

Introduction

In August of 2021, Minnesota State University, Mankato (MSU, Mankato) began installing 100 MavPODs, “semi-private, comfortable, and convenient place[s] to study, make a call, recharge, and more”¹ in 13 buildings across campus. Initially, none of the MavPODs were accessible to people with mobility disabilities who use wheelchairs, motorized scooters, or other similar such mobility aids. Late September/early October, four larger accessible MavPODs were installed: three in the Wigley Administration Building and one in the basement of Wissink Hall².

Placement and Publicizing of MavPODS & Accessible Spaces

Persons without a mobility disability can readily access 100 MavPODs in 13 buildings across campus: Armstrong Hall, Carkoski Commons, Centennial Student Union, Clinical Science Building, Ford Hall, Memorial Library, Morris Hall, Myers Field House, Nelson Hall, Performing Arts Center, Preska, Wiecking Center, and Wissink Hall. Persons requiring an accessible MavPOD have access to four larger MavPODs in two buildings: Wigley Administration Building and Wissink Hall. Refer to the [campus map](#) for a layout of buildings.

When a person with a mobility disability encounters one of the 100 inaccessible MavPODs, a sticker posted on the side of the MavPODs directs them to go to Memorial Library. The sticker states the following: “Looking for an accessible study space? Accessible semi-private study areas are available in Memorial Library with more locations coming soon”. The sticker does not direct persons to the larger accessible MavPODs in the Wigley Administration building or Wissink Hall. Some of the MavPODs also have a purple sticker with a QR Code to look up MavPOD locations. See image to the right.



An IT Solutions one-page flyer promoting the MavPODs, directs persons needing an accessible option to Memorial Library: “Fully accessible study rooms are available in Memorial Library”. Refer to Appendix B for a copy of the flyer.

The MSU, Mankato website promoting the MavPODs directs persons looking for an accessible option to Memorial Library and to the Clinical Sciences Building. Fully accessible study rooms are also available in [Memorial Library](#) and the Clinical Sciences Building. The link to the library goes to a page titled “Services for Minnesota State Mankato Students”, however there is no information available about accessible study spaces on the landing page.

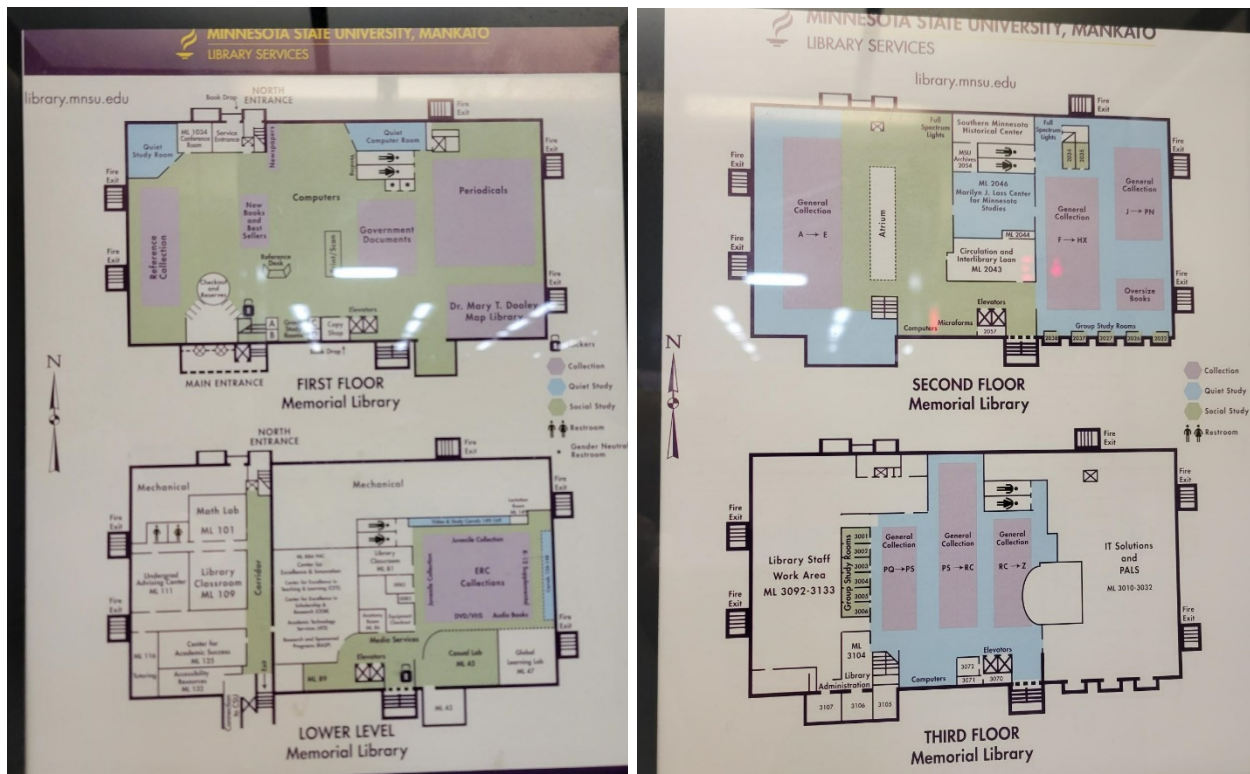
¹ <https://mankato.mnsu.edu/it-solutions/help-support/mavpods/>

