

Blind student picks education in 'real world'



Shorthorn: Charles Davis
Bob Hulla . . . "Getting around
takes concentration"

Construction, textbooks present constant obstacles for Bob Hulla

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Bob Hulla doesn't feel sorry for himself because he can't see cars whizzing by on Cooper Street.

He's learned to cross it anyway.

Hulla is blind. But that's not going to stop him from getting a history degree, either.

A freshman here, Hulla said that he chose to attend public school so he wouldn't be isolated from the "real world." But his decision puts "very real" obstacles in his way.

"Textbooks are always a problem," he said. "I have to order them several months in advance from New York where they tape them free for the blind."

Tapes are being used by blind students more now, he said, because they are faster and less expensive to make than braille books.

"Braille books are much easier to understand than textbook tapes," Hulla said. "I hate those tapes because it takes so much time to study them. It gets boring and I have to keep switching the tapes back and forth if I miss a point."

However, certain subjects are especially difficult to learn by tape, he said.

"Math and foreign languages are harder to understand on tape. They can't spell out every word in a foreign language book, so learning to write and recognize words isn't easy."

Reared in Garland, Hulla shares an apartment with his brother several blocks from campus. He walks back and forth from the apartment by himself. "It's not scary really, just bothersome if I trip over something or get lost.

"Sometimes I'll ask a person for directions if I can't figure out where I am," he said. "It's funny when they say 'Oh it's over that way two blocks,' and then hurry on by. I just have to find someone else and make the request a little clearer."

With the construction on campus, Hulla said he finds out the hard way each day what new obstacles have been placed in his carefully mapped path between classes.

For example, one day he went to cross at his usual spot on West Street near the student center when his cane

went into a hole. Feeling around, he figured the hole was about five feet deep.

Walking further up the street, he found still more holes. He finally asked someone to help him find the way across. No one had told him about the two foot wide trench before that.

"I'm glad my cane went in the trench before my foot did," he said.

Blind since birth, Hulla said he is usually sensitive to openings or obstacles before he reaches them.

"If a dog is lying in the middle of the floor and if I'm not too deep in thought, I can sense the dog's presence," he said. "I have to use my head all the time though or else I wind up tripping over or into something."

"When I'm really worried about a class," he said, "it is more difficult to get around because I'm not as sensitive to my surroundings. It takes concentration."

On the other hand, he said that when he is especially aware of things he can sense danger.

"The day that Robert Kennedy was

shot I had that terrible feeling and I even knew what was the cause of it. I asked my mother if something bad had happened and she told me that Kennedy had been killed. I just knew that was it."

Staying out of trouble isn't the only way Hulla uses his "hunches." An avid football and basketball fan, he enjoys betting.

"I love to go to games, but I always bet emotionally and not logically. This isn't the most profitable method. I have come out ahead financially this year, though."

Hulla, one of several totally blind students on campus, plans to either teach history or practice law.

"Studying history helps you to see what will happen in the future," he said. "The future, especially science fiction fascinates me."

"Sometimes science fiction makes me think about what it would be like if I could suddenly see. I don't feel sorry for myself, but I do feel sorry for others when they are sick or have a problem. It seems silly to worry about something that can't be changed about myself," he said.