

Handicapped students at A&M. . .

Life travels on campus easier with special help



Oscar Cardenas, a freshman accounting major from McAllen, moves up the ramp provided for the handicapped at the library. Cardenas says that there are still a few minor

problems in attending classes and getting around campus, but for the most part, facilities for the handicapped are good.

By KAREN ROGERS
Battalion Staff

Steve looked at his watch. Only three minutes to make his 10 o'clock. He rolled his wheelchair past the seal on the Academic Building floor toward the elevator marked "For Handicapped Students Only."

He reached for the button and waited while the elevator slowly creaked down to the first floor. Unexpectedly, the doors flew open when the elevator reached its destination.

Steve wheeled his chair into the elevator, but as swiftly as the doors had opened, they closed again, catching him in the middle.

Fortunately, another student saw him and helped Steve untangle himself from the persistent doors.

Although this particular situation is hypothetical, it happens each day across the Texas A&M University campus as handicapped students attempt to get to classes.

About 17 students attending the University this fall are in wheelchairs, says Ted Elliott, campus counselor for the Texas Rehabilitation Commission.

For those students living on campus who require special living facilities, eight rooms in the Commons area have been specially de-

signed to allow students in wheelchairs better access.

The rooms, six in Aston-Dunn and two in Krueger, are designed to put everything within easy reach of the student.

Ron Sasse, assistant director of student affairs, says the rooms are built with wider doors, low light switches and thermostats, tilted mirrors, sinks that allow a wheelchair under them and a shower with low faucets that is wide enough for a wheelchair.

Roddy Dunnell, a sophomore engineering technology major who lives in one such room in Dunn, says there are still some problems.

"The thermostats are way up high," he says, "and you can't see how hot or cold it is. The wall plugs are real low and they're usually behind the beds."

"Also, the two highest priced men's dorms are the only two modified."

W. G. Ferris, area coordinator for the Commons dorms, explains this is because the needs of the handicapped students were just being realized at the time the Commons complex was being built.

Sasse says, "We're looking at other resident halls to expand the options. Leggett will have some spe-

cial rooms when it's finished."

The Leggett renovation is scheduled for Fall 1979 completion.

Gary Gray, a sophomore political science major, also lives in a special room in Dunn.

"I feel A&M has done a more than adequate job in providing facilities for handicapped students," he said.

"It's really quite nice," Gray says of his room. "It's kind of small for a wheelchair inside. To make the bathroom larger, they had to squash the rest of the room together."

Both men agree there are some places on campus they wish were more accessible.

"A lot of the ramps and curb cuts are too steep," Dunnell says. "They're there, but they're not too convenient to use."

Dunnell has a manually operated wheelchair.

Gray, who uses an electric wheelchair, says, "If the ramps aren't just right, then the wheelchair won't pull it." He adds that most of the ramps on campus are "designed all right."

Elevators, a necessity to the handicapped student who has a class on an upper floor, also are a source of discontent.

"A lot of the elevators are outdated," Dunnell said, "like the one

in the Halbouty (geology) building. It's an old freight elevator and to close the door, you have to set a iron gate."

Gray is quick to point out the worst elevator on campus for handicapped students is in the Academic Building.

"The reaction of the door is very swift and if you're not as swift the door closes on you."

The elevator in the animal science building, which he describes as "an old 1900 freight elevator," also works half the time, he says, which makes it difficult to get to his class on the second floor.

Some of the elevator controls are just out of reach for students in wheelchairs, Gray said.

He adds he has "more practical anything" for Texas A&M's handicapped facilities. The University of Texas is the only campus he says he thinks might be better equipped, but that campus is big, which doesn't lend itself to easy travel in a wheelchair.

Here, he says, he leaves only 30-40 minutes before his class to make it on time.

"The main reason I came to Texas A&M," Gray said "is because it's the best university in Texas that had what I needed -- easy accessibility and understanding profs."

State agency assists students

Handicapped students, who need financial or physical aid, can find it at the Texas Rehabilitation Commission (TRC) branch on the Texas A&M University campus.

TRC, a state and federally funded organization, assists students by giving scholarships, job placement information and medical help.

"We pay for the tuition and non-

refundable fees and then depending on the student's situation, we take it from there," says Ted Elliot, the TRC campus counselor.

Elliot explained this could mean paying for the student's books, room and board and medical assistance.

Only students who have a permanent disability that would serve as a vocational handicap are eligible for aid from TRC, he said.

