

Journalism school flunks, in test of 504 compliance

By KENT PATTERSON
Of the Emerald

Steep, narrow staircases that block wheelchair access to the School of Journalism in Allen Hall discriminate against physically handicapped people, according to a report on equal rights for the physically disabled.

"Handicapped persons are not denied access, just discouraged from taking classes," says Loren Simonds, a handicapped member of the task force, which wrote the report.

"It's such a hassle getting into the building or getting transferred. Most don't try."

An elevator and some other changes would cost an estimated \$64,500, according to the report. By the terms of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, the University must make all programs accessible to the handicapped by June 1980, or risk losing federal funding.

"We intend meeting that deadline," says University Planner David Rowe. "Our proposed budget for the 1979-81 biennium includes a major program to make buildings accessible to the handicapped."

While there is the chance that the Legislature will not approve the budget, Rowe says he regards approval a virtual certainty.

After the budget is approved, the first priority for new construction will be to bring all University buildings up to the current codes

on safety and health. "Our second priority will be accessibility for the handicapped," Rowe says.

Allen Hall will be given top priority for accessibility remodeling, Rowe adds, because presently there is no wheelchair access to the building at all. "It's not just difficult. There's no way!"

Until the elevator can be constructed, the School of Journalism is following a policy of transferring classes to other buildings to accommodate handicapped students.

Transferring classes does not really give handicapped persons full equality, says Mark Rowe, a senior in journalism who uses a wheelchair.

"I can't get to my professors' offices," Rowe says. "Last term I missed two films which were shown in Allen Hall because I would have had to have someone drag me upstairs."

"Last year we had a real confrontation," Rowe continues, "my professor was handicapped, and it was hell for him to get up and down the stairs. So he wouldn't transfer the class. I couldn't get in, and he couldn't get out."

Transferring classes is at best a necessary inconvenience, says Galen Rarick, dean of the School of Journalism, although some classes cannot be transferred.

"Newspaper editing, for instance, uses a VDT (Video Display Terminal) which is electroni-

cally installed and cannot be moved. It cost \$50,000, and we can't afford to duplicate it somewhere else," Rarick says.

According to a departmental self-evaluation submitted to the affirmative action office, the inaccessibility of Allen Hall has not caused the School of Journalism to reject qualified handicapped applicants for faculty positions.

Of the 11 faculty members currently employed, one, Associate Prof. Jack Ewan, has a nervous ailment which makes accessibility to Allen Hall a problem.

Ewan is presently on sabbatical leave, but Rarick says that the steps of Allen Hall have made it difficult for Ewan. "He has a nervous ailment which makes it difficult for him to walk. He comes in the morning, and then stays here in the building all day. It's so hard for him to get in and out, he hardly ever goes out for lunch."

The inaccessibility of Allen Hall exerts a "chilling effect" on any handicapped person who wants to pursue a career in journalism, Simonds says.

"It can't help but make a handicapped person think twice before he signs up for a class or applies for a job."

The matter will not rest until the elevator is built and every program on campus is fully accessible, he adds. "The handicapped may have legal rights by Section 504 to have access to all programs, but to get those rights implemented, we will have to force the issue on every program at every university in the country," Simonds says.

