

the daily Collegian living

A weekly look at life in the University community

Handicapped students find problems, and progress

By BECKY JONES
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Most able-bodied people can't even begin to imagine what life would be like with a physical disability. They shudder at the thought of losing the use of their eyes, ears or limbs. Yet an estimated 400 disabled students attend the University and lead normal lives.

Their disabilities range from paralysis and deafness to respiratory problems and cardiac weakness. Although many of these disabilities do not cause major difficulties in people's lives, some of them do.

What problems does the disabled University population face in getting an education and in dealing with people? And how does the University handle these problems and try to correct them?

Bob Carlson (14th-civil engineering) gets around campus in a wheelchair. He said the biggest physical problems he faces are having access to and finding buildings with accessible lavatory facilities.

Carlson estimated that 50 percent of the University's buildings pose wheelchair problems. Lack of ramps and elevators, and narrow doorways that cannot accommodate wheelchairs are features of a building that able people rarely notice.

For example, some areas in Sackett Building are inaccessible, and so are the dining halls in North and South, he said. All of Nittany Halls is inaccessible because of steps leading to every door.

However, extensive work has been done in some buildings. Willard, for instance, has had a first floor lab made accessible and ramps put in between floors, Carlson said.

In addition, Beaver Stadium has a wheelchair section, according to Carlson. But, he said, all the entrances to the stadium have turnstiles that wheelchairs cannot get through, so a separate gate has to be manned for wheelchairs.

Many of these modifications have been necessitated by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, according to Dennis Phifer, coordinator for handicapped student services. The act states that it is illegal for the University to deny admission to anyone on the basis of his handicap, and that all University programs must be made accessible to all students, regardless of their disabilities. This accessibility must be achieved by 1980, Phifer said.

"Building accessibility, it's safe to say, has been achieved already," he said. He explained if a disabled student wants a class held in an inaccessible building, the class will often be moved rather than spend thousands of dollars on modifications.

"Disabled students run into other mobility-related problems because

many do not attend class during winter term, Carlson said. Instead, these students go summer term and must live in East Halls — the farthest halls from the center of campus.

Another problem with attending Summer Term rather than Winter Term is the limited number of courses offered in the summer, Carlson said. He said disabled students may also miss out on courses offered only during the Winter Term.

Carlson said a plus is the availability of an adaptive physical education class because it allows the handicapped a chance to get exercise and move around.

The University also provides disabled students with special parking permits to allow them to park in any space during specified class periods, Carlson said.

However, some disabled students do not have cars here. Since he is a quadriplegic, Andy Hartman (3rd-physics) cannot use the Campus Loop. He said the University should provide disabled students with transportation comparable to that which the loop provides.

Ralph Zilly, vice president for business, said a specially equipped van for wheelchairs has been ordered. In addition, he said future loop buses will be modified to accommodate wheelchairs. However, he said there are no immediate plans to buy new buses.

According to Joan Elaine Lee, assistant reference librarian who is in a wheelchair, the campus size and lack of curb cuts also poses transportation problems for the disabled.

