

**Proposal for Increased Equity and Inclusivity for the Disabled Community at CWRU**

Prepared for the For a Better CWRU Executive Committee

Prepared by the Disabilities Committee and its co-chairs

November 13th, 2020

## Statement of Purpose

With this proposal, we aim to improve the experience at CWRU for the disabled community, to increase access to reasonable accommodations, and to ensure equitable access to campus resources and infrastructures. We have identified four areas which need improvement: disability training, physical accommodations, academic accommodations, and campus resources and research. Many students have brought issues to our attention that must be addressed.

First, many students have experienced ableism from faculty, staff, and peers, which we hope to address with improved disability training for both employees and students of the university. In addition, accessibility is a huge issue both physically, especially regarding transportation, and online accessibility, such as difficult and/or unclear accommodation processes. In some regards, there is insufficient awareness or ease of use of certain disability accommodations and their processes. Importantly, students also report a need for more visible and comprehensive reporting systems for inaccessible buildings and faculty/staff violations of accommodations and/or ableist comments making students feel uncomfortable or unwelcome.

We believe that the disabled community on campus is often deprioritized in conversations about diversity and resources to support communities on campus. Disabled students have a wide range of needs that are not being consistently met, and efforts such as Days of Dialogue tend to be focused on abled individuals with the disability community rarely being more than an afterthought. There is a need for increased social and material support for the disabled community at CWRU, including adequate resources during COVID-19, a community center on campus akin to which other communities have (e.g. LGBTQ+ center, Women's center, etc.), and more adequate training and visibility of disabled students within the idea of diversity

on campus. We plan to address these inequities by planning and implementing the following solutions.

### **Category #1: Disability Training**

#### 1. Training for University Employees

##### a. Faculty and Staff

- i. Students have experienced faculty and others in advisor not being respectful of disabled students and their needs for accommodations and privacy. There have been numerous reported incidents of faculty breaking confidentiality and questioning the need for accommodations and/or outing people for their disability. There have also been incidents of microaggressions by faculty and staff as well as insufficient support for students with disabilities.
- ii. We propose that faculty and staff have ongoing training in regards to accommodations as well as cultural competency for the disabled community and their experiences in higher education. We believe that this training would be most effective for faculty and staff if there was an emphasis on the differences between the kinds of disability and how they impact learning. These are physical, mental, and social disabilities. The disability community is very diverse in itself, and we do not believe that this is currently reflected in how faculty and staff are taught about them.
- iii. In addition, CWRU should ensure that this training makes instructors aware and familiar with exit strategies not only for fire escape protocol, but specifically for students with disabilities. All faculty and staff, as well

as graduate teaching assistants (GTAs), should be aware of the proper protocols, but they also need to be trained in helping students who need assistance or who simply have to take a different route.

- iv. In order to competently address these concerns, faculty and staff should be required to complete continuing education on disability resources.

Continuing education would involve discussion of ableism and diversity of experience within the disabled community. The Disability Resources office is equipped and enthusiastic about this expanded training.

- b. Teaching Assistants

- i. In addition to providing and requiring more disability-centered training for faculty, GTAs should have much more training. In the required teaching courses offered, such as UNV 401 A, B, and C, there is an apparent lack of disability training.
- ii. We propose that such courses and/or departments have a day long disability training seminar that is required for all GTAs. This should include, but not be limited to, training to assist students with academic and physical accommodations, empathetic approaches to students with disabilities, and how to effectively communicate with such students about these topics.

## 2. Changes to Orientation Training

- a. Diversity 360

- i. Diversity conversations at CWRU often do not include the disabled community enough. Many students report disabilities only being

mentioned at Diversity 360 on a worksheet reflecting on their own diversity. This is unacceptable, and we believe that representation matters. However, Diversity 360 is already considered to be too long, so we are proposing a new format for Diversity 360 that would be more interactive and inclusive of diverse communities on campus

- ii. Four hours is very long, so we would suggest breaking it up into sections, in order to encourage cultural competency for every community on campus. This would entail students moving from room to room where presenters within or who have experience with the community they're representing.
  1. There would be 2 hours for the normal training, and then for the following 2 hours, students would go through the following breakout sessions: Race/Ethnicity, LGBTQ+, Gender, Disability, and a room dedicated to intersectionality.
  2. Each of these 5 sessions would be 25 minutes, and due to the rotation, students would be able to go through the sessions in smaller groups, which would allow for better interaction than a lecture-style Diversity 360 presentation. These sessions should capitalize on this opportunity, each doing an activity with students focused on empathizing with and better understanding the perspectives of that community on campus.

