

ENABLED

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Briggs said she has a white cane to help her, but she usually doesn't need it during the day.

"People just assume things sometimes or they don't ask questions," she said. "That's probably the biggest issue."

Briggs, who will be a resident assistant next year, said being active in the residence halls has allowed her to show others that students with visual impairments can lead normal lives.

"The dorms are an amazing thing," she said. "I've gotten really involved in the dorms and met a lot of people, and it's given me a lot of opportunities to educate people about my condition. A lot of people have never been around someone with a visual impairment."

Briggs said the University's Disability Services department has been key to her success. She said the department allows students to hire people to take notes, provides special testing accommodations and helps students work through individual issues.

"I've been really impressed with Disability Services," she said. "I can't give them high enough (praise)."

Sirois said Disability Services works with between 550 and 600 students who have a wide range of disabilities, including learning, psychiatric, physical and health conditions. She said the department provides services ranging from sign language interpreters for deaf students to books on tape for the visually impaired.

Sirois said just navigating a university can be a challenge for visually impaired students.

"Physical access can be an issue, although I think at the University of Oregon we're doing a really good job addressing that," she said.

Sirois also said other students and faculty members are hesitant to ask visually impaired students about their conditions.

"If a student were to have an interaction with someone with a visual impairment, instead of presuming what would be helpful to them, it's probably a good idea to ask," she said.

Briggs said the department helped her hire an assistant for her chemistry lab.

"I can pretty much do most of the stuff, but there's just a couple things that (I need help with)," she said.

"That's pretty much how it would work in the real world, too. It's not



really about can you read this volume, it's more about are you able to know what to pour where than actually pouring it."

She said adaptive technology has also helped her in her studies. Briggs said the electronic Blackboard Learning System allows her to read lecture notes and other course materials in large text on her computer. Briggs also uses a video camera with a zoom function in math class so that she can enlarge lecture notes written at the front of the room.

"That helps a lot because even though I'm visually impaired, I'm still very much a visual learner," she said. "I'm really thankful for the vision I have."

She said technological advancements have "really opened the doors to science for all people."

"Hopefully, with experience, I'll be



Photos by Danielle Hickey Photo Editor

Meghan Briggs uses a video camera's zoom function to help her see lecture notes in class Friday afternoon. Briggs is one of about 10 legally blind students at the University.

able to learn about all those adaptations that I can use," she said.

Chemistry Professor David Herrick, who instructed Briggs in two classes, said he has provided her with large format quizzes and advance copies of his lecture notes, which he normally does not do.

"She's very determined and very serious as a student," he said. "She puts a lot of effort into it but seems to get through it very well."

Briggs said her career goal is to become a genetic counselor. As a counselor, Briggs said she would help future parents work through decisions about genetic traits that might affect their children.

"I love helping people, and I would really like to work with people to make decisions about their future," she said.

Briggs said her career goal is close to

home because her parents, who consulted a genetic counselor after Briggs was born, wanted to find out if her condition would be passed on if they had another child. They learned that there was a one in four chance that another child would also be visually impaired. Briggs said her parents decided it was an acceptable risk because Briggs' condition "was going to affect life, but not in a bad way."

Despite her challenges, Briggs maintains a positive attitude about her vision.

"My issue might have a title to it, but I think everyone has problems they have to ... work with," she said. "I'm just lucky enough to have a title to mine."

Contact the city/state politics reporter at parkerhowell@dailyemerald.com.

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