

Director's Digressions

by Sheryl Burgstahler

International Ties. DO-IT connects with organizations throughout the world that share its goal to increase the success of people with disabilities in postsecondary education and

careers, using technology as an empowering tool. Some of the individuals and organizations with whom DO-IT has worked are from Canada, Japan, Korea, the United Kingdom, Vietnam, and, most recently, India.

To reduce printing costs and yet still share exciting news from DO-IT, we provide a short print version of DO-IT NEWS and an expanded version online at <http://www.washington.edu/doi/Newsletters/Apr07/>. Contact DO-IT if you would like a printed copy of the expanded newsletter.

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In November I traveled to Bangalore, India, to present at the first Indo-U.S. Conference on Information Technology Uses for Children and Adults with Disabilities. The event included people from Indian universities, information technology (IT) companies, IT-developing organizations, professional associations, and family centers, as well as individuals with disabilities. A delegation of twelve people from around the country represented the U.S. I was honored to be selected as one of them.

The event was funded by the Indo-U.S. Science and Technology Forum in New Delhi, India. Lead organizations were PACER Center, USA, a national parent center for families of children and young adults with disabilities, and the National Institute for the Mentally Handicapped in India.

I kicked off the conference with a keynote address on access to technology for people with disabilities that was followed with a similar address by Dr. Anapam Basu that

focused on developments in India. Other international speakers covered a range of accessible IT topics that included:

- research,
- application development,
- best uses in education and employment,
- access issues affecting people with different types of disabilities,
- consumer needs, and
- government responsibilities.

This conference provided a wonderful forum for sharing best practices in both countries and exploring areas for future collaboration. I look forward to future opportunities for DO-IT to increase access to empowering tools for people with disabilities worldwide. The next article shares details of one of our many collaborative activities with Japan.



Sheryl Burgstahler, DO-IT director, celebrates with other U.S. and Indian delegates as wheelchairs are donated to people with disabilities.

Using Technology to Visit Japan

by Carson Smith, DO-IT Ambassador

Recently two of my DO-IT pals, Chris and Alexandra, and I went to Kyoto, Japan. We didn't spend much time there, about fifteen minutes was all. And, we didn't have to pay for a plane ticket! Thanks to iChat video conference technology, we didn't even need to leave Seattle.

Our itinerary simply required that we show up at the DO-IT Center at 6:00 p.m. (11:00 a.m.

in Kyoto) and check in with our guide, DO-IT Program Coordinator Tami Tidwell. The purpose of our trip was to speak at the Assistive Technology and Augmentative Communication Conference (ATAC) where Dr. Mamoru Iwabuchi, a former University of Washington Visiting Professor and DO-IT partner, was giving a talk to teachers, parents, and service providers in Japan. We talked about college preparation and the role of technology in education. Via video, Dr. Iwabuchi asked us questions such as, "What accommodations do you have at school?" and "What have you learned from DO-IT?" He translated our answers to the polite and attentive audience in Kyoto.

As this was my first time in Japan, I was a little nervous, but I think Dr. Iwabuchi was pleased with our answers to his questions. Once we answered the questions we said "Sayonara!" and our journey ended with the click of a mouse. I didn't even get to try any sushi! Despite this, I want to thank Dr. Iwabuchi for his gracious hospitality during our short stay and sincerely hope that we were able to provide helpful input to the conference attendees in Kyoto.

Disability Mentoring Day

by Scott Bellman, DO-IT Staff

Seventy-five students participated in Disability Mentoring Day (DMD) on October 16, 2006. This event is sponsored by the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) and DO-IT. As the Washington State Coordinator, I support the five other local coordinators in Washington.

The sixty-nine high school and six college DMD students visited employers—Starbucks, Microsoft, Boeing, Albertsons, NOAA, Children's Hospital, and the Federal Aviation Administration and learned about many challenging careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

“Research documents the importance of mentors to young people as they contemplate future careers,” says DO-IT director Sheryl Burgstahler. “Mentors help students understand specific information about jobs and also answer questions about disability and accommodations. The face-to-face interactions that occur at DMD complement DO-IT’s electronic mentoring community, which is supported by email communication, and are great for both the mentee and the mentor.”

