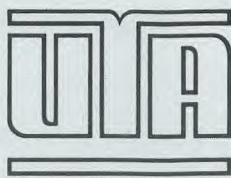


UNIVERSITY



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An even break	2
The body may be impaired, but the mind doesn't have to be wasted. Barriers to handicapped students are coming down rapidly at UTA, thanks largely to a man who knows those barriers firsthand.	
Marriage on wheels	3
Life's road isn't always smooth, especially if you're in a wheelchair. But adversity isn't as difficult to face when you don't have to face it alone.	
Leaving 'em laughing	5
He claims they called him "Neckline" because he was always plunging down the middle. But as a football coach, he certainly was no bust.	
The odd couple	9
They say politics makes strange bedfellows, and it's no different at UTA, where a conservative Republican and a New Deal Democrat run one of the state's most respected seminars.	
Where we're headed	10
In less than two decades, UTA has grown from a junior college to become the state's fifth-largest university. The man at the top looks at the reasons why and at the future.	
Presidential profile	13
How do you go about running a university the size of UTA? The first step — not always easy — is finding a space in the parking lot.	
No lack of energy	15
Some say Mo-Shing Chen speaks only two languages — Chinese and engineering. But he doesn't need words to communicate his love of teaching.	
What's new?	18
Ex-Press	22
'News for and about UTA Alumni'	

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ON THE COVER: Sunday night is one of the rare times the UTA campus is quiet, and that's when photographer Peggie Mazziotta captured this peaceful view of University Hall.

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Getting an even break



Two years ago, five students in wheelchairs attended classes at UTA — today there are 50. That's a dramatic 900 percent increase and the direct result of a program attuned to the needs of the handicapped at the rapidly growing University.

A mainspring activist behind the awareness movement on campus is Jim Hayes, director of UTA's two-year-old program for the handicapped. Hayes, a UTA graduate, has more than the normal passion for the job. Confined to a wheelchair for the past 11 years, he is personally aware of the difficulties faced by handicapped students trying to get a college education.

"The key word is accessibility," he emphasizes. "And UTA has spent in the neighborhood of \$85,000 to make the campus accessible to wheelchair students."

The Texas Rehabilitation Commission provided \$31,000 for necessary alterations with the requirement UTA put in matching funds. The University, however, came up with more than \$50,000 for the project, which has included such things as curb cuts, ramps and electronic doors. The result is almost total accessibility of the campus to the wheelchair-bound.

"And the one or two spots, mainly older buildings, which are not accessible are not being used as classrooms or labs," Hayes commented.

But campus accessibility to wheelchair students has been only one part of the increased awareness program at the University. Counseling, physical help where needed and vigorous physical education activities have added dimension to UTA's program for the handicapped, which Student Affairs Vice President Wayne Duke describes as "probably the best in the nation."

Hayes has learned that his own handicap lowers barriers between himself and disabled students so communication comes easier. "They at least know I know where I'm coming from."

In counseling the students who come to his office, Hayes says he first tries to help them realistically accept their limitations.

"This doesn't mean," he stresses, "that the handicapped have to settle for a life of doing less, just one in which they compensate and do things differently." He uses his own wheelchair as an example.

"It gets me anywhere I want to go the same as a healthy pair of legs would. And my hand-controlled car goes anywhere a foot-controlled car goes."

A former high school athlete, Hayes enthusiastically endorses UTA's wheelchair basketball program. Not only does it help the students keep physically fit, it's a good morale booster, he said.

"Wheelchair basketball has been gaining rapidly in popularity — there are now 13 teams in the state. The UTA team was the second one organized and has been so successful that we're now experimenting with wheelchair soccer and wheelchair volleyball," Hayes reported.

Wheelchair basketball is now offered as a full credit physical education course, the only such course in the state.

Hayes stresses that handicapped students are basically the same as other students, with the same needs and ambitions.

"And if competition was important in a handicapped person's life before he or she became disabled, then it continues to be important. Most handicapped persons just want the same opportunities as any other student — and that's what we try to provide at UTA. That, and the means for a disabled person to become independent and self-supporting and not a burden on the welfare rolls."

For students who are unable to be totally self-sufficient, the University employs a number of dorm helpers. According to Hayes, this service can mean the difference between a student attending college or having to remain in a medical facility.

"And any medical facility, no matter how good, can in itself be depressing," says Hayes with personal knowledge.

In the past, the dormitories have not been accessible to handicapped students. However, part of the \$85,000 was spent in



remedying this condition. Ramps were added, mirrors, sinks and bookshelves were lowered in some of the first-floor rooms, and desks were raised so that a wheelchair could get under them. Now anywhere from 10 to 20 handicapped students are housed in the dorms.

Hayes said the majority of handicapped students major in business areas, but more and more are branching out into other fields.

"Architecture is becoming popular with wheelchair students who want to do something about changing the 'damned buildings' which are inaccessible to the handicapped. Personally, I feel that there are not too many architectural designs for the handicapped which are not also beneficial to the able-bodied.

"For example, people don't usually fall down ramps as they do steps. And wider doors are convenient for all people, not just for persons in wheelchairs. And if wider parking spaces were allowed, just think how many fewer scratches on cars there would be," he explained, adding that wider parking spaces were originally designed to help persons getting a wheelchair out of their vehicles.

Although the UTA program for the handicapped is just two years old, it has already made its mark on a number of students.

There's the amputee who came to UTA and after much persuasion joined the wheelchair basketball team. He's now got a starting position with the Dallas Raiders, a professional wheelchair basketball team and the NWBA regional champion. Along the way, the student also graduated with a 3.7 GPA and has had a job offer.

Another one of UTA's handicapped students was only able to come to school because of the dorm helper program. Three years ago, a doctor had told him he would have to be in a nursing home for the rest of his life.

