



Summer 2006

Beckwith Residence Hall

In 1959, the University of Illinois created a transitional living program for students with physical disabilities who needed assistance with daily living activities. In this, the 47th year of offering such services and the 25th year of providing them through Beckwith Hall, we have a myriad of exciting opportunities, challenges, and accomplishments to share with you in this sixth edition of the Beckwith Newsletter. For example, we have included an article describing our plan to host a Silver Anniversary Celebration of Beckwith Hall in April of 2007. Next, an update is provided on the status of the University's plan to build a new state-of-the-art residential complex within which the service, educational, and research programs of Beckwith Hall will be an integral component. Finally, as in past newsletters, we have included articles by current students which highlight, from their perspective, the many ways in which the programs and services of Beckwith Hall continue to positively impact their lives. I know that you will enjoy reading this edition of the Beckwith Newsletter, and I hope that you will contact us if you have questions or would like additional information about our programs and services for students with disabilities.

Brad Hedrick, Director
Disability Resources and
Educational Services

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*For an alternative format of this newsletter please go to:
www.disability.uiuc.edu*

Director's Perspective

By Patricia B. Malik, Ph.D., CTRS

As I look over this past year, my first year as director of Beckwith, I am proud of the accomplishments of the students and staff. This year has been an amazing experience and I can honestly state that we are definitely a program that is raising the bar for ourselves and hopefully for other post-secondary educational programs across the country. The following is only a highlight of our goals and accomplishments from this past academic year.

Goal 1 – Enhance and improve the Transitional Disability Management Program (TDMP). Paige Lewis, our disability specialist, worked on this Beckwith program. Accomplishments included developing benchmarks for each year someone is a resident at Beckwith; implementing a new documentation format that is more efficient, individualized, and flexible; and developing Beckwith-specific modules for the Illinois Students Taking Effective Preparation (ISTEP) program. These online modules include resources, videotaped segments of Beckwith students and staff, and exercises for incoming students to complete.

Goal 2 – Enhance and improve the Personal Assistant Training/Educational Program. Katherine Johnson, Beckwith's associate director, spent much of her time this year upgrading and getting the personal assistant (PA) materials revised and put online. The intent is to have online topic-specific modules developed with test questions so that prospective PAs can complete these modules prior to attending class, allowing more time for hands-on, experiential activities. This will allow our new PAs to be better prepared when they begin working.

Goal 3 – Enhance and improve the operations of Beckwith Hall. While this goal area doesn't sound as exciting as the previous ones, it was an important area for us to work in. We systematically reviewed and revised the Beckwith Hall Handbook to be more in line with University Housing's Hallmarks and with the actual operations of Beckwith. An operations manual was developed through the work of Ruben Robles, a live-in PA who completed his community health internship with us during Spring 06. All of the PA evaluations were revised and put online for ease of student use. Recruitment materials for personal assistants and graduate resident advisors were also updated.

Goal 4 – Increase and nurture relationships between Beckwith Hall staff and a variety of stakeholders including, but not limited to, DRES staff, the greater university community, Beckwith alumni, and current Beckwith PA staff and residents. This goal was achieved through strengthening the Beckwith Mentor Program, surveying Beckwith alumni, working closely with Susann Heft, resource facilitator for the majority of Beckwith students, and beginning to plan for the 25th Anniversary of Beckwith Hall. You can find more about the 25th Anniversary Celebration in this newsletter.

This is an exciting time to celebrate past achievements and accomplishments of Beckwith students and staff, as the University is working on a new "Beckwith" Residence Hall. This will be a cooperative venture between Housing and DRES. Again, you will find more about the project in this newsletter.

It has been a pleasure to be part of the Beckwith community this year. The students and staff have been gracious; I felt welcomed right from the start! I look forward to writing more articles for future Beckwith Annual Newsletters. As we have come to say this year, "Beckwith is a great place to live AND work – the best kept secret on campus." We are striving to get the word out so that we are no longer a secret!



An International Adventure: Mother and Son Perspectives

A Mom's View

By *Antonia Nikolaides*

To any visitor, Argentina is a country forever remembered for its passionate music and dance, intense geographical contrasts, rich history and culture, and gushing warmth of its people. In my mind, the beautiful South American country will always coincide with a major turn in my younger son's journey into adulthood.