We encourage our readers to engage in nationwide DMD activities next fall. Contact me at swb3@u.washington.edu for details.



A group of DMD high school students tour an ambulance at Children's Hospital before meeting up with mentors.

Pizza Parties: DO-IT Family Reunions by Tami Tidwell, DO-IT Staff

Developing social skills and relationships in a variety of situations is a big part of self-determination and success. DO-IT Pizza Parties, held each fall and spring, are perfect opportunities to put some of those social skills to work and develop strong and lasting relationships. Through a statewide K-20 telecommunications system, we connect DO-IT Pizza Party

participants from several locations throughout the state. Below, DO-IT Scholars, Mentors, and staff share their strategies, perspectives, and experiences.

Bella, a 2005 Scholar, offers advice to those who might be feeling a little nervous about attending. “The way I usually deal with specific social situations in which I am feeling anxiety is by giving myself permission to take a break. I get overwhelmed easily, especially with lots of loud noises and crowds of people. That night at the [fall] pizza party I just went outside the room [to get some space]. [Once in a quieter space] often I’ll do counting and breathing, which helps me to calm myself. Once I gather myself together, I can return to the situation in a better frame of mind. Often I’ll speak to my aid who is there with me, or sometimes I tell her to go away because I want to work through it alone. It’s really important for me to listen to my inner voice when it says it’s time for a break. Trusting yourself is essential. It’s really important to know that everyone at DO-IT is supportive and understands these types of issues. There is nothing to be afraid of because DO-IT is a really great program.”

Charity, a DO-IT Mentor, has a very different experience to share, “Pizza Parties for me are like going home for Christmas (but without all the turmoil). I am such an extrovert that meeting new people is a battery-recharging experience.”

According to Ben, “Attending a DO-IT Pizza Party is always a rewarding experience for us as student staff in the DO-IT office. The event gives us a chance to connect new faces with names and have face-to-face interactions that are not possible from behind a phone. There are always new people to meet, familiar faces to reconnect with, and interesting facts to discover. This past Pizza Party, I was amazed by 2006 Scholar Taylor who blew my mind with his uncanny knowledge of geography!

The Pizza Party is a great opportunity for us to transcend our office roles and create relationships with our student peers in the DO-IT program. There is a community atmosphere which makes this an event every staff member, parent, Scholar, or friend can benefit from attending.”

As a staff member, I look forward to the Pizza Party for weeks. I enjoy receiving the RSVPs and getting the DO-IT office ready for the fifty-plus visitors. Seeing Scholars from 1993-present is fantastic. When there is a table of people playing a game, a bunch of people hanging out chatting, a few people signing paperwork, and parents together connecting, I know it is a successful night.



DO-IT Scholar Profile
by Maria

Hi, my name is Maria and I'm a Phase II DO-IT Scholar. I live in Bellevue, WA where I am a junior at Interlake High School. My favorite subjects are physics

and history. Last summer I went to an all-girls leadership school for three weeks. I got to kayak at night and saw a double sunset and an otter. I also learned more about the environment and saw people with different disabilities rafting and kayaking, which was really cool. This summer I am going to a six-week leadership program and will have to defer my second year of Summer Study until 2008. I will miss seeing everyone but plan to keep in touch through our email listserv and the DO-IT Pizza Parties.

In my spare time I like to read, listen to all kinds of music, and play sports (but not just watch them). I would love to race kayaks or race skulls in the future. I am interested in

careers as a civil rights lawyer, a historian, an expedition guide, or a detective. DO-IT has given me a chance to know my disability and other people's disabilities better, which will help me become a stronger advocate for myself and for others.



DO-IT Staff Profile
by Ashley Ingersoll

Hi, my name is Ashley Ingersoll. I'm currently a senior at the University of Washington (UW). I will be taking time off to spend one year in Hawaii and then

return to the UW to graduate in 2009. My double major in communications and social science has kept me really busy.

I've been working at DO-IT since 2003, as both a student staff person and currently as a Program Assistant. Most of my work at DO-IT is "behind the scenes." I organize conferences, help with events, and assist the program staff in many ways. This work entails sending a lot of email messages and spending a good deal of time attending meetings and working at the computer.

