

At this point no one dares estimate how many handicapped people would come out of the woodwork if all obstacles to their mobility and academic activities were removed. The schools, as Gentile points out, would prefer not to make the necessary improvements until the users actually show up on their doorsteps. But most users will stay away rather than make an assault on an architecturally hostile environment, or one that supplies accessibility only at the cost of stigmatization and loss of dignity.

Enforcement of the rehabilitation act may help bring about a profound shift in attitudes toward the handicapped. The prevailing attitude toward those who have formal contacts—through business, health services provision, education, employment—with handicapped individuals is commonly characterized as “custodial” and “paternalistic.” There is a good deal of misdirected good will which results in other people making decisions about what those with disablements can and cannot do.

Although new laws are changing the picture, most handicapped people have been funneled into a system whose purpose is to enable them to become self-sufficient as soon as possible. This prevents their integration into the mainstream and makes it extremely difficult for those wanting to explore their full potentials. Special schools for this and that population of disabled are useful in giving them basic skills to compensate for their limitations, but they also perpetuate segregation.

State vocational agencies, while providing invaluable aid in education and training, will rarely subsidize postgraduate education. Science, for example, is difficult for a handicapped person to get into because of the years of training required, yet this field is particularly appropriate and rewarding for people with physical limitations.

State agencies, eager to get handicapped people off their rolls, will encourage them to go into low-level jobs such as bookkeeping and button-pushing even though these people more than any others have to rely on developing their brains in order to lead full lives.

Most colleges and universities say they will make every effort to accommodate a handicapped person. Yet any handicapped person can come up with disheartening stories of students who are not permitted to try, and to fail, just like everyone else—who are persuaded, for example, to major in English rather than science because the administration fears they will fail, and no one wants to kick out a cripple.

Phyllis Stearner, a biologist at Argonne National Laboratory who is also a cerebral palsy victim, tells of a young man with a congenital deformity of the arms that left him with a total of five fingers. He graduated from college with an A average and was admitted to medical school. After 1 month, she says, “they discouraged him to the point where he dropped out.” They wanted him to go into psychiatry; he wanted to be a general practitioner. It was not a question of whether he could perform the necessary manipulations—rather, the school felt, according to Stearner, that “patients wouldn’t accept him,” and he’d be liable to malpractice suits. This is a classic example of authorities acting in what they perceive to be the best interest of the student while they were, in fact, acting on unproven assumptions and were reinforcing stereotyped attitudes.

Martha Redden, who heads the AAAS project on the handicapped in science, finds a cruel irony in the fact that many handicapped persons—such as disabled veterans—are alive today owing to advances in medicine. Yet the institutions fostering such research are the same ones who, by their attitudes and the inaccessibility of their facilities, are depriving these people of the opportunity to make full use of the very same lives medical science has gone to such lengths to preserve.

It is probably safe to say that most colleges and universities regard the new regulations as unnecessary at best. All, of course, agree with the intent of the rules, but they have been burned by experiences in complying with other civil rights laws where they felt they were acting in good faith and were being pestered by the government with stupid and unreasonable demands. Small, privately funded colleges are obviously going to have a harder time adapting to the architectural requirements than big state universities. But the government doesn’t want to put any schools out of business (after all, that would make them completely inaccessible), and if the law is enforced with reasonableness institutions should have no cause to find its demands intolerable.

Whether or not the new law is meaningfully enforced, its passage has encouraged the emergence of the handicapped as a new, nationwide voice. They are angry, and they are adamant. If the government doesn’t get moving, as one official said gleefully, HEW may wake up one morning to find itself ringed with an angry mob in wheelchairs.

—CONSTANCE HOLDEN

APPOINTMENTS

Ronald Geballe, professor of physics, University of Washington, to dean, Graduate School at the university. . . . **William C. Langworthy**, chairman of chemistry, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, to dean, School of Science and Mathematics at the university. **Paul Olum**, dean, College of Natural Sciences, University of Texas, Austin, to vice president for academic affairs, University of Oregon. . . . **Richard A. Matula**, chairman of mechanical engineering and mechanics, Drexel University, to dean, College of Engineering, Louisiana State University. **William F. White**, professor of educational psychology, University of Georgia, to dean, School of Education, West Chester State College. . . . **Sheila A. Ryan**, acting dean, College of Nursing, Creighton University, to dean of the college. . . . **Charles W. McLarnan**, former vice president, Macalester College, to dean, College of Science and Engineering, University of Texas of the Permian Basin. . . . **Alan J. Weston**, chairman of audiology and speech pathology, Memphis State University, to dean, School of Allied Health Professions, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. . . . **George E. Sutton**, former director of professional services, National Council of Engineering Examiners, to dean, School of Engineering, Youngstown State University. . . . **R. Bryan Roberts**, professor of anesthesiology, Mount Sinai School of Medicine, City University of New York, to chairman of anesthesiology, Wright State University. . . . **George W. Zobrist**, professor of electrical engineering, University of South Florida, to chairman of electrical engineering, University of Toledo. . . . **Dan W. Elliott**, professor of surgery, University of Pittsburgh, to chairman of surgery, Wright State University. . . . **Frank D. Popp**, professor of chemistry, Clarkson College of Technology, to chairman of chemistry, University of Missouri, Kansas City. . . . **Leon I. Mann**, co-chairman, obstetrics-gynecology department, State University of New York, Stony Brook, to chairman, obstetrics-gynecology department, University of Vermont. . . . **Victor L. Wallace**, associate professor of computer science, University of North Carolina, to chairman of computer science, University of Kansas.

Erratum: News and Comment, 19 November, p. 814, incorrectly characterized the Tennessee Valley Authority Act of 1933. The act mentions electric power generation.