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## Efforts to Install Additional Braille Signs On Campus Continue

By Rachel Van Horne, Associate Editor, and Olivia Slack, Co-Editor in Chief

Using braille—a system of raised dots that can be read by visually impaired people—on signage is something that can make buildings more accessible. Meredith College student Mikayla Gephart, '23, has been advocating for the addition of braille signs on all buildings at Meredith since June 2019. *The Meredith Herald* recently interviewed Gephart and Assistant Director for Disability Services Carolyn Koning to hear more about this issue.

Upon arriving at Meredith, Gephart, who identifies herself as blind, noticed that all buildings had a sign on the outside of them indicating the buildings' names, but that these signs did not include braille. Gephart said, "I started advocating for braille signage because I feel it is unfair that I do not have the same access to the signs as everyone else." She continued, "When I realized in June, 2019 that Meredith needed more braille signage, I alerted Carolyn Koning about the issue. I didn't want the issue to get swept under the rug. Two years later, there has been minimal progress."

Gephart gave an example about the impact of inconsistent braille on campus: "The lack of braille signs grew particularly frustrating during my first Cornhuskin," she said. "I volunteered to bring some cans to one of the

co-chairs for the Class of 2023, who lived in Heilman. I lived in Faircloth, where all of the room numbers were brailled. However, when I tried to find the correct room in Heilman, I was shocked to find that there were no braille signs to help me find the correct room."

Koning said that when she arrived at Meredith, braille signage was inconsistent and that she and Karen Hager, a disability

counselor in the office, have been working on a braille audit. "Last summer, we committed to getting this done," Koning said. "Karen Hager and I went into every single building and every single outside space, and we made a spreadsheet and identified every location that still needs braille."

When asked about student advocacy for the braille signs on Meredith's campus, Gephart said, "I think that we need to make the administration aware that this issue is important to us as students who want to make Meredith a more inclusive environment." Koning shared similar sentiments, and said

she wanted to make students aware that they "have done a lot by increasing visibility and letting that people know we want to be an inclusive community."



A braille sign in Joyner Hall; photo by Olivia Slack

"We want diversity because it makes us a more inclusive community," Koning said. "We really do care about accessibility and welcoming all students."

Koning said that often, there are "too many projects and not enough money."

"Ultimately, we didn't have the budget for all the locations that still need braille," Koning explained. "We prioritized the buildings that were most frequently used by a known user of braille, and we hope to have access to funding to complete the braille project at the end of this fiscal year."

In Gephart's opinion, there is little excuse for the lack of braille around Meredith's campus. "[Placing braille sign] is as simple as ordering the signs and then having Facilities hang them

in accessible places," Gephart said. "I have received countless emails throughout my time here saying that they were making progress, but it has still been three years and most of our buildings still do not have signage that is accessible to the blind. If Meredith can build new buildings for some of our academic programs, there is no reason why we cannot purchase braille signs for all locations on campus."

According to Koning, braille signs can cost more than people may think, and budgets across Meredith's campus were cut due to the pandemic, limiting what Disability Services was able to accomplish this summer. "We want students to know we care about this," she said. "I wish we had the resources to get ahead and be proactive, but we typically react to the specific accommodation needs of incoming students, so it often feels like we're playing catch up."

"Putting a braille sign next to the dorm I am living in and a few other buildings is not going to cut it," Gephart said. "It can be frustrating being the only blind student, because I am only one person. However, if we all put pressure on Meredith, maybe this can be finished by the time I graduate."

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## Students Alert College About Mold in Residence Hall Vents

By Evelyn Summers, Staff Writer

Within a week of moving into her on-campus residence in Heilman Hall, student Lara Brown, '25, says she started experiencing symptoms that she described as "pure exhaustion, super stuffed up [nose], dry throat, runny nose [and a] dry sort of cough." Brown believes these symptoms are indicative of an allergic reaction to mold and mildew in her on-campus living space.

"We noticed we had to dust every two days due to how bad our room was," Brown said. "One day we looked up at our vents and realized how disgusting they looked. There was mildew coating [them] and mold on the outside of the actual cover to the vent." Brown said that a month and a half after complaining about their findings, Heilman's residence director gave her and her suitemates 48 hours to move out with no definite information about when they could return. Brown and her suitemates ended up permanently moving to another floor in Heilman.

On Nov. 16, students living in Heilman were notified via email that Meredith had scheduled a contractor to clean air ducts and the air handler in Heilman over winter break to ensure continued healthy air quality. Prior to winter break, Heilman students will need to move all personal belongings at least four feet away from the hallway wall to ensure protection of belongings from the vent cleanings.

However, Heilman is not the only residence hall that students have found mold in. While residents of Faircloth Hall have also been notified of intended cleaning, Andy Bullock, '25, who lives in Poteat Hall, says she also found mold in her room and has been sick ever since she moved on campus. She said she has a persistent "sore throat" and that many other of the students on her floor do as well.

When asked about how she felt about the upcoming cleaning project, Brown replied, "I don't understand how they are just now

getting to it when a lot of people get sick from mold, mildew and dust. It just seems very irresponsible of the school to not put their students' safety first. A lot of Meredith students...are from far away places, not local, and it is in no way convenient for them to have to take things home or store them somewhere else."

Carrie Barnhart, Director of Residence Life, explained that once the College was notified of the problem by students, they brought in an environmental hygienist to take a closer look. "The results of the testing by an American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA) certified lab showed no safety concerns," Barnhart said. "Having this AIHA certification is a sign that they are providing expert testing and analysis, and that their review of the test results is trustworthy."

When asked about the cleaning schedule already in place, Barnhart said, "The air vents and air handlers in our residence halls are cleaned regularly by our Faci-



Photo by Lara Brown

ties staff, and the College also has a rotation for having a contractor provide additional cleaning of air ducts and the air handlers." She added that according to the environmental hygienist, "the levels [of mold] found did not indicate an immediate need for remediation in order to remain at a safe level for residents."

According to Barnhart, "Heilman is next on the list for this extra step of cleaning by an outside contractor during winter break. All of the residence halls will have this cleaning on a regular schedule as part of this rotation."