TRC also provides such study aids to students as interpreters for the deaf and tape recorders for those not able to take notes.

Attendants for para- and quadrap-

legics are also available. These attendants live with the student and tend to all of his personal needs.

There is no charge for TRC services.

Elliot estimates there are about 212 handicapped students attending the University on some type of TRC scholarship this fall.

"Of these, about 41.4 percent are severely disabled," Elliott says. This is a handicap involving two or more limbs or organs.

Students desiring an assistant may make an application in the TRC office, Room 146, in the Memorial Student Center.

— Karen Rogers

A&M modifies buildings, curbs ahead of 1980 HEW deadline

By MICHELLE SCUDDER
Battalion Staff

Building improvement projects, though seldom noticed, are constantly under way on campus. But a drive to improve buildings will be particularly noticed by 212 handicapped students on the Texas A&M University campus.

An HEW regulation, published in June 1977, requires that all institutions of higher learning make all programs accessible to qualified handicapped students and personnel. They have until June 3, 1980 to comply with the regulation.

Texas A&M Chancellor Jack Williams appointed an ad hoc committee in January 1978 to identify buildings with architectural barriers and to see what needs to be done on campus to make all programs accessible. The committee conducted a survey among academic departments to establish priorities for the requirement.

Gen. Ormond Simpson, assistant

vice president for student services, says that hundreds of curb cuts have been put in sidewalks and that tremendous progress is being made. Simpson was a member of the ad hoc committee that studied the improvement project.

Simpson said Texas A&M did a lot of work before the regulation was issued because it recognized there was a problem.

"All we've done is speed up a program that was already in motion," Simpson said.

"We don't ever anticipate that every building on campus will be accessible to handicapped students, just every program," he added.

He said \$35,000 has been spent for work done so far, but there are no specific funds for this purpose yet.

Bob Cherry, assistant to the chancellor, said the legislature doesn't make appropriations for construction or repairs on university campuses. He said the improvement project will probably be

funded by the permanent university fund or local funds.

"We will ask the Board of Regents for appropriations from whatever sources may be legal, and appropriated to the particular building being planned," Cherry said.

Tony Helger, of University System Facilities, said work done so far has been funded in conjunction with various construction projects.

In order for a building to be accessible to handicapped students, the student must be able to get into the building, the elevator buttons must be at a height which can be reached from a wheelchair, the restrooms must be modified to accommodate a person in a wheelchair, and the classroom must have enough space for a wheelchair.

Simpson said all new buildings and construction on campus comply with the regulation.

"It is economical and easy to make a new building comply because it is designed that way, but it is very expensive to do afterwards,"

Simpson said. "It is \$100,000 to put an elevator in an old building," he said.

Simpson said that previously when a handicapped student was enrolled in a class in an inaccessible building, the class would be moved to a building that was accessible.

"This moving classes worked until a student received a graduate assistantship in finance," Simpson said. The finance department is located in Francis Hall, a building inaccessible to wheelchair students. "At this time it became a requirement for this student to actually get into this building, so a concrete ramp was built to meet his needs," Simpson said.

Simpson explained that Texas A&M can build a dormitory on campus that is inaccessible to handicapped students as long as there are some dormitories that are accessible.

All state universities are required to comply with the HEW regulation

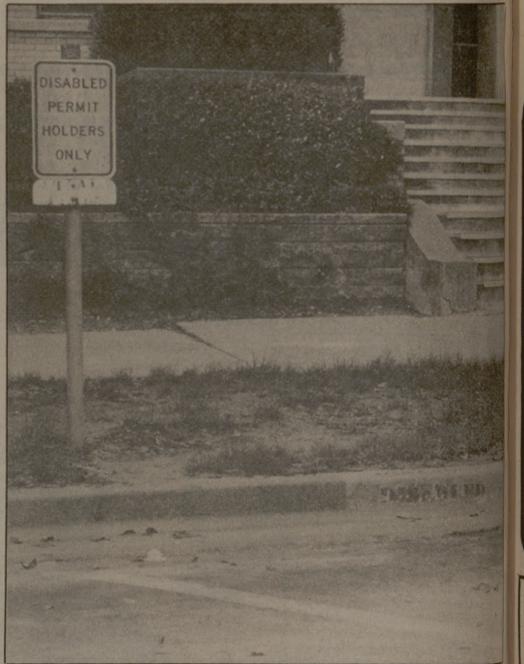
by June 3, 1980, also.

