

Handicapped enrollment shows national increase

by **Bridgette Y. Rose**

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The percentage of handicapped students entering college nationwide increased from 2.6 percent in 1978 to 7.4 percent in 1985, according to reports released Sunday by the American Council on Education's Resource Center for the Handicapped and the President's

Committee on Employment of the Handicapped.

That trend is evident here, officials said.

"When we started the program in 1976, we had 23 students," said Jim Hayes, coordinator of Handicapped Student Services. "Now we have 375. The wheelchair population has gone from

five in 1971 to 103 today.

"There's been a continual increase of about 10 percent each year since 1976."

Handicapped Student Services deals with disabled students who require assistance to function in school. But Hayes said an undetermined number of students may fit the definition of hand-

icapped but are not being helped by the office.

"We can't require students to tell us that they're handicapped on applications," he said. "There could be 500 handicapped students out there we don't know about."

Hayes said a college education is vital for handicapped students.

"To be competitive in the marketplace and have a degree, it's essential. A lot of students are not college-oriented when they become handicapped. But the handicap limits their options, so many go to junior college and transfer here."

Andy Beck, a wheelchair-bound En-
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English junior, said he came to college because he was tired of working for other people.

"I could've gone back into management where I was, but it would have been a physical hardship on me. I would be working long hours, and I just don't think I could sit up that long."

Beck now dreams of "moving to Brazil and writing novels."

He said he isn't surprised by the number of handicapped students entering college. "People who had jobs in the past working with their hands or (jobs) that didn't require college education are finding out they won't be able to continue it because of the job market, so they go to college."

Hayes cited other possible factors for enrollment, including good handicap facilities, transportation and the local job market.

"When you put all those together as a package, this is a pretty accessible place to be," he said.

Sonia Nixon, Texas Rehabilitation Commission counselor to UTA, said she expects the growth trend to continue.

"There's a push from both the state and federal Legislatures to give handicapped students more opportunity to go to college."

But she also said the university itself is a reason for the increase.

"UTA has provided good opportunities through Jim Hayes and the handicapped service. I think it's one of the leading schools in the state. It has taken the lead in handicap programs."