We were visiting Argentina for the 2005 Pan-American Boccia Games. My 19 year-old son, Costa, had the privilege to be one of the eight athletes representing the USA that year. Costa had been playing boccia since third grade and had competed in many national tournaments. Although he had participated for many years at the Windsor Indoor Games in Canada, the tournament in Argentina was truly his first international competition. His performance for the first time would not just affect his personal standing, but the chances of the USA to send a team to the Paralympic Games in Beijing in 2008.

Costa has always been very competitive. Whether he played boccia, Monopoly, power soccer or had debates with people, his goal had always been the win. Barring cheating, he would always welcome factors such as good luck on his part or bad luck for his opponents to turn things in his favor. He thrived on the thrill of the win, the rush and the exhilaration after the intense pressure. Although he was always a good sport when he lost, the anticipation of the win would motivate him to do his best during the competition.

In Argentina, the team won the Bronze Medal, missing the Silver by a hair. I thought he would be excited for being able to help the USA to get a medal in his first international competition. Instead he was extremely upset. He told me that even if they had

won Gold, it would have meant nothing to him because in his opinion they played so badly they should be ashamed to go out on the court and compete at all.

I was rendered speechless. It had not happened slowly over a period of time and after a lot of deliberation and introspection. It was almost an epiphany, an abrupt realization that the real trophy is not in the rush of the win, but rather in a skill well-honed, a job well done, and the personal pride of the quality of one's performance. This is the type of awareness that once it happens, it lasts a lifetime.

I really like the road you are taking, Costa, and because I know you still love the rush of the win I hope you get it more often than not, but for the right reason.

The Athlete's Perspective

By *Costa Nikolaides*

My name is Costa and I am a 19 year-old sophomore. I am a quadriplegic and I have played boccia ball competitively since I was eight years old. Boccia is a game of skill played on the ground using leather balls. The International Sports & Recreation Association allows me to use a ramp, which is placed by a holder/assistant according to my direction. Since I have been playing for eleven years now, I participated in many competitions which, until recently, took me as far as Windsor, Canada. However, this past summer I was invited to compete on the USA Team for the 2005 Pan-American Championships held in Argentina in September. This invitation was the high point of my boccia career to date, so I gladly accepted.

The trip to Argentina was an experience that I will never forget. The plane trip was the first obstacle to hurdle. For a

President's Commentary

By *Amber Buckley-Shaklee*

Beckwith Hall is a unique residence hall for many reasons. Most obviously because of the number of students with physical disabilities who live here alongside the non-disabled live-in personal assistants. Also, the relatively small size of this residence hall compared to others on campus makes Beckwith Hall distinct. These qualities have made Beckwith a great place to live and I have enjoyed my four years as a resident. I have made a lot of great friends and have had amazing experiences while living here. Serving as President of the Beckwith Student Government (BSG) has been both fun and challenging; ultimately, both have been enjoyable.

The purpose of the Beckwith Student Government is to act as a liaison for the administrative staff and residents. In addition and perhaps most importantly, BSG acts as a social committee for the hall. The informality of BSG means that planning of

events often involves most of the residents and leads to various fun activities. This year we have had new events, thanks to the contributions of those involved with the hall. In the fall, several of us visited Curtis Orchard and picked apples, took a hayrack ride and ate many delicious foods. For the first time in my four years living here, we also had a halloween party with Delta Sigma Omicron. We also had a valentine's exchange fundraiser, and members of Alpha Gamma Alpha sponsored a game night. Other activities included going to the Beverly Theatre, movie marathons, game nights, and the always popular bar crawl.