Norris Kurio, director of the physical plant at the University of Texas, said they also are well into an improvement program.

"We've completed over half of our sidewalk curb cuts, and outside ramps, but we still have a lot to do inside the buildings," Kurio said. He said they expect to complete the project in June 1980.

Kurio said the UT Board of Regents appropriated \$1.5 million from university funds for the program for the next two years.

Bob Carter, staff architect in charge of remodeling at the University of Houston, said they have done quite a bit. "We've added control panels in elevators, modified many restrooms, and added dozens of ramps at curbs and buildings," Carter said. Although no official appropriation has been made for the project Carter estimates that it will probably cost the university \$2 million to meet the requirement.



Parking areas, such as the area here outside the Biological Sciences building, are provided for disabled or handicapped students. A serious problem arises when unauthorized vehicles take up these areas.

Battalion
photos by
Steve Lee

Handicapped students get more P.E. variety

Handicapped students who want more physical activity than is offered by their adaptive P.E. classes should try archery, swimming or riflery.

Dr. C. W. Landiss, P.E. department head, said that the student may take any activity he or she can get into so long as their participation does not create undue danger to themselves or another student.

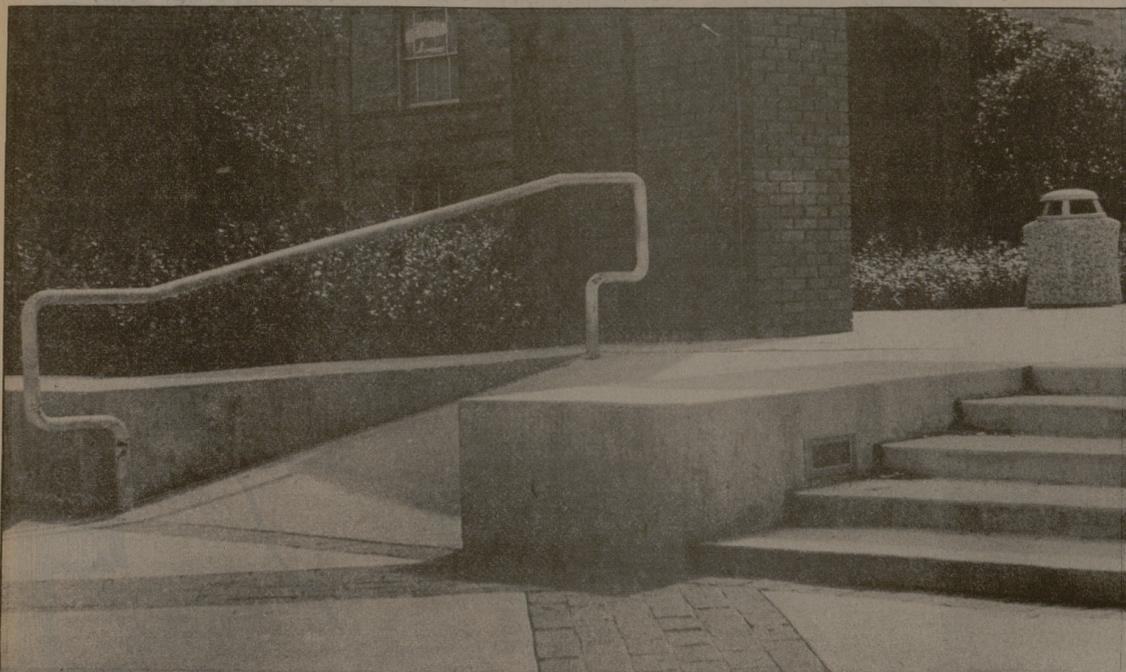
He added however, that G. Rollie White Coliseum "is not built for handicapped students; there are no ramps or elevators."

An elevator in the new addition of the coliseum which is scheduled to begin construction in November will make all of G. Rollie White accessible to handicapped students, he said. Completion is scheduled for fall 1980.

Patrick Patterson, who specializes in working with people who have physical handicaps, has been hired by Texas A&M University this fall and will interview handicapped students during spring preregistration to determine what kinds of P.E. courses they would like to have.

Disabled students, like all Aggies, are required by state law to take four hours of P.E. before graduation.

— Karen Rogers



The Alternative . . . The choice is clear for most students, but for those who don't have a choice, the University has provided ramps to facilitate mobility. By June, 1980, all state

universities must comply with an HEW regulation requiring all programs to be accessible to qualified handicapped students and personnel.