



The letters desk is experiencing an overload of your rhymes and reasons. All letters will be printed as space permits. Please be patient! Thanks.

SUELECTION



NEED SOME EXTRA CASH?

The Students' Union requires staff for the General Election on Friday, February 5. Help us out and earn \$4.00/hour at the same time. For further information, please contact the SU Returning Office (Room 271, SUB) or the Receptionist SU Executive Offices (Room 259, SUB).

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Plans to eradicate barriers

"So far in history, the handicapped have always been expected to adjust to society. The time has come for society to start adjusting to them. This will not be accomplished without a deep re-examination of our social values."

The Royal Bank
Letter Vol. 62, No. 3
May/June 1981

The theme of the 1981 International Year of Disabled Persons was the achievement of Equality and Full Participation for disabled people. During the year, governments, agencies and groups representing disabled people attempted to create awareness about physical and attitudinal barriers which prevent the integration of disabled people into the mainstream of society.

Physical barriers to integration are everywhere - escalators, doors that are impossible to open in a wheelchair, stores with several steps at their entrances and apartment buildings with no

elevators. But, just as important are attitudinal barriers which come into play when disabled people seek jobs, for example. Fifty per cent of the handicapped people officially classified as employable are unemployed, including 80 per cent of the employable blind and 90 per cent of employable paraplegics. One obvious explanation for these staggering unemployment statistics is employer prejudice against handicapped people looking for jobs.

With such unemployment figures, it is not unexpected that increasing numbers of disabled people are turning to post-secondary institutions as a means of ensuring future financial security. And universities across North America have seen a dramatic increase in the number of wheelchairs on campus. Wheelchair students and blind students have created a whole host of new challenges for university educators and administrators, but to date the approach by many Canadian universities appears to be uncoordinated and piecemeal.

The University of Alberta for example has had a steadily increasing disabled student population for several years, yet it was not until last year that a full-time Co-ordinator of Services for Disabled Students was appointed. Creation of the position of Co-ordinator was recommended, by disabled students in the past and indicates that the university has become more aware of the special needs of disabled students.

The system must be adjusted in order to allow disabled students to compete academically. Blind students need readers, deaf students need notetakers and students in wheelchairs may need help to get to classes. Without the aid of the Co-ordinator to facilitate these accommodations, arrange for volunteers, or counsel disabled students, many disabled people would not be able to attend university.

There are other issues con-

cerning disabled students which the university must also address. For example, there have been no studies done on employment of graduates who are disabled. Though many such reports and studies have been done to show the employment prospects of Engineering students or students from other programs, this has not been the case for disabled grads. In Engineering, any indication that graduates are not getting jobs in their field prompts an investigation into the lack of interface between academic programs and industry requirements.

When two blind students failed to get jobs in their field after graduating with degrees in Recreation Administration there was no serious questioning of their participation in the program - except by a City official in the Parks and Recreation department who expressed doubt they would EVER find jobs in the field of recreation and questioned the admission of blind students into the program in the first place.

These are issues which the university must address. The university has no duty to guarantee the employment of its graduates. It does, however, have a responsibility to counsel students about career and academic choices - especially when employment prospects are so ridiculously low.

The University of Alberta is to be commended for taking action to appoint a Co-ordinator of Services for Disabled Students and joining the ranks of other Canadian universities which have done the same. It is important that the University of Alberta, the third largest in the country and located in the richest province, continue to promote the Integration, Full Participation and Equality of disabled people through the office of the Co-ordinator of Services for Disabled Students.

This however is not THE COMPLETE ANSWER - it is only the first step.

Stephanie Harrison

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