I'll remember Beckwith Hall as being a great place to live because of the close group of friends I made and the tight-knit community of individuals that have lived here over the years. I hope that as my peers and I move out, the remaining students and new students maintain the close, friendly relationships that make Beckwith Hall a great residence hall for students with and without disabilities to live. ♦



quadriplegic, it is important to be able to change position in order to avoid continuous pressure on one area of the body. In my electric wheelchair I can recline from a sitting position to one that is nearly flat. The flight would be ten hours long, meaning I would have to sit in a cramped seat that could recline all of five centimeters. I also use a ventilator to assist my breathing, which normally hangs on the back of my wheelchair. On the plane, my ventilator had to be wedged under the seat in front of me, along with a battery and necessary tunings and wires. Once this was accomplished, I watched the first movie on the flight, but having already seen all the other choices, I fell asleep. Now I am one of the few people who actually enjoys airplane food, so I awoke for the meals, but otherwise I was sound asleep. Finally, I awoke when my parents and I were landing in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Landing led to our second obstacle, getting to the competition site. We would be staying and playing in Mar del Plata, a city six hours away. In my wheelchair this would not have been a problem, but to my surprise I was seated in a large bus on a bench-like seat with no seatbelts. Usually I enjoy taking risks, but I thought this was a bit too much. Unfortunately there was no other way for me to get to Mar del Plata, so I had to deal with it. As can be imagined, I was slightly afraid of being hurled off the seat, but my mom was seated next to me firmly holding me in place. After I realized my mom had control of me, despite the numerous bumps I again fell asleep. When I awoke we were in Mar del Plata.

Once the rest of the USA team and I were settled in our rooms, all attention turned toward the competition. The games took place

over ten days, so we had a little time to practice and get the feel of the courts before the singles matches began. My first objective was to get enough wins to move out of my group of competitors and into the playoffs. I reached that goal, but unfortunately I lost my first playoff game which eliminated me from that tournament. My next objective was to help my team do well in the ensuing pairs matches. During the pairs I discussed strategy with my teammate and made some important shots, helping our team win the Bronze Medal. We came just short of winning the Silver Medal by losing

in overtime to the Argentinean team, who went on to win that medal. The Canadian team won Gold, while Puerto Rico and Chile placed fourth and fifth. After the medal ceremony, the games concluded and it was time to go home. The return trip was basically a repeat of our arrival, and I was immediately plunged back into college life.

On the whole, despite the transportation troubles, the trip to Argentina was a positive experience. There were volunteers that helped us with coordinating buses and moving our massive amount of luggage. Without them the trip would have been much more difficult, if not impossible. Because of the rigorous schedule we did not have any time to go sight-seeing, but the thrill of the competition was enough for us. To me, this competition was different from previous ones. I was not playing for my own status, but that of the United States of America. The Bronze Medal was rewarding, but this international experience will spur me to practice even harder so that next time the USA can come home with the Gold Medal.



Transitional Disability Management Plan–The Next Generation

This year, the emphasis for the Transitional Disability Management Plan (TDMP) was to continue to assist students in gaining the competence necessary to enable them to manage their lives independently, though the methods of receiving this information broadened from only 1:1 interaction to include small group seminars facilitated by the RAs, Stephen Covey's *Seven Habits for Highly Effective People* led by our director, Pat Malik, and "Peer Mentoring." This year's efforts to reformat the program were intended to bring us one step closer to the next phase of improving the TDMP for the 2006-07 school year, which will include the following modifications.

The Mentoring Program will be more structured. It will not only focus on peer mentoring, but also encompass alumni mentoring. We are fortunate that several Beckwith alumni voiced an interest to be involved with the current students on developing a better sense of reality on disability-related issues, independent living, and professional advice. They will develop a relationship with the students either by email or phone, assist in networking, serve as guest

lecturers at Beckwith on various relevant topics or meet in person in their community.

Another related program to the TDMP is the integration of Beckwith modules in the DRES-ISTEP Program. Modules are being developed for new students to complete the summer before arriving on campus and/or their first semester at Beckwith Hall. These training modules utilize video vignettes and online curriculum. In the fall, those modules not completed during the summer will be incorporated into the students' TDMP. Furthermore, similar modules are being developed for upper classmen, focused on specific skill progression relevant to their phase of independent growth. For example, sophomores will focus on time and stress management in the fall and effective communication during the spring term, whereas juniors will focus on an Introduction to Careers Module in the fall semester and the ADA/Fair Housing Act Module in spring.

Enjoy the next several articles which highlight students in various phases of their tenure at the University of Illinois and Beckwith Hall. ♦

A New Era For Beckwith Hall

On July 25, 2005, the University of Illinois Board of Trustees accepted a proposal for University Housing to develop a ten-year multi-phase project known as the Champaign Redevelopment Campaign.

