

# Hidden traps

## Law will improve accessibility, add services for handicapped

By Phil Latham  
Contributing Editor

To be a "death trap," it looks incredibly safe.

Thousands of UTA students walk into the double-doored restrooms in the Business Building and Davis Hall without a second thought. For most of

them the entrances present no problem.

To handicapped students it's another matter. The small space between the two doors isn't enough room to maneuver a wheelchair. Without a good deal of physical strength, the person can get stuck easi-

ly in the tiny hallway, unable to go either way.

And, once the person is stuck, it's almost impossible for an outsider to assist him. A fire can leave him stranded.

Double-doored restrooms are only one of the problems the school may

have to fix as the 1980 deadline approaches for meeting Section 504 requirements of the 1973 National Rehabilitation Act.

Failure to comply with the law, which was amended in 1974, could mean an end to federal funds here, including work-study money.

Mike DeFrank, coordinator of the school's 504 effort and assistant to the vice president for academic affairs, and Jim Hayes, Educational Support Services Office director, have been working for several months on a building-by-building campus evaluation to determine where efforts should be focused.

A report, to be released in three or four weeks, is expected to find the campus below — but not substantially — the standards set by the law.

Hayes said Tuesday he thinks the school could meet the requirements in about a year with "\$20,000 or \$30,000 putting us in real good shape."

"When it comes to four-year institutions in Texas, we are one of the most accessible, and I would say that in the North Texas area we are the most accessible. You can see it in the enrollment. North Texas has two wheelchair students and we have 50."

Section 504 has few specific regulations, but DeFrank says many more rules will be interpreted from the broad wording as problems that hamper accessibility are discovered.

"Section 504 basically deals with program accessibility," he said. "Of course, it gets into architectural and other kinds of accessibility by not allowing discrimination on the basis of a person's handicap."

Both DeFrank and Hayes said they

believe much of the law will be determined by court action as students sue for particular services.

"This is probably the first law we have had on the federal, state or municipal level that has any real teeth," Hayes said. "It's a law that can be used by handicapped students to get some of the things they need."

The courts have already added a few provisions. A student at Converse College in Spartanburg, S.C., sued the school after it refused to provide him with an interpreter. The court agreed with the student, saying that Section 504 required the college to give the same accessibility to the handicapped student as to the able-bodied.

Hayes said this decision could be far-reaching in requiring schools to provide more handicapped services than ever before.

"For instance, the only way a handicapped student, say, from Del Rio can go to school at UTA is to live in the dorm because most of the apartments in the area are totally unaccessible. To live in the dorm they must have attendant care.

"This could be interpreted to mean that if a handicapped student wants to come to UTA it would be up to the school to see that he, in some way, gets attendant care."

DeFrank said UTA should at least be able to provide the fundamental services for the different types of handicapped students, including basic medical care.

Hayes said that in the past some problems had existed in getting that medical attention from the Health Center, prompting him to hire a staff nurse. He said the problem has essen-

tially been corrected and the nurse will be released.

"We're not talking about sick students," he said. "We're talking about students who may be sick every once in a while, just like able-bodied people, but they do need a little special attention."

Hayes said he wouldn't ask the center to do anything he believed beyond its scope. With the staff nurse gone, he said, it would be up to the handicapped students to see a doctor when they realized they were sick.

"I think it's good for the students to do as much for themselves as possible," he said. "It's not required, and I don't think it should be required, to do everything for the handicapped, but when you're denying students accessibility to a program, that's going to have to stop."

DeFrank also stressed that Section 504 would have an impact in the classroom.

"Teachers have to make their classes accessible, too," he said. "If there are

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Shorthorn: Bill Canada

**CHECK IT OUT** — Jim Hayes, handicapped students' adviser, and Mike DeFrank, assistant to the vice president for academic affairs, inspect a wildly decorated Swift Center restroom to determine its accessibility and safety for han-

dicapped students. UTA is not completely accessible to handicapped students, but both Hayes and DeFrank say the situation is not that serious.

### Correction

Student activities program director Toni Moynihan was incorrectly reported Tuesday as saying academic sponsorship is one of the smoothest approaches in selection of speakers to interest special academic groups. She actually said that academic co-sponsorship with the SAB Forums Council is one of the smoothest approaches for the present.



# Hidden traps. . . 'we are the most accessible in the area'

some who had just rather not do that, then 504 may well come into play."

Making a classroom accessible includes both the mental and physical aspects of learning. If work tables are too high or can't be used by wheelchair students, they must be modified — though this would not necessarily be the instructor's responsibility.

Note-taking is another problem. Hayes said a few UTA teachers do not allow lectures to be taped, feeling that note-taking is a part of the learning process. This, he says, violates 504 and the teachers will have to make modifications.

"This is one example, though, of where more than one solution presents itself," DeFrank said. "Another student who is good at taking notes could make a copy for the handicapped student. There isn't always just one course to take."

Still, in the area of services and

academics, Hayes and DeFrank feel fairly confident they will meet the standards of the law with little revision. It is in the buildings where most changes will need to be made.

Restrooms are a big trouble area with double doors and stalls which aren't equipped for handicap use, sink fixtures with improper handles, un-

Another dilemma is the sunken conversation pit in the Business Building. Without a raised ledge to warn blind students there is a drop ahead, it is, says Hayes, a real hazard.

DeFrank and Hayes agreed the new law must have a definite impact on the planning of future buildings.

"I hope what 504 will do is change

some progress has been made.

At least one double door has been removed in the Business Building and some telephones and water fountains have already been lowered.

"In the Business Building the restroom door situation can easily be solved by just taking off the second door. All you can see with the door open anyway is a blank wall so there's really no reason for that door to be there in the first place. In Davis Hall the problem is modesty. If you take off the door you really need a partition to take its place."

Hayes said under Section 504 it would not be necessary to correct every problem, just enough to make each facility or program accessible.

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lowered mirrors and doors with too much spring tension.

Other building features which will need to be added are entrance ramps and ramps to bypass stairs, depressed room numbers (though this is already common on most of the campus), lowered water fountains and lowered telephones.

A few special problems exist which may find solutions rare. Hayes called Cooper Center, which houses the Graduate School of Social Work, a "nightmare" and said the steps on the mall can be dangerous to blind and wheelchair students.

building codes," Hayes said, "and make architects more aware of what the handicapped need."

"Practically, it's the only sensible thing," DeFrank said. "It just makes sense to spot the problem and stop it before you build rather than having to change it all once it's built."

DeFrank said the Business Building architect, who did have design problems, had shown sensitivity, the key to having future facilities meet 504 standards.

Hayes said compiling the evaluation had turned into a mammoth project, but while the report has been delayed