In my spare time, I enjoy playing soccer, hanging out with my friends and family, kickboxing, traveling, and cooking... all right, and the occasional episode (or season) of *Lost* and *Survivor*.

Experts Meet at Web Accessibility Capacity Building Institute

by Terry Thompson, DO-IT Staff

From November 29 to December 1, DO-IT hosted a Web Accessibility Capacity Building Institute (CBI) in downtown Seattle. The purpose of the CBI was to identify accessibility problems and solutions related to emerging web applications and the technologies used to create them. Technologies such as AJAX and Adobe Flash are becoming more common on the web for creating engaging, interactive web applications. Unfortunately, these applications present barriers to some users, especially people using assistive technologies such as screen readers, screen magnification, and speech recognition software.

Institutions of higher education are exploring and beginning to utilize rich media technologies to improve functionality and usability of both academic and administrative web services, but by doing so they may risk excluding students and employees with disabilities from the content presented.

Participants at the CBI included representatives from the World Wide Consortium (W3C), IBM, Google, Yahoo!, Adobe, and GW Micro, as well as twenty-seven web managers and programmers from eleven colleges and universities. Participants spent three days exploring problems and solutions through presentations, panels, interactive problem solving sessions, and extensive group discussion. CBI Proceedings are available at <http://www.washington.edu/doit/cbi/webaccess/proceedings.html>.

The CBI was funded by DO-IT's Northwest Alliance for Access to Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (*AccessSTEM*), which is funded by the National Science Foundation (cooperative agreement #HRD-0227995). *AccessSTEM* serves to increase the successful participation of people with disabilities in STEM careers.



Google's T.V. Raman, at DO-IT's capacity-building institute on web accessibility, accompanied by his service dog Hubble, prepares for his keynote address.

DO-IT Hosts AccessSTEM Capacity Building Institute

by Valerie Sundby, DO-IT Staff

January 10-12, 2007—Thirty leaders of National Science Foundation (NSF) projects that promote the participation of women, ethnic/racial minorities, and people with disabilities in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) gathered in Seattle for the *AccessSTEM* Capacity Building Institute (CBI). This CBI provided a forum for comparing recruitment and access challenges, sharing successful practices, developing collaborations, and otherwise increasing the capacity of all NSF-funded projects to serve individuals with disabilities. The ultimate goal of the CBI was to increase the participation of individuals with disabilities in programs that support STEM participation of other underrepresented groups.

Presentation and discussion topics included barriers encountered by individuals with disabilities (e.g., access to science labs, field trips, technology, information resources); successful

strategies for recruiting and retaining individuals with disabilities into STEM fields; how projects that support other underrepresented groups can work to recruit and support individuals with disabilities to maximize outcomes; and how all STEM programs can be made more inclusive of individuals with disabilities by applying universal design principles and offering accommodations. The outcomes of these discussions are published as part of the *AccessSTEM* CBI Proceedings at <http://www.washington.edu/doi/cbi/bpstem/>.

Workforce Recruitment Staff Visit UW by Scott Bellman, DO-IT Staff

Each year, the U.S. Department of Labor creates a student database through a federal project called the Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP). The WRP database lists college students with disabilities along with their major, their skills, and the places in the country where they want to do internships or accept permanent positions.

“It’s a chance for students to get their information into the hands of employers who want to hire them,” explained this year’s Seattle recruiter Jerry McGaughan. On the University of Washington (UW) campus in Seattle, Jerry met with eighteen students to hear about their academic experiences, skills, and employment goals. The student information gathered during the interviews is made available to employers in the public and private sectors. Each database remains active for one year. During that time, employers contact students directly to invite them to apply for open positions.

“It’s fun to participate in a national program,” explained one student. “Maybe I’ll get an offer here in Seattle, or maybe I’ll decide to go somewhere cool like Washington, D.C. I’m not sure. Either way, it was good practice to prepare for a real interview and meet with a recruiter! Next time I do an interview, I’ll be more confident.”

Find more information about the WRP, at <http://www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/brochures/wrp1.html>.



Students from Issaquah participate in the ACCESS Job Fair.