Included in Phase I of this project is the inclusion of a new Beckwith Hall. The operation of this new facility will be a joint cooperative venture between DRES and University Housing. This partnership will provide a variety of opportunities that have not been available before, including a Living Learning Community. The goal of this community is to immerse students with and without disabilities in a residential environment containing both formal educational curriculum and informal learning experiences related to disabilities. Students without disabilities who choose to live in this community will inherently develop a different perspective of the needs, issues, and culture that students with disabilities juggle on a daily basis.

Hopefully, in three years Beckwith residents can look forward to these features:

- All resident rooms located on the first floor.
- A classroom/kitchen which is completely accessible to

enhance independent living skills.

- Accessible features, such as pocket doors, keyless entry into rooms and larger bathrooms.
- A student lounge, computer lab, laundry facilities and other features that currently exist at Beckwith Hall.
 - An opportunity to interact with students in adjacent residence halls.
 - Accessible rooms on the other floors into which students with disabilities may move to live more independently.



Students will also utilize a new state-of-the-art dining facility being built within the complex. This will increase integration amongst the Beckwith residents and those living in other residence halls, and

allow easier access to meal service throughout campus that is more compatible with their schedules. This partnership with University Housing affords DRES another opportunity to uphold the Beckwith Hall mission of providing students with severe physical disabilities with all of the resources necessary to excel at the University of Illinois, and to provide an avenue for further disability education and research.

Reflections of the Graduate Resident Advisors

By *Christy Peters and Amanda Murry*

Christy...

Beckwith Hall...Where is it? What is that? I think the first week of resident advisor (RA) training, I must have heard that question a thousand times. I usually answered "It's a dorm with accommodations for students with physical disabilities." If you would ask me that now, I would say "It's a dorm on 2nd and John."

When I first began in August, I was nervous about how different Beckwith would be compared to my own dorm experiences. What I was surprised to find was the replication of the normalcy which I did not expect. The social planning, gaming competitions, triumphs and pitfalls of attending a Big Ten university mirrored many of the weekends and weekdays that I experienced as an undergraduate. However, Beckwith differs from many other dorms in a few monumental ways.

The first is the support staff. The personal assistants here are more than just employees, they are smiling faces, helping hands and giving hearts. The second is the building staff. Laundry, room-cleaning service and made-to-order meals are not only unheard of on this campus, but probably rarer than an Illini football victory. All of these attributes are complimented by our administrative staff. Trust me, the amount of paperwork that these folks go through is frightening. Sometimes during administrative meetings, Pat, Katherine and Paige practice standing on their heads to get the services they need to keep

this building going.

Last but not least, the greatest resource that Beckwith has is its students. I think the greatest thing that I have learned from my dorm-mates is that the small victories in life are worth celebrating. No birthday has gone unnoticed and no milestone unrecognized. I am thankful for the time that I have spent with them and grateful for the perspectives they have given me.

Amanda...

My first glimpse at UIUC was the day I moved into Beckwith. I slowly began to get to know the campus during the next two weeks while going through Housing's training for resident advisors. I learned how to read the first signs of suicidal tendencies and eating disorders, what cannabis smells like, and the importance of accepting diversity in the dorm. But I still wondered if I was prepared for the task of working with students with disabilities. I didn't have any prior experience and with advertising as my major, I felt I was under a microscope to do well.

It only seems like a few months since that time, but I guess that's how you feel when you're having fun. Everyone at Beckwith helped me adjust to the campus. By the time basketball season started, I was as big a fan as anyone else! Living here has given me life skills I would not have obtained in any other atmosphere. I only hope that I was able to give to the residents as much as I received from them. I am thankful for the opportunity that I was given; I truly feel it was divine intervention on some level. ♦



Christy Peters



Amanda Murry

Beckwith Hall 25th Anniversary Celebration

It may be very hard to believe that Beckwith Residence Hall opened its doors 25 years ago this coming fall. To celebrate this momentous occasion, we are planning a series of events April 19-22, 2007. The goal of this celebration is to honor people involved with Beckwith Hall, including residents and staff, reflect on past milestones and achievements, and share future projects and plans within a variety of venues in order to educate and communicate with a large number of constituencies within and outside the university community.

