

A

ccessibility creates a campus handicap

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Writer

hen sleet and snow hit UNC this morning, filling the streets, covering the parking lots, stopping the buses and coating walkways, ice became an obstacle like a handicap. The only difference between the two is that ice is a few days; handicaps stick around.

Jim Spainhour can explain the difference. Spainhour, a junior at UNC, is confined to a wheelchair because of an injury he suffered during his freshman year. If the above statement about ice were presented to him, Spainhour might say that the other certainly has made this week rougher than usual, but even on nice days nothing is easy.

Take Hill Hall for instance. Spainhour has created an interdisciplinary major, Music Industry. One class he needs for his degree meets in the second floor of Hill Hall. He is scheduled to be in that class this semester, but because of one conspicuous absence in the building's facilities, he cannot physically get to the room.

"They've got an elevator shaft," says Spainhour, "with no elevator in it." What was once an elevator is now an antidor's closet. "They replaced the elevator door with a locking door and made a storage closet out of it." And several stairways lead the other students enrolled in his Music 167 class to the studio are inaccessible to him.

According to the department officials Spainhour has spoken with, the elevator is scheduled to be installed. "Now that they know I need the course in my major," Spainhour says, "I have a little more leverage, I hope."

While Spainhour waits to see the cond floor of Hill Hall, he also visits friends in other residence halls. A handicap access map shows that of the 29 residence halls, only five allow a wheelchained student entrance. But just because the doors of these five halls are open, Spainhour says not to expect a full display of hospitality within.

The South Campus dorms all permit entrance and ground floor handicapped facilities. "But try," Spainhour says, "to use the suite bathrooms and you are stopped by the lump in the middle (of the doorway)." Though there are a few suites designed to allow handicapped students access, Spainhour does not have the freedom to visit friends' rooms as he pleases.

But some strides have been made in campus where access difficulties have caused large-scale problems. The Dean Smith Activities Center faced one such problem. The bathrooms did not provide adequate room for handicapped patrons and seats lacked views. Every time fans stood up to cheer, students in their handicapped seating area found their vision obstructed.

Those problems have been corrected beautifully, according to Laura Thomas, coordinator of Handicapped Student Services. Parking at the SAC still remains somewhat of a headache, according to Thomas, but that problem should soon be fixed as well.

Sue Cleland, a freshman from California, has experienced her own type of exclusion. Since the eighth grade, Cleland's hearing had been gradually robbed from her by an auto-immune disease. Last year, she was rendered legally deaf.

She chose to attend UNC, her mother's alma mater, rather than a college for the deaf because "their courses are not as advanced (as UNC's) and I was not good enough in sign language."

Since Cleland had only recently lost all hearing, her education never lagged. However, when another accident took away her ability to read lips, she had the additional challenge of learning the American Sign Language (ASL), which Cleland calls "a foreign language in itself." Through HSS, Cleland was set up with Greg Propp, a senior transfer from Nebraska who also freelances as an interpreter. Propp has become Cleland's primary in-class interpreter, and through practice with him and others, Cleland has become proficient in ASL.

Propp, whose parents are both deaf, learned ASL at home and has interpreted in court cases, legislative sessions and other educational situations. "He's great, he's perfect," says Cleland. "I've had three or four interpreters and he's by far the best."

Coordinated scheduling allows Propp to accompany Cleland to all her classes and still work to complete his own degree. "It's about 27 hours total (class time)" Propp says, "but some of her classes are interesting to me."

Interpreting can be hard work as well. The concentration involved, Cleland says "can be fatiguing, like reading under a bad light."