DO-IT Co-Sponsors ACCESS Job Fair by Scott Bellman, DO-IT Staff

Seattle’s annual ACCESS Job Fair for individuals with disabilities was held on March 7 at the Seattle Center. The event was co-sponsored by DO-IT and other businesses and community partners, including REI, Safeco, Safeway, Starbucks, the Aven Foundation, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Washington State Department of Services for the Blind.

“At DO-IT, we understand the high value of a job fair designed specifically for job seekers with disabilities,” explains DO-IT Program Manager Michael Richardson. “Our staff hosted a display of assistive technology, an exhibit of pictures and publications, and a workshop for about twenty-five high school students with disabilities.”

High school students heard a presentation about job seeking skills and learned ways to take advantage of a job fair. They also played a “Job Seeker” trivia game for prizes and ate pizza for lunch. As students navigated the job fair, they collected company information and

job application forms and dropped off resumes. When asked what they learned, students said:

- *You should always have a few resumes when you go to a job fair.*
- *Want ads are NOT the best way to get jobs. You have to network.*
- *You need to spend time preparing for an interview—practice ahead of time!*
- *It's always good to find out about different accommodations.*
- *At an interview, dress nicely and shake hands at the end when you say "thank you."*
- *Honesty is a big key to a successful interview.*
- *After an interview, follow up with the person.*

AccessComputing Completes Successful First Year!

by Michael Richardson, DO-IT Program Manager

The goal of The Alliance for Access to Computing Careers (*AccessComputing*) is to increase the participation of people with disabilities in computing fields. *AccessComputing* collaborators apply proven practices to

- increase the number of students with disabilities successfully pursuing education and careers in computing fields;
- increase the capacity of postsecondary computing departments to fully include students with disabilities in computing courses and programs; and
- create a nationwide resource to help computing educators and employers, professional organizations, and other stakeholders develop more inclusive programs and share effective practices.

During the first year of *AccessComputing*:

- Fifteen people joined the Advisory Board and attended meetings to address challenges of increasing the representation of people

with disabilities in computing academics and careers. Many board members are computing professionals themselves, from companies that include Google, Microsoft, IBM, Cray Corporation, and View Plus Technologies.

- One hundred and sixteen educators, employers, and other stakeholders joined *AccessComputing* Communities of Practice (CoPs) to share perspectives and expertise and identify practices that promote the participation of people with disabilities in computing fields.
- One hundred and forty-seven students with disabilities attended seven events supported by *AccessComputing* funds. In these activities, participants learned about careers in computing and college transition issues; practiced self-advocacy skills; explored options for internships and jobs after college; took computing-related field trips; met computing professionals; learned about resources; interacted with peers and mentors; and/or were invited to participate in *Alliance* e-mentoring communities, internships, and other activities.
- Thirty high school, college, and graduate students with disabilities joined the *AccessComputing* Team, an online mentoring community. Mentors also participated in twenty computing internships as part of *AccessComputing*.

AccessComputing is led by the Department of Computer Science and Engineering and DO-IT at the University of Washington. It is funded by the National Science Foundation as part of the Broadening Participation in Computing program of the Directorate for Computer and Information Sciences and Engineering (grant #CNS-0540615).

For more information about *AccessComputing* consult <http://www.washington.edu/accesscomputing/>. Direct questions to accesscomp@u.washington.edu.

AccessComputing to Host Summer Academy

by Michael Richardson, DO-IT Manager

Advancing Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Computing (ADHHC), a project of The Alliance for Access to Computing Careers (*AccessComputing*), serves to increase the participation of individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing in computing fields.

ADHHC will host the 2007 Summer Academy for Advancing Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Computing from June 17 to August 17 on the UW Seattle campus. This program is for students with skills in math or science who may be considering computing as a major. Students at the Summer Academy will:

- take UW credit courses, such as those in programming, data structures, and calculus;
- conduct a special group project in computer animation and robotics;
- tour industry giants in the Seattle area, such as Microsoft, Google, and Adobe; and
- engage in meeting and mentoring with successful deaf and hard of hearing role models in the computing field.

Find more information on ADHHC at <http://www.washington.edu/accesscomputing/dbb/index.html>.