A tentative agenda includes opportunities for those associated with Beckwith Hall to reunite and socialize at the Annual Sports Banquet, Thursday, April 19th. Beckwith residents who competed in quad rugby and track will be honored. Also, a social or banquet will take place immediately following the Ellis Lecture, Friday, April 20th. A brunch and open house will occur at Beckwith on Saturday, April 21st.

These events not only serve as a venue to rekindle past friendships, but also allow current students and staff to connect with Beckwith alumni. Moreover, it affords an opportunity to educate the university community about the issues surrounding accessible housing and accessibility issues in general. Finally, it provides an opportunity to celebrate programmatic achievements of Beckwith Hall and those involved with Beckwith Hall over the past 25 years. Other elements of the

25th Anniversary Celebration include a disability awareness interactive display at the Illini Union and *Through the Ages—A Historical Perspective and Recipes of Beckwith Hall Cookbook*.

For those interested in making an immediate contribution to Beckwith Hall, a list of needed items is below. Send your contribution to the University of Illinois Foundation, P.O. Box 3429, Champaign, IL 61826-9916. Checks should be made payable to "UIF/DRES." Please indicate the item(s) you wish to purchase on the check. For additional information, contact the College of Applied Health Sciences Office of Development and Alumni Relations at 217-244-6600.

ITEM	ESTIMATED PRICE
Tripod	\$35
Digital Camera	\$350
Laminating Machine	\$350
Photo/Color Printer	\$400
4'x6' Large Dry Erase Board	\$185
Laptop Computer	\$1,000
LCD Projector	\$1,000 - \$1,500
Easy Pivot Standing Lift	\$2104-\$2679
Easy Pivot Extra Thigh Strap	\$65/student

An Odelius Scholar Looks Back—and to the Future

By Ji Hae Lee

I had the pleasure of receiving the 2005 Matthew Allan Odelius Award. This award was established to honor the memory of a former Beckwith resident. From what I understand, Matthew was involved in many community and campus-wide activities. I learned that he was a very positive person and a true leader. He thought it was important to be active in various organizations. I was honored to receive this award and hope that my pursuits and accomplishments are worthy. Moreover, I was presented the award from my friend, Carmen Sutherland, who was the 2004 recipient. This made attending the banquet more enjoyable for both of us. I wish that I would have had the chance to meet Matthew's family at the banquet, but they were unable to attend.

Let me introduce myself a little bit. I'm from South Korea and a sophomore in psychology. I came to the states last year to attend the University of Illinois. This was such a different experience for me, as I had been home-schooled. I was away from my family for the first time, and also in a foreign country. I always planned to be active in volunteering. That is why I enjoyed being on the Executive Board of Delta Sigma Omicron and a member of the Beckwith Student Government. My affiliation with the Champaign County Nursing Home and raising money for "Josh's Fund" for cancer research were very gratifying and educational also.

I managed my first year pretty well, excelling academically with a 3.95 accumulative GPA. I attained this with lots of help from resources around me, including Beckwith residents and staff. Residing at Beckwith was one of the crucial factors when I decided to go to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) and I benefited a lot from it. I enjoy attending school here very much. I'm still not completely sure what my future holds, but I envision myself in the field of psychology as an educator and researcher, in which the skills and knowledge obtained at UIUC and Beckwith will be utilized.

This award gave me the chance to think about what I have gained here so far and appreciate my experiences more. Also, receiving this award helped me to realize that people acknowledge my various interests as an accomplishment, which encourages me to continue focusing on both academic and extracurricular activities.

I'm planning to move out of Beckwith and into an apartment next year. I'm excited, yet a bit scared, the same way I felt when I first arrived. I believe that I will manage that new transition as successfully as I have the first half of my college career, though I have also been a part of several interesting incidents. I want to try many new things next year that UIUC offers. I still want to learn more, not just from my studies, but also from getting involved in different types of activities on campus. I also look forward to sharing my encounters with my sister, who will live with me next year. ◆



A New Beginning

By Shannon O'Brien

What is it like going to a school with over 30,000 students and not knowing a single one? If this is your concern, it is not as bad as it sounds. When I first arrived on campus, there were people everywhere moving stuff into their dorms, apartments and fraternity houses. Music was blasting and people were outside playing sports and swimming in blown-up kiddie pools.



