect. This belief was in line with what disability activists in other parts of the U.S. thought, but UChicago had no established disabled community. Ellis may have been the only wheelchair user at the university, and the majority of his supporters were likely nondisabled. The AHCHA was also aware of the cost of renovations, but its members used rights language that put the emphasis on equality for all students over cost to the university.

The AHCHA also conducted their campaign in writing. They circulated several petitions, most explaining the facts of Ellis’s situation and the failed negotiations with university financial officers. They called on administrators such as the provost, the affirmative action officer, and the University President to halt further modification on the

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<sup>41</sup> SSA Protest Photos

<sup>42</sup> SSA Protest Photos

<sup>43</sup> SSA Protest Photos

inadequate lift and to approve the more expensive but safer option of an elevator.<sup>44</sup> In their petition, the AHCHA called Ellis's exclusion from classroom and office space an "indignity" and used their sense of moral obligation as social workers to highlight the destructive impact of violating the "civil rights" of not only Ellis but all students, faculty, staff, researchers, and community members with disabilities, as well as prospective students.<sup>45</sup> The AHCHA members were thus not only concerned with Ellis's rights, but saw the lack of access at SSA as symptomatic of a university-wide problem that would bar promising students in the future. Many people who signed the petitions to administrators were other SSA students, and according to interviews, undergraduates and students in other divisions did not know about the SSA issue en masse because of the geographical and social distance between SSA and other schools.<sup>46</sup> However, the *Maroon* student newspaper ran a few articles about Ellis and his plight throughout April and May, and the *Hyde Park Herald* mentioned the issue in June.<sup>47</sup>

Media coverage, particularly from the *Maroon*, was a way for the AHCHA to spread the word about inaccessibility at SSA, and the administration's reticent response. Jeff Ellis wrote a short op-ed in which he articulated a case against the chair lift, arguing that it was a short-term solution to a long-term, ongoing, and widespread issue.<sup>48</sup> Ellis was clearly conscious of the administration's response to his case and its consequences

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<sup>44</sup> SSA Student Association Ad Hoc Committee to Provost Robert Adams, April 13, 1983, School of Social Service Administration. Records. Addenda. Box 219, Unnumbered Folder. "Access Committee 1977-1983". Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago. ; Chicago NASW Affiliates to President Hanna Gray, April 16. 1983, School of Social Service Administration. Records. Addenda. Box 219, Unnumbered Folder. "Access Committee 1977-1983". Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago. ; SSA Student Association Ad Hoc Committee to President Hanna Gray, April 16, 1983, School of Social Service Administration. Records. Addenda. Box 219, Unnumbered Folder. "Access Committee 1977-1983". Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago.

<sup>45</sup> SSA Student Association, "FACT SHEET"

<sup>46</sup> Sandy Stein (classmate of Jeff Ellis), interviewed by author over FaceTime, November 4, 2017

<sup>47</sup> Bloom

<sup>48</sup> Jeffry L. Ellis, "U of C Neglects Handicapped." *The Chicago Maroon*, April 8, 1983

for disabled students across the university and in the future. The articles all attempted to get at least some comment from administrators, particularly Vice President of Business and Finance William Cannon, but he was never reachable for comment. Dean of the SSA Philip Hovda appeared to support increased accessibility, saying that he thought there should be an adequate lift.<sup>49</sup> The AHCHA sent a petition informing Joan Dworkin, the president of the National Association of Social Workers, of the inadequate lift in hopes that she would use her influence and the stated pro-accessibility policy of the NASW to halt the inadequate lift.<sup>50</sup> NASW members from Chicago-affiliated schools also sent University President Hanna Gray a letter in support of Ellis.<sup>51</sup> Clearly, then, the AHCHA had a reach throughout Chicago, and it and other Chicago-area social work programs were aware of inaccessibility as an issue. The influence of social workers is something that distinguished UChicago from other schools: nowhere else that I have examined did social workers lead the revolution. In his book on how social workers can empower disabled people, Gary May makes a crucial distinction between “working with” disabled people and “working on” them.<sup>52</sup> What the AHCHA did in supporting Ellis was aligned with the positive model of working with, even if Ellis was not a client.

Reactions of administrators were closely tied to the outcome of the protests, although difficult to assess. Keith Madderom, then an assistant dean at SSA, confirmed that Dean Hovda was in support of the protest and of increased physical accessibility at SSA, and William Cannon was in an “unenviable spot,” caught between issues of

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<sup>49</sup> Rovens

<sup>50</sup> Chicago NASW affiliates to Gray

<sup>51</sup> SSA Student Association Ad Hoc Committee to Provost Robert Adams, April 13, 1983, School of Social Service Administration. Records. Addenda. Box 219, Unnumbered Folder. “Access Committee 1977-1983”. Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago.

<sup>52</sup> Gary E. May, *Ending Disability Discrimination: Strategies for Social Workers* (Boston: Pearson/Allyn and Bacon, 2005), 84

accessibility and cost when SSA was experiencing budget cuts.<sup>53</sup> It is interesting to compare many administrators' view of the costs of accommodation as prohibitive with the AHCHA's view that any price tag put on access and dignity for current and future students was irrelevant. Ever since SSA's founding by Edith Abbott and Sophonisba Breckenridge in 1920, social work students and faculty put great emphasis on the importance of social work practice in addition to theory. According to former dean Alton Linford, the philosophy of Abbot and Breckenridge centered around the "union of social action [and] political action. You don't just teach things, you do them."<sup>54</sup> Given this philosophy, it makes sense that Ellis' classmates would feel a strong desire to right the wrongs being done to him. Advocating with him was a form of political action that came as a natural consequence of training that emphasized helping the less fortunate.

Administrator reaction is hard to assess, given that many documents are restricted by the university. Former University President Hanna Gray did not recall the 1983 protest, but did recall that administrators were beginning to become aware of physical accessibility concerns in 1978, after a university-administered self-audit prompted by both the release of the Section 504 standards and the need for general renovations.<sup>55</sup> Gray remarked that she did not witness overt hostility from administrators to compliance with Section 504, but that the main worry was the cost of renovations, especially given that so many buildings needed to be renovated and the university did not have sufficient funds.<sup>56</sup> I question her assertion that all administrators supported increased wheelchair accessibility given the hostility toward compliance with Section 504 displayed in

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<sup>53</sup> Keith Madderom, interviewed by author in person, May 19, 2015, Chicago, IL

<sup>54</sup> Alton Linford interviewed by Carol Coohey, August 5, 1994

<sup>55</sup> Hanna Gray (former University of Chicago President), interviewed by author in person, January 19, 2018, Chicago, IL

<sup>56</sup> Hanna Gray interview

administrator memos discussed later in the essay. Gray recalled other moments of student activism from the 1980s and 1990s. Students working to end the apartheid approached her office directly, yet her memory, and by extension historical memory, overlooks the AHCHA's direct action outside the administration building. The university's official diversity and inclusion historical timeline mentions milestones related to religion, race, sexual orientation, and gender identity from 1891 to 2009, but it makes no mention of any milestones relating to disability.<sup>57</sup> Disability is absent from institutional memory and is not considered a facet of diversity worth celebrating.