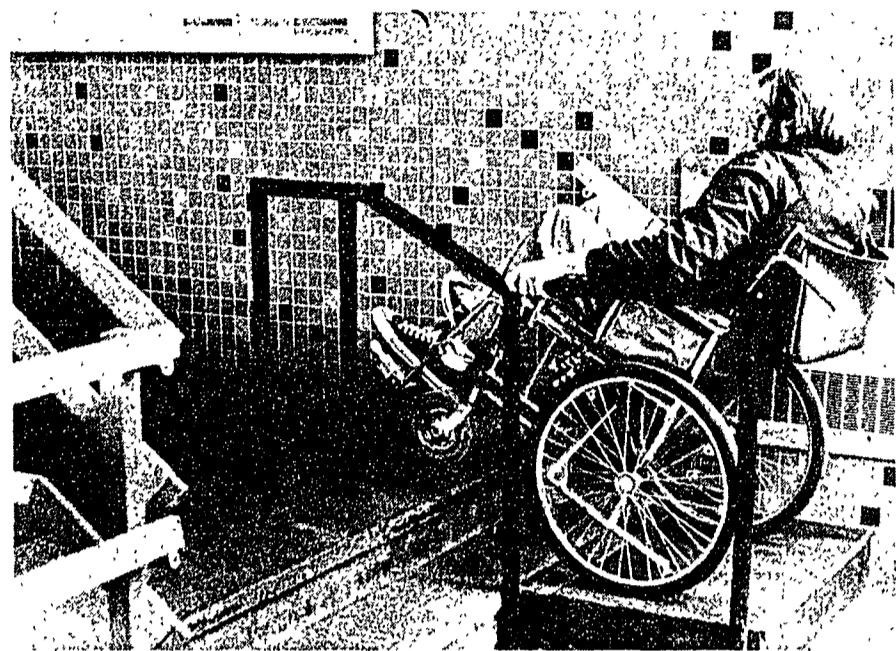
"... there is a big problem in terms of student awareness of the presence of the disabled population ... students don't understand the problems of the handicapped because they do not realize their existence."

Lee went on to cite the difficulties in getting wheelchair repairs and spare parts as big problems. She said these difficulties force her to keep duplicates of everything on hand.

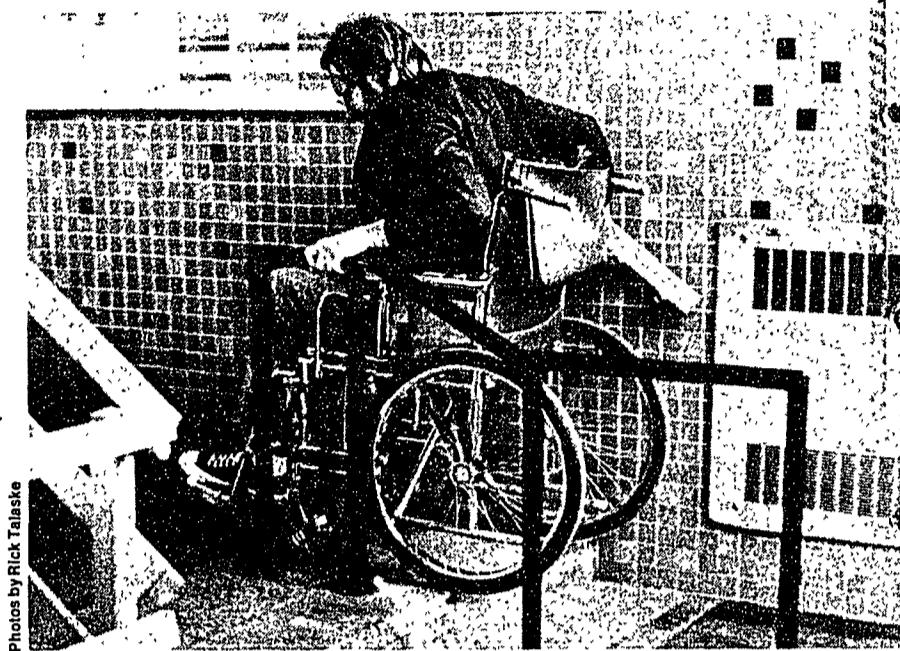
As far as her dealings with the University as an employer, Lee said "The library has been really quite good about hiring the handicapped and putting them in proper positions."

Lee said students are considerate in their dealings with her. Carlson and Hartman said they have no problems with prejudice or hassles with other students either.

However, Laura Lloyd (12th-rehabilitative education), who used to have a visual disability, said there is a big problem in terms of student awareness of the presence of the disabled population. She said students don't understand the problems of the



Bob Carlson (14th-civil engineering) uses a special step (left) to get to the top of a set of steps in Hammond Building (right). Without these special steps, handicapped persons like Carlson would not be able to enter Hammond.



handicapped because they do not realize their existence.

