

Campus due handicap renovations

65 percent of buildings accessible; doors, restrooms top repair census

By Phil Latham
Contributing Editor

504 is a special number for UTA. That's the section in the 1973 National Rehabilitation Act that requires universities to provide total accessibility for handicapped students by 1980.

It's also the total of possible problem areas, pinpointed in a special report given to President Wendell Nedderman in March, the school may have to repair to meet the requirement.

The study, researched by 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, deals specifically with the physical barriers impeding the handicapped.

The investigation found the school 65 percent accessible, which Hayes says is "a statement few colleges can make." Still, 12 of the 24 buildings were listed as only partially accessible in the report.

Despite the high number of problems, Hayes estimated the school could meet section 504 guidelines for under \$30,000, adding that he wasn't "that sure" about the figure.

Hayes and DeFrank basically looked for 21 things which they thought were needed for accessibility,

including door width, delayed door closers, automated doors, door tension, ramps, handrails, restroom entrance doors, lowered sinks, single-lever sink controls, receptacles, towel dispensers, toilet stalls, restroom handrails, urinals, mirrors, water fountains, telephones, raised lettering for doors, elevators and handicapped parking.

Of the list, Hayes said only automated doors, which would probably not be added to every building because of their cost, were not essential for accessibility.

The most consistent problem is excessive door tension, which was noted in every building. The recommended pressure is eight pounds. The second most common difficulty was inaccessible telephones, a problem found in 16 of the 24 buildings.

Generally, buildings built in the '60s received the lowest grades because no standards existed then and they have not been remodeled yet; but some special problems turned up with the new Business Building that leaves its usability questionable.

In an overview accompanying the report, Hayes said that perhaps too much faith was placed in the regulations and not enough checking occurred to insure accessibility.

"In my view a handicapped person should be helping the planning com-

mittee," Hayes said last week. "They should at least have access to it; whether they have a voting seat or would just be an ex-officio member is beside the point. The committee needs input from someone, somewhere."

The Business Building was identified as having problem areas in door tension (a difficulty found everywhere), restroom entrance doors and telephones.

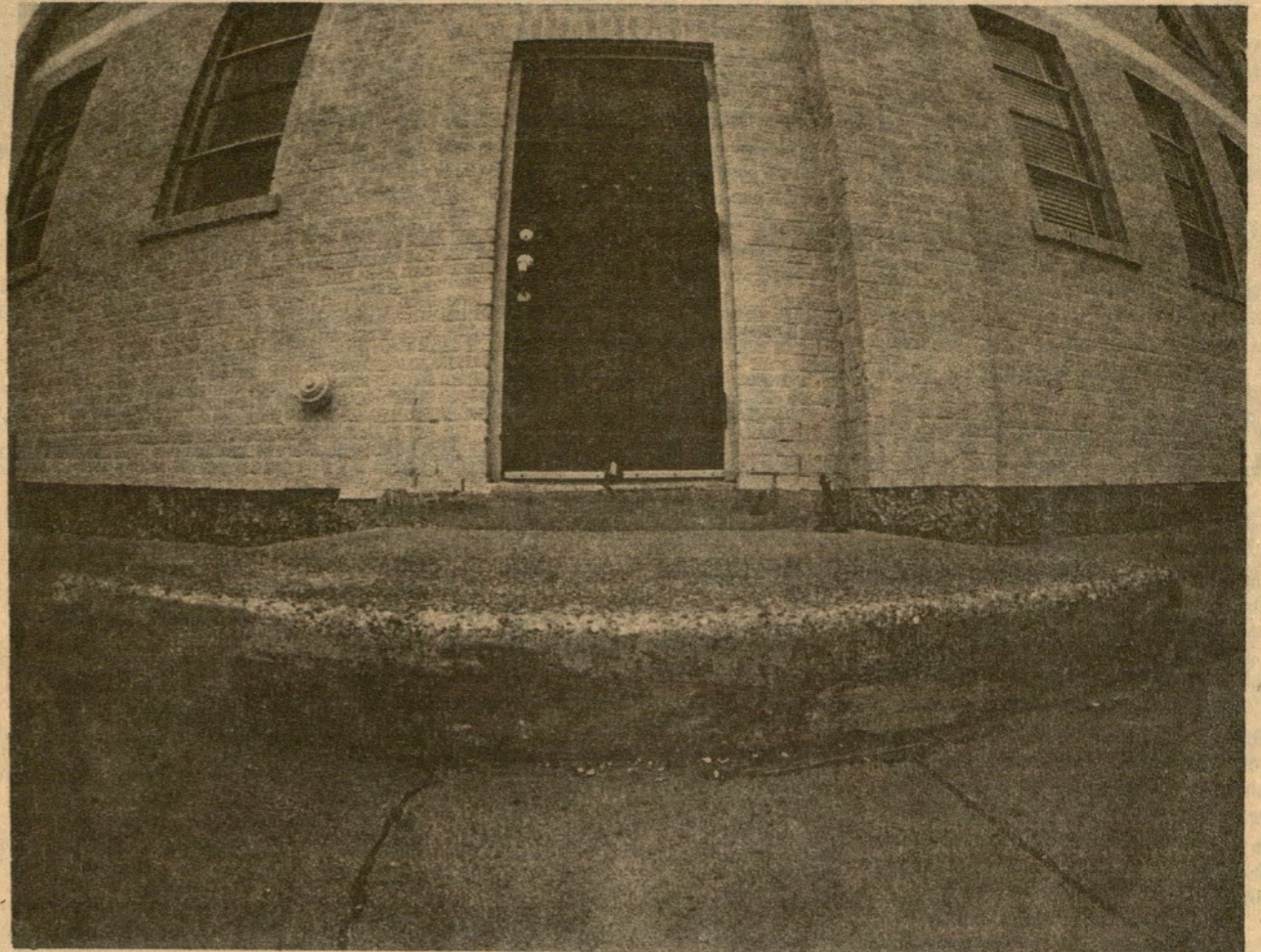
The strongest comments were directed at the double-doored restroom entrances which the report says violate "virtually every standards publication available on the subject of accessibility. The fact is that the dual door entrance/exit is a trap for the wheelchair student."

