

Class studies handicapped experiences

By LaVerna Fountain

"You can't judge another's lifestyle until you have walked a mile in his shoes." Sound familiar? Students of the Basic Preparation II (BP II) course are finding out what that cliché means.

Professor Robert Lesniak, Associate Professor of Education, requires students of BPII spend a day in a wheelchair as part of his course. The total package is called Sensitivity Training, designed to give the future elementary educators a deeper knowledge of what it is like to be handicapped.

Lesniak said, "Based on Federal Public Law 94142, the Mainstream Act, handicapped students have a right to public education. The reality is that most teachers are unaware of the problems handicapped students face."

"Teachers should feel empathy

towards the handicapped, not sympathy. They must learn to respect each individual's potential and ability. This course helps the soon-to-be teachers experience a little of someone else's world."

One student, Ann Hartzfield, has already spent her day in the wheelchair. She said, "In one day we must go to the records office, bookstore, Lion's Den, and library. It is difficult. My arms were sore before the day was over. The doors are far too heavy and to do simple things takes tremendous effort."

For example, using the soda fountain in the Lion's Den proved to be a horrendous experience for one student. Not able to see how far her cup was filled, the soda overflowed causing commotion and several students to run to her aid. Trying to get in and out of the latrines placed scrapes and bruises on several of the participants.

Barb Thompson, who was involved in an automobile accident at the age of 24 and is classified



as a quadraparetic, said, "The more people who participate the better. You cannot know what it is like until you are actually dependent on a wheelchair, and as an experiment, you have only scratched the surface of the handicapped's world."

"When you are experimenting with a wheelchair you realize you will be able to walk away. You don't have to deal with the emotional impact of being handicapped," Barb added. "But I'm glad someone has taken the initiative to do this. More people need to be involved and learn what it is like to be in a wheelchair; especially if they will be working with handicapped children."

The sensitivity training has allowed students to understand more clearly what it is like to be confined to a wheelchair. As Hartzfield said, "I am in awe of the ability of the confined to get around. They are beautiful."

Status of handicapped elevator examined

By LaVerna Fountain

A common sound at Capitol Campus is the panicked yell for help from wheelchaired students

stranded on or between floors.

The panic comes around class times when the freight elevator--the only means of wheelchair transportation between floors here--is being used for freight or

when someone has forgotten to close the heavy elevator doors.

According to Dennis Cannon, engineer for the United States and Transportation Architectural Barrier Compliance, "The latest standards for the handicapped elevators include doors that close automatically, are electronically sensitive to any obstruction without the doors actually touching the person or object and is not for freight use."

Pennsylvania's Department of Labor in Industry in 1972 granted a special permit to Capitol Campus and allowed for temporary use of the freight elevator by handicapped persons.

Lynn DiClemente, Department of Labor and Industry said, "The temporary permit was granted with the understanding that it would be used by the handicapped and inspected yearly. As long as the elevator passes inspection there will be no reason to rescind the permit."

Handicapped students are experiencing problems with the elevator. Unless the door is closed completely, the elevator will not move.

Handicapped persons have been stranded or late for classes because of their inability to inform persons on other floors to close the door.

Assistant Provost-Dean, Duane Smith, said a proposal has been sent to University Park to modify the existing elevator shaft. Although Smith did not make

public details of the proposal, he did disclose that a cost figure of \$100,000 is being considered.

"We've discussed the elevator issue at different times down through the years, the last time was when we modified the library," Smith said, "But because an elevator would have to go all the way down to the Lion's Den area, we have not been able to come up with a feasible plan

"The temporary permit was granted with the understanding that it would be inspected yearly."

**Lynn DiClemente
Dept. of Labor and Industry**

to construct an external elevator. Therefore, we have to look to modifying the existing shaft."

Smith said the elevator would remain on a temporary approval basis.

"If we pushed for some sort of permanent approval, we would probably have to go without any type of elevator for handicapped use," Smith said.

