

Learning disabled aid

by Wendy Joy

There is an invisible minority that exists among university students. They are people of average to high intelligence who are distinguished by the way they learn.

This invisible minority is the learning disabled. These students experience significant differences between their learning potential and their actual performance.

The Disabled Students Services Office is attempting to help. It is in the second year of its 2-year Pilot Project on Learning Disabled Students.

The average learning disabled student has a combination of several problems. One problem on its own may not seem so severe; but it is the cluster of many difficulties that distinguishes the L.D. student.

Marion Nicely, Coordinator of Services for Disabled Students and administrator of the Pilot Project, emphasized that "you are not learning disabled unless your problem affects you severely in day to day life."

In the cognitive area, these problems can include difficulties with reasoning, memory, problem solving, language, and other general cognitive problems.

The L.D. student has resulting academic deficits. These include poor skills in studying, reading, writing, and math.

Nicely stated that "we all have different styles of learning, and we all have strengths in how we learn (and) strengths in acquiring information. The question is what are the strategies best for us? That is the aim of the program."

Several classes and workshops are offered to the students involved.

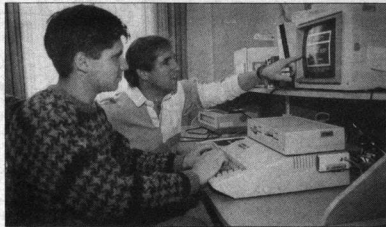
A writing class teaches analyzing and composing skills. For those who have difficulty in recognizing words, or who have perceptual and processing problems, there is a reading tutorial. A computer assisted program is available, with specific software in language and math areas. There are special workshops in areas such as organization, time management, reducing stress, and note taking. Tutoring assistance is offered for difficult courses.

Volunteers are considered especially important. They transfer texts onto tapes for L.D. students who learn better orally, and take dictation for exams.

There is also a counselling component, which aims to help the students improve their self-esteem.

Said Nicely, "a lot of these students have been called lazy or dumb or stupid... actually it's the opposite. They're the most hard-working students I've ever seen. Counselling lets learning disabled students know that they're not alone; there are other people who went through the same horrors."

To combat the frustration involved with their disability, these students seem to develop incredible motivation. Karen Kardash, a third-year Arts student taking part in the program, refers to it as the "100% effort that a L.D. student needs to succeed."



Richard Wilson and Kelly Keith demonstrate learning tools.

students referred to them by professors.

When the project is completed, Nicely states that every attempt will be made to expand the program to assist other learning disabled students.

Both Hegerat and Kardash attest to the value of the program. Said Ray Hegerat, "I thank heavens there's a program here. I probably wouldn't have survived at university without it."

Elevator traps woman

HALIFAX (CUP) — A woman in a wheelchair was trapped in a Dalhousie University elevator until three passers-by managed to lift the chair up to the level of the floor.

The incident, reported in the university's public relations department newspaper, prompted a member of the Dalhousie Board of Governors to complain about accessibility for the disabled on campus.

"She accepted it — what can one do? But I'm not about to," Maxine Tynes told colleagues at last month's board meeting. "I feel so strongly someone has to lobby for changes."

Hegerat says that "people don't understand you're not trying to sliff off... (you) have to work much harder to learn things."

Karen Kardash refers to the education and learning process of a L.D. student as "almost like being tone deaf - (it) doesn't mean we can't appreciate music."

Nicely emphasizes that the program is attempting to guide the learning disabled student toward independence, through strategies and tools that can extend from university to the work force and other areas of life.

The project is filled beyond capacity. There are five more students participating than were originally planned for. Nicely states that they have been forced to turn away

U of T argues equity

TORONTO (CUP) — As the final wording for proposed amendments to the University of Toronto's faculty appointment policy is being hammered out, several professors are charging that the changes give an unfair advantage to women.

The U of T Faculty Association (UTFA) first proposed last May that the university establish a new hiring process designed to increase the number of women faculty be established. In departments in which there is an imbalance between male and female faculty members, the most qualified member of the under-represented sex would be hired unless the member of the other sex is "demonstrably better."

Michael Marrus, a history professor, said the policy introduces non-academic criteria into a decision that should be based on academic qualifications. He said the new policy would, in fact, constitute reverse discrimination.

"We must hire the woman in every case unless the man is demonstrably better. What is really understood by 'demonstrably better' is that if you are going to hire a male candidate, he has to be proven to be considerably better. If that's the case, we are in an unfair situation," said Marrus.

But according to UTFA President Fred Wilson, the amendments are a response to what has become "systemic prejudice" in the university hiring practices. Women make up less than 20 per cent of the faculty members at Ontario universities.

"U of T has long had the ideal of hiring the best — where best means academically best," said Wilson. "That is supposed to mean that it's gender-blind. We know, in fact, that it has not been."

"Requiring people to give reasons (for their choice of candidate) is a way of asking them to reflect very carefully on the reasons they are giving. It is a provision to make the policy more fair than it is now."

Under the proposed policy, search committees must include members of both sexes, and when this is not possible, a non-voting "equity assessor" will be a part of the committee. This provision was made to combat sexual discrimination that is sometimes a factor in interviews.

Wilson said that search committees must complete a questionnaire on the applicants and their qualifications with much more pointed questions than in previous questionnaires.

The questions will be carefully constructed to reveal any subtle discrimination that might happen.

Thomas Pangle, a political science professor, said the new guidelines will just confuse the process.

"I think it means more bureaucratic interference by people who are not qualified to judge," he said.

Marrus was quick to point out that opponents of the amendments are taking a stand against discrimination, not against women.

"I think it's extremely important to note that we who oppose the policy are not making a stand against women at U of T," he said. "On the contrary, I see myself standing for the principle of equality."

Although the faculty association has agreed in principle to the proposed amendments, they will not take effect until they are approved by the university's governing council.

The University of Alberta is "committed to an amelioration of the present imbalance (in staff sex ratios)," said Doris Badir, Employment and Equity Advisor to the President.

"When qualifications are equal, the decision should be given to a woman rather than a man."

The present hiring policy does not, however, include a qualifier equivalent to the U of T's "demonstrably better."

"A clause like 'demonstrably better' is dreadfully difficult to prove," said Badir. "I'd hate to see it introduced into legislation."

"We're committed to equity in employment."

Condom giveaway at Montreal

MONTREAL (CUP) — The University of Montreal's student newspaper had its most popular edition ever when condoms were inserted in the first 10,000 copies of last week's issue.

"We had never seen the distribution boxes emptied so quickly — in 24 hours," said *Continuum* advertising manager Gilles Tremblay.

The condoms were provided free of charge by Ortho Pharmaceutical Ltd. The insertion was part of a campus-wide information campaign against sexually transmitted diseases.

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