After I saw this, I was not as concerned as I was before because everything seemed like so much fun!

People were very friendly and everyone just wanted to have a good time. After the move in and when the reality of classes hit, it also wasn't as bad as I had

thought. Classes went by fast and although the work was a lot denser than high school, I found it to not be impossible. As long as you stay on top of your work and use your time efficiently, you will definitely be able to manage your workload. At first it was hard to be disciplined because I was so used to not having to work very much in high school, but once I got the hang of it, it became a lot easier to manage everything all at once. As the semester progressed I made a lot of new friends and it was a lot of fun! They showed me all the hot spots on campus which made my transition a lot easier, since I didn't have any friends here and I missed all my friends from back home.

All together my transition to college was a good experience. I did not run into any problems at all really and everyone at Beckwith made it a lot of fun to be here! I can't imagine what I would have done if I had ended up not living at Beckwith, because I believe that is one of the main reasons my transition went so well.

The Busiest (Yet Best) Semester of My College Career

By Anne Hopkins

As I prepare to leave the University of Illinois, I can look back on my senior year and be proud of my accomplishments. I entered the University with many insecurities and no idea what I wanted to do with my life after college. I was used to my life back home, where I had 24-hour personal assistance provided by my mom. When I came to college, it was taken away from me and I had to get used to the idea of independent living.



What is independent living? It is not having someone there for you at your beck and call. It is being able to manage your own life - from what time you are going to shower to how you are going to get to your exam in the pouring rain because you forgot to schedule a ride from DRES. It is also needing more than two hands to count the number of people who have seen you naked. These people are personal assistants and my peers, and hiring them was the hardest part of independent living because I had to have my own peers help me with very personal needs. Eventually, I became comfortable with this new life and I was able to set personal and academic goals for myself.

I changed my major three times throughout college, but I was still able to accomplish my goal of graduating in four years. I entered a major that made me happy and excited about my future. I will

be graduating with a degree in community health, concentrating in rehabilitation and disability studies. At first I was not sure what I wanted to do with this degree, but over this past summer I had an epiphany of what I wanted to do with my life.

I have always enjoyed educating people about individuals with disabilities and I think that this kind of education is very important at the college level. My interactions with peers have led me to want to provide this kind of experience for other students. I believe I can do this on a larger scale if I pursue my doctorate degree and become a disability studies instructor. I have taken many disability-related classes taught by people without disabilities, but through my interaction with peers I have concluded that information provided by people with disabilities about disability-related issues is much more valuable to them because the information is more credible. Knowledge gained from disability studies courses will help reduce discrimination and benefit both people with and without disabilities through meaningful interactions with one another.

Because I decided what I wanted to do so late in the game, my senior year became filled with extracurricular activities related to disability education. I took every opportunity possible to speak, including college courses and elementary school classes, and to promote disability and sexuality by presenting at a convention and speaking in human sexuality classes. I started working at DRES scheduling transportation for students and converting textbooks. Finally, my extracurricular activities took a non-academic turn with the birth of Rock for Research.

Rock for Research is a not-for-profit promotional organization that plans concerts with national and local bands, and all proceeds go to disability-related organizations for medical research. I started the organization this semester, my final semester of my senior year, with the help of my brother, Steve, close friends, and student volunteers. With 16 hours of classes plus the hours I work at DRES, Rock for Research has been hard to manage, but the hard work has been well worth it. I love music, and Rock for Research has provided me with the opportunity to work with musicians by giving local bands the chance to play in venues with national bands. It is a rich industry and it has been so rewarding to be able to give back to charity. When I first came up with the idea, Rock for Research was only about giving to charity, but now I realize it is so much more. Rock



for Research is able to provide disability awareness by not only allowing bands to come in contact with people with disabilities, but everyone involved in the process, from fans to venue owners. Hopefully it is helping many people realize that people with disabilities can be active contributors to society. I have grown from the experience and have met some really great people and made many new friends. If you are interested in learning more about Rock for Research, you can access our web page at www.rock4researchonline.com.