Tech Tips: Content on Demand—Podcasts and RSS

by Doug Hayman, DO-IT Staff

Two modes of using the Internet that have gained in popularity of late are RSS (Really Simple Syndication or Rich Site Summary) and Podcasting. Each of these technologies allows a user to subscribe to content on the web

and have it delivered to their home computer to access later at a convenient time. This type of application is called “content on demand.”

RSS

The use of the word “subscription” may confuse new users into thinking that they have to pay for the content. These feeds are free.

The software you use to subscribe to a particular RSS feed queries the remote site and acquires new content. Most of the newest web browsers, such as Firefox 2.0, Internet Explorer 7, and Safari on Apple’s OS X machines, are capable of acquiring RSS feed content. An orange square logo with two concentric white arches is used in icons to represent an RSS feed. While using a supported browser you can add RSS-available content to your list of subscriber feeds.

Let’s say you regularly read the “Listening Post” column on the www.wired.com website and would like to have it readily available when you use your Firefox web browser. Within Firefox, surf to that website and then navigate to the column. Once on that page, look for the orange XML icon in the left side of the page or navigate to the link <http://feeds.wired.com/ListeningPost>. When you select that link, a pop-up window will allow you to add a “Live Bookmark.” Once subscribed, you will have a new link available in Firefox’s bookmarks toolbar (you may need to go into the View menu and select the Bookmarks toolbar to make this option visible). Selecting this bookmark toolbar link will bring up a drop-down menu of all the RSS feeds you have downloaded so far, with one drop-down list per RSS subscription. When you pick one from the list, you will be directed to that web page.

Podcasts

While RSS feeds give you immediate access to newly written content, podcasts give you access to newly created audio and video content

on demand. This could be a professor's lecture, or someone's review of the latest compact discs out this month that contained clips of songs and the host's comments about them.

To acquire new content, download the podcast to your computer from a remote host and either listen to it on your machine, portable mp3 player, or media-capable cell phone at your preferred time. Some computer media player applications allow you to subscribe to a podcast and look for new podcasts by the same source on the interval that you select for acquiring new content.

There are stand-alone programs—called aggregators—that will seek new content and download it to your preferred audio application. Applications like Apple's iTunes can acquire new podcast content when it becomes available, play it back on a computer, or allow that content to be transferred to an iPod. Other applications are capable of the same podcast subscription automation for later listening.

If you create your own podcast, make sure you have permission to replay copyrighted material—in other words, use “podsafe content.” For more on podcasting visit the following websites:

www.podcaststricks.com

www.pod101.com

www.podcast.net

The Thread—Accessible Air Travel by Sheryl Burgstahler, DO-IT Director

A DO-IT Mentor recently posed the following question within our Internet discussion forum. I will share some of the responses so that you can get the flavor of the many rich conversations the DO-IT community has online. Some comments have been modified to improve clarity.

An engineer with the Boeing Payloads Concept Center is part of a small team of people working on a project to apply elements of Universal Design into the interior of the aircraft. She is seeking your input to identify what needs to change in the airplane to better accommodate people. Suggestions can pertain to seating, access to light/air controls, etc. I will be gathering your ideas and forwarding them to her. Suggest ideas related to your own disability, but also think about ideas that can benefit everyone. I already know what I want to say—caption the in-flight movies!

DO-IT Ambassador: *For travelers with mobility impairments, flying can be a serious pain, literally as well as figuratively. If airlines are not willing to look into installing a section of seats that could be removed and then have the space used for wheelchairs, they need to ensure that transitions to a seat be as easy as possible. If there is someone who needs to transfer into a seat, the person should be able to move to the closest seat possible. Many times I have been drug down sections of the plane because I am not part of the first or business classes. Some aisle seats do not have armrests that can be moved and are not conducive for transferring. Because the aisles in the planes are extremely narrow the chair they use for transferring is extremely narrow and a person can barely fit.*

I would prefer that controls be on the inner portion of the seat since I often bring my seat cushion on board (otherwise I get extremely uncomfortable), and I hate having people dig for the volume on the plane. In the end most of my challenges on a plane come down to space.

DO-IT Mentor: *What in-flight movies???? I thought they went the way of in-flight meals! Here are a few of my suggestions:*

1. *On flights four hours or longer, a toilet room with a doorway wide enough for a caregiver/parent to assist a disabled person with toileting should be available. Specific ideas include curtains that can*

be drawn around the doorway opening to provide a larger privacy area, wider doorways, longer grab bars on the side walls, and positioning the sink and accessories within reach of the doorway or toilet seat.

