

Opinion

Strong Getting Stronger: Accessibility in Wonderland

By Savi Swiggard, Staff Writer

On Meredith's campus, the idea of inclusion is almost sacred. Though not perfect, the Meredith community as a whole takes steps every day to make the culture more inclusive and accessible to women of all backgrounds.

The American Disabilities Act declares that individuals with disabilities are to have equal access to the resources and services available to individuals without disabilities. In effect, accommodations must be made by any public-serving entity existing within the United States, and under Title III of the ADA, privately-owned public serving buildings must be designed or altered "in such manner that the (altered portion of the) facility is readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities." This means that buildings must have tools such as ramps, handicap buttons and bright lights to ensure that people with disabilities are physically capable of moving around and accessing necessary resources. This means that Meredith is effectively ADA compliant. The issue comes in where ADA ends, where the ability to access resources does not translate to easy access, nor does it extend to resources which are not deemed necessary.

Hannah Brittain-Dubois, a freshman here at Meredith College, expressed frustration with Meredith accessibility in terms of her personal struggles navigating campus. Brittain-Dubois was diagnosed with brain cancer and, since her treatment, suffers issues with strength and balance. She complains that the courtyard bricks are broken loose and have caused her to fall and fracture her foot. She noted to me that the campus is very difficult to get around with little balance, as handrails aren't always available. Brittain-Dubois also referenced that many of the doors at Meredith, specifically doors without handicap buttons such as residence hall personal doors and classroom doors, are heavy and difficult to push,

making it a chore to get into some rooms and buildings from certain entrances.

A significant number of Brittain-Dubois' complaints were echoed in my own small experience with accessibility here at Meredith. At the beginning of January this year, I was tripped and sprained both ankles and my knee, leaving me to use a wheelchair around campus. This was how I came to realize that ADA compliance did not translate to easy access. My own issues navigating Meredith campus in a wheelchair consisted primarily of ease-of-access issues. While I could enter and exit all buildings and had access to most floors, getting there was an exhausting chore. I found that ramps were often so steep that I had to cling to railings to pull myself forward, or put the brakes on the wheels to briefly rest. Similar to Brittain-Dubois's struggles, loose bricks often caused issues when moving around the courtyard. I found that having only one entrance into many of the buildings meant having to go all the way around to get in, which takes both time and effort and became a painful fight when trying to escape rain. Outside of Vann residence hall on the Johnson side, I had to circle around in order to reach a ramp due to a small step, and even then, the door into my building lacked a handicap button. I had to either go all the way to the other entrance, or awkwardly force open the door and pull myself through. I could not access the fourth floors of either String or Faircloth, which while unnecessary, meant that I couldn't visit friends or attend any hall socials on those floors. It would have been a completely different story if I had lived on one of these floors, unable to access them until my sprains had all fully healed. There must be more we can do.

Tasia Bromell is a sophomore here at Meredith. She's a strong

leader with an impressive path in front of her, and she has a tethered spinal cord. This means that Bromwell primarily gets around campus with forearm crutches. Bromwell noted that while Meredith has a wonderful Disability Services office, Meredith College as a whole could benefit from disability education. She states, "Navigating campus has gone pretty well so far, considering that Meredith's campus is very small; however, getting up to certain places is sometimes a problem because not every building (i.e. residence halls) contains an elevator, and not all the elevators work all the time." Bromwell also mused that the Disability Services office is ironically on the second floor of Carroll Hall, where the elevator breaks from time to time. While she expressed a deep love for the employees of Disability Services and the way Meredith does its best to treat students with disabilities as equals to students without, there is a frustration with how society as a whole treats accessibility as an afterthought. One way in which Bromwell recommends we practice treating people as equals is to stop qualifying people with disabilities by their disability. Some ways the Meredith community can normalize disabilities and treat people as people include simple "person-first" language shifts (from "disabled student" to "student with disabilities") and only noting a student's disability when it's relevant to the conversation.