b. Optional Disability Resources Meeting Options

- i. Currently, the Disability Resources office has an invite-only meeting for first years who have started an application with their office, and they table for their office for graduate student orientation. These measures are good, but they are not enough.
  - ii. During orientation week, there is a schedule provided to students with a list of various optional meetings that they can attend. We propose that the Disability Resources office informational meeting be on that list. This would give students more information about the office and accommodations on top of the general information they'll receive during orientation. It is integral, too, that graduate students be able to receive this additional information as well.
  - c. In addition to the list of apps recommended for students to download during orientation, we ask that the Rave Guardian app be added. It would be beneficial for students to understand the range of information and utilities offered by the Rave Guardian app as well.
3. Orientation Leader Training
  - a. Having been an orientation leader myself, I have also been through orientation leader training, which is a week long with full 8 hour days of presentations. Of those 40 odd hours, the training on Disability Resources constituted hardly a half hour, and this was squeezed into a rapid fire succession of presentations on various departments that morning. The accommodations process is not easy or simple to go through, and many students learn that this is an option to them too

late. Orientation leaders must have knowledge about DR in their repertoire, so that they can direct students to the office and its services.

- b. We only ask for a dedicated hour of time for disability training for orientation leaders. The Disability Resources office is very enthusiastic about this and would gladly give a more holistic presentation if given the proper amount of time.
- c. However, we know there is a finite amount of time for training orientation leaders, so how can this expansion be accommodated? This is an issue of prioritization, as the disability community often feels like an afterthought in these conversations.
- d. In general, I believe these rapid fire presentations should be more interactive and should brush over the intricacies of the department which you could find from a google search. I did not glean much information from that outpouring of technical information. Instead, they should focus their presentations on the information that orientation leaders should have a working knowledge of in order to bring up in conversation to support new students.
- e. Finally, I (Brianna Olson) would be more than happy to work with the First Year Orientation team in order to facilitate this and to help work this into their training program from the perspective of someone who's gone through this program.

#### 4. Training Disability Advocates

- a. We would like to start a division of students called Disability Advocates, which would be integrated into CWRU in a similar manner to the Wellness Ambassadors which operate under University Health and Counseling Services. These students would be overseen by the Disability Resources office and operate

independently, directing programming and efforts to increase the visibility of disabled students on campus as well as serving as a resource for them.

- b. This would be a combination effort from Disability Resources, disabled student leaders, and the Disability Community Center (if/when established). Disability Resources would educate these advocates on relevant legislation and disability rights, such as the ADA, IDEA, etc.
- c. These disability advocates would continue work similar to which this disabilities committee has been able to do where they would critically evaluate whether campus services are equally accessible and use their collective voices to call attention to the struggles that disabled students face daily.

## **Category #2: Physical Accommodations**

### 1. Improvement to Transportation Accessibility

#### a. Assisted Transport

- i. Students can receive assisted transport through their accommodations in order to be transported to classes. Many have experienced exorbitant wait times for assisted transport that lead them to be late to class and which pushes them toward utilizing other more consistent and expensive modes of transport. We believe that this is an issue of prioritization, coordination, and accountability.
- ii. It is integral that students be able to use this service that they are legally qualified for and which is essential to their quality of life on campus. It is true, too, that the same vehicles and drivers are responsible for assisted



transport who are also drivers after 6PM when the service becomes Saferide. We suggest that these drivers be more adequately trained on the differences between their roles, responsibilities, and the communities they serve before and after 6PM.

- iii. In addition, we believe that the communication systems need to be evaluated and subjected to a quality improvement process in order to ensure that wait times are not more than the advertised time and that these standards are maintained regardless of the time of day or year.
- iv. Currently, the system keeps track of when requests are put in and when the transport arrives, so this data will be important to the evaluation of the current system in addition to student feedback. However, it would be useful to establish a method of data collection for when the system fails and students have to call dispatch themselves.

b. Saferide

- i. Students have also asserted that there are not enough disability-accessible Saferide vehicles, and this makes it difficult for them to get transportation home after 6PM. Students should not have to build their class and extracurricular schedules around when it is convenient for the service-providers; instead, service-providers should prioritize those that they serve with increased needs.
- ii. We would suggest a transition to all accessible vehicles; however, we understand that this change will be a process, and this change will not and cannot be immediate. Because of this, we propose that the Saferide apps