² Usable, but without all features fully installed.

Disparities in Access

THERE IS A 13 BUILDING (INACCESSIBLE MAVPODS) TO 2 BUILDING (LARGER MAVPODS) RATIO.
THERE IS A 100 INACCESSIBLE MAVPOD TO 4 LARGER MAVPOD RATIO.

There are accessible study rooms/spaces available in the Memorial Library and the Clinical Science Building, however they are not readily identified on any campus map, MavPOD information, or the Memorial Library weblink to find an accessible study space. There is a room on the third floor of the library, ML 3072, marked as the “Faculty Emeriti Office”, that has two accessible (adjustable) desks. ML 1034 conference room, a group meeting room, is designated as an accessible space. Maps in Memorial Library do not indicate where the accessible spaces are located.³



Access to MavPODs, accessible and inaccessible, and to accessible spaces in the library vary depending upon the hours that buildings are unlocked and open to the public. Most buildings do not post the hours that they are unlocked and available for students and others to access. Refer to Appendix C for October 2021 Memorial Library hours. It is believed that the Wigley Administration Building, the location of the three larger MavPODs, is locked on weekends. The variability of hours is a factor contributing to unequal access for persons with mobility disabilities. These disparities afford persons with mobility disabilities on campus, most notably students with disabilities, unequal access to the services of this University.

³ Maps were found inside the elevator in Memorial Library.

These disparities call into question whether the University is in violation of the civil rights law for people with disabilities in the United States: The 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act.

The Americans with Disabilities Act

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) “prohibits discrimination and guarantees that people with disabilities have the same opportunities as everyone else to participate in the mainstream of American life”.⁴ Title II of the ADA pertains to State and Local government services. Federal regulation, Part 35 of the Nondiscrimination on the basis of disability in State and Local Government stipulates, § [35.130](https://www.ada.gov/regs2010/titleII_2010_regulations.htm#a35130) stipulates the General prohibitions against discrimination as follows:

- (a) No qualified individual with a disability shall, on the basis of disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of the services, programs, or activities of a public entity, or be subjected to discrimination by any public entity.
- (b) (1) A public entity, in providing any aid, benefit, or service, may not, directly or through contractual, licensing, or other arrangements, on the basis of disability—
 - (i) Deny a qualified individual with a disability the opportunity to participate in or benefit from the aid, benefit, or service;
 - (ii) Afford a qualified individual with a disability an opportunity to participate in or benefit from the aid, benefit, or service that is not equal to that afforded others;
 - (iii) Provide a qualified individual with a disability with an aid, benefit, or service that is not as effective in affording equal opportunity to obtain the same result, to gain the same benefit, or to reach the same level of achievement as that provided to others;
 - (iv) Provide different or separate aids, benefits, or services to individuals with disabilities or to any class of individuals with disabilities than is provided to others unless such action is necessary to provide qualified individuals with disabilities with aids, benefits, or services that are as effective as those provided to others.⁵

