

Disabled students voice mixed feelings about services

By Mary Louise Knapp

Handicapped UNL students have mixed feelings about the way they are treated by classmates, teachers and administrators and about the services provided for them by the university, according to some disabled students.

Bradley Munn, director of the Affirmative Action Office, said at least 250 UNL students have some kind of physical disability and UNL is required by law to provide disabled students with access to all programs.

According to Bill Rush, a junior "The ramps are only average, there should be electric doors on all buildings, and curb cuts should be less steep, but one must realize that all these things cost money."

"The university has done some neat things for me such as given me a voice synthesizer and electric door opener," Rush said.

Rush, who is confined to a wheelchair, can communicate only by using electric devices such as a special phone, typewriter and message board.

"People have been considerate and have helped me, but they really don't know how to react to me," he said. "They are bewildered by me, but mostly they've been really great, fantastic."

Susie Dahl, a second-year graduate student, said "UNL is required to make every program available to us, but this does not necessarily mean every building."

"THE SERVICES I personally have received are mainly in the housing area," she said. "They set up a special shower for me and installed an air conditioner in my room. The housing staff has done everything possible to help."

Dahl praised the Affirmative Action Office for its assistance.

"I think his (Munn's) office is overworked, though," she said. "I think the university should provide a separate coordinator for disabled students. In some cases, I feel the administrators' attitudes are not helpful. They are not that open to discussion, and they are not likely to get more funds for disabled students if they don't sit down with the regents and talk about it," Dahl said.

She cited an instance in which she felt certain UNL administrators had not been helpful.

"Three out of four of my classes are on East Campus, which means I have to ride the bus frequently," she explained. "The shuttle buses have no wheelchair lifts, and UNL frowns on the use of Handi-Buses," she said.

"Since the Lincoln Transportation System is financially subsidized by UNL to provide help for the disabled, I felt they were obligated to install lifts in the buses. Brad (Munn) had to talk with LTS about this with no backup from the rest of the administration.

"MOST PEOPLE'S attitude toward me is just great,"

Dahl continued. "A few treat you like you're still in first grade, but the basic, everyday attitude of the faculty and students is good."

Pat Bean, a sophomore, offered suggestions on how UNL facilities could be improved.

"The wheelchair section in the stadium has no curb cut on it," he said. "Many people, especially those in electric wheelchairs, cannot get up on the curb."

Also there should be files on handicapped students at the Health Center in case of emergency, Bean said. "Most ramps are in the back of the buildings, and often the doors to our entrances are kept locked," he added.

Bean said UNL tries to provide as many services as it can, but with a lack of funds this is difficult.

"They have a lot to do," he said. "Sometimes you just have to keep after them."

Bean said that he has been trying to organize an intra-

mural sports program for the disabled students, preferably one that would not cost much money and in which all could participate.

BEAN SAID that people often park their cars in spaces reserved for the handicapped, or in front of ramps.

"I realize they aren't being malicious, they just see a place to park," he said. "I think the biggest handicap disabled people have is able-bodied people's unawareness of their needs."

Dahl said, "There is an important distinction between a disability and a handicap. A disability is an inability to perform some life function; a handicap is something put on you by attitudes and environment. There are many students here who are perfectly normal physically, but are handicapped worse than we are by their attitudes and those of others."

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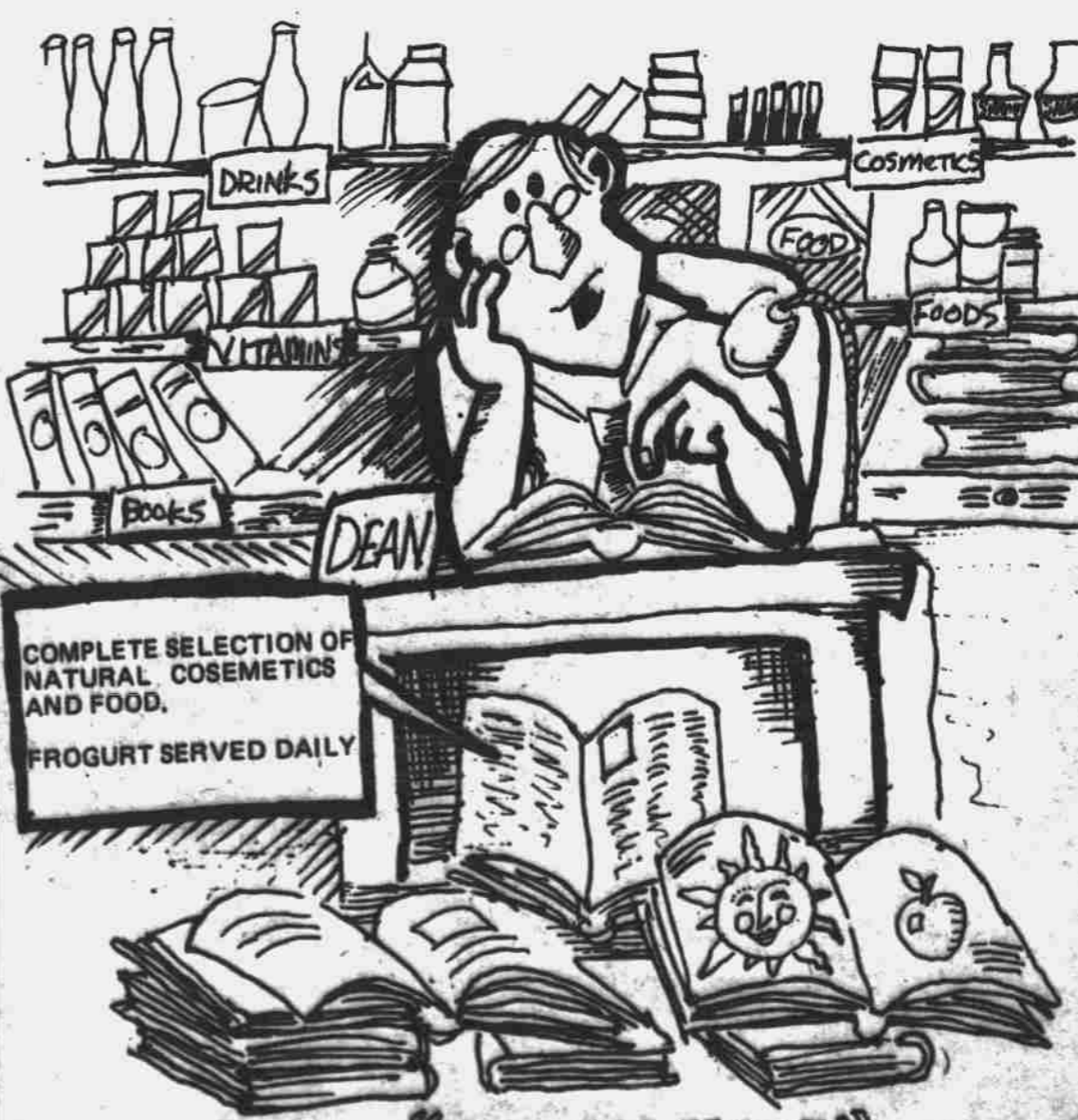
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