2. Put controls and call buttons on the armrest or seat back in front of you rather than overhead. I am short in stature and I can't reach any controls for air, light, or calling for assistance. They are WAY over my head.

3. Provide optional foot supports for the short statured adults and children. My feet dangle during flights which is not good for circulation.

DO-IT Ambassador: *Here are a couple of improvements that might benefit the visually impaired:*

1. Put Braille markings on the call button. In most of the planes I have ridden on, the call button is just a flat panel on the ceiling. There is not a good way for me to feel where the call button is. This issue could be resolved by simply putting a Braille sign on the button that says, "call" or "attendant."

2. Provide spoken messages indicating whether the seatbelt sign is on or off. On most of the planes I have ridden in, the tone for the seatbelt sign is the same regardless of whether the sign is on or off. An alternative to a spoken message is to vary the tone. There could be a high tone when the seatbelt sign is turned on and a low tone when the sign is off.

DO-IT Scholar: *I think they should have hand rails on the aisle seats so people with mobility impairments that need support to walk can get to the restroom. Most of the time I fly by myself and I am not comfortable asking for help to get to the restroom. I also think that the aisles should be wider and airline staff should be trained in how to assist a disabled person in an emergency—for example, if something happens to the plane and someone who can't walk needs to get off quickly. Also they should have interpreters for the deaf in case of an emergency so they too know what is going on.*

DO-IT Ambassador: *Definitely more space in the bathrooms is needed. Most already have grab bars that are helpful. Also labeling things in Braille would be good. Flight attendants are generally very helpful, and that's a plus. Until they design a commercial flight where you can keep a wheelchair on board, I'm not sure what else to suggest.*

DO-IT Scholar: *I'm 18 years old and I have many disabilities; the main one is that I'm a Little Person with a syndrome called Morquio's that causes me to use a power wheelchair as I have trouble walking. They should make the airplane seats, aisles, and bathrooms bigger for people with mobility issues and have signs, call buttons, etc., in Braille for people who are blind or have visual impairments. I think they should design the passenger areas to have room for all kinds of wheelchairs in them, just like the city buses.*

DO-IT Scholar: *I think airplanes should have a bigger bathroom (much bigger!) with bars so you can hang on. I use a walker on the plane and I usually crash my way to the bathroom holding on the back of the chairs. Even people who do not use wheelchairs, like me, would appreciate both the aisles and the bathroom being more accessible! I can't imagine how people in wheelchairs go to the bathroom on a plane; the bathrooms are so tiny! How do people using wheelchairs get to the restroom when flying?*

DO-IT Ambassador: *I don't even attempt to use bathrooms on the plane, just too hard!*

DO-IT Ambassador: *Yeah, whenever my wife and I fly over four hours, we intentionally get a layover so I can use the restroom at the airport between flights.*

DO-IT Scholar: *So you never go to the restroom on the plane? What happens if you really have to go?*

DO-IT Ambassador: *Never had it happen, but we'd have one of the airline attendants hold a blanket like a curtain so I could go.*

DO-IT Scholar: *I never go to the restroom on the plane. It's much easier to go in the airport because the restrooms are a lot bigger.*

DO-IT Mentor: *One thing I would really like to see is that buttons for calling the flight attendant, turning on the light, etc., are distinguishable from each other. In some planes these buttons are mounted in one strip at the underside of the overhead compartment, but the different buttons are not distinguishable by touch.*

Also, as some others have mentioned, controls on the inside of your armrest or overhead can be difficult to reach. Placing the controls on the back of the seat in front of you could cause the person sitting in that seat to be bothered when the buttons are operated, so some kind of fortification of the area around the buttons might be useful in that case. It would also be nice if bathroom doors carried some type of identification including a label "push here to open", or whatever is appropriate, in both large print and Braille. When looking for the restroom on the plane, I'm often not exactly sure where I should pull or push and hesitate to try something for fear of setting off some alarm or opening a door I shouldn't be opening.