⁴ https://www.ada.gov/ada_intro.htm

⁵ https://www.ada.gov/regs2010/titleII_2010_regulations.htm#a35130

An Inquiry into Accessing MavPODS on Campus

A discussion with students about human diversity, social justice, and the MavPODS in an introductory social work class, prompted this inquiry into accessing MavPODS on campus.

- How long does it take to walk on campus to an inaccessible MavPOD?
- How long does it take to walk to an accessible MavPOD?
- How long does it take to walk to an accessible study space in Memorial Library?

Twelve buildings were included in the inquiry: Armstrong Hall, Carkoski Commons, Clinical Science Building, Ford Hall, Morris Hall, Nelson Hall, Performing Arts Building, Preska, Trafton North, Trafton South, Wiecking Center, Wissink Hall. One classroom was selected as the starting point in each building. An effort was made to select an array of rooms at all levels of buildings (basement, first floor, second floor, and third floor), with the specific room arbitrarily selected off of the campus map.

Nine undergraduate students and one professor participated in the inquiry. Refer to Appendix A for the inquiry protocol, directions, and documentation form. All of the data was collected on Wednesday, October 6, except for Preska and Carkoski Commons (collected on Wednesday, October 13). At the time that the data was collected on October 6, the rainy weather had cleared, and it was moderately windy. However, the weather was nice enough to comfortably walk outdoors. October 13 was a lovely autumn day; it was comfortable enough to walk outdoors.

The professor leading the inquiry re-walked some of the routes to verify the general time it took to navigate the campus in search of inaccessible MavPODS, larger accessible MavPODs, and accessible spaces in Memorial Library, because some of the travel times seemed lengthy. Similar results were obtained.

Findings: Quantitative and Qualitative

Before presenting the findings, it is important to acknowledge factors contributing to the varied and lengthy timeframes navigating campus to find inaccessible MavPODS, larger accessible MavPODS, and accessible spaces in Memorial Library. Factors included:

- Level of familiarity with the campus.
- Level of skill in reading a map.
- Elevator wait times.
- Accuracy of the map to locate accessible routes (e.g., elevators, doors with push buttons).
- Knowledge of library personnel working at the checkout desk and reference desk.

Quantitative Findings

The quantitative findings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Length of Navigation Time

Starting Location	Walk to the closest MavPOD*	Walk to the closets MavPOD**	Walk to Accessible MavPOD**	Walk to an accessible Library Space**
Armstrong Hall 302	12 sec.	12 sec.	7 min. (420 sec.) (Wigley)	16 min. (960 sec.)
Carkoski Commons 150	15 sec.	15 sec.	Did not access. Closer to go directly to the library.	8 min. 51 sec. (531 sec.)
Clinical Science Building 212	24 sec.	24 sec.	7 min. (420 sec.) (Wigley)	16 min. (960 sec.)
Ford Hall	86 sec.	3 min. 57 sec.	14 min. 11 sec. (851 sec.) (Wigley)	21 min. 57 sec. (1,317 sec.)
Morris Hall 102	51 sec.	1 min. 6 sec.	2 min. 27 sec. (147 sec.) (Wigley)	10 min. 8 sec. (608 sec.)
Nelson Hall 205	25 sec.	1 min. 43 sec.	3 min. 38 sec. (218 sec.) (Wigley)	12 min. 20 sec. (740 sec.)
Performing Arts Center 101 (basement)	54 sec.	3 min.	9 min. (540 sec.) (Wigley)	18 min. (1,080 sec.)
Preska 126	33 sec.	33 sec.	5 min. 26 sec. (326 sec.) (Wigley)	10 min. 06 sec. (606 sec.)
Trafton North 296	104 sec.	7 min.	Did not access. Went straight to the library.	20 min (1,200 sec.)
Trafton South 350	74 sec.	19 min.	Did not access. Went straight to the library.	26 min. (1,560 sec.)
Wiecking Center 220	30 sec.	30 sec.	9 min. 20 sec. (560 sec.) (Wissink)	14 min. 35 sec. (875 sec.)
Wissink Hall 228A	57 sec.	2 min. 23 sec.	2 min 36 sec. (156 sec.) (Wissink)	10 min. 21 sec. (621 sec.)

