

# SCSU's GOAL: REMOVE OBSTACLES FACING DISABLED



TIMES PHOTOS BY SHER STONEMAN

**St. Cloud State University student Patrick Rolfe (front row) watched as interpreter Maren Petra Howard (foreground) signed associate professor Janis Cimperman's words during a recent math**

**class. The St. Cloud State Student Disabilities Services office provides interpreting and other services for students with disabilities.**

## School, students tackle issue

**By Jerry L. Carter**

TIMES STAFF WRITER

Lauretta Larson nearly gave up on higher education two years ago, when faculty and administrators at a Twin Cities technical college told her she didn't have what it takes to go to school.

That hasn't been the case at St. Cloud State University, the 23-year-old juvenile criminal justice major said.

Larson has reading and writing disabilities, and only retains that which is read to her. At St. Cloud State, she receives help getting reading material converted into audiotapes. Others take notes for her.

"I am getting help here," she said. "I don't care if it takes four or eight years, I am going to get a degree, and I think St. Cloud State will help me do that."

St. Cloud State leads other state colleges in its services for students with dis-

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■ SCSU student redesigns wheelchair.

abilities, even as enrollment of those students continues to rise, and state funding for the programs that help them is cut.

Even so, administrators and students agree more must be done to help the students gain equal access to education.

The number of students with disabilities at St. Cloud State has gone up significantly in recent years, although school officials do not have exact numbers.

Better diagnosis of learning disabilities, improved survival rates for serious accidents, and the university's increased commitment to provide accessibility and alternatives for students to get an education may account for the increase, said Lee Bird, interim vice president for

Please see **OBSTACLES, 9A** ▶



**Rolfe watched intently as Howard signed the math lecture, dividing his attention between Howard and the symbols Cimperman wrote on the overhead projector.**



TIMES PHOTO BY SHER STONEMAN

**Interpreter Maren Petra Howard signed SCSU math instructor Janis Cimperman's explanation of the intricacies of Venn Diagrams to her students.**

# Obstacles

student life and development. Four years ago, 94 students used the university's disability services. Now, 287 use them, Bird said.

Students use the service's interpreters, note-takers, alternative testing methods and tutoring to help them overcome their disabilities.

Despite budget crunches, administrators and educators have tried to expand the services, administrators said.

Two years ago, administrators cut \$98,000 from the office's budget. Administrators were able to keep services and expand them by using more student volunteers to take notes.

In 1994, the disability services office spent three times more money than any at the other six state universities to accommodate students with physical and learning disabilities, said Gene Gilchrist, vice president for administrative affairs.

Today, the office's director works nearly full-time, even though the budget was scaled back to \$150,000 and the program has grown, Gilchrist said.

Disability Services Director Maribeth Overland Swalley said St. Cloud State is open and progressive in its attitude toward students with disabilities.

Nonetheless, Swalley — in her first

year as director — said she plans to review how services are delivered to students and try to make improvements.

"We are trying to empower these students. We are trying to help them to succeed, and I am going to try to do everything I can to help them."

Gilchrist said the services help fulfill the university's mission.

"Not only are we required to make accommodations for people, but we want to create an environment at the campus that is inclusive," said Gilchrist.

Limited funding will be an obstacle for Swalley, as it is unlikely the university's budget crunch will ease.

"We are going to have to find ways to overcome obstacles and a limited budget," she said. "I am just going to have to find ways to provide students with what they need."

David Althoff, a senior studying applied psychology and special education, said he thinks university officials should try to find private funding to help students like himself.

Althoff has a short-term memory disability.

He also said more faculty members and students need to be educated about disabilities.

"We need them to understand why a student like myself may need more time to take tests or (need) someone to take notes for them," he said.