



EMPOWERING A







PHOTOS COURTESY AQUA CREEK PRODUCTS

# BARRIER-FREE WELLNESS CULTURE

BY MARLEY CUNNINGHAM

As private universities and post-secondary educational institutes strive to create inclusive environments that cater to the needs of their diverse student populations, one crucial aspect that must be given serious consideration is accessibility. Ensuring equitable access to recreation and wellness facilities not only promotes a sense of community, social connections, and peer support among students, but also has a positive impact on their physical and mental health, academic performance, and overall well-being. In this article, we discuss the importance of accessibility in the context of campus recreation, and we explore various strategies that can help institutions foster an inclusive atmosphere that promotes health and wellness for all students, irrespective of their abilities.







### **Understanding Accessibility: A Spectrum of Needs**

When discussing accessibility, it is essential to recognize that the idea is not a one-size-fits-all concept. Accessibility needs can vary greatly among individuals, depending on their physical, cognitive, or sensory abilities. For example, a student with a mobility impairment may require adaptive equipment to participate in physical activities, while a student with a visual impairment may need alternative formats for printed materials.

Recognizing that ability is a spectrum and not a black-and-white rulebook is the first step towards creating inclusive spaces for students. By adopting a holistic approach to accessibility and considering the diverse range of abilities among the student population, institutions can work towards providing equitable opportunities for all students to engage in wellness activities that improve quality of life.

### **Access Equals Success: The Link Between Retention and Wellness**

Research has shown that accessibility plays a significant role in student retention, particularly for students with disabilities. According to a study by the American Institutes for Research, only 40% of students with disabilities who enrolled in post-secondary institutions completed their degrees or certificates within eight years. This statistic

emphasizes the need for institutions to prioritize accessibility in order to create an inclusive environment where all students feel supported and have the resources they need to succeed.

To further support this notion, additional studies have also shown a strong correlation between physical well-being and academic success. Accessibility in recreation and wellness facilities contributes to students' overall well-being by encouraging active lifestyles, providing stress relief, and fostering social connections.

### **Active Bodies, Focused Minds**

By providing accessible recreation facilities, private universities create a welcoming environment that supports students' physical and mental health, leading to improved focus, motivation, and productivity in their academic pursuits. Students who engage in regular physical activity often exhibit better time-management skills, higher graduation rates, and improved overall academic achievement.

Educational institutions can integrate physical activity into their academic curriculum by offering courses that emphasize the importance of exercise, nutrition, and overall well-being. This interdisciplinary approach not only enhances students' academic performance but also equips them with lifelong skills for maintaining a healthy work-life balance.

### **Creating a Culture of Wellness and Lifelong Habits**

Private universities have a unique opportunity to instill lifelong healthy habits among their student population. By ensuring accessible recreation facilities, these institutions can inspire students to develop regular exercise routines, learn about healthy nutrition, and practice self-care strategies. Equipping students with the knowledge and skills necessary for maintaining a healthy lifestyle during their college years fosters habits that can positively impact their lives well beyond graduation.

Private universities can collaborate with health and wellness professionals to provide educational programs and workshops on topics such as exercise physiology, nutrition, stress management, and sleep hygiene. By

integrating these initiatives into the campus culture, institutions can empower students to make informed choices and adopt healthy habits that will benefit them for years to come.

**Inclusive Branding:  
Sending a Loud, Clear Message**

In today’s competitive higher education landscape, private universities need to be mindful of their branding and the message they convey to potential students. In a world where young adults are making their decisions in a split second online before ever stepping foot on campus, an institution’s approach to accessibility can greatly impact its attractiveness to prospective students, particularly those with disabilities or unique needs. By showcasing a commitment to accessibility and inclusivity, institutions can appeal to a wider range of students and parents alike, increasing their chances of attracting a diverse and talented student body.

All schools should consider adopting inclusive branding strategies that highlight their commitment to accessibility, both in their physical spaces and online presence. This approach can include showcasing accessible facilities on virtual campus tours, highlighting adaptive programs and services in marketing materials, and ensuring that websites are compliant with accessibility standards. By emphasizing the inclusive nature of these facilities and the opportunities they offer for personal growth, institutions can attract students who prioritize their physical and mental well-being.

**Strategies for Implementing  
Accessibility in Recreation  
and Wellness Facilities**

**1. Assess Current Accessibility and  
Identify Areas for Improvement**

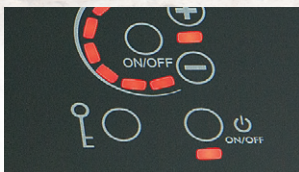
The first step in implementing accessibility in recreation and wellness facilities is to assess the current state of accessibility and identify

*continued...*

Accessibility needs can vary greatly among individuals, depending on their physical, cognitive, or sensory abilities. For example, a student with a mobility impairment may require adaptive equipment to participate in physical activities, while a student with a visual impairment may need alternative formats for printed materials.