Based on interviews, the outcome of the AHCHA's activism is uncertain. News coverage stops after June, and by a friend's account, Ellis left UChicago after the spring of 1983 for health reasons and never returned.<sup>58</sup> No one recalls seeing the elevator until the 1990s, possibly as late as 1998, which was well after the passage of the ADA in 1990. Ellis was the figurehead who drove the discussion of access on campus, and without him, the AHCHA no longer had a cohesive case to persuade administrators. The administration's attitude toward access was oriented towards individuals, so they only saw accessibility as an issue when there was a disabled person in front of them attracting media coverage. Their installation of the elevator years after the ADA fits with the general trend of significant delay between passage of a federal law and UChicago's action. It is not fair to say that the AHCHA failed completely, because, if nothing else, it left records and made progressive arguments that saw disability rights as civil rights, even in a place without an established disability community.

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<sup>57</sup> University of Chicago, "Historical Timeline," Diversity & Inclusion, accessed April 06, 2018, <https://diversity.uchicago.edu/history/historical-timeline/>.

<sup>58</sup> Nancy Chertok (classmate of Jeff Ellis), interviewed by author in person, November 6, 2017, Chicago, IL

## Accommodation at Northwestern and UIC

At Northwestern, there was not one single incident that demonstrated a lack of physical access but instead several. The case that most parallels Ellis's is that of Greggory Stastny. Stastny arrived at Northwestern in 1978 with hopes of studying medicine. He was a wheelchair user and encountered numerous physical hurdles on campus, including busy roads without curb cuts, inadequate parking spaces, small bathrooms, and buildings without accessible entrances.<sup>59</sup> These barriers were similar to the ones Jeff Ellis faced at UChicago, which makes sense considering that UChicago and Northwestern are both "elite" private schools. Both Northwestern and UChicago are very selective and had few physically disabled students. At both private schools, administrators did no explicit outreach to disabled prospective students, indicating that they did not think of the elite and therefore worthy student as disabled. One distinguishing advantage that Stastny had over Ellis was support from guidance counselor Chuck Pistorio, who acquired keys to locked elevators, helped Stastny to clear parking spaces, and generally acted as point person for Stastny's accommodations in the absence of a formal disability services office.<sup>60</sup> Ellis did not appear to have this level or kind of support from anyone at UChicago. Stastny was the second wheelchair user to go to Northwestern. The *Daily Northwestern* article about Stastny does not give details of the first wheelchair user other than a name and year, but perhaps that person began laying the groundwork for support. Pistorio would have had a protocol for accommodating wheelchair users by the time Stastny enrolled if he worked with the first wheelchair user.

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<sup>59</sup> Catherine Trevison, "An Uphill Battle." *The Daily Northwestern*, January 21, 1987

<sup>60</sup> Trevison

The access problems at Northwestern proved too much for Stastny, however. Frequent transportation issues compelled him to take most of his classes pass/fail, which prevented him from transferring to another medical school after he left Northwestern.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, like Ellis, Stastny's access issues remained frustratingly unresolved while he was at school. Administrators did not think of any one accommodation as too costly to make, and Pistorio seemed willing to help, but Stastny's case illuminates that good intentions cannot make up for an inaccessible system on both the physical and policy levels. A combination of decentralized services, a slow-moving bureaucracy, and daily access barriers halted Stastny's education. Pistorio played a central role in providing supports, but in the end, these supports were individual and not systemic. Northwestern may have been more receptive to Stastny's needs at an administrative level than UChicago was to Ellis's, but this glacial pace of improvement was not enough for Stastny to pursue his education.

A slightly more hopeful case is found in Jim Nebeker, who returned to Northwestern in 1987 following a spinal cord injury that necessitated a wheelchair. Northwestern administrators faced a new challenge in finding suitable classroom space and housing for Nebeker, who was a resident advisor prior to his injury and could not return to his former, now inaccessible residence hall.<sup>62</sup> In the case of the classrooms, Northwestern opted not to install an elevator, yet at the same time spent approximately a million dollars on plants to beautify the campus, calling into question whether accessibility was really only set back by costs, or also set back by competing priorities.

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<sup>61</sup> Trevison

<sup>62</sup> Tom Berger, Mark Coe, Lisa Hammerman, Carol Loitman, and Adam Usdan, "A Critical Look at the Disabled at Northwestern", Term paper for Professor Anton Org, Behavior D-53, June 9, 1987, Disabled at Northwestern Subject File, Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Evanston, IL, 10

Cliff Edwards, who reported on Nebeker's return, "noted the irony that the university spends around \$1 million to beautify the campus with flowers and sod but that they are unwilling to install an elevator in a building for \$50,000."<sup>63</sup> It is a small wonder that Nebeker was only the third wheelchair user student, if accommodations for wheelchair users were a lower priority for the administration than landscaping. It is unclear what kind of support Nebeker received between his return and his senior year, but he was featured in a *Daily Northwestern* article from 1989 that mentions that Northwestern employed a disability services coordinator.<sup>64</sup> Perhaps the experiences of Nebeker and Stastny compelled Northwestern to hire a formal coordinator.

One aspect that illuminates the climate of access at Northwestern beyond individual cases is the administrative confusion on how best to renovate the main library. The main library had many barriers to physical access, including inaccessible bathrooms and unreachable phones and drinking fountains.<sup>65</sup> Even at accessible entrances, the doors were often too heavy to be operated independently or the buttons did not work. These design flaws mirrored some of the hurdles that Ellis faced at UChicago, and reflected the idea of accessibility as an afterthought and not a core feature of the built environment.

