

# Volunteers lend helping hand

by Heidi Janz

Most students lead very hectic lives. Between papers, studying and exams — which are usually followed by a new round of papers — most students find that they would need a 10-day week made of 40-hour days just to get caught up on last week's work. In spite of the tremendous time pressures that university students must contend with, there is a group of students on campus that not only manage to keep up with their work, but also find time to provide fellow students who are disabled with some much needed assistance. These students, along with interested people from outside the university community, are the helping hands of the Disabled Student Services Volunteer Program.

The Volunteer Program has been a vital component of Disabled Student Services ever since the Office was established in 1981. By 1984, the Volunteer program had grown so much that an Assistant Coordinator was hired to administer the Program. This year, a second Assistant Coordinator joined the staff of Disabled Student Services.

According to Barb Adams, one of the Coordinators of the Volunteer Program, there are approximately 140 individuals involved in the program this year. About 80 of these people have volunteered to take notes for a disabled student in their class, while the remaining 60 assist disabled students in a variety of ways which include: reading material onto cassette tapes for blind or learning disabled students, acting as scribes for disabled students when

they write exams, assisting with a student's mobility around campus, assisting with library research, and helping students get books from the bookstore.

Adams said that the way people

Volunteer Program from his daughter who was a volunteer reader for blind students when she attended U of A.

"It seemed to be a worthwhile thing for me to do in my retirement."



Volunteers provide many types of assistance.

Photo: Julie Kim

come to be volunteers is just as varied as their reasons for doing so. Students are made aware of the program through advertisements, notetaker recruiting in classes, and by word-of-mouth.

"Most people volunteer because it makes them feel good," explained Adams. "For instance, some of our volunteers are learning disabled students who have benefited from the program themselves and want to give something back."

Jack Bilsland, a retired U of A English professor, has been a volunteer with Disabled Student Services for two-and-a-half years. He said that he first heard about the

explained Dr. Bilsland, "so I came over and talked to Mary Hyndman about starting to volunteer."

Dr. Bilsland's assignment as a volunteer has ranged from acting as a scribe for blind students, to working with paraplegic and quadriplegic students, and, most recently, helping students with learning disabilities improve their writing skills.

Dr. Bilsland says that the support services for disabled students have improved immensely in recent years.

"One of the saddest things I ever saw was when I had a very badly injured young man, a quadriplegic, in one of my classes. At that time, apart from the fact that DATS brought him to the university and took him home, as far as I can remember, there was absolutely no kind of provision for assistance of any sort," Dr. Bilsland recalls.

Dr. Bilsland went on to say that, although that young man tried very hard to make a go of it, he was just unable to manage on his own. He strongly feels that this student would have been able to have a successful university career had Disabled Student Services been in existence twenty-five years ago.

Dr. Bilsland spends an average of eight or nine hours a week volunteering. Although the amount of time he puts in may increase dramatically around exam time, he says it never feels like too much of a demand on his time.

"I think it's without a doubt one of the most — if not THE most — rewarding things I've ever done in my teaching career," said Bilsland. "I've never worked with a group of students who were so hard-working and gifted in that they are devotedly concerned with learning in spite of their handicaps."

For this reason, Dr. Bilsland does not think of volunteering for Disabled Student Services as doing charitable work; rather, he thinks of himself as a neutral intermediary who helps disabled students gain access to their own education.

Dr. Bilsland feels that volunteering for Disabled Student Services has given him an insight into the special needs and capabilities of disabled

students that he just didn't have when he was a professor.

"I would never have been so simple-minded as to think that a physical disability such as blindness limited a student's mental capacity, but I would always have felt that I must deal with that student differently," explained Dr. Bilsland. "Now, I know full well that the only difference is that my eyes see, and that student's eyes don't see. I would now feel absolutely comfortable in talking to the student about the handicap and any provisions that have to be made for it."

Beth Dawson, a fourth-year Education student, agrees that the Volunteer Program benefits the volunteers as well as the disabled students they assist.

"I meet really neat people and it gives me a great sense of satisfaction to know that I'm helping someone else get through this incredible mess!" Dawson said.

Dawson also emphasizes the fact that the Volunteer Program also plays an important role in providing a social structure in which disabled students can get their bearings.

Sometimes, if a person has an obvious disability, it's harder for them to get along socially," Dawson explained. "The volunteer setting helps students to interact more socially."

While the Volunteer Program is expanding by leaps and bounds, the staff at Disabled Student Services are quick to point out that there's always room for another pair of helping hands. If you think that one of those pairs of hands may belong to you, give D.S.S. a call at 432-3381.

# Laser tech lagging behind

by John Putters

Canada's "window of opportunity" for introducing high power lasers into its manufacturing sectors is quickly disappearing, contends Dr. H. J. Seguin, a leading laser researcher in the Faculty of Electrical Engineering.

Seguin predicts that "in another couple of years the window will be completely closed."

Seguin is a specialist in the research of laser technologies capable of being used for industrial processing. His research is concentrated on the development of new processes for laser use and the processes necessary for laser application in manufacturing sectors.

According to Seguin, the U of A had "developed lasers that were five years ahead of their time." However, he also stated that "it takes massive funding by industrial or governmental areas" in order to implement these new technologies.

The possibilities of receiving the

type of capital necessary for the diversification into high powered industrial lasers does not seem to be available if Canada had a "national project like the U.S. space program."

"A man landing on the moon is neither here nor there, but the technological spinoffs and the infrastructure created is what's important," said Seguin.

Unlike the European Eureka project, "which is an attempt to emulate laser technologies developed by the U.S.," all of Canada's projects are purely short term. The Eureka project is to be from 12-15 years in duration said Seguin. He added that "our governments look to the next election not 20-30 years down the road."

Seguin also dismisses the possibility of private enterprise financing the introduction of high power lasers. "Canada does not have the entrepreneurial spirit necessary to take these types of risks. Canadian

companies want to see profits now not sometime in the future."

As a consequence of the reluctance to implement new laser technologies in manufacturing, Seguin feels generally pessimistic about diversification. "It is very difficult to get technology transfers without the necessary infrastructure, he said.

The incorporation of laser technologies in medical procedures and surgery is also lagging behind the U.S., said Dr. J. Tulip who specializes in the research of lasers in this field.

Tulip stated that the "main avenues of research we have are the use of lasers for endoscopic surgery." This type of laser development permits surgeons to operate without open surgery and consequently reduces the time needed for patients to convalesce.

Tulip concedes, however, that "across Canada lasers are not used extensively in hospitals" while "in the United States the introduction of lasers for surgery is increasing by 20 to 30 percent per year."

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