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Disability simulation an eye opener Support Services offers brief access to others' challenges

I asked about the Americans With Disabilities Act, most of us would say that it sounds like a pretty good idea. We'd say nobody should be denied access to places like our university — and then continue walking to class, unable to relate.



MELISSA MEGLIOLA
Columnist

Last Wednesday, Networks — a student group based out of Support Services — hosted "Access Challenge," an opportunity for students to try to understand disabilities. For over three hours, anyone could stop by the Rudder Exhibit Hall and participate in any one of six disability simulations.

With a little over an hour between classes, I decided to stop by and quickly learn what it feels like to have a disability. I signed in at the starting booth and received a certificate of participation. The registration process was simple. I was ready to go.

I moved first to the speech impairments simulation to my right. An attractive young woman, whose name tag identified her as Sherry Green, sat behind the table holding a bag of marshmallows. Immediately, I thought about the game played at Fish Camp to see which campers can stuff the most marshmallows in their mouths. My cheeks started to hurt.

Luckily, Sherry instructed me to put just one marshmallow on each side of my mouth.

The difficult part came when she asked me to read aloud the paragraph on the table in front of me. As I read, I tried to control my drool and attempted to read with presence. It didn't work. I shook my head and chewed up the marshmallows. While I waited to move to the next booth, Sherry began talking casually.

"I started to use Support Services a few years ago," said Sherry, who didn't seem any different from those of us who were participating in the simulation.

In January 1987, Sherry's car was broadsided by a drunk driver and she was hospitalized for four months. She had to relearn how to walk and perform the basic tasks she had always taken for granted. She made up missed high school classes at a local junior college and graduated on time. Now "98 to 99 percent" back to the way she was before the accident, Sherry has her senior ring.

With about 45 minutes left until class, I approached the manual dexterity simulation. A volunteer limited the use of my thumbs with tape and cheerfully handed me a list of tasks. I was to tie my shoe, button one shirt button, practice using a knife and fork and then take a short quiz. I immediately started on my shoe. After three or four minutes, I had a loosely tied bow that would unravel into two stray laces after any movement at all.

"I did it!" burst the guy sitting next to me. I looked down at his shoe. His bow looked just like mine. After slowly completing the other chores, I had only 15 minutes before I needed to leave.

Before going to class, I wanted to try using a manual wheelchair. I took off and headed for the MSC. Moving around the slick, polished wooden floors of the Rudder lobby was

relatively easy. Exiting the building was not. I approached the door from seemingly every angle with no luck. The doors were heavy and just narrow enough to need both doors open at once. Finally, I used the foot rests of the wheelchair to keep one door open and somehow held the other door open long enough to get through. The rest of my 10 minute experiment was very tiring but not catastrophic.

Embarrassed that I had assumed I could gain understanding of different disabilities in an hour, I returned the wheelchair and left for class.

Eric Howell, a junior industrial engineering major, traveled around campus in one of the wheelchairs.

"At first it was kind of fun," he said. "But pretty soon the novelty wore off. I couldn't even drink from the water fountain."

Eric said that he not only learned about the physical demands of using a wheelchair but also noticed that people treated him differently while he used it.

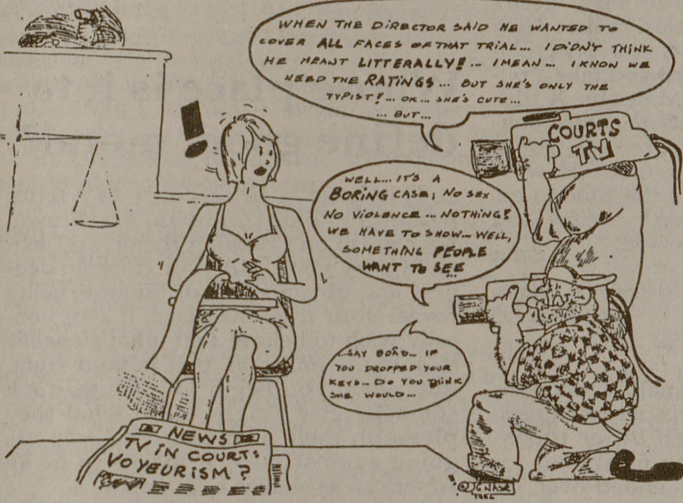
"Some went out of their way to say 'Howdy' to me. Others just darted their eyes. I gained a whole new perspective."