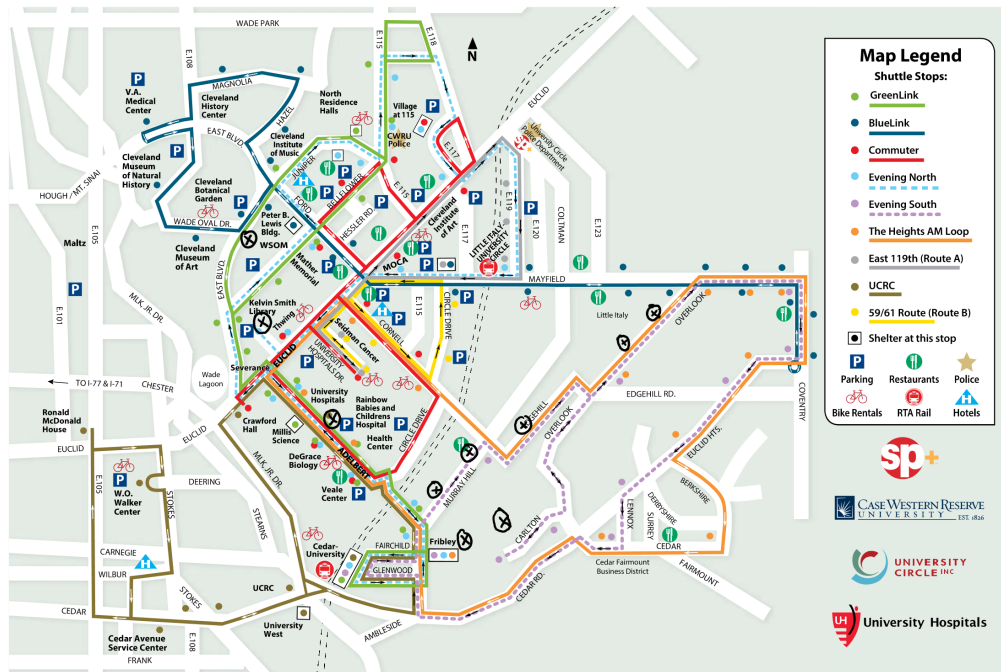
be updated in order to allow a place for students to specify if they are disabled or will need an accessible Saferide vehicle to be their ride. This would improve the efficiency of the system, so that students do not need to turn a driver away and request a new one if and when an inaccessible vehicle shows up to pick them up. This provision should be in place until we achieve the standard of every Saferide vehicle being accessible.

c. Campus Shuttles

- i. Campus shuttles are an integral service that assists students with varying degrees of disability to get around campus and the areas surrounding CWRU. Many have noted a need for an increased number of stop locations as well as times. We believe the bare minimum for an increase in stops should constitute more shuttle stops near clinics and pharmacies, such as RiteAID, which improve access to medication refills and locations to seek help for emergency health needs.
- ii. This service affects many more than just the disabled community, so we propose that a survey be sent out to the student body at large in order to gauge the need for specific location and time expansions. This survey will also collect data on current usage in order to establish a baseline. This survey constitutes the following:
  1. What time do you usually use the shuttle in the morning, if any? (open ended)
  2. What time do you usually use the shuttle in the afternoon, if any? (open ended)
  3. How many times do you take a shuttle in a day? (open ended)
  4. How many times do you take a shuttle in a week? (open ended)
  5. Would you prefer for there to be more stops on North Side? (Y/N)

6. Would you prefer for there to be more stops on South Side? (Y/N)
7. Would you prefer for there to be more stops in between North Side and South Side? (Y/N)
8. Check off all the areas where you would like there to be more stops: (Top of the hill, Bottom of the hill, KSL/Tink area, The Village, Near Wade, Off-campus toward Cleveland Clinic, Off-campus around North Side, Off-campus on Murray Hill, Off-campus in Little Italy, Off-campus in Cleveland Heights/Coventry, Other)
9. Do you think that shuttles are accessible? (Y/N)
10. Are there any stops that are not accessible or inconsistent in their stopping frequency? (Y/N)
  - a. If so, which stop(s)? (open ended)
11. Are the shuttle maps clear and easy to understand/access? (Y/N)
12. Do you think there are enough shuttles? (Y/N)
13. Do the shuttles start early enough? (Y/N)
14. Do the shuttles run late enough? (Y/N)
15. If not, when would you like to see the shuttles run from and to? (open ended)

- iii. The following figure is an example of increased stop locations which were identified by our physical accommodations committee:



## 2. Building Accessibility

### a. Improvements to the Reporting System

- i. The buildings across the CWRU campus lack many aspects of accessibility in terms of ramps, automatic ('handicap') door mechanisms, regular maintenance of structural accommodations, bathrooms that are accessible for those that are physically disabled, as well as consistent and accessible elevators.
- ii. Often, these issues go unreported for too long. While there is a system to report and fix these issues (email: [barrierreporting@case.edu](mailto:barrierreporting@case.edu)), we believe that the visibility and accessibility of this reporting process should be improved. We propose that the knowledge about reporting systems, in general, be added to the new student checklist, so that students are

knowledgeable of how to report issues for disability accessibility in addition to many other important issues.