Administrators were baffled by the vague language of Section 504, particularly as to what constituted a "program."<sup>66</sup> If something was a program, administrators were bound under 504 to offer it in an accessible location. The law itself became a barrier to understanding their obligations as a private school. Just as at UChicago, there was

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<sup>63</sup> Berger et al 11

<sup>64</sup> Tirrell

<sup>65</sup> "Transition Plan for Compliance with Section 504 - 1973 Rehabilitation Act," Term paper for Professor Anton Org, Behavior D-53, June 9, 1987, Disabilities Services Subject File, Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Evanston, IL, 2

<sup>66</sup> "Transition Plan" 7

confusion over what compliance would mean for a private school. Many administrators worried about the multi-thousand dollar cost of physical renovations.<sup>67</sup> This concern mirrors the administrators' concerns discussed previously at UChicago. Northwestern opted to focus in some cases on moving classroom locations to ensure "program" accessibility rather than physical accessibility for all buildings, and in their 1977 504 transition plan, administrators recommended the formation of an accessibility task force that included disabled students. While UChicago and Northwestern shared similar access barriers, Northwestern administrators were formulating a plan and seeking the input of disabled students in the 1970s.

At Northwestern, there was no evidence of a student protest around accessibility, and certainly not on the level of the one at UChicago. There was a consciousness-raising activity where able-bodied students navigated the campus using wheelchairs in 1989.<sup>68</sup> This event was a more relaxed affair than the protest at UChicago, but Nebeker was pleased with how it went and hopeful that more students would begin to think seriously about physical accessibility. Notably, unlike UChicago, undergraduate students and the disability services coordinator were involved in executing the simulation. It was not localized to one school or division so it was more effective at raising initial awareness broadly, even if such simulations have been critiqued from a disability rights perspective for lacking nuance and staying power.<sup>69</sup> As to why Northwestern, on the surface very similar to UChicago, did not have a direct action protest, perhaps disabled students felt too isolated to form a community. Access issues were dealt with on a case-by-case basis,

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<sup>67</sup> "Transition Plan" 4

<sup>68</sup> Tracie M. Finley, "Leaders Spotlight Troubles of Disabled," *The Daily Northwestern*, February 23, 1989

<sup>69</sup> Toby Olson, "How Disability Simulations Promote Damaging Stereotypes," *The Braille Monitor*, January 2014, accessed February 28, 2018,

<https://nfb.org/images/nfb/publications/bm/bm14/bm1401/bm1401>

so it is plausible that the few physically disabled students at Northwestern might not have known about each other.<sup>70</sup> In the 1987 profile on Stastny, he and physically disabled college senior Beth Levion did not even know of each other's existence.<sup>71</sup> This may have been due to the fact that the two were in different programs, but it is significant that there was no disabled students' club or other organization where they might have met. There is also the possibility that any protests were not recorded, which is not to say that none happened.

The University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), a public university with a demonstrated concern for physical accessibility, offers a point of contrast to the two private universities, although UIC had access issues of its own. Much earlier than either private school, accessibility became an administrative concern. In 1975, the university chancellor asked a dean to develop an accessibility committee and appoint members who would make recommendations on accommodating disabled students.<sup>72</sup> This committee also conducted an updated accessibility survey and made recommendations for improving procedures and the built environment. In the same year, Peggy LaPlante became the first Coordinator of Services for the Disabled.<sup>73</sup> This appointment came after months of discussions between the Chancellor, several other administrators, and students. In 1974, two wheelchair-user students, Joan Howe and Marie Myhr, developed a brochure entitled "A Guide for Circle Campus Via Wheels" aimed at helping other wheelchair-user

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<sup>70</sup> Berger et al 17

<sup>71</sup> Trevison

<sup>72</sup> Robert P. Bentz to Oscar Miller, July 9, 1975, UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES, Office of the Chancellor, Chancellor's Central Files, Series: IV, Folders: 450-458 Box 35 Records Group: 003/01/02. FOLDER: COMMITTEE- FACILITIES FOR DISABLED STUDENTS 3-1-2 Series 4 (35-456), Richard J. Daley Library, University of Illinois at Chicago

<sup>73</sup> Miller to LaPlante July 7, 1975

students navigate campus successfully.<sup>74</sup> The brochure covered the locations of many accessible routes on campus and included a map. This kind of information-sharing between disabled students was not documented at UChicago or Northwestern, and it likely played a role in both UIC's concern for access (there were enough wheelchair-using students that this information was necessary to formally write down) and the administrators' relative awareness of accessibility as a goal.

Even before 1973, when the Rehabilitation Act was passed, faculty and staff had completed an accessibility survey in 1971, prior to the one the access committee did in 1975.<sup>75</sup> The 1975 establishment of a disability support office, then, cannot have been solely because of a legal obligation under Section 504. The administration was undoubtedly talking to disabled students, which created a bottom-up pressure for centralized coordination of services and supports. The top-down pressure of a legal obligation under Section 504 may have been a factor in establishing the office formally, but unlike at the two private schools, the legal requirements did not feature most prominently in administrator correspondence. This lack of emphasis on legal obligation could be because, as a public school, UIC was more aware of and in tune with legal obligations, or perhaps they conceptualized an accessible education more broadly than UChicago or Northwestern, both of which boasted of attracting only “elite” students.

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<sup>74</sup> Joan Howe and Marie Myhr, “A Guide to Circle Campus Via Wheels,” 1974, UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES, Office of the Chancellor, Chancellor’s Central Files, Series: IV, Folders: 450-458 Box 35 Records Group: 003/01/02. Folder: Handicapped Persons - General Series I, (001-1232) Richard J. Daley Library, University of Illinois at Chicago

<sup>75</sup> A. Armstrong, J. Curry and M. LaPlante to H. Kiehr, “Report of the Committee on Needs of Handicapped Students at Chicago Circle Campus”, June 13, 1973, BOX Office of the Chancellor, Chancellor’s Central Files, Series: IV Folders: 610-620, Records Group: 003/01/02, Box : 52, Richard J. Daley Library, University of Illinois at Chicago

With no such preoccupation, UIC perhaps had a more holistic approach to admission and subsequent support of disabled students.

Despite UIC's relatively welcoming climate, there were still numerous instances of building inaccessibility, particularly in the 1970s, of which both students and administrators were aware. Senior Kanella Diakoumis met with administrator George Safford in 1974 to discuss some access barriers facing physically disabled students, including locked elevators, narrow aisles, inaccessible classrooms, inadequate bathrooms and parking, and lab tables that were too high.<sup>76</sup> Safford then began to formulate a plan for a centralized disability office that prospective and admitted students could go to for assistance or resource referrals, a system of student volunteers to help with class-related tasks, and an accessibility committee.<sup>77</sup> As discussed above, the chancellor followed through on the centralized office and committee. It is significant that the impetus for these important changes to the structure of disability services was brought about by a conversation with a student, not by a lawsuit or federal accessibility audit.