*No restriction. Quickest route. Use any door. Use the stairs.

** Restrictions imposed as if person was using a wheelchair. Refer to Appendix A for rules.

The first column presents the data on how long it took to walk to the closet MavPOD with no restrictions (i.e., the quickest route found using any door and using the stairs). In all of the starting locations, a MavPOD was found under 2 minutes, with the average time being 47 seconds (range 12 seconds to 1 minute 44 seconds). Students participating in the inquiry were not asked to note if the MavPOD found was also available for use. However, in most, if not all of the locations, there are at least two or more inaccessible MavPODS in close proximity to one another.

The second column presents the data on how long it took to walk to the closest MavPOD as if the person were using a wheelchair. For this, and subsequent segments of the inquiry, only elevators and doors with push button access could be used to navigate from the starting location to the nearest MavPOD (inaccessible or larger accessible). For most of the locations, the time it took to find any MavPOD was the same or fairly comparable to navigating without any restriction. The exceptions were Trafton North and Trafton South, which were reported as very difficult to navigate in general, and in specific very difficult to navigate using the MSU, Mankato Accessibility Map, to find elevators, and to locate doors with push button access.

The third column presents data on how long it took from the starting location to walk to a larger accessible MavPOD after discovering that the closest MavPOD was not accessible. The location accessed is identified in parenthesis: (Wigley) or (Wissink). The closest accessible MavPOD accessed was typically in the Wigley Administration building. The larger accessible MavPOD located in the basement of Wissink Hall was accessed when the starting location was Wissink Hall and Wiecking Center. The student navigating from the Performing Arts Center went to the Wigley Administration Building, despite Wissink Hall being a closer location to find one larger accessible MavPOD. Given the complexity of navigating Trafton North and South, the students conducting the inquiry opted to go directly to the library to find an accessible space, rather than try to find the larger accessible MavPODs in the basement of Wissink Hall or Wigley Administration Building. The time it took to locate an accessible MavPOD ranged from around 2 and one-half minutes to 14 minutes, with an average time of almost 7 minutes. Constraints such as navigating using the MSU, Mankato Accessibility Map, finding elevators, locating doors with push button access, and only walking on sidewalks and crossing at curb cuts contributed to lengthier travel times.

At the time of the inquiry, the larger accessible MavPODs were physically available. However, access was limited by the presence of a chair or chairs within the space. In order to use the space, a person would need to move the chair(s) out of the MavPOD, or at least out of the way. This could present as a barrier to some people with mobility disabilities being able to actually use the larger MavPODS. See pictures of the larger MavPODs in the basement of Wissink Hall and in the Wigley Administration building on page 7.



Larger MavPOD in Wissink Hall



Larger MavPOD in Wigley Building

The fourth column presents data on how long it took from the starting location to walk to Memorial Library and locate an accessible study space. In nine of the eleven trials, the person doing the inquiry located a larger semi-private accessible MavPOD before going to Memorial Library to find an accessible study space, thus the travel times must be understood to include this additional step. The time it took to locate an accessible space in Memorial Library from the starting location, ranged from approximately 9 minutes to almost 22 minutes, with an average time of approximately 15 minutes. Of course, the time would be shorter to access a space in the library without the additional step of trying to find a larger accessible MavPOD.

However, only the larger accessible MavPODs provide people with mobility disabilities a comparable semi-private study space. The accessible spaces in the library are shared spaces, not one-person spaces.

Qualitative Findings

Students engaging in the inquiry were instructed to record notes to document their process, journey and/or an obstacles encountered.

