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Building changes aid handicapped

by Julie Griffin

Staff Writer

Making buildings accessible to the handicapped is helpful to the entire university not just to the disabled, said Joann Fritsche, director of equal employment opportunity.

"These changes, for example, ramps and elevators are helpful to other people," she said. The science departments can move heavy equipment more easily and people with broken legs can use the elevators, she said.

Fritsche said the student population is getting older, and this trend will continue. Making buildings accessible will help this group, she said.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 defines disabled as anyone who "has a condition which impedes some significant area of life functioning," Fritsche said.

The law requires institutions which receive federal funds to make their programs and courses accessible to the handicapped. Fritsche noted this also pertains to student organizations and residences.

She explained, "It doesn't require every building to be made accessible." When a handicapped student expresses an interest in a program, the program must be moved out or the building must be made accessible.

The university is doing a number of things to make buildings accessible. Ramps have been installed in various buildings, the biggest one in the student union. Male and female restrooms are or have been renovated for handicapped use in the Union, Little Hall, English/Math building and Hancock Hall. Chairlifts, which make one floor accessible, have been installed in the bookstore, Bennett Hall and Aubert Hall.

Where there is a major change of equipment, the program must be relocated. For instance the radio/broadcasting studio had to be moved. The child study laboratory in psychology was moved to the scientific research center.

One-tenth of one percent of every University of Maine campus's educational and general budget is set aside for 503 funding, Fritsche said. The Chancellor's office then matches



Joann Fritsche

the amount. Last year UMO contributed about \$37,000, she said.

For emergency projects or very expensive projects the Chancellor's office is asked for a 50-50 match over and above the budgeted money, Fritsche said.

In some cases departments provide money for a project. Money was given for the elevator in the Union by the President's office, the Vice President for Student Affairs office and student groups. The chairlift for the bookstore was paid for by the bookstore. Renovations in the dorms are done with Residential Life funds.