The cost of renovations or new construction was daunting, and sometimes ran hundreds of thousands of dollars.<sup>78</sup> However, the high cost did not seem to deter either students or administrators from taking on renovation or construction projects, even if they had to move slowly. While administrators at UChicago and Northwestern (both with large endowments) balked at the high costs of elevators, UIC administrators did not see

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<sup>76</sup> George Safford to Dean Miller, "RE: Handicapped Students," August 23, 1974, UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES, Office of the Chancellor, Chancellor's Central Files, Series: IV, Folders: 450-458 Box 35 Records Group: 003/01/02. Folder: Handicapped Persons - General Series I, (001-1232) Richard J. Daley Library, University of Illinois at Chicago

<sup>77</sup> Safford to Miller 1974

<sup>78</sup> Peggy LaPlante to Robert Russell, "RE: SURVEY OF DISABLED STUDENTS NEEDS," May 31, 1978, BOX: Office of the Chancellor, Chancellor's Central Files Series: I Subseries: I Folders: 1000-1019 Box 84 Records Group: 003/01/02 Folder: Committee on the Handicapped Series I (84-1019).Folder: Handicapped Persons - General Series I, (001-1232) Richard J. Daley Library, University of Illinois at Chicago

cost as a reason why a student, at least a physically disabled one, should be denied access. As part of the University of Illinois system, UIC was in some communication with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), a pioneer of wheelchair access since the 1940s, so it is logical that UIC would take some cues on access from UIUC. The private schools did not have such a model. The private schools were more insular and operating on the individual level rather than functioning as part of a larger state system, so they were much more wary of outside influence.

UIC is unique in that there was a relatively high amount of access with no sign of student protest over accessibility. Perhaps students felt sufficiently well represented on planning committees that they did not need to protest. Perhaps, like Howe and Myhr, they found it more helpful to spread knowledge within their social circles than to try to persuade administrators. It is not clear how effective the disability services office was at addressing access issues, but if the office was effective and the process clearly laid out, perhaps students felt that their concerns were being taken seriously. I would venture that Northwestern's reasons for a lack of recorded protests and UIC's reasons are different. At Northwestern, disabled students were isolated from each other, in part by scarcity. At UIC, there was a much larger disabled population, so if students indeed did not protest it was much more likely a conscious choice and not for lack of connection to others.

When I visited Special Collections at UChicago, the archive had barely any records regarding disability rights activism on campus, and what I did find took months of digging. Many materials that would have potentially been helpful to me were restricted. At Northwestern, more material was available with much less restriction. UIC had the least restriction around items like budgets, because it is a public school.

However, I encountered some unexpected difficulty finding material at the UIC archive because the archivist was searching under “disabled” and not “handicapped.” Material can be forgotten based on how it is categorized. Especially in an area of history so overlooked as disability, lack of evidence does not always indicate that an event did not occur. The less restricted nature of UIC’s archive mirrored its comparatively physically accessible environment. UChicago, arguably the least physically accessible archive, had the most restrictions. UIC clearly documented its disability history with some care, showing that archivists thought of disability history as something worth preserving in several dedicated boxes. My main source material at UChicago was contained in one medium-sized folder, which indicates that disability history was preserved much less. The first materials on the SSA protest I encountered were in fact part of the online photo archive, not the main material in Special Collections.

Another point of departure between UIC administration and the other administrations was the extent to which UIC not only welcomed, but also sought guidance from disability organizations in the community and on other campuses on how to best serve their own students. UIC had ongoing communications with UIUC and the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago.<sup>79</sup> Many of these correspondences dealt with how to accommodate the needs of particular groups of students or requests for some item of assistive technology that UIC did not have access to. Clearly, UIC administrators were not afraid to seek help when they were out of their depth. This openness to outside help

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<sup>79</sup> Timothy Nugent to Chancellor Briscoe, May 7, 1969 BOX Office of the Chancellor, Chancellor’s Central Files, Series: I Subseries: I Folders: 1000-1019 Box 84 Records Group: 003/01/02 Folder: Committee on the Handicapped Series I (84-1019).Folder: Handicapped Persons - General Series I, (001-1232) Richard J. Daley Library, University of Illinois at Chicago: RIC Community Coordinator for the Mobility-Limited to Warren Cheston, October 9, 1973, BOX: Office of the Chancellor, Chancellor’s Central Files Series: I Subseries: I Folders: 1000-1019 Box 100 Records Group: 003/01/02 Folder: Committee on the Handicapped Series I (84-1019),Folder: Handicapped Persons - General Series I, (001-1232) Richard J. Daley Library, University of Illinois at Chicago

is a marked contrast, especially to UChicago, where administrative assistant Paul Ausick openly disdained bringing in representatives from community organizations as an “intrusion.”<sup>80</sup> As a public university, UIC was less sensitive to the public coming into their physical or conversational space. Perhaps seeking outside help was more stigmatized at a private, “elite” university like UChicago, so people at UIC were not so ashamed of not knowing or not having certain resources. Whatever the reason, UIC’s active engagement with other campuses and disability community organizations undoubtedly served its students well by providing students with both university and community-based resources.

UIC’s advanced attitude toward physical access was again demonstrated by the fact that administrators were discussing wheelchair accessible transit by 1984.<sup>81</sup> This discussion of accessible transit roughly coincided with the formation of (or activities of) activist groups in other U.S. cities such as Denver, Colorado, who were fighting to gain access to their city’s public transit. The UIC campus is much smaller than a major city, so it was very progressive for the administration to consider it. In a 1977 memo to Charles O’Connell, Margaret Fallers mentions that UChicago would likely need wheelchair accessible transportation in the near future, but “we could wait until we need it.”<sup>82</sup> That UChicago knew that accessible transportation would likely be a need but

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<sup>80</sup> Paul Ausick to Charles O’Connell, November 10, 1975, Office of the President Wilson Administration Records 1891-1978, Facilities for the Physically Handicapped 1974-1978, box 114, folder 8, series I, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago.

<sup>81</sup> Margaret LaPlante to Chancellor Langenberg, “RE: Service and Equipment Needs of the Handicapped,” December 21, 1984, BOX : Office of the Chancellor , Chancellor’s Central Files , Series: I Subseries: I Folders: 1184-1197 Box 97, Records Group: 003/01/02 Folder: Committee on the Handicapped 3-1-2 Series I (97-1186) Richard J. Daley Library, University of Illinois at Chicago

<sup>82</sup> Margaret Fallers to Charles O’Connell, November 30, 1977, Office of the President Wilson Administration Records 1891-1978, Facilities for the Physically Handicapped 1974-1978, box 114, folder 8, series I, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago.

decided to ignore it indefinitely speaks to the more antagonistic climate at UChicago and the individualized nature of accommodations and access.