Lee said this lack of awareness is manifested in the fact that many people do not know how to deal with the disabled and their actions. Able people are very conscious of not wanting to do or say anything wrong, she said.

Often people will misunderstand a person's mental abilities because of his physical disabilities, Lee said.

Misunderstandings with people are a big difficulty for Paul Johnston

Johnston said another problem he had was he missed visitors when he slept because he could not hear knocking and he had no doorbell with a light to visually alert him.

Johnston said he told the University last May he would need the special doorbell in the fall. He got a light hooked up to the doorbell and fire alarm last week. He had not had a fire alarm previously either, he said.

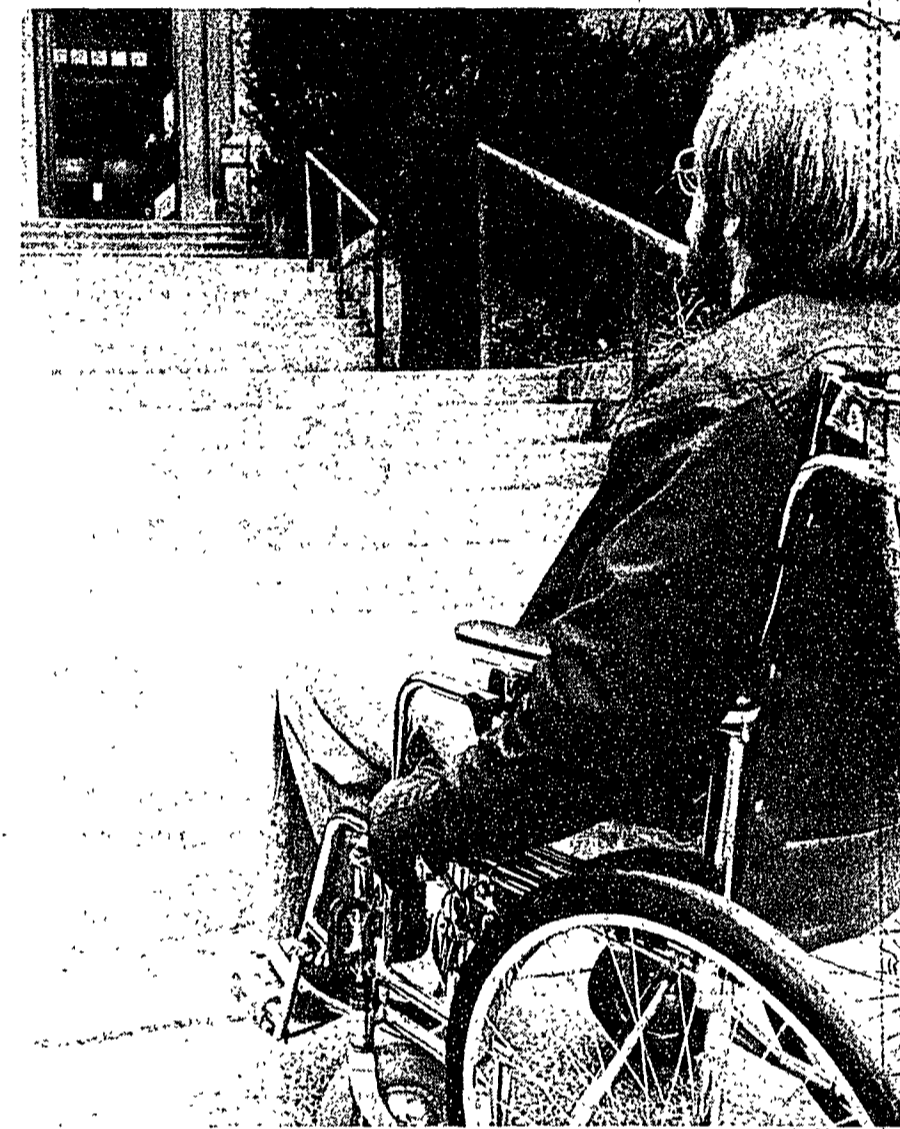
Getting information in class also poses a problem for Johnston. He said paid graduate students usually accompany him as interpreters. If no one is available to go with him to a certain class, he can take the course as an independent study, he said.