Though a major problem, Hayes said a solution is simple and cheap — remove the inner door.

Other weak points in the building included the sunken study area on the first floor, which the report said had an inadequate warning system for the blind, fixed swinging seats in classrooms which cannot adapt to wheelchair use and the architectural structure which presents sharp corners and a "maze effect" for blind students.

"It's very important to remember," Hayes said, "that just because you make something usable for a handicapped student it doesn't keep the able-

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Shorthorn: Bill Canada

FORBIDDING FOOTING — This entrance to a Cooper Center building is an example of barriers to handicapped students. According to a report recently presented to President Wendell Ned-

derman, the school is 65 percent accessible to the handicapped, although 12 of the 24 buildings examined are only partly accessible.

Campus . . . Trinity, Texas Hall most inaccessible

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bodied people from using it, too. Many times able-bodied students will like the change better than the old way."

The 183 physical problems outlined in the report will be repaired gradually up to the 1980 deadline.

"We talked to (Vice President for Business Affairs) Dudley Wetsel and told him the things that had to be changed and we looked at what was really necessary. He's going to work on a timetable when everything should be done, and I'm sure we'll get together again before that," Hayes said.

Failure to meet the Section 504 deadline could cost the university all federal money, including work study funds.

Before final repair plans are made, Hayes intends to survey handicapped students here on their particular problems with accessibility.

It's doubtful any more difficulties will show up for Trinity House, as the dorm was given the lowest marks — problems cited in 19 of the 21 categories.

The report says that, except for the immediate hallway area of the entrance, the building is totally inaccessible. An elevator would have to be installed, rooms modified to give a proper turning radius for wheelchair students and the restrooms and showers remodeled.

Another building which received strong words is Texas Hall, with problems cited in 16 of the 21 areas.

Although a plush and comfortable auditorium for the able-bodied, the report says that "many educational related programs and cultural activities which are held in Texas Hall are accompanied with hassles relative to accessibility for handicapped students."

Texas Hall lacks, the report says, ac-

cessible restrooms, water fountains, telephones, an elevator and raised lettering for rooms.

An "other" category spotlights two other problems unique to Texas Hall. Hayes says an appropriate number of seats should be removed from one section to "insure participation by the wheelchair individual."

He also said that ticket pricing for wheelchair students may be discriminatory since they cannot get to the second floor where tickets are cheaper. He suggested users of the hall take this into account when pricing tickets.

Swift Center, a former Arlington elementary school, received the

'Many times able-bodied students will like the change better than the old way.'

report's third worst rating with 15 categories noted. Still, the study said only minor alteration would be required to bring the structure to 504 standards.

The biggest problems here are bathrooms, which do not allow for total handicap use, no depressed lettering plaques and a lack of nearby handicapped parking.

The PE Building also ranked among those with the most problem areas. Built in 1962, the structure has inadequate restrooms (no facilities for women). Water fountains, no accessible telephone and no elevator also add to the problem.

Trimble and Hammond halls were surveyed together for the report and 12 trouble areas were found. As in other 1960 constructed buildings, the main difficulty was no accessible bathrooms. Remodeling here, though, will not be as simple as in other buildings.

The restrooms are contained within brick walls and renovation or expansion will be costly.

The rest of the campus buildings had fewer than 10 problems and are listed from the worst rating to the best.

COOPER CENTER

Nine problem areas were listed, the

biggest being no elevator in a building where all classes are held on the second floor. Hayes recommended installing an elevator or, if that is unfeasible, moving classes to another building.

DAVIS HALL

Tabbed "functionally accessible to and usable by the handicapped student." Here, as in the Business Building, the double-doored bathroom entrances pose the problems. Cited in seven areas, only limited remodeling would be needed to meet 504 requirements.

BRAZOS HOUSE

Seven problem areas, but most can be easily changed, Hayes said. Perhaps the biggest difficulty is the lack of handicap parking near the building.

PACHL HALL

Like Brazos, most of Pacht's seven problems are minor and can be fixed with little difficulty, such as door tension.

LIPSCOMB HALL

A more serious dilemma here, in that the toilet, lavatory and shower are inaccessible to wheelchair students. An alternate facility was built in the laundry room especially for handicapped students.

ENGINEERING BUILDING

Needs only minor alterations. Again the main problems are in the restrooms, where mirrors and towel dispensers need to be lowered.

HEALTH CENTER

Ironically, the Health Center is not totally accessible. With six major problem areas, the major difficulties are in getting inside. The main entrance is unusable because of steps which could not be fixed and still be compatible with the architectural design. The back door, where handicapped students are supposed to enter, is too heavy, according to the report, for most of them to open. Additionally, the emergency buzzer is too high for a wheelchair student to reach, making that system useless.

LIBRARY

Problems in four areas, the most

serious of which for wheelchair students was the difficulty of navigating around the sensor detection device.

ACTIVITIES BUILDING

Though opened in 1977, there are no delayed door closers or automatic doors and no elevator.

ENGINEERING LAB BUILDING

Main problem is that the doors are not equipped with delayed door closers or automatic doors.

The Geosciences Building, Fine Arts Complex, Science Building, Life Science Building, Ransom Hall, Preston Hall and University Hall all were cited with three problem areas or less and with little renovation needed to meet the 504 requirement.