- **Sidewalks on campus:** Steep slopes. Sidewalks not very level, very bumpy. Had to walk up five slopes greater than 5 degrees.
- **Elevators:** Slow and sketchy. Elevator was scary. Took forever to find an elevator.
- **Accessible entryways:** Noticed few accessible entryways in and out of buildings. Took forever to find an accessible door in Armstrong Hall. Lots of walking to find accessible doors.
- **Accessibility map:** Accessible doors on map for Armstrong Hall are not correct. Map was easy enough to read, but using the information was very time consuming – it felt like a maze.
- **Memorial Library:** ML1034 conference room has adjustable tables, but not a private space. ML 3072 is a small office space with two adjustable desks, but not a private space.

Several of the notes focused on finding an accessible study space in the library. In every instance documentation was provided, the library personnel working at the front desk, presumably student workers, struggled to provide direction to an accessible study space in the library. Some of the student workers were more helpful than others in trying to determine if/where an accessible study space was located. The librarians working at the reference desk were the second point of contact in Memorial Library. The librarians were infinitely more helpful in directing to an accessible study space in the library, notably ML 1034 and ML 3072.

Limitations

This inquiry was not conducted as a rigorous scientific experiment. Thus, the results should be understood with this limitation. As was previously noted, there were several factors that contributed to the varied and lengthy timeframes. The inquiry was meant to reflect a real-life experience trying to navigate this campus in search of a MavPOD or an alternative accessible study space. Despite the limitations, the metrics clearly reveal that people who need an accessible MavPOD or alternative accessible study space will spend significantly more time trying to find such a space.

The inquiry was conducted in early October when weather conditions were readily amenable to walking outside. It is reasonable to conclude that the travel times would be greater during inclement weather (e.g., rain, sleet, snow) and icy conditions. Such conditions

make travel outside in a wheelchair or other mobility device extremely difficult and very time-consuming. Navigating the campus using interior walkways and tunnels is complex, but even more so for people who need to travel using accessible routes. Refer to the [Interior Walking and Tunnels](#) map. It is important to note that not all buildings can be accessed using interior walkways and tunnels.

Conclusion

The findings of this inquiry make clear that persons with mobility disabilities on the MSU, Mankato campus are afforded unequal access to its services, most notably students who are the primary targets of the MavPODs. There is a 13 building (inaccessible MavPODs) to 2 building (larger MavPODs) ratio. There is a 100 inaccessible MavPOD to 4 larger MavPOD ratio. The chairs placed in the larger MavPODs make the space less readily accessible for people with mobility disabilities. The accessible spaces in the library are not private spaces, nor are they comparable to the MavPOD experience. Perhaps, a case can be made that the MavPODs are not *essential* to benefiting from the services, programs, and activities of this institution. The University has made at least a \$1 million dollar investment in MavPODs — a sizeable investment. The MavPODs are being enthusiastically promoted as a beneficial resource to faculty, staff and *most notably students*. They are scattered across campus, with an invitation to [request that additional locations](#) be added, suggestive of plans for continued investment. The MavPODs are now part of the campus tour for prospective students and their families.⁶ The MavPODs are touted as offering “endless other possibilities”. With the aforementioned considerations in mind, MavPODs hardly seem not *essential*.

The Americans with Disabilities Act sets the floor, not the ceiling. Meaning, entities under its authority must meet the letter of the law, with opportunities to provide less than, “different”, or “separate” for people with disabilities when deemed acceptable under the law. From a diversity, equity, and inclusion perspective, a stated goal of this institution, the MavPODs are a clear affront to people with mobility disabilities and are a blatant violation of Minnesota State University, Mankato’s stated commitment to being a welcoming, inclusive, and affirming place for all.

⁶ While conducting business in the library, the professor witnessed the MavPOD being promoted as part of the campus tour.

Appendix A

MavPOD / Accessible Space Inquiry

Directions: Student researcher will walk to their designated starting place on campus. Student researchers will time how long it takes to walk from their designated starting place on campus to an accessible MavPOD and/or an accessible space in the library.