Johnston's use of non-professional interpreters is difficult at times because he studies very technical aspects of art which they might not understand. However, according to Phifer, the hiring of a professional interpreter is too expensive because Johnston is the only deaf student on campus.

His instructors have been very helpful, Johnston said. When he found that his instructional media course was all on tape, his teacher gave him a copy of the script. Other times, teachers have given him lecture notes and spent extra time with him.

All of these disabled people agree there is a need for a greater awareness of their presence on campus. They feel that through this awareness, the student body will realize the problems the disabled face daily.

To help achieve this awareness, ABLED, the Association for Barrier-free Living and Environmental Design, is planning a campus-wide awareness week for late April or early May.



Carlson surveys a situation that, for him, is an impossible task. Sparks Building is one of several buildings on campus with entranceways impassable to persons in wheelchairs.

Pressure big part of graduates' lifestyles

By SHAWN HUBLER
Daily Collegian Staff Writer

"I'll be walking along with (my girlfriend), and she'll be telling me something, and I'll just be staring off into space. . . I just can't think of anything but getting this thesis done."

—Terry, a master's degree candidate
"We are totally dependent on them (faculty supervisors), and you'd better believe it. You have to do a lot of brown-nosing and get a lot of brownie points."
—graduate student, name withheld

It's as if four years at the grindstone weren't enough.

In 1976, more than 1.1 million graduate students were attending public and private schools in America — the largest enrollment ever. At the University, as at other universities, the faces change, but the concerns remain the same: money, academic pressure, relationships with faculty members, and, above all, time.

"Your time becomes infinitely more valuable when you're a graduate student," Andrew Welki said. He is working toward a doctorate in economics. "You find that you don't want to waste even a minute."

Vicki Ziegler, an associate professor of German and a member of the University Faculty Senate, agrees.

"You're under a lot of pressure," she said. "You have a lot to learn in a very short period of time."

Graduate study, depending on the degree, can take anywhere from five terms to seven or more years. While the time commitment is greater, most grad students say the work itself isn't much harder for them than were undergraduate assignments.

Since applicants are screened initially for academic ability, the "weed-out" courses which test undergraduate aptitude are unnecessary in graduate school. The quest is not for grades, but for certifiable knowledge.

"You're here to get your degree and get out," Tish Rhodes, executive secretary of the Graduate Student Association, said. "This could be Penn State, or Ohio State or anywhere. Grad students are so much wrapped up in their research and getting that thesis written that there really isn't much time

or concern for much else. They're pretty much self-centered — they have to be."

The University has more than 2,300 candidates for master's degrees, and more than 2,000 doctoral candidates, according to the University's data processing department. The need for concentrated study within a limited time has forced many of them into an unavoidable intimacy with their departments.

This closeness to faculty and advisers, students say, is a two-edged sword: It can mean encouragement, valuable contacts and job recommendations, or personality conflicts, pressure and borderline paranoia.

"Any graduate student that I take on is part of my life," explains Richard McCarl, a professor of biochemistry. "I sometimes see them more than I see my own family. Before we even accept them, we try to be very sure that they'll be compatible."

"Faculty recommendations are very important," explained a doctoral candidate. "Just by not being totally positive in a recommendation, faculty members could ruin your chances of getting a job."

"They can make you nervous. Flunk you on a candidacy exam. They can talk to you and say they don't think you'll make it in the program."

"Graduate students, as a whole, are very nervous people. The guys who encourage you don't have nearly as big an impact as the ones who needle you — just because you're so sensitive to that. I've never heard of anybody who's gotten to the dissertation stage, just to be told that he or she couldn't pass. But everybody's convinced that you could easily flunk out."



"These things, in many cases, do look different in time," Ziegler said. "For instance, you may get mad — as I did when I was a graduate student — and think that this person is just horrible, a pedant, all sorts of things."