### **Chicago Disability Rights Activism Beyond the University**

Disability rights activism in Chicago was not limited only to universities. The Chicago chapter of a senior citizens advocacy organization called the Gray Panthers was active in the 1970s and 1980s. They worked on issues such as accessible transit and government benefits. In 1984, Agnes Ranseen, a senior official in the Chicago Gray Panthers, wrote a letter to the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) about the CTA's lack of a plan to make 300 new buses physically accessible.<sup>83</sup> Ranseen used similar rhetoric of disabled seniors deserving the same service available to nondisabled people that the SSA students did when arguing that disabled students deserved the same educational opportunities as other students. Like the SSA students, Ranseen appealed to civil rights, alleging that the CTA's plan was "violating the Civil Rights Law."<sup>84</sup> Ranseen presumably meant Section 504, which shows that college students were not the only ones aware of or benefitting from federal legislation or claiming a disability identity. Much of the independent living movement in the early years distanced itself from senior citizen issues, so it is significant that a senior citizens group readily embraced a disabled identity.<sup>85</sup> Slightly before Ranseen's letter inquiring about physical access on the CTA, the Denver-based activist group Americans Disabled for Access to Public Transit (ADAPT) picketed the American Public Transit Association conference in October 1983

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<sup>83</sup> Agnes Ranseen to the Chicago Transit Authority, May 9, 1984, BOX: Gray Panthers Collection, Box 16 of 34 Folders 259-276, Folder: CTA - Handicapped, etc 1977-1984 (16-268) Richard J. Daley Library, University of Illinois at Chicago

<sup>84</sup> Angnes Ranseen to CTA, 1984

<sup>85</sup> Judith E. Heumann, "Independent Living Movement: organizing for an active, disabled old age," Independent Living Institute, 1984, accessed February 28, 2018, <https://www.independentliving.org/toolsforpower/tools28.html>.

and demanded that all Denver buses be made accessible to wheelchair users.<sup>86</sup> Their protest was successful, and by 1993 the mayor of Denver and the American Public Transit Association pledged to buy only wheelchair accessible buses.<sup>87</sup> The Gray Panthers and at least one organization that they worked with, Advocates for the Handicapped, knew about ADAPT by 1983 or 1984, referencing it in handwritten notes on a memo.<sup>88</sup> Clearly, although the Gray Panthers were in Chicago and ADAPT was in Denver, the Gray Panthers were aware of disability rights issues beyond the local context, which makes sense given that they were a national organization.

The Gray Panthers centered much of their activism around protecting government benefits, as many of their members depended on a fixed income from Social Security. In 1985, they released a tract criticizing the federal government for using money from the social security trust fund (supposed to be reserved for future social security recipients) to increase military spending.<sup>89</sup> The Gray Panthers were also conscious of problems with Supplemental Security Income (SSI), a fixed income for certain elderly, blind and disabled people who did not have a substantial work history or other source of income. The Gray Panthers noted that SSI did not adjust for inflation or changes to cost of living, so many recipients lived in increasing poverty.<sup>90</sup> Many young adults with disabilities were on SSI, which would make financing a college education, let alone paying for

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<sup>86</sup> Steve Groer, "ADAPT (155)," ADAPT Media Gallery, July 11, 2013, , accessed April 05, 2018, <http://adaptmuseum.net/gallery/picture.php?/274/category/10>.

<sup>87</sup> Federico Pena, "ADAPT (162)," ADAPT Media Gallery, July 11, 2013, accessed April 05, 2018, <http://adaptmuseum.net/gallery/picture.php?/279/category/10>

<sup>88</sup> Advocates for the Handicapped, Press Release, 1980 (note from 1984) BOX: Gray Panthers Collection, Box 16 of 34 Folders 259-276, Folder: CTA - Handicapped, etc 1977-1984 (16-268) Richard J. Daley Library, University of Illinois at Chicago

<sup>89</sup> Arjun Makhijani, "Let Social Security Be Social Security", March 1985 BOX: Gray Panthers Collection, Box 16 of 34 Folders 259-276, Folder: Folder: 59 Social Security 1975-1990 (16-275) Richard J. Daley Library, University of Illinois at Chicago

<sup>90</sup> Makhijani

housing and supplies, very difficult. Unless they were supported by a wealthy family, it was unlikely that disabled students could attend an expensive private university like Northwestern or UChicago.

#### Chicago-Area Universities in Context

Other public university campuses also had long histories of physical accessibility. At the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), the school began building ramps for academic buildings as early as 1948, as part of a concentrated effort to recruit newly disabled veterans returning from World War II.<sup>91</sup> UIUC's commitment to physical accessibility was very far ahead of other major universities, and its long history of destroying physical barriers and conducting research on accessibility and disabled people's quality of life allowed for the early flourishing of disabled student networks. These networks spanned the entirety of campus life, including a disabled fraternity, men and women's wheelchair basketball team, and an accessible dormitory by the 1950s.<sup>92</sup>

The students at UIUC undoubtedly had a unique experience of an environment that was relatively free of physical barriers, which shaped their conception of what an accessible education could look like. In 1961, the director of Rehabilitation-Education Services, Timothy Nugent, along with his staff, developed the first standards for architectural accessibility, which covered aspects of wheelchair, blind, and deaf access.<sup>93</sup> These standards would later be adopted by the state of Illinois, and were referenced in disability services materials at UIC.<sup>94</sup> The standards developed at UIUC clearly had a

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<sup>91</sup> *Expanding Horizons: A History of the First 50 Years of the Division of Rehabilitation-Education Services at the University of Illinois.* (Champaign, IL: Roxford DT Pub., 1998) 7

<sup>92</sup> Patterson 63-64

<sup>93</sup> *Expanding Horizons* 61

<sup>94</sup> copy of ANSI standards in disability services folder

substantial impact on accessibility beyond the local context of UIUC. As another state university, UIC in particular was aware of the standard set by UIUC.