Use the campus accessibility map provided to locate the various buildings and accessible buildings/entrances on campus.

Imagine that you are a wheelchair users.

Follow these Rules:

- Walk at a pace slower than you typically walk.
- When walking up or down an incline, walk at a slower pace.
- Only walk on the sidewalks. No walking on grass.
- Only cross streets at a curb cut. You have to find a curb cut to cross the street.



- When inside a building, you must use an elevator to get to the lower level and 2nd and 3rd floors of buildings. No using the stairs.
- If it starts to rain or snow, you can only access a building through an accessible door.
- If you are so inclined, ask others for directions.

Step One: Walk to your assigned starting location.

Step Two: Record your start time.

Step Three: Walk to the closest MavPOD. Remember, you are in a wheelchair. Find and read the sticker directing you to an accessible study space.

Step Four: Walk until you find an accessible MavPOD or an accessible study space in the library. If the space is occupied, keep looking for a space that is available for you to use. When you get to the library, go to the checkout desk to ask where you can find an accessible study space. If they don't know, go to the Reference Desk. If they ask, tell the person you are asking for a professor.

Data Collection Form

Starting Location:

Route:

_____ Inside route

_____ Outside route

Starting Time:

Time Arrived at an INACCESSIBLE MavPOD:

Time Arrived at an accessible MavPOD:

Time Arrived at an accessible study space in the library:

Notes: Record notes documenting your process, your journey, any obstacles you encountered. Really anything you think will help understand your experience navigating the campus in search of an accessible MavPOD and study space in the library.

Appendix B

MavPODs

New personal spaces located all around campus. They provide a **semi-private, comfortable, and convenient place to study, make a call, recharge, and more.**

HOW CAN I USE THEM?

No reservations required, just find an empty MavPOD and...

- Transition between in-person and **online classes**
- **Study** or do virtual group work
- Make **telehealth** or other calls
- Have virtual **advisor meetings**
- **Record video or audio** for class projects
- Sit back, **relax, and recharge**

& ENDLESS OTHER POSSIBILITIES!

OTHER FEATURES:

- Comfy chair and desk
- Soft lighting
- Plugins for power
- Sound-buffering for privacy
- Fan for airflow

FIND A MAVPOD
100 locations all
across campus

mankato.mnsu.edu/mavpods

NEED AN ACCESSIBLE OPTION?

Fully accessible study rooms are available in **Memorial Library**.

MINNESOTA STATE

Minnesota State University, Mankato
A member of Minnesota State

A member of the Minnesota State system and an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity University. This document is available in alternative format to individuals with disabilities by calling IT Solutions at 507-389-6654 (V), 800-627-3529 or 711 (MRS/TTY). 08/21

Appendix C

Library Hours						
OCTOBER 2021						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1	2
					From: 7:30am To: 6:00pm	From: 10:00am To: 6:00pm
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
From: 11:00am To: 12:00am	From: 7:30am To: 12:00am	From: 7:30am To: 12:00am	From: 7:30am To: 12:00am	From: 7:30am To: 12:00am	From: 7:30am To: 6:00pm	From: 10:00am To: 6:00pm
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
From: 11:00am To: 12:00am	From: 7:30am To: 12:00am	From: 7:30am To: 12:00am	From: 7:30am To: 12:00am	From: 7:30am To: 12:00am	From: 7:30am To: 6:00pm	From: 10:00am To: 6:00pm
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
From: 11:00am To: 12:00am	From: 7:30am To: 12:00am	From: 7:30am To: 12:00am	From: 7:30am To: 12:00am	From: 7:30am To: 12:00am	From: 7:30am To: 6:00pm	From: 10:00am To: 6:00pm
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
From: 11:00am To: 12:00am	From: 7:30am To: 12:00am	From: 7:30am To: 12:00am	From: 7:30am To: 12:00am	From: 7:30am To: 12:00am	From: 7:30am To: 6:00pm	From: 10:00am To: 6:00pm
31						
From: 11:00am To: 12:00am						