DO-IT Ambassador: *The problem with having buttons on the back of the seats is if the person in front of you is reclined it could be hard to reach the buttons.*

DO-IT Mentor: *The entertainment systems are becoming more and more interactive and, thereby, less and less accessible to those of us who cannot read the screen. The systems are probably designed by each airline, but perhaps Boeing can do some things to help make them accessible.*

DO-IT Ambassador: *The seating system for people in wheelchairs that can't transfer well or at all needs to be changed. I think there should be a way to allow the passenger to remain in his or her wheelchair. One possible way to do this is to have a section of removal seats at the front of the plane. These seats could be removed and then a wheelchair*

occupant could park in that place. It should be fairly simple to have straps to tie a wheelchair down like in buses. The only possible problem would be the width of the airplane door. That is one thing that definitely needs to be fixed.

DO-IT Scholar: *Would it be unsafe to have a wheelchair in the passenger cabin of the airplane? If they are able to make it really secure that would be great!*

DO-IT Ambassador: *I would think having chairs on board would be unsafe. Even during take off/landing it would potentially move... not to mention if something were to happen during the flight. I have no desire to be trapped under a 300lb chair. I think the plane seats are bolted down, but I may be COMPLETELY wrong. How would someone in a wheelchair that is secured move around, go to bathroom, etc., and still stay secure?*

DO-IT Ambassador: *There should be wider and bigger entrance doors so wheelchairs can fit. A way to tie down similar to those on a bus would be WONDERFUL. Also a place to store manual chairs or scooters for people who choose to sit in an airplane seat would be helpful. I just got back from a vacation in Wisconsin, and my family took the train so I could keep my power chair.*

DO-IT Ambassador: *The main safety concern with wheelchairs is not that they won't be able to tie them down to the plane but what is actually within the chair. When a wheelchair is put on the plane in the cargo bay they are sure to disconnect the batteries and separate those as well as inspect all other wiring for potential explosive devices. Allowing a wheelchair on the plane would simply alleviate the problems that are caused by transferring to another seat. The problem of space for a chair on the plane is a simple matter of money—first class eliminated a number of seats and the seating space grew wider in general, but to compensate they charge more for each seat. If there were some sort of monetary incentive for the airline operators to operate more accessible planes, I think they'd be more willing to change.*

DO-IT Ambassador: *Most aircraft use a track system to connect the seats to the floor. So they could have a system that has a special wheelchair designed to act as your seat and it could then be connected to the floor using the track.*

DO-IT Ambassador: *I always have a hard time reading on planes. If the top of the tray could be covered in non-stick material, that would help so much!*

DO-IT Mentor: *Great ideas! Here are a few more (sorry for any redundancy)*

1. *Some Braille labels on the buttons—the call button, air, etc.*

2. *More room in the bathroom would also allow those of us with service dogs to have them with us in the bathroom and thus eliminate the need to either leave the dog alone or have the flight attendant hold the dog.*

3. *Braille or taped instructions of where everything is in the bathroom.*

4. *Special airline-sponsored training for small groups of people with disabilities who are interested in experiencing a total simulated emergency evacuation including opening the emergency exit doors and sliding down the inflatable tubes.*

DO-IT Mentor: *I agree 100% with you. Presently, I leave my guide dog by my chair when going to the bathroom and so far it has not been a problem. Of course, it helps to have a bigger restroom as all service dogs are not the same and some need to stay with their masters.*

DO-IT Mentor: *Ditto about Braille labeling. I cannot find the flusher in some airplanes and also the call button. I always have to ask flight attendants where things are.*

DO-IT Ambassador: *During my last couple of trips, I have had some issues of my own. For example, at the end of spring term, I went by airline*

to Medford to see my mother and father. I was let off at the curbside check-in and was able to check in my suitcase. However, I had trouble getting assistance to the security checkpoint and boarding gate. The man at the curbside check-in took me into the building and said he was going to call someone to take me to the boarding gate. However, it was over thirty minutes and no one came. In fact, I didn't get assistance through security until close to time for my flight to take off.

During my last trip, I had trouble getting assistance to the ground transportation center. I landed in Portland and the attendant was going to call the airport to have someone meet me at the plane and take me where I needed to go. However, no one showed up by the time I landed. In fact, it took over twenty minutes just to get assistance to baggage claim. When you are traveling, how do you resolve the problem of getting assistance to your destination?