Wheelchair user students at the University of California, Berkeley also formed a tight-knit community. In 1962, the first wheelchair user to live on campus at Berkeley, Ed Roberts, was admitted.<sup>95</sup> By 1966, there were seven other wheelchair user students living in the campus hospital, which the students converted into a dormitory.<sup>96</sup> Calling themselves the Rolling Quads, the students spent time together, threw parties, and hired their own personal care attendants from among the student body.<sup>97</sup> The support system that the Rolling Quads had was similar to the one at UIUC, but the UIUC students had more institutional social support.<sup>98</sup> However, the Rolling Quads had a tremendous reach within Berkeley, as well as at the state and national levels. They, along with the California Association of the Physically Handicapped, called on the mayor of Oakland to install curb cuts, accessible phone booths, and drinking fountains.<sup>99</sup> Their effort was successful, and the mayor agreed soon after the initial petition to make Oakland physically accessible.<sup>100</sup> On the national level, members of the Rolling Quads went on to found the first Center for Independent Living, which connected disabled people with housing and personal attendants.<sup>101</sup> These priorities, along with the focus on young, white, physically disabled men, came to define the ILM, which had its roots at UIUC in

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<sup>95</sup> Wendy Edelstein, "Ed Roberts, disability-rights leader and Cal alum, gets his own state day," *Berkeley News*, July 09, 2015, accessed February 28, 2018, <http://news.berkeley.edu/2010/07/27/roberts/>.

<sup>96</sup> Patterson 70

<sup>97</sup> Patterson 70

<sup>98</sup> Patterson 71

<sup>99</sup> Patterson 76

<sup>100</sup> Patterson 76

<sup>101</sup> Patterson 76

1962 and Berkeley in the 1970's but soon spread nationwide.<sup>102</sup> The framework used at the Berkeley CIL was soon replicated nationwide, including in Chicago at Access Living, where Jeff Ellis received legal advice on UChicago's failure to accommodate him.<sup>103</sup>

In New York, wheelchair user Judy Heumann entered Long Island University in 1965. LIU's Brooklyn campus, unlike UIUC and UC Berkeley, was not very wheelchair accessible and did not have a large wheelchair user population.<sup>104</sup> Heumann opted to live in a dormitory even though fellow students had to carry her up and down a few steps each time she entered and exited.<sup>105</sup> Although she did not become a disability rights activist until 1967, Heumann's determination to live in a dormitory set a precedent for other wheelchair user students. Heumann and a nondisabled NAACP activist named Ted Childs founded the Disabled Students Program at LIU, which both provided a community to disabled students on campus and served as an organizing group for the rights of disabled university students.<sup>106</sup> Heumann and her wheelchair user friends from other universities formed numerous groups on their respective campuses and linked up to form community organizations that fought for disability rights in education and in wider society.<sup>107</sup> As at UIUC and Berkeley, Heumann and other students recognized the impact of a close-knit community on campus but also expanded their efforts to the community.

### **Disability, Diversity, and Intersectionality**

Even as administrators at the three Chicago schools became acquainted with the concept of affirmative action for (nondisabled) women and people of color (although not

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<sup>102</sup> Nancy M. Crewe and Irving Kenneth Zola, *Independent Living for Physically Disabled People* (San Jose: People with Disabilities Press/iUniverse.com, 2001), 6-8

<sup>103</sup> SSA Student Association, "FACT SHEET",

<sup>104</sup> Patterson 81

<sup>105</sup> Patterson 81

<sup>106</sup> Patterson 82

<sup>107</sup> Patterson 85

all were receptive to it), disability was not included in this framework, raising questions about why administrators did not conceptualize disability as a facet of diversity, particularly at private schools. Documents from the 1970s discussed admission of women and people of color (POC,) but ignored disability, which was common and speaks to the exclusion of disability from other social justice issues. Cost was a pressing issue, especially for UChicago and Northwestern administrators. There was an internal memo from Vice President Charles O'Connell to Cedric Chernick in which O'Connell was “outraged” by having to accommodate disabled people and bemoaned the fact that the University would have to do so “as long as we take money from the government.”<sup>108</sup> UChicago administrative assistant Paul Ausick worried that having to provide disabled students with insurance as required by Section 504 would cost too much. His impression of compliance with section 504 was that it was “very distressing and depressing.”<sup>109</sup> The affirmative action officer, Margaret Fallers, attended a conference where there were administrators from several schools and reported that the room was dismayed and shocked by the regulations.<sup>110</sup> The general sense from the administration in the late 1970s was that accessibility was an expensive burden and that the law was unrealistic and made too many demands.

At Northwestern, the administrators also talked about cost, but not as frankly and they did not place blame on students in the same way. Nevertheless, they considered disability to be different from affirmative action for women and POC, because those

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<sup>108</sup> Charles O'Connell to Cedric Chernick, March 28, 1978, Office of the President Wilson Administration Records 1891-1978, Facilities for the Physically Handicapped 1974-1978, box 114, folder 8, series I, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago.

<sup>109</sup> Paul Ausick to Charles O'Connell, November 10, 1975

<sup>110</sup> Margaret Fallers to Charles O'Connell, November 30, 1977, Office of the President Wilson Administration Records 1891-1978, Facilities for the Physically Handicapped 1974-1978, box 114, folder 8, series I, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago.

groups (thought of as monolithic) did not have a cost attached to them, unlike physically disabled people who often needed modifications. The cases of Ellis and Stastny clearly show that accommodation was done case-by case and reactively, not proactively. Even UIC, and the U of I system more broadly, was in need of a nudge from a concerned student, who in 1983 pushed the chancellor of UIUC to implement a 504 transition plan for all U of I schools and to include disability under affirmative action.<sup>111</sup>

It is also necessary to problematize the gains of “the disability rights movement” or “the disability community” because there is not one community but several sub communities, sometimes with competing interests. For example, the disabled student narratives at UIUC and Berkeley focus on white, male wheelchair users. Obviously, there were disabled students who did not fit these categories, but the narrative of the ILM subsumes any of their narratives. Few of the relevant authors explicitly address the relative absence of women, people of color, or people with other types of disabilities in the discussion of disability rights, but white men from wealthy families had the most access to treatment, rehabilitation, and education, all of which facilitated their entry into activist spaces. In fact, rehabilitation facilities like Warm Springs, where many young white activists first found community, were officially racially segregated and very expensive, keeping Black people and poor people from accessing needed resources.<sup>112</sup> Black and low-income people did not have the same opportunities to access treatment or education, leading to their underrepresentation in ILM activism. Additionally, many ILM activists, like Fred Fay at UIUC (a white disabled man), equated ableism with racism,

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<sup>111</sup> Daniel Devine to Chancellor Earl Porter, May 3, 1983, BOX: Office of the Chancellor, Chancellor's Central Files, Series I Subseries I Folders: 1246-1257, Records Group: 003/01/02 Box 101 Folder: Handicapped Persons- General 3-1-2 Series I (101-1246) Richard J. Daley Library, University of Illinois at Chicago