"The student began lifting weights as part of our physical education program and was soon out of his electric wheelchair and into a manual one. Now our campus police are after him to put reflectors on his wheelchair so he can be seen more easily when he runs laps at night on the parking lot," Hayes commented.

He noted that finding jobs for the handicapped after graduation is becoming less difficult than in the past.

"Employers are finally getting the message that the disabled actually make better employees. They have less absenteeism, are more loyal to their employers, change jobs less often and are actually safer on the job than the able-bodied employee," he bragged.

"And by the way," he concluded, "UTA was named the Outstanding State Agency for Employment of the Handicapped in 1974. We're not only helping the handicapped receive an education, we're willing to give them a job." □

At home on wheels

Water skiing is about the only thing that's ever defeated Jim Hayes. After experimenting, he finally admitted that the skis just wouldn't hold the weight of his wheelchair.

His bride, Betty Ann, who is also confined to a wheelchair, shares the same daredevil spirit. Their latest project is a joint fishing trip, so they frequently practice their casting skills behind their apartment. Since Betty Ann's a student at UTA where Jim's in charge of services for the handicapped, they can use the same car. Their solution is to sell one of their cars — and buy a boat.

The two met when Betty and her mother appeared in Jim's office to inquire about enrolling. "She really grilled me," Jim remembers.

Betty Ann explained, "I'd had a bad experience at another university and wanted to make sure I didn't get a repeat performance at UTA. At the other school, I couldn't get to class easily and labs were impossible. Because it took me longer to do things, someone was always doing it for me."

"And if there's anything that makes Betty mad," Jim inserted, "it's people being too helpful."

Both Betty and Jim have learned to operate cars with hand controls. They transfer themselves from the wheelchair to the car quite easily and then maneuver their wheelchairs into the back seat. They usually reply when someone offers to take them somewhere: "Let us pick you up."

Jim injured his spinal cord 11 years ago, just shortly after graduating from high school, when he dived into a shallow portion of a lake. Betty's accident occurred two years ago when she was struck by a hit-and-run driver.

Jim admits that he went through some severe states of depression before accepting — "if anybody really does accept the

loss of his legs" — his limitations and learning to make the best of the abilities he had. Jim explains, "I don't do less; I just do things differently. And I've learned that I have many more abilities than limitations."

Mechanically oriented, Jim wasn't a very good student. But after the accident, a nurse talked him into trying Tarrant County Junior College. His first semester he made a 3.2 grade point average, which both pleased and surprised him, and was later elected student body president.

"Since I was the only wheelchair student at the school, there was no precedent of things I could and couldn't do," said Jim. "So I did everything."

After graduating from TCJC, he entered UTA, where he continued an active life. He graduated in 1974, when his dad gave him the hand-controlled car, and started work toward a master's degree. Jim was just six hours short of earning the advanced degree when he accepted the position as director of the handicapped program at UTA.

Betty's reaction to her accident was more one of anger than depression. "I kept getting frustrated waiting for people to help me do things, so I learned how to do things myself," she recalls. Driving only a few months after her accident, she can't understand how Jim waited seven years.

But he did drive a girlfriend's car once, he remembers, "I used an umbrella to work the accelerator and brake controls. When it started raining, I pulled over to the side of the road and let her get behind the wheel." But the car wouldn't budge; it was stuck in the mud.

It's obvious that Jim and Betty Hayes have developed a sense of humor that lets them laugh at themselves from time to time. One of these times occurred just recently.



Jim and Betty Ann Hayes

It seems that Betty hadn't quite learned how to "pop a wheelie." Jim's way of describing a maneuver necessary to get over a curb. Jim offered to teach her the technique in the parking lot of their apartment.

"She was doing just fine," said Jim. "But all of a sudden, she got off-balance and began falling out of her wheelchair. She grabbed at me to stop the fall, but instead, I went tumbling down with her. By that time it started raining. So there we were in the middle of the parking lot, getting drenched."

Laughing, but undaunted, they scrambled back into their wheelchairs and the lesson continued.

Like most wives, Betty does the family grocery shopping and most of the cooking and housework. Jim pitches in when needed and barbecues outdoors. Because of their physical disabilities, the couple feel they've developed better communication

than couples normally do. But they admit, at times they squabble just like any two people who live together.

"You know the first thing I noticed about Betty Ann?" asked Jim. "Her wheelchair." It's a sportsman wheelchair which allows more freedom of movement because it has no sides and a lower back.

"I knew then she had spunk."

"That's the first thing you noticed?" Betty said on hearing him make the remark for the first time. It was evident she had expected him to be more aware of her attractive feminine qualities.

Betty and Jim work out in a room they've set up to help them stay physically fit. Jim lifts weights and Betty, whose injury is not quite as immobilizing, walks back and forth between parallel bars. They both play the guitar.

"Our biggest problem is getting people to understand we can do things on our own. It's not that people are cruel; it's just that they are sometimes basically ignorant of handicapped people," Betty commented.

Jim says that Betty progressed faster than he did, especially in her attitude. But she points out that Jim's injury was more serious. Formerly active and not geared toward college or the type of administrative work he now handles, Jim had to make more radical changes in his behavior and his life goals.

Betty, on the other hand, is majoring in microbiology, basically the same direction she was headed before the accident.

What does the future hold for these warm, outgoing people who seem delighted to have found each other? Whatever it may be, it won't be dull. Jim may not try to water ski again, but he's sure to give other things a try. And now that Betty has banished yet another barrier by learning to "pop a wheelie," the world had better watch out.

Pat Bean has recently returned to the Dallas/Fort Worth area after working for almost eight years at Utah State University. Now a writer in the UTA News Service, she has extensive background in newspapers.