Access Challenge happens only one day each year. But its lesson is meaningful every day.

"I hope that through things like this, people will develop a greater understanding of people with disabilities and become more compassionate," said Sherry.

I hope so, too.

Melissa Megliola is a senior industrial engineering major



EDITORIAL Basketball bash

Tech's lack of security a warning

When athletes finish their competition, they shouldn't be expected to step in the ring and fight a few rounds. But, partly because of inadequate security, that's just what happened when the Aggie men's basketball team beat Texas Tech in Lubbock Saturday night.

In a game where the lead changed three times in the final 10 seconds of the game — and where both teams criticized the officiating — the fans were bound to get caught up in emotion.

While a few bad fans are responsible for instigating the fight, it's hard to deny the fact that a higher level of security could have prevented it.

After one of the most exciting finishes in recent Southwest Conference history, some fans from Tech insulted and charged Coach Tony Barone and Tony Barone, Jr. After a punch missed Coach Barone, chaos broke loose as the Aggies tried to force their way through a student section to the safety of their locker room.

Texas Tech apologized to Coach Barone after he criticized the Tech athletic department

for not having enough security to control the 7,000 fans who attended the game.

A&M should learn from Tech's mistake. At a time when both the men's and the women's basketball teams are in first place in the Southwest Conference, the crowds for games at G. Rollie White Coliseum are getting bigger than usual.

Aggies should be expected to show class when they come out to support their teams, but officials need to prepare for the worst to avoid such embarrassing incidents.

Increased security is also needed in other sports, and not just in case a losing team's fans are angry. There was a severe lack of control at the Wisconsin football game last year when they unexpectedly defeated Michigan. The school had sold more tickets than the number of seats, and did not have enough security when the celebration got out of control.

Although individuals should be more responsible at such emotional sporting events, it is the schools which must do more to prevent any violence.



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Allies offer understanding to homosexual, bisexual Aggies

Do not run screaming from the room. This is rude.

So begins a pamphlet about meeting gay and lesbian people entitled "Hints for the Heterosexual."

Though it may sound silly, the program that distributes this pamphlet is not. "Allies" is a new program at Texas A&M that is designed to provide a support community for gays, lesbians and bisexuals.

Last spring, Zack Coapland, a student development specialist in Student Activities, North Area Hall Director Scott Lewis and two others started the program after learning about a similar one at the University of Georgia.

Sheri Schmidt, a student development specialist in the Department of Multicul-



LYNN BOOHER
Columnist

tural Services who was one of the original members of Allies explained, "It's a way of showing your support ... and to spread awareness that [homosexuality] is not a disease."

The program originally was aimed at resident advisors, faculty and staff, but is now open to other students as well. Although the Allies program at a university in Michigan limits its membership to heterosexual faculty and students, people of any sexual orientation can join the A&M group.

To become an Ally, one must first go through a series of workshops and then attend a retreat held on campus. The retreat is known as an "Advance," which signifies the direction toward which the program aims itself.

At the Advance, candidates talk about gay, lesbian and bisexual issues and learn how to deal either with students who come to them to discuss their personal struggles with understanding their own sexuality or with students whose roommates, friends or relatives have come out to them.

Once they sign the contract required to

join the program, Allies members receive a placard which they display on their doors so that others will know they are safe to talk to. The placard says "ALLY" in blue letters and has a pink triangle nestled in the letter "Y."

Knowing a person, especially a resident advisor, is an Ally can be a comfort for homosexual students — even if they aren't interested in discussing their sexu-

Candidates talk about gay, lesbian and bisexual issues and learn how to deal with students who come to them to discuss their personal struggles.

ality. They can go to an R.A. about something like getting a light bulb changed without having to worry that the R.A. will reject them if something slips about their loved one or lifestyle, Lewis said.

Currently, there are 61 Allies, including

12 resident advisors and resident directors. People interested in becoming an Ally should be aware that sometimes others will choose to discriminate against them. Lewis warns that the program may not be for you "if you're afraid of being labeled."