<sup>112</sup> Patterson 59

comparing administrators hostile to physical access to the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>113</sup> This simplistic equivalency flattens the nuances of how both ableism and racism function and ignores the differences between them. There is also no room in this framework for disabled people of color, who navigate ableism and racism simultaneously and in ways that differ from both nondisabled people of color and white disabled people.<sup>114</sup> Disability historian and ILM activist Corbett O'Toole says that Black disabled people's issues were often ignored or minimized by white leaders, and Black disabled community activists were written out of the dominant narrative of the ILM.<sup>115</sup>

There were also few women or openly LGBTQ people in the segments of the ILM that received media attention. The women's wheelchair basketball team at UIUC was founded in the 1970s in part because wheelchair-using women wanted to play basketball and not just cheerlead for the men's team.<sup>116</sup> The sports culture at UIUC, particularly around wheelchair basketball, was always masculine-centered. Testifying to this culture of sexism, the men's team gets several pages in UIUC disability history materials, but the women get only a few sentences. Disability activists who were LGBTQ could be fairly open about their queerness within a certain center for independent living (CIL), for example, but they were discouraged from discussing their identities in any news media, and the official policy at Berkeley CIL was that it had no relationship with gay organizations.<sup>117</sup> This put disabled LGBTQ activists in the position of having to choose which of their identities to organize around. One of the barriers to LGBTQ inclusion in

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<sup>113</sup> Patterson 62

<sup>114</sup> see Kimberlé Crenshaw "Mapping the Margins" on intersectionality

<sup>115</sup> Corbett Joan O'Toole, *Fading Scars: My Queer Disability History* (Fort Worth, TX: Autonomous Press, 2015), 101

<sup>116</sup> *Expanding Horizons* 24

<sup>117</sup> O'Toole 102

the ILM was the stigma around HIV/AIDS, and whether people with those conditions, along with drug users, would be protected under Section 504.<sup>118</sup> Patterson does not mention what ILM activists thought about the inclusion of drug users and people with HIV/AIDS under the category of disability, but as this was a federally-debated issue and ILM activists had no stated position, at least some activists were drawing the line between the deserving and less-deserving disabled. It is notable that Jeff Ellis, Greggory Stastny, and Jim Nebeker were all white wheelchair user men who did not claim other types of disabilities, so the demographics of the ILM at large were replicated at UChicago and Northwestern, making any definitive claims about universal accessibility, or any accessibility beyond wheelchair accessibility, out of reach. Although Section 504 did, on paper, extend the same rights to access that it granted students with physical disabilities to students with mental disabilities, the ADA was much more comprehensive and explicit in its discussion of mental disabilities.<sup>119</sup> The same devaluation of mental disability that was at play in the ILM was mirrored in the relative silence around mental disability at the Chicago schools until after the passage of the ADA.

There was a hierarchy of value in place based on type of disability in the ILM. Many activists sharply separated their issues (mainly focusing on architectural barriers) from issues faced by people with psychiatric or developmental disabilities, such as deinstitutionalization.<sup>120</sup> This approach isolated other disability rights movements from the ILM. A March 1992 letter in *Mouth* magazine, popular in the ILM, took aim at the valuation of “a good mind” in the community and called on ILM activists not to replicate

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<sup>118</sup> Patterson 162

<sup>119</sup> Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990. Public Law 101-336. 108th Congress, 2nd session (July 26, 1990), <https://www.ada.gov/pubs/adastatute08.htm#12111>

<sup>120</sup> Patterson 9

the ableism and dehumanization that they experienced in their attitude toward people with mental disabilities.<sup>121</sup> ILM activists did not consider the rights of people with mental disabilities on the same level of importance as issues faced by wheelchair users. The focus on having an able mind regardless of bodily disability was even more pronounced in any university setting. The phrase “the life of the mind” had been associated with UChicago since at least 1953, when historian Richard Storr used it to describe the university’s culture, but the attitude is present to some degree at any university.<sup>122</sup> The life of the mind undoubtedly left little room for mental disability and provided strong incentive to downplay it, particularly in students were already viewed as burdens due to physical disability. Even scholars included in a book on the ILM (tellingly entitled *Independent Living for Physically Disabled People*), reveal their biases against people with mental disabilities. On how technology can create new possibilities for disabled students, Newman, Schatzlein, and Sparks say, “For example, mentally retarded students can practice the same exercise over and over on a computer terminal, without trying the patience of the teacher, or slowing the progress of other students.”<sup>123</sup> It is telling that students with physical and sensory impairments got to utilize recorders and Braille machines, while the highest expectation for students with intellectual disabilities was that they could do repetitive tasks without bothering anyone. It is small wonder that people with mental disabilities often felt shut out of the ILM paradigm, if the message to them was not to achieve their full potential, but to focus on not disturbing others.

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<sup>121</sup> Carol Marfisi, “Views of Ourselves: The Hierarchy of Acceptance,” *The Disability Rag*, March 1992

<sup>122</sup> John W Boyer, *The University of Chicago : A History*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015.) eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), EBSCOhost (accessed February 28, 2018), 535

<sup>123</sup> Crewe and Zola 256

None of the disabled students from the Chicago schools that I examined claimed mental disabilities, which makes an examination of disability rights at Chicago-area universities incomplete. Movements focusing on the rights of people with psychiatric disabilities, or intellectual and developmental disabilities, have their own separate histories outside of the ILM, making it hard to tell what obstacles non-physically disabled students encountered at universities. Physically disabled students drew a great deal of their sense of worth and belonging, particularly in “elite” settings, from the belief that their disabilities did not affect their minds. Students whose disabilities did affect their minds faced a different, and perhaps more complex, set of issues in framing their worth as students, to say nothing of students (like myself) with both physical and mental disabilities. It is beyond the scope of my thesis to address the experiences of students with mental disabilities, or other disability rights movements beyond the ILM in this time period, but further study is greatly needed.

### **Conclusion**

In the period from 1990 to the present, the ADA has outlined and solidified access requirements for all buildings covered under Section 504, a great step forward for disability rights. However, each of the three Chicago schools’ trajectories after the ADA continues to reflect much of the same attitudes present before 1990. At UChicago, the SSA did get an elevator, but not until 1998.<sup>124</sup> This victory owed more to the ADA than the AHCHA. This reactive, rather than proactive, approach to access, was not challenged overall by either the student protest or increased legislation. A campus master plan written in 1999 makes no mention of the ADA or people with disabilities, and only brief

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<sup>124</sup> Eileen Libby interview

mention of restructuring Ellis Avenue to “show preference to pedestrians.”<sup>125</sup> The omission of any provisions for disabled people casts doubt on whether UChicago administrators had undergone a significant attitudinal change since 1983.

