

Friday, October 7, 2011 By Anthony Adornato

BBI chairman to keynote Universal Design conference

At a global conference Oct. 24-26 in Sao Paulo, Brazil, University Professor Peter Blanck, chairman of the Burton Blatt Institute (BBI) at Syracuse University, and key partners will highlight how the Global Universal Design Commission (GUDC) is leading an unprecedented effort to build support for the voluntary adoption of universal design (UD).

Created to widen the concept of accessibility, the UD principles transcend the disability universe, considering other populations with needs, such as aging baby boomers. The UD approach advocates that all built environments and products be useable by all people.

Blanck, along with University trustee and BBI board member Joshua H. Heintz L'69, and his law partner, William J. Gilberti Jr., founded the GUDC to create UD standards—consensus-based, innovative performance guidelines that go beyond minimal compliance with law and provide ease of use to all. The GUDC standards are modeled on the green standards for the built environment, designating a level of accreditation for a project based on its usability, safety, health and inclusiveness.

At the third international Meeting on Technology and Innovation for Persons with Disabilities, Blanck will deliver the keynote address on “Universal Design in the World.” James Schmeling, interim executive director of the GUDC and managing director of SU’s Institute for Veterans and Military Families, will present on “Universal Design in the Civil Construction Industry.”

“The GUDC’s presence at the conference comes at an important time. Brazil is considering adoption of GUDC standards to guide development for its 2014 World Cup facilities and its 2016 Olympics and Paralympics,” says Blanck. “Brazil’s interest is an exciting development, and we hope it will bring international attention to the importance of the GUDC standards.”

In addition to Brazil, BBI and the GUDC are collaborating with other university, corporate and government leaders to promote adoption of the standards. For instance, Procter & Gamble is partnering with the GUDC to focus on implementing the standards in its built environment and workforce policies; Greiner Hall, a residence hall at the University of Buffalo, used the UD standards; and Syracuse University College of Law’s new building committee is considering using the standards.