

# Deafness hinders teacher, student

## Nurse experiences communication problems

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Imagine sitting in a classroom watching a discussion that has no sound.

Imagine walking into a class and finding that the mid-term exam is being given, and no one thought to tell you.

Try using someone else's notes as the only means of passing a test.

For Tommie Kirkland, a senior biology major, these things aren't part of a bad dream. Ms. Kirkland is deaf.

"I transferred here from TCJC," she said in a pleasantly pitched voice, "and you can't imagine the difference. I was really lost. I didn't know anyone. It (UTA) was too big and people were too indifferent and I came close to quitting."

Ms. Kirkland transferred in January 1972 against the advice of counselors at the Vocational Rehabilitation Commission in Fort Worth. They recom-

one or two teachers who were actually hostile and I had to drop the course. But mostly they just ignore me."

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mend she attend North Texas State University, she said in an interview this week, "because they (faculty at NTSU) are more willing to help.

"Some of the teachers here have helped me, but just a few. I've had

Ms. Kirkland came here because she felt she could get a superior education.

"The problem," she said, "is one of communication. The solution is common kindness. And there isn't much of that floating around here."

Her grades have dropped from a 3.7 grade-point average at TCJC to a 2.8 GPA here.

"I know there is a difference in the schools," she said, "but there isn't a difference in my intelligence. I made a 1,230 on my GRE (graduate record exam)."

Ms. Kirkland, a licensed vocational nurse, lost her hearing at 12 as a result of a genetic condition. She has two children, 12 and 14, who have normal hearing.

She has retained her vocal ability and can read lips well enough to converse but not well enough to understand a lecture. She does not know sign language and points out that "it wouldn't do any good because you can't watch the signs and take notes at the same time anyway.

"I never felt especially handicapped," she said, "until I started going to school."

Ms. Kirkland relies on student vol-

unteers who take notes.

"They put a carbon under their paper," she said, "or they just let me copy the notes they make. There has only been one class where no one was willing to take notes for me. Once you get on a one-to-one basis the students are really nice."

She doesn't expect a teacher to change his class just to help a student, Ms. Kirkland said, but she feels he could use an outline or refer the student to appropriate books in the Library.

"The teachers here are under more pressure and they have less time," she said, "and there have been some who took the time to help me.

"In one of my English classes Dr. (Kenneth) Roemer couldn't find anyone to take notes for me and he wrote them up himself."

Can she understand any of the lectures or discussions?

"No. I just take up room. The teachers want you to come and so I do. I just sit there and if there are any diagrams I look at them or I copy notes.

"Several times I have come into a classroom and had a test smack me in the face. Everyone else knew about it for a week but no one thought to tell me. And sometimes I go to an empty room because there was a walk and no one thought to tell me."

Ms. Kirkland said she doesn't know any other deaf students here.

"It would be hard for a deaf person to go to school if they had less vocal ability than I have," she said, "and most of them are very shy. People can't see the problem like they can with a blind person and they sometimes don't realize a person can't hear."