At Northwestern, the establishment of an official disability services office between 1987 and 1990 made it possible for many more physically disabled students to enroll, but questions remained about whether those students received adequate support. A *Daily Northwestern* article from February of 1990, a few months before the ADA became law, mentioned that there were 25 registered disabled students on campus, including students with learning disabilities. These students faced many of the same hurdles earlier as students, including inaccessible classrooms, busy streets, and a lack of school-provided assistive technology.<sup>126</sup> Despite having more clearly established administrator support, Northwestern’s attitude was still one of attempting to fix physical barriers only when they arose, with little emphasis on providing social support. The lack of social support for disabled students would partially be alleviated not by administrators, but by four wheelchair user student activists. *Wheels of Change*, a student group, was founded in 2002 and worked on issues of disability awareness and wheelchair accessibility on campus.<sup>127</sup> At UIC in 1996, the disability services office put out a flyer discussing what types of disability services they provided and who used them. The flyer prominently mentions that students with learning disabilities and chronic illnesses, including HIV/AIDS, are entitled to support.<sup>128</sup> UIC looked beyond physical and sensory

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<sup>125</sup> The University of Chicago, Campus Master Plan Special Collections Research Center, Rare Books

<sup>126</sup> Tirrell

<sup>127</sup> Northwestern University, "Diversity & Inclusion Timeline and Report: Diversity & Inclusion," Diversity & Inclusion , 2018,, accessed February 28, 2018,  
[http://www.northwestern.edu/diversity/timeline/index\\_text.html](http://www.northwestern.edu/diversity/timeline/index_text.html).

<sup>128</sup> UIC News, "Office of Disability Services Seeks the Help of Student Volunteers", Sept. 18, 1996, Folder: Disabled (students, policies, etc) 1987 - Richard J. Daley Library, University of Illinois at Chicago

disabilities and gestured toward a broader definition of both disability and accommodations. Once again, UIC was more inclusive than UChicago and Northwestern.

I bring up a vignette from my own experiences at UChicago to illustrate the simultaneous remarkable improvements in wheelchair accessibility and the tremendous gap between what ought to be accessible and what is. In the spring of 2015, I became interested in pursuing a human rights minor and contacted the program director, requesting to meet in person. She agreed but expressed concern that my large power wheelchair would not fit in her office. We agreed to meet somewhere else and, out of curiosity, I went to the human rights building and looked around. There was no ramp at the entrance, and there was no elevator to the second floor, where the human rights department was housed. I was not wholly surprised, as several buildings on campus are either not ADA compliant, or designed for chairs much smaller than mine, but there is a particular irony to an inaccessible human rights building. Thanks to the ADA, I can access many classrooms, the dining hall, and my dormitory. I have more freedom to move around campus as I please than at any school I attended prior to college. I have academic accommodations to facilitate my participation and learning in class. I have all the tools necessary to succeed, but there are still problems, and some of them are not too different from the ones Ellis faced more than thirty years before me.

I close with a call, as a mentally and physically disabled student, not to reduce all of disability on campus to the physical. In both activist and academic spaces, I have struggled to have both of my impairment categories recognized in a nuanced way. Since I am most often perceived as only physically disabled, administrators (including former

members of Student Disability Services) assume that all of my access issues on campus can be solved by removal of physical barriers. Yet I still have not resolved what space “the life of the mind” holds for me, with neither a typical mind nor body. Although all disability history, particularly at UChicago, has been hard to find, physically disabled students have the relative privilege of nearly always being thought of as disabled. Their presence left marks on the campus that I could trace, at least in theory: ramps to buildings, the lift and then elevator in SSA. Students with mental illnesses and/or disabilities are less easily traced, both because of the intentional and unintentional erasure in disability history and because I do not have the tools to discover the marks that they left. It is needed work, and I fervently hope my project opens the door for others to undertake it.

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## **EDUCATION**

### **The University of Chicago**

Bachelor of Arts in History, expected June 2018, 3.82 GPA

Honors: Pozen Family Center for Human Rights Grant Recipient (2017), Dean's List (2015-2016 Academic Year)

## **DISABILITY ADVOCACY EXPERIENCE**

### **Chicago Disability Studies Conference 2018**

Chicago, IL  
April 2018

*Presenter*

- Presented my B.A. thesis on wheelchair accessibility at Chicago universities

### **The Organization for Students with Disabilities**

*Vice President*

Chicago, IL  
September 2014 - Present

- Facilitated discussions on a variety of disability rights topics, including educational rights and community organizing
- Co-ordinated events and lectures, including outreach via social media
- Participated in community organizing using public speaking and networking skills
- Collaborated with other activist groups on campus to advance common agendas

### **Access Living**

*Policy Research Intern*

Chicago, IL  
June 2017 - August 2017

- Wrote a memo to the Chicago Housing Authority arguing for increased attention to the housing needs of people with a wide range of disabilities
- Collaborated on research regarding raising the amount of Supplemental Security Income in Chicago
- Compiled resources on supporting disabled survivors of domestic violence
- Developed a guide for community organizing groups to make their meetings and spaces more accessible

### **The UChicago Symposium on Autism and Neurodiversity**

*Board Member*

Chicago, IL  
September 2015 - June 2017

- Used strong communication skills to present on topics relevant to neurodiversity
- Assisted with event planning, including promotion via social media
- Promoted acceptance of neurodiversity on campus via organizing open discussions and a book club

### **Disability Day of Mourning Vigil Site Coordinator**

*Site Coordinator*

Chicago, IL  
March 2015 and 2016

- Organized vigil to honor disabled victims of filicide and caregiver murder
- Secured event venues and materials
- Participated in outreach to university press to promote awareness of filicide

### **Student Disability Services at The University of Chicago**

*Student Advisory Board Member*

Chicago, IL  
September 2014 - June 2015

- Collaborated with other board members to develop and advance plans to improve accessibility on campus
- Engaged in dialogue with administrator related to campus accessibility

### **Disability Studies in Education Conference**

*Presenter*

Chicago, IL  
April 2015

- Spoke on the intersection of physical and mental disability in educational settings

### **Access UChicago**

*Co-Creator*

Chicago, IL  
2014 - 2015

- Finalist in the 2014-2015 UChicago App Challenge
- Assisted in concept development and data gathering

## **SKILLS**

- Proficient in Microsoft Office, including Word, PowerPoint and Excel
- Experience with archival research: Handling historical materials, using microfilm, and navigating databases