**SMART BUILT-IN SAFETY FOR THE USER AND FACILITY**



**CHILD SAFETY LOCK-OUT  
WITH AUTO SHUT-OFF**



**HEAT LIMITING COOKING  
SURFACE PROTECTORS**



**MEETS ADA REQUIREMENTS  
INCLUDING CA & TX**



**RADIANT & INDUCTION  
COOKTOPS AVAILABLE**

CONTACT US FOR SPECIAL PRICING :  
[COOKWITHKENYON.COM](http://COOKWITHKENYON.COM) | 860.664.4906





areas where improvements can be made. Such assessment may involve conducting an accessibility audit, consulting with students with disabilities to gather feedback on their experiences, and collaborating with disability service professionals to identify best practices for creating inclusive environments specific to each facility.

## **2. Incorporate Universal Design Principles**

Universal Design (UD) is a proactive approach to designing environments and programs that are accessible to, usable by, and inclusive of everyone, including those with different abilities. By incorporating UD principles into facility planning and design, institutions can create spaces that are not only simply ADA compliant, but go above and beyond accessibility to create aesthetically appealing spaces that are welcoming to all students. For example, when aquatic facilities invest the time and resources to select branded bleachers and starting blocks, they should take equal efforts in selecting branded pool access equipment.

**The National Disability Authority specifies seven key principles of UD:**

- Designing facilities for equitable use by ensuring that all users can enjoy the same means of access, either identical or equivalent, without segregation or stigmatization, with a design that is appealing to all users
- Flexible designs that accommodate a variety of abilities and preferences, such as providing users with options for their preferred method of use
- Providing simple equipment that is intuitive for all users, regardless of their experience, language, knowledge, or ability
- Incorporating perceptible modes of communication that can be digested by a diverse range of users, regardless of their sensory abilities
- Designing with tolerances in mind so that potential hazards are minimized
- Minimizing repetitive actions and movements that require substantial physical effort so that people of varying abilities can comfortably use facilities and equipment
- Ensure ample size and space so that users are able to view, approach, and manipulate, regardless of body size, posture, or ability

## **3. Provide Training and Support for Staff and Faculty**

In order to successfully implement accessibility in recreation and wellness facilities, it is crucial to provide training and support for staff and faculty. Such training may include offering workshops on disability awareness, providing resources on best practices for creating inclusive environments, and encouraging ongoing communication and collaboration between staff, faculty, disability service professionals, and the student body.

## **4. Develop and Implement Policies and Procedures**

Having clear policies and procedures in place regarding accessibility can help ensure that all students have equitable access to recreation on campus. These policies should outline the institution's commitment to accessibility, as well as the specific steps and resources available to support students with disabilities in participating in physical activities and accessing wellness services.

### 5. Foster a Culture of Inclusivity and Peer Support

Creating an inclusive environment goes beyond simply ensuring that facilities are compliant. It also involves fostering a culture of inclusivity and peer support among students, faculty, and staff. Such a culture can be achieved through initiatives such as:

- Encouraging student organizations to be inclusive and welcoming to all students, including those with disabilities
- Providing opportunities for students with and without disabilities to engage in recreational activities together, such as adaptive sports or inclusive fitness classes
- Promoting peer mentoring programs and support networks for students with disabilities
- Encouraging open dialogue and education around accessibility and disability issues on campus

### Conclusion

Ensuring equitable accessibility in recreation and wellness facilities is an essential aspect of creating an inclusive and supportive environment for developing young minds. By implementing and maintaining policies and procedures that better serve a more diverse population, private universities can promote the health and well-being of all their students, leading to improved student retention, academic performance, and overall success. Taking a strong stance on creating equitable experiences speaks volumes to prospective students, positioning institutions as progressive leaders of the educational system who proactively seek to instill both success and lifelong values within their student body. Let us strive for a future where every student feels empowered, included, and supported, ensuring that no one is left behind on the path to personal growth. And who better to lead the charge than the guardians of our post-secondary educational system, the

visionary stewards entrusted with shaping our youth and empowering them to conquer new frontiers? As they champion accessibility in campus recreation, these leaders possess the transformative power to forge a generation that embraces diversity, dismantles barriers, and propels humanity towards a future defined by unity and limitless possibilities. Through their examples, let us ignite a revolution of inclusion and resilience, ensuring that every student emerges from their educational journey equipped to conquer and unite a world waiting to be transformed.



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Marley Cunningham is a marketing professional and avid outdoorswoman. She is the Director of Marketing for Aqua Creek Products, based in Missoula, Montana. [www.aquacreek-products.com](http://www.aquacreek-products.com)

**THERE IS NOTHING LIKE STERIFAB®**

*Nothing!!!*

**STERIFAB®**  
MUCH MORE THAN A BED BUG KILLER

800 359-4913 • [STERIFAB.COM](http://STERIFAB.COM)

**AquaticAccess.com**

**Simpler is Smarter**

Water flows in - the seat goes up  
Water flows out - the seat goes down

No electricity, batteries, charging, remotes, actuators, contacts, solar cells, gears, motors, brushes, oils, pumps, or extensive maintenance schedules

800.325.LIFT  
502.425.5817

*“Our students love our lift!  
It’s easy maintenance, actually no maintenance.  
It’s a wonderful product. Get one!”*

Karen Sato, Gavilan College, Gilroy, CA