- iii. We also suggest that each building have an ‘accommodations directory’ online which would be updated regularly based on the reporting system. In addition, a generalized map outThis refers to the idea of having a map of the building next to the directory for classrooms/offices that

b. Maps for Transparency on Accessibility

- i. Almost all of the buildings on campus that are deemed ‘historic’ sincerely lack or have no accommodations for those with disabilities. It is important that students be made aware of which buildings are accessible and which are not.
- ii. We propose first that CWRU provides a map that details which buildings are accessible and which are not. This would provide routes with ease of access, elevator locations, elevator functions (including which floors they service), as well as how to navigate buildings that require a roundabout way to get somewhere, such as Millis Schmitt. This map should be integrated into the various maps of campus available online. This map should also specify if a building is fire safe or not for students with physical disabilities as well.
  - 1. Moreover, we propose that CWRU determine a manageable budget to make historic buildings more accessible, as students have reported being turned away from some programs because the main academic building(s) required for their studies are not accessible.

2. If accruing these funds is not possible, we demand that programs of study, especially the graduate schools, be held accountable on this issue. It is essential that classes accommodate disabled students and the building for the class be changed to allow the student to take that class over turning the student away, as that is unacceptable.
  - iii. CWRU's Environmental Health and Safety does provide a map online that labels each building's fire escape location(s), but there should also be physical maps in the buildings by the doors and in the hallway for students with disabilities to have ease of access to such information and routes that best suit their needs.
- c. Improved Access to Amenities
- i. Bathrooms
    1. Several buildings on campus lack bathrooms that can accommodate a wheelchair, scooter, or any other necessary aid. Given the addition of COVID-19 procedures and the need to limit occupants in the bathrooms, this issue has become even greater. For example, the women's bathroom on the first floor of Millis hall makes it essentially impossible for a student with a physical disability to use the bathroom as the structure is very difficult to navigate and there is almost no space in between the entrance and the stalls or the stalls and the sinks.

2. We propose that CWRU inspect all bathrooms in residential halls, academic buildings, libraries, and dining halls to ensure that they can accommodate those with physical disabilities regardless of the aids they need.
- ii. Elevators
    1. On CWRU campus, not all buildings that are in working order are easily accessible, the locations are not well-known, the lag time is very long, and some elevators do not reach certain floors.
    2. In addition, as described earlier, there should be a directory for elevator location, function, and number to call for issues, as there is a directory for classrooms and offices. There should be visible signs as well stating if an elevator is disability accessible or not and a number to call if one should have any issues.
  - iii. Sidewalks
    1. Given the size of our campus and the climate it is situated in, we propose that CWRU has a more efficient way to clear snow from sidewalks and paths, particularly those which are cobblestone or alike, as they are harder to navigate with a wheelchair or scooter.

### **Category #3: Academic Accommodations**

1. Visibility of Accommodations
  - a. Many students are unaware that they can receive accommodations in their lab setting classes. These accommodations are very important and should not be

brushed over or only offered/mentioned when students express a specific need for them. Instead, we should increase the visibility of these accommodations by adding a section in the list of accommodations offered and on the website labeled “lab accommodations.” Under this section, the accommodations that Disability Resources already offers in regards to labs will be listed, but the availability of these accommodations will become much more clear.

- b. We also believe laboratory courses should follow a ‘universal design’ in which the environment and items in the laboratory are suitable to be used by all people. For example, all laboratories should contain adjustable-height workstations to accommodate those in a wheelchair. The work area should also be comfortable for those who are required to remain seated due to health impairments. Laboratory training for the students taking the course should include addressing special learning needs, accommodation alternatives, how to address issues with a lab partner, extra time for set up and completion of the lab work, safety procedures for students with a variety of sensory or mobility abilities, and use of institutional resources.

## 2. Clarity in Accommodations

### a. Website Accessibility

- i. There is a lot of potential to improve access and help the community by improving capabilities and pathways of disability resource websites. First, there should be a link to AIM on CWRU’s main website. Students have reported that they need to bookmark the AIM website and struggle to find



it even from a google search if they do not do this. We must make these resources more accessible.