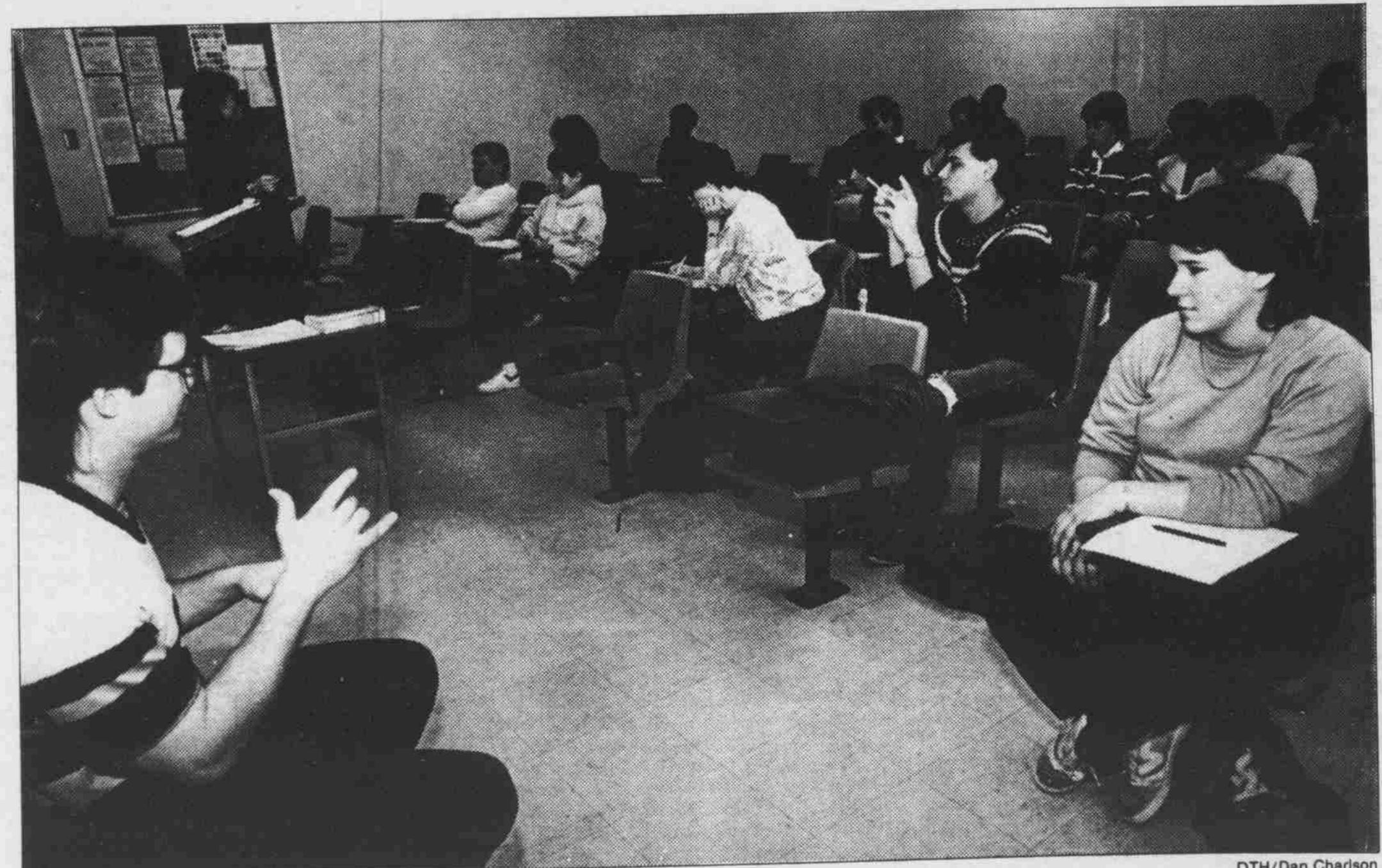
One course put Propp's talent to the test. "Last semester," says Cleland, "I took a Russian history course." Since many of the names and places mentioned in lectures have no English sign, Propp had to shift from signing words to speed signing letters. "Luckily, he's a great speller," Cleland says.

Though ASL is a chore to both learn and use, Cleland says it does afford one benefit. "It's also a foreign language to those who don't understand it," Cleland says, but she admits she rarely uses it to exclude others, for she knows well the pain of being left out.

"People hesitate to talk to me," Cleland says, because of the effort involved. Since most people must write down messages or try to sign spell words when she is without an interpreter, Cleland realizes she is sometimes left out. And she has set



Sue Cleland (left) gets a little help understanding the questions and relaying her message from her own personal interpreter Greg Propp (right) in an interview with STV



With the help of Propp, Cleland doesn't miss a word of lecture during an English class. Propp accompanies her to each class

lutions will be staged in Pitt. "We are hoping to have Dean Boulton participate," says Line, whose project goal is to encourage support for the

SEA's proposed lobbying efforts in Raleigh and to raise an awareness on campus of the difficulties encountered by handicapped students.



Jim Spainhour takes his time maneuvering his way through the ice

Cleland and Spainhour both express frustration when discussing physical or bureaucratic restrictions beyond their sway. Yet both students