Dr. Jerry South, Director of Student Affairs, said that statistics show that there are about 25 handicapped persons on campus.

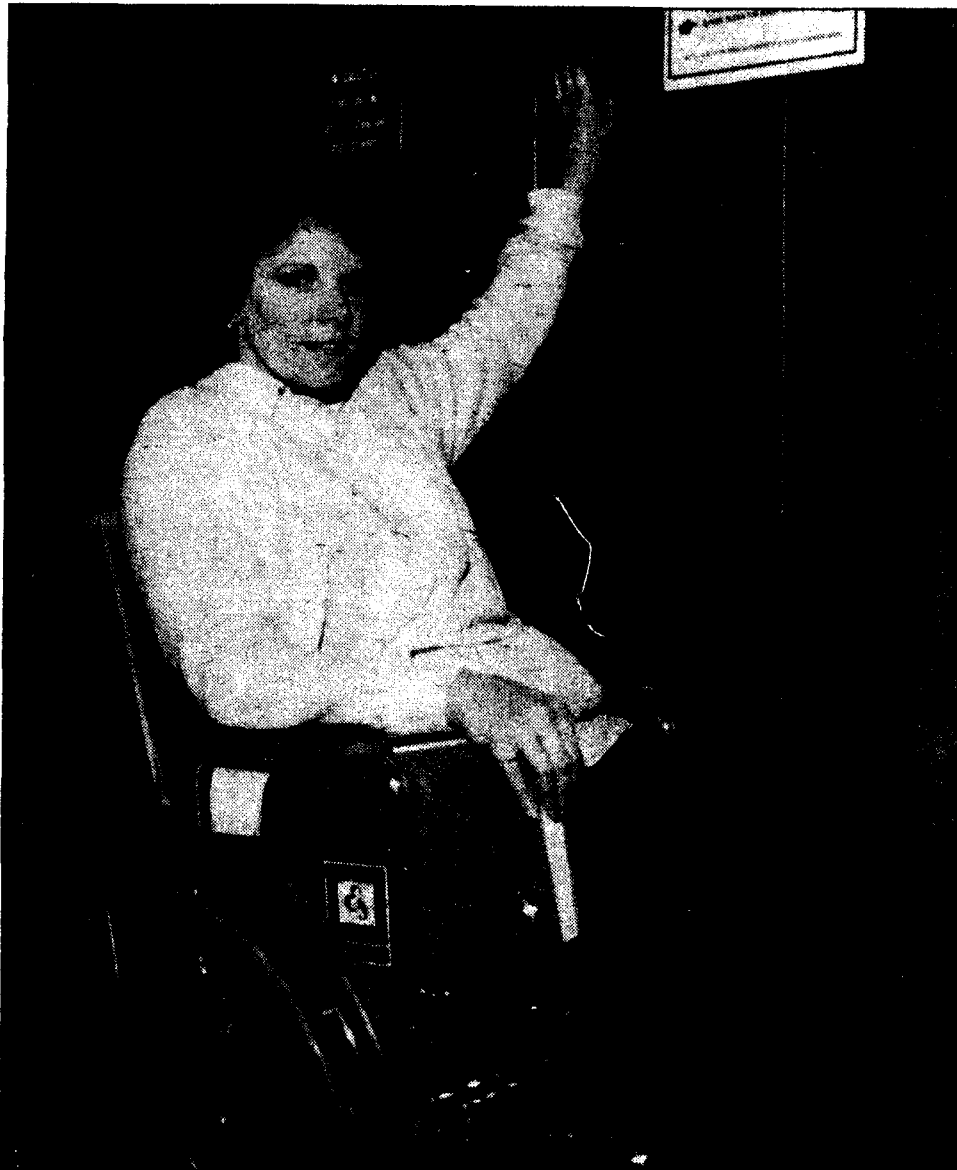


Photo by Joe Hart