Even so, students can still go through the workshops and the Advance without having to become an Ally. Lewis explained that the contracts are designed to be turned in after the Advance so that candidates can decide without being pressured by peers whether they really want to commit to the program.

Craig Blessing, a sophomore Ally said, "Even if you don't decide to be an Ally, go through training. It's really eye-opening."

The program has helped him to "be more sensitive to others."

"It is an awesome feeling to be in a room with so many people who are open-minded and don't care if you're gay or lesbian, black, white, Catholic, Muslim or Baptist — you're still a human being and deserve respect," Blessing said.

People who don't want to commit to the program but still want to show sup-

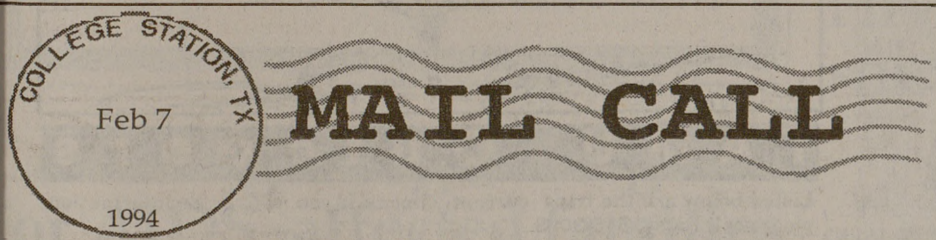
port can just be "gay positive" and "take a stand" when others tell derogatory jokes or engage in other types of gay-bashing.

The ultimate goal of the program is to create a campus "where placards are not needed," said Lewis.

The Allies program hopefully will help heterosexuals understand that homosexuality is not a choice. As one anonymous homosexual said, "Being gay, lesbian or bisexual is to awaken every morning, to live every day, and to go to sleep at night fearing discovery and rejection by your friends, family, and colleagues ... [It is] hating yourself for what you are and knowing you couldn't change your sexual orientation, even if you wanted to."

As more people become Allies and display their placards so that others can see the strength in their number, more heterosexuals will realize that gays, lesbians and bisexuals are people, too. More homosexuals will realize that A&M is a place where they can feel welcome and not persecuted.

Lynn Booher is a sophomore psychology and English major



Aggie basketball slams without dunks

After reading the letter by Darren Siefer, I have to guess that his collegiate athletic days were not spent as a basketball player. Like any sport, the goal of the Aggie basketball team is not to appease Siefer with Harlem Globetrotter-esque performances, but to play their

best and try to win. Which they have been able to do this year. They lead the SWC with a 6-0 record, and have an impressive non-conference record at 12-9. I find it discouraging that with 43,000 students, only 4,000 are able to come see their team play; but even more saddening that those who do come cannot give them the support they deserve. Siefer states that the slam dunk is the spark the Aggies need and that it gets the crowd all pumped up.

I have always had the belief that it is the fans who spark the team with their support, and it is the fans' job to get their team pumped up. I have been a basketball supporter all my life and have seen some of the most exciting games this season. If you cannot get excited about simply seeing your team play a great game and be victorious, then stay home.

Deana Davalos
Class of '95

It's our time to shine

Thank God the football season isn't over yet! Here I was watching the A&M vs. Tech games, and all I have to say is, "It's gotta be the pasta."

It's about time that our basketball programs got some respect, and no better time than on HSE.

OK, granted that in the final seconds of the men's game, there were two questionable calls on both teams, but as I understand, that's part of any sport. What I don't understand is where the security was on the court. Better yet, where was the class from the Tech fans?

I am proud of Tony Barone defending our team from those irate fans. And Damon Johnson, my hat's off to you as well.

I don't think I know of anyone who would have reacted any differently if somebody was attacking their coach, throwing garbage on them, or kicking them in the head. The ESPN highlight speaks for itself.

Yes, Aggs, I must say of this year's basketball team ... they're brass.

As for the Lady Aggs, they deserve additional applause for their win over the Lady Raiders. I think that if you keep playing on that level, you will be an unstoppable force in the tournament. See you there.

Jason Estridge
Class of '93

Cloning a sure cure

I read Tim Deithloff's letter about Beutel. Maybe they could clone Dr. Shelton.

Jennifer Jones
Class of '95