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# Make society accessible, stress disabled students

By **MIKE RUST**  
 Of the Emerald

It's estimated that one out of every 10 people is disabled. To increase understanding of the problems associated with disabilities, the United Nations declared 1981 the International Year of Disabled Persons.

The idea behind IYDP is "making society accessible," says Physically Limited Union of Students director Chester Faller. Local groups are working to give disabled people access to roles that society has traditionally viewed as closed to disabled citizens.

Disabled people — Faller calls them the "last minority" — are working in two movements, says PLUS member Susan Sygall. One is the effort to obtain equal rights. The other is a consumer movement that seeks to let disabled people "take control of



our lives," she says.

In addition to political activity, many disabled people also are pursuing cultural equality in various arts, often subsidized by the National Endowment of Arts for the handicapped.

"A lot of these groups are starting out not so much to be separate but to be integrated into theater, television and dance," Sygall says.

Few television shows feature disabled doctors or lawyers, she points out.

"It's necessary to have positive role models. It's changing, but it's sure as hell slow."

Another example of the disabled integrating their concerns with other interests is the IRON DUCHESS, described by member Anet Mconel as "a support group for women with disabilities that places an emphasis on feminism."

The IRON DUCHESS group, now five years old, grew out of the first University Women's Symposium. The group spells its name in capital letters "for our egos," Mconel says. It works with disabled consumer groups such as the Center for Independent Living she says.

"They establish a philosophy of independent living. Feminism fits in well with that."

However, budget cuts are casting a pall over the domestic effort to achieve equality for disabled persons.

"Reagan's being sarcastic when he talks about the International Year of Disabled People," says Faller, who predicts that the IYDP "will have the same effect as International Women's Year — not a damn lot."

However, one IYDP project may help bring about change — encouraging developing countries to begin industries for inexpensive "do-it-yourself" wheelchairs. Multinational corporations currently are selling the necessary technology to Third World nations, Faller says.

Another area where accessibility is important is transportation, Faller says. There the United States lags behind other countries.

"Socialist European countries are way ahead. We get accessible vehicles from Canada. GM decided there wasn't a big enough profit margin in accessible transportation."

Rather than gradually replace their current models with accessible vehicles, GM prefers to develop specialized buses, Faller says. However, a local LTD study has shown that it is more cost-effective to phase in accessible buses instead of using special vehicles, he adds.



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