DO-IT Ambassador: *The airlines ALWAYS unplug the batteries to my chair and forget they've done it, leaving me to put the pieces back together. It always takes awhile to find the seat cushion too. We've taken to removing the cushion and using it for extra cushioning on the airline seat...not a bad solution. Sometimes they take an interminably long time with the aisle chair, but, other than being really frustrating, it's usually not a problem to wait. The one time I needed something quickly—when I was interviewing in Chicago for a Mellon Fellowship—they actually got it right! My worst airport experience was actually while still on the ground. Note to others: I could find no accessible bathrooms at Dulles International Airport near the terminals. Yes, this meant waiting about eight hours for a catheterization and I was seriously paying for it. That was along time ago and I wouldn't be surprised if things have changed.*

DO-IT Mentor: *I travel frequently for business and leisure and use a manual wheelchair. I require assistance boarding and deplaning. I often wait twenty minutes once a plane lands to get off the plane (all passengers must deplane, then they bring*

the aisle chair and assist me to my wheelchair, waiting in the jet way.) Sometimes my wheelchair hasn't appeared from down below yet, sometimes the special services staff aren't yet available—who knows. Patience is necessary when you travel. I warn folks who might be waiting for me in baggage that I usually don't show up for thirty minutes after a plane lands.

Now about getting through security, I would ask the fellow at curbside check-in to take you to a person at the counter of the airline you are flying. Your physical presence in front of them will urge them to get those special services staff to you more quickly. Plus, you will have someone you can keep checking in with to be sure you get your needed assistance in a timely manner.

DO-IT Ambassador: *Thanks for the recommendations. Next time I fly out, I will get directed to the ticket counter inside the terminal instead of using curb side check-in. What do you think of the idea of contacting the airline and arranging assistance before I arrive?*

DO-IT Ambassador: *I only have tried to travel with my electric wheelchair on a plane twice and my wheelchair got there fine but didn't make it back home in one piece both times. The second time that we traveled with my wheelchair, we tried putting notes on my chair but we didn't think about the fact that not everyone can read the English language. So, my dad and I came up with an idea for the traveling companies to have a box that the power wheelchair could go into with handles on the outside of the box so it would make it easier for the workers to pick up to lift.*

DO-IT Ambassador: *I just got back from New York City where there was a miscommunication with the hotel shuttle, and I gave them a piece of my mind. Airport shuttles are the worst for me in terms of accessibility, but I usually leave a larger tip, so the hassle decreases.*

It's great that some of you use your parents as resources, but there may be times when they aren't

there. Be objective, confident, and persistent too. You have to have patience with people. I fill out forms regarding my chair and tell them what might be vulnerable pieces of the chair. I say things like "lift from here." I've been fortunate that they've never dropped or bent my chair (at least no more than my brothers have), and I have escaped with no damage.

If your chair ever is damaged you should report this. I'm just wondering why some of you dismantle your chair? Is it because of the batteries? It helps to leave your seat cushion by your feet. I've forgotten mine in an overhead bin a few times.

DO-IT Scholar: *I have two power wheelchairs so I take the old one. I'm thinking about the wheelchair all the way to where I'm going because I'm scared about it. My mom takes the joystick off because before we did that it got messed up badly and it made the chair harder to drive. I like the idea of making signs in different languages about how to handle the wheelchair if it gets stored on a plane—just like the multi-language signs they have in airports to assist travelers.*

Summary

From this conversation here is a list of some of the suggestions the DO-IT Community recommends that airlines consider to make all passengers, including those with disabilities, feel welcome and make the environment usable by everyone:

- captions on video presentations,
- conveniently located sections where seats can be removed and wheelchairs can be tied down,
- non-stick material on trays,
- wider aisles,
- aisle seat arm rests that can be moved up,
- larger bathrooms,
- different tone levels indicating when the fasten seatbelt signs go on and off,
- Braille labels on call buttons, and
- sign language interpreters.

The Browser: Calendar of Events

For a schedule of conferences of interest to our readers, go to

<http://www.washington.edu/doi/Newsletters/calendar.html>

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