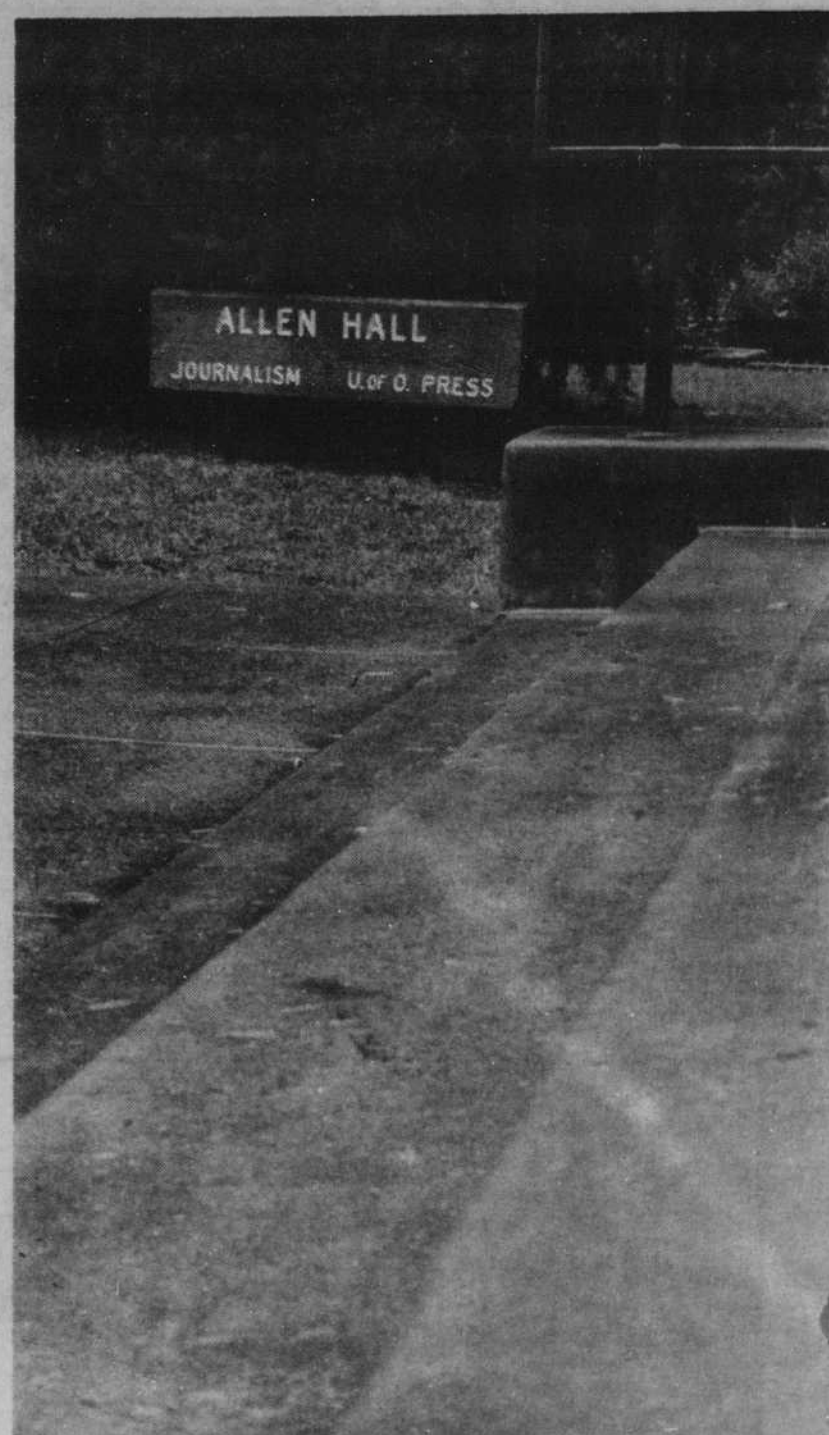


Photo by Ed Allen

Allen Hall, home of the School of Journalism, is completely inaccessible to handicapped persons. When a handicapped person wishes to take a journalism class, the class must be scheduled in a different building. Money for building alterations is included in the University's proposed budget for 1980-82.

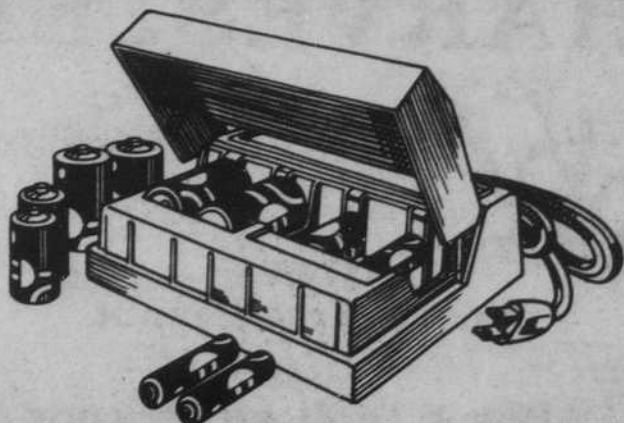
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