This sentiment was echoed by Carolyn Koning, Assistant Director of Meredith's Disability Services. When asked about the motivation for accessibility moving forward, Koning expressed optimism for the future, stating, "We, [Disability Services and Facilities Services], are slowly making very intentional progress," in reference to improving quality of life. Meredith

College first began adding ramps and elevators in 1971, long before the ADA was brought into law in 1990, and had been accepting students with physical disabilities years before that. Progress in making Meredith easy to traverse is still long and expensive, as Koning noted that even the cost of many recent adaptations has been absurdly high. Despite the cost, the culture at Meredith is one that strives for improvement. Koning wanted it clear that any issues with accessibility faced by any student should be brought up and dealt with, and the Disability Services and Facilities Services on campus do everything to fix both short-term inaccessibility and long-term ease of access. Thanks to these services, accommodations have been made recently for visually impaired students, such as adjusting light levels and marking stairways, at the request of students.

This is how Meredith gets stronger. The language used by Bromwell and Koning was deliberate in how we as a campus culture can move forward. While cost will be an issue, making problems known and drawing attention to them is a crucial step. The intention of this piece is not to bash Meredith—it is intended to give us the tools and knowledge to improve. Cost is the primary obstacle between Meredith and complete accessibility, but an awareness on campus could enable fundraising opportunities to make these changes. Whether we have disabilities or not, we should feel an obligation to make everyone feel equal, and it's hard to feel equal when it takes twice as long to get into a building, or when you can't visit a friend's room because there's no elevator. We are Meredith Strong, so let's get stronger. Equality can begin there. Where it ends is up to us, the students, staff and faculty of Meredith College.

A Great Start to 2019: Passion Conference Review and Preview

By Ashleigh Murr, Staff Writer

Are you involved in a Christian ministry on campus? Do you enjoy Christian speakers and worship music? If so, the 2020 Passion conference is a great opportunity for you and your campus ministry group. It will be in Georgia's Mercedes-Benz Stadium (home of the NFL Atlanta Falcons). According to CBS Sports, the next big event taking place there is the superbowl, showing the prominence of this location.

The Passion movement was started in 1995 by Louie and Shelley Giglio out of a desire to see young people come together and lift the name of Jesus. According to the Passion website, 268generation.

com, the movement is "rooted in the confession of Isaiah 26:8 [Yes, Lord, walking in the way of Your Truth, we wait eagerly for You, for Your name and Your renown are the desire of our souls.]" and "exists to glorify God by uniting students in worship, prayer and justice for spiritual awakening in this generation." The mission of the Passion conference is "calling students from campuses across the nation and around the world to live for what matters most. For us, what matters most is the name and renown of Jesus." The first gathering of 18 to 25-year-olds for an event was in 1997 and has happened annually since.

In early January of 2019, forty-thousand 18 to 25-year-olds

attended the 2019 Passion conference. These attendees were split up among four locations: the State Farm Arena and Infinite Energy Center in Atlanta, The Theatre at Grand Prairie in Dallas and The Anthem in Washington D.C. The locations all came together each session via video conference and hosted many amazing speakers and worship-leaders. Christine Caine had a powerful message on the evening of Jan. 3 in which she called believers to have and demonstrate faith that amazes Jesus.

In another session, Ira, a young girl from the Philippines, shared a testimony of the impact the Deaf Bible Society has on her life and community. This ministry

exists to "reveal the hope of the gospel in Jesus Christ, so that every deaf person has the opportunity to receive, experience, and share it," according to the Deaf Bible Society's website. The 40,000 young adults in attendance, many being financially struggling college students, raised \$448,270 for the Deaf Bible Society, according to both Fox News and Blaze Media.

The conference, for me personally, was filled with life-giving community and spiritual focus as I went into the new year. I saw and spoke with other Meredith students with their own groups while at the conference and received positive

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