Although my last semester has been busy and packed with many activities, it has been my happiest and best semester. I have prepared for grad school by applying and figuring out independent living outside of the University of Illinois. I do not know where I am going, but I now know exactly what I want to do.

It's Not Quite Déjà Vu All Over Again

By Muffi Lavigne

As the oldest student living at Beckwith, I am in the unique position to be able to compare and contrast my undergraduate experience at the University of Connecticut (UCONN) and my graduate experience here at Illinois. I never thought I would get to a point in my life when I could say “Back in the day...” and “When I went to school...” and mean it. (I suddenly feel like I am channeling my parents or grandparents... “When I went to school, I walked to school – uphill – BOTH ways!”)

When I walked through the front doors as a freshman at UCONN in 1989, I literally walked through the doors. It wasn't quick, but at that point of my life my disease hadn't progressed to require me to be a wheelchair user all of the time. As a result, my needs in the dorm weren't that different from everybody else. I found myself on a floor surrounded by tons of other girls as bewildered as I.

Flash forward 15 years, and I now find myself being thankful that Beckwith exists. This time I “rolled” through the front doors in a power wheelchair, accompanied by my service dog, Ritz. I've used a service animal and PAs for several years, as well as lived independently in an apartment in Washington, D.C., but the thought of having to juggle all of that plus focus on my graduate studies as a Track 3 Architecture student was just too much because the program is that intensive. The Track 3 program is a master's degree program for students who have already received their bachelor's degree in something other than architecture. Basically, it is an accelerated undergraduate education in architecture first, followed by the two-year master's program. My BA is in English, so this latest adventure in my life is a complete left turn. (I finally figured out what I wanted to be when I grew up!) I knew that by living in Beckwith, I wouldn't have to worry about my PAs not showing up, food shopping and cooking my

meals, doing my laundry, and cleaning my room, all of which would allow me to focus my time and energy on my studies.

I also noticed that many other things have changed through the years. The first was that the technology level has changed. When I was at UCONN, desktop personal computers were just going mainstream and the Mac computer was still the king. Laptops and Microsoft had yet to hit the market. Walkmans and tape mixes were the music genre of the time. Nowadays, technology today is history tomorrow. Cell phones, MP3 players and laptop computers are getting to be old news.

I'm learning that the technology available for architects today will make my success in this career a lot easier. There are programs that will replace the need to make models, redraw plans, etc. How I study is also different. Finding out what I'm able to handle in relationship to my disability, as well as compensating for different learning styles, has definitely been an adjustment. I'm glad that I have access to some academic accommodations to ease some of the stress that we all undergo. I haven't used them yet, but I would not be surprised if I do in the near future. It is comforting to know that they are available in case I ever need them.

And yet, some things also never change - college dorm food and undergraduate students, um ... let's just say... expanding and acquiring new “beverage” tastes. The one thing I do enjoy about being older is that I already know what my limits are. I already did my experimenting. I know who I am – yet there is always room for growth – as evidence why at age 36, I am in the second semester of a four-year graduate degree architecture program. ♦



Beckwith Mission

Beckwith Hall opened in 1981 to accommodate the residential needs of students with disabilities who require the help of personal assistants to perform basic activities of daily living. While aiding students in the management of their activities of daily living (transferring in and out of wheelchairs, dressing, grooming, bathing, etc.), Beckwith also offers individualized training designed to help students learn to independently manage their disability-related needs and, whenever possible, transition to mainstream community housing. The ultimate goal of Beckwith Hall programming is to make it possible for graduates to go anywhere their lives and career aspirations take them, confident that they can manage their own needs.

Beckwith is much like any other university residence hall in that it has a dining hall, student government, laundry room and a campus location along the Division's bus route. In addition, Beckwith offers the unique convenience of private sleep-study rooms with adjacent semi-private bathrooms. A computer lab with four workstations, voice activation systems, and a wide range of peripheral assistive input devices are also available.

For additional information about Beckwith Residence Hall, you may visit our website at www.disability.uiuc.edu/services/beckwith/, contact the DRES Student Services Office by phone at (217) 333-4603 (v/TTY), or send email to disability@uiuc.edu.



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