

Campus renovations alters accessibility

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Renovations on Highsmith Student Union and construction of the new residence halls directly impact the accessibility of buildings for students, staff and visitors. Founders Drive and the bridge into Highsmith closed during the summer, further limiting access to the buildings.

"The campus population in general and how we move around has been affected by construction," said David Todd, associate vice chancellor of campus operations. "I think we've made concerted efforts to focus specifically on people that have any kind of different or special need for their mobility concerns to try to address that."

People on campus must adjust the way they move around due to the construction on Highsmith and the new residence halls. Campus operations plans to accommodate people with disabilities during the period of construction. The Director of Housing and Student Life Operations, Vollie Barnwell, consulted with the construction contractor about the availability of Founders Drive.

"I think having Founders Drive closed has presented issues starting back in the summer with students moving into Founders Hall for summer programs. We have done our best to work with those groups to provide extra assistance whether that's moving in through Highsmith, increased signage and then for move-in weekend having Founders Drive open for new students," Barnwell said.

Barnwell worked to make sure Founders Drive was open to move students and visitors into Founders Hall at the beginning of the semester. Following move-in day, Founders Drive closed once more.

"The accessible parking for Highsmith is right along University Heights. The

accessible ramp would then lead down. Those right now are the closest permanent parking to Founders," Barnwell said. "We haven't had an issue yet where someone has contacted us about needing accessible parking at Founders Hall."

Parking outside of Founders Hall remains closed, including handicap parking. Accessible parking is available in front of Highsmith Student Union. The ramp and stairs outside Highsmith provide access to both buildings.

"The other way would be to come down the ramp at the butterfly gardens and come behind Mills Hall and around that way. If you're at the Ridges, Governors Hall, or Overlook that would be an easier way to access Highsmith," Barnwell said.

Another way into the area Barnwell offered as an alternative is the ramp that goes between Mills and Highsmith. The plans for the renovation of Highsmith Student Union and the new residence halls comply with ADA design standards according to David Todd.

"Everything that we're building new construction wise, which would be the residence hall buildings, the multipurpose building and the new multipurpose room that's part of Highsmith, all of those pieces will be built to the current accessibility codes," Todd said.

The plans for Highsmith renovations on the student life porch include easy accessibility. Christina Jaeger, associate director of Highsmith operations, helped decide the amount of levels for the student life porch.

"Everything is one level so it's not like there will be an accessibility issue if a student wants to go from the walkway on the porch, to an office on the porch," Jaeger said.

The university plans to go above the ADA design standards of accessibility by incorporating universal design.

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The area between Highsmith and Brown Hall is a cratered construction sight that looks very different now than it did this time last year. The ongoing construction on campus is causing problems for student access.

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