- ii. In addition, a link to AIM should be included in the Student Information System (SIS) because AIM is a very important student resource. We think that SIS would also be a good platform to display this access because it would separate the stigma of disability being only a healthcare issue.
- iii. It is very common that students don't know that they can access disability accommodations, let alone how to go about this process. We believe that having a very user friendly interface, which could automate a lot of the communication barriers students experience, would really assist a lot of students and decrease stress associated with the accommodations process.
- iv. The next steps are to work with UTech obviously and to get the details of this integration figured out with the legal aspects, internal policies, ensuring that it hits all the required objectives for the requirements we currently have. If the folks at PeopleSoft are not going to cooperate with this, then there is always the option of integration into other sites, such as possibly Canvas or MyHealthConnects, although these options are not ideal and carry their own barriers.
- v. The main goal is not that it is directly in SIS or any other specific system, but that there is accessible, streamlined consolidation of these resources so that the time between an issue, whether chronic or acute, and getting the appropriate arrangements is minimized in such fashion that academic performance does not suffer.

- b. Accessibility in Other Formats
  - i. The room reservation website should feature information on whether or not the room is accessible. At least, this platform could link to the map we discussed which would show which buildings are accessible to students with physical disabilities.
  - ii. In addition, we would like to see a mandatory syllabus statement which discusses disability accommodations and resources to assist with the process of obtaining them. This would need to get in front of the faculty senate in order to be approved, and the Disability Resources office has been trying to advocate for this to happen for a while. The student body should be made very aware of the availability of these resources and the processes by which to receive accommodations, and we believe that a mandatory syllabus statement would be one way to help facilitate this.
3. Improved Reporting System for Accommodation Discrimination
  - a. Similar to the reporting system for physical accommodations, the reporting system for violations of academic accommodations exists, but it needs to be more visible and accessible to students.
  - b. Formal complaints about being denied accommodations go through the Office of Equity. We suggest that the availability of this process be made more visible to students by including it alongside general disability resources and information.
  - c. We also suggest an additional system, which would keep track of less serious grievances than outright violations of ADA compliance. The utility of this would be to keep track of complaints about faculty, staff, administrators, or student

instructors, such as GTAs or tutors. If a person in one of these positions receives more than two complaints of ableism or breaches of confidentiality, for example, then that person would have to complete continuing education credits online.

- d. If the administration is willing to go forward with this initiative, we would be happy to aid in the design of an online continuing education “course” for these individuals to become more culturally competent and understanding of students with disabilities.

#### **Category #4: Campus Resources and Outreach**

##### 1. Disability Community Center

- a. Students have identified a need for a physical space that will unite and support students with disabilities. Similar to places on campus such as the LGBTQ+ center and the Women’s center, we strongly believe that we need a Disability Community Center.
- b. This center would provide a safe, accessible space for our marginalized community to gather, seek support, and form a community presence on campus. The disabled community is very diverse in experience on campus, and currently, we have no real unifying place or organization to celebrate and uplift each other and our community here at CWRU. We need a location to do this that is separate and distinct from DR and OATS, as our accommodations do not define us or our potential.
- c. The disability community center would also supply some key resources in addition to support for the disabled community. We would want to have a mini

fridge to hold onto lunches that needed to be packed due to specific dietary restrictions. There could also be a small lockbox in the fridge in our community center in which students could temporarily store their medications closeby which need to be refrigerated, such as insulin. In order to be accommodating to everyone and what they want from this space between classes, we would like to supply several pairs of noise cancelling headphones. In addition, a couch suitable for naps between classes would be great for students with sleep disorders or chronic fatigue conditions.

- d. This community center would also encourage and facilitate widespread inclusion of people of varying abilities. We have a vision of programming and events being hosted in the space and eventually hiring student employees similar to the Women's Center, the LGBT Center, and the Office of Multicultural Affairs.
- e. The disabled community would greatly benefit from a shared community and centralized peer support system at CWRU, and the disability community center is the perfect opportunity to give that to students. In addition to the stated above, this center would also encourage dialogues and advocacy efforts for disability rights on and off campus. This would be a powerful way to include and uplift disabled voices without speaking over them or attempting to speak for us.

## 2. Resources for Caregivers

- a. Accommodations for Caregivers
  - i. We propose that caregivers be allowed to apply for accommodations in a similar way to students with disabilities. Possible accommodations which

caregivers may greatly benefit from are flexible attendance, for obvious reasons, and transportation assistance.

- ii. Transportation assistance would constitute that caregivers also have access and permissions to the use of assisted transport in the case that the shuttle services are needed for getting medications or medical supplies.