"Then later, when you're away from the irritation and frustration, you may find that he's taught you quite a lot."

Teaching — a means of income for more than 1,100 grad assistants — can also be a source of pressure.

"It's just as much work to teach a course as to take it," one grad student working towards a doctorate in chemistry said.

While teaching assistant programs vary among departments, all of the TAs interviewed noted a relative laxness in their training and supervision.

"I was surprised when I got here that there was no course on how to teach," said Paul, a TA in the engineering department. "But I guess it's just assumed that you're in graduate school, that you know what you're supposed to do, and that you have the responsibility to do it."

"Last year, I taught physics three terms," said another TA, also named Paul. "It was basic stuff, and I felt I was capable of transferring the knowledge. If you needed help, the prof was always there to answer questions."

"Still, I felt very scared about gyping the students of their money. I remember

what it was like to have a sucky TA."

"They say they'll sit in on classes, monitor you," said another TA. "No one sat in on my classes, not once. I could have been playing tic-tac-toe, and no one would have known."

"If a TA's good, it's because he wants to be, not because he has to be," another said. "I've been told by faculty members that my graduate work comes first, and that teaching is secondary."

A study of the use and training of TAs is being conducted by the University Faculty Senate's Committee on Undergraduate Instruction. However, according to Ziegler, who heads the subcommittee in charge of the project, the data will not be available until late this term.

Nonetheless, argue some grad students and faculty, teaching know-how is not necessarily essential to the grad student's education.

"Most students come here, not to become teachers, but to become the best in their fields," McCarl said. "My reputation as a scientist doesn't come from the fact that I teach a good course in Bi. Sci."

Becoming the "best in their fields" is only one of the motives reported by University graduate students. Most prevalent, especially among those in industry-related fields, was money.

"You really can't get a job with one of the top companies without an advanced

degree," said Paul, who is earning a dual degree in physics and engineering. "And the pay is a lot better with an advanced degree."

"I'm here because I need a Ph.D. to get a job," said another grad student, who will earn his degree in Spanish. "It's a key to advancement."

The validity of this "sheepskin equals greenbacks" motive depends, in reality, on the type of degree, the field in which it is awarded and the sex of its holder. A woman with a master's degree in business administration, for instance, stands to gain more financially from her graduate work than, say, a man earning a Ph.D. in accounting in order to teach.

While Northwestern University's Endicott Report (based on a survey of corporate college recruiters) predicts an increased demand for master's degree candidates, the job outlook for Ph.D.s, most of whom will teach, looks a lot like the unemployment line.

According to Richard B. Freeman, an associate professor of economics at Harvard, college graduates have had trouble since 1969 in getting jobs at the university level because the demand for professors has been increasing less rapidly than in the past.

And Gail Parker, co-author of "College on Your Own," (Bantam Books) said a woman with an advanced degree is "better off than her male counterpart. She's something they are

looking for, while he is swimming upstream with the rest of the competition."

However, some students, like Jeff, who is earning a Ph.D. in accounting, feel that "money isn't everything."

"With a Ph.D., I'll have a lot more freedom to do what I want to do and study what I want to study."

And others, like Joe, a master's candidate in chemical engineering, say they see graduate school as a goal in itself.

"I knew I wanted to get an advanced degree — that I was capable of it," he said, "and I didn't want to delay. I knew that if I went to work, I might not come back and do it."

For the foreign graduate students, the motives aren't much different: Graduate school, they say, is proof of academic excellence (in most cases, only the best students leave their countries), a shot at the high-paying U.S. job market, advancement in their own job markets, or a chance to see the world.

Incidentally, despite the pressures of graduate school, a grad student's life isn't necessarily all work and no play.

"I remember, when I was an undergrad, I used to think all the grad students were weird," Joe said. "But I wouldn't say I have less of a social life now. . . I'd say I work about 35 hours a week, overall, but one way or another, you always end up in a bar."