

Learning disabled are learning 'enabled' at OCC

By Tim Richard
Staff writer

Counselor Lawrence Gage looks at the bright side. He thinks of certain students, not as "learning disabled," but as learning "enabled" because of the help he can give them at Oakland Community College.

"An oasis in the desert for many capable learning disabled students" — that's how Gage sees OCC's role.

"Federal law in 1975 mandated that all elementary and secondary schools have handicapped programs. Now more learning disabled are completing high school and aspiring to post-secondary dreams," Gage said, explaining the great growth in numbers of LD students.

Gage was the chief moving force behind OCC's efforts to help the learning disabled. He has the title of "counselor advocate" at the Orchard Ridge Campus in Farmington Hills. His counterparts at other campuses are Suzanne Pickering at Auburn Hills, James Rutkowski at Highland Lakes and Thomas Stone at Royal Oak.

NOT EVERY LD student can be helped by a college, and some are referred to vocational programs. But Gage is building up a string of success stories.

A recent Michigan State University graduate, who had been helped by OCC for his reading impairment, landed a job as a cost accountant for a major corporation.

OCC worked with him in developmental reading and in providing taped textbooks. "We played off his strengths," Gage recalled. "Making them feel good about themselves — that's 50 percent of it. We build up success experiences."

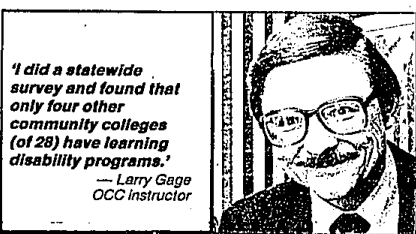
Another reading impaired student got help with his English and social studies at OCC, then went on

to earn a bachelor's degree at the Center for Creative Studies in Detroit. Today he works for a firm in office and industrial design.

OCC's help can take many forms: training willing faculty in how to help LD students, modifying testing procedures, tutoring in the campus learning laboratory or arranging for note-takers, interpreters and textbook recordings. It's all done with existing resources, said Gage — no special LD budget.

A math-impaired former OCC student received her bachelor's degree from Central Michigan University, teaches elementary grades and is determined to become a special education teacher. Gage thinks she'll be a better special ed teacher because of overcoming her impairment — not only because she has "a lot of compassion" but because "she knows how to approach it from several different directions."

"We got her through algebra. She's



'I did a statewide survey and found that only four other community colleges (of 28) have learning disability programs.'

— Larry Gage
OCC instructor

OK to teach the elementary curriculum. She can employ the concepts she used to learn numbers and the multiplication tables" in dealing with problems of her own students," Gage said.

• Another math-impaired student

got help in pre-business math and eventually earned a degree in sales and marketing. "On a one-to-one basis, he's charming, articulate — a natural in dealing with people," Gage said.

"FOUR PERCENT of Oakland

County's school enrollment is diagnosed LD," Gage wrote in a 1984 report. That amounts to 7,800 students.

"The learning disabled comprise the largest category (40 percent) of diagnosed special education students in Oakland County."

The figures bear out his assertion that LD students are now aspiring to college. Between the fall of '84 and last January, OCC's enrollment of LD students tripled from 54 to 188. They are at every campus — 98 at Orchard Ridge, 50 at Auburn Hills, 21 in the Southeast campus system (Royal Oak and Southfield), 11 at Highland Lakes.

To Gage's mind, that's as it should be. With his open enrollment policy and experience in helping older and non-traditional students, OCC is equipped to deal with students that other institutions would consider high academic risks.

"I did a statewide survey," Gage

A learning disability, says OCC counselor Lawrence Gage, is a permanent disorder that affects how individuals with normal intelligence take in, retain and express information.

He likens it to having a TV set where you get a good picture on channels 7, 8 and 9 but a fuzzy picture or poor sound on channel 4.

LD may be caused by perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction or other problems.

LD does not include visual, hearing or motor handicaps.

said, "and found that only four other community colleges (of 28) have learning disability programs. Some others assist, without a specially designated LD program."

Road work well worth the trouble, state says

By Teri Bonas
Staff writer

The state's \$500 million summer construction schedule for highways and roadways promises to mean "inconvenience" for some motorists but it "will be well worth it," according to transportation director Jim Pitz. Work is beginning on the John C. Lodge \$39 million freeway reconstruction project, the first phase of a two-year effort.

In western Oakland County, a 2.4 mile stretch of I-96 will be resurfaced from Kent Lake Road to the Wixom city limits. Cost: \$3.5 million.

The final eight miles of I-96 to run through Southfield will be opened for bidding with an 1989 completion date set. This phase of the I-96 construction is expected to add \$74 million to \$160 million in work done to date.

Over the next two years, a 7.2 mile stretch of US-10 (Dixie Highway) in north Oakland County from I-75 to Telegraph will be updated. It's uncertain whether this estimated \$10 million project will begin this year, said transportation officials.

In the Detroit tri-county area, said Pitz, projects will total \$185 million in improvement which is 40 percent higher than spent last year.

Pitz said transportation officials have begun "logistics planning" with local officials to reroute traffic. On the Lodge, though, he pointed out that much of this year's work will be done during off peak hours, keeping lanes open for travel.

"On the Lodge we're deliberately not doing heavy construction this year because we don't want motorists tied up," he said at a Southfield news conference last week.

Once the Lodge project is completed, he said, transportation officials will turn their attention to the Ford (I-94) Freeway and the Southfield (I-75) Freeway.

No determination has yet been made which project will be started first, though the leaning is toward making repairs along the Ford first, he said.

Pitz said total reconstruction is needed along the Ford Freeway within Detroit's city limits.

Permanent patching is also needed on the Southfield Freeway.

China experts give trade help

China specialists will spell out business opportunities there in a free public seminar April 28-May 1 at Oakland University. Sessions will run from 9 to 4 in Meadow Brook Hall on the Rochester Hills campus.

Experts from education and industry will aid in what is called a "cross-cultural training program." Reservations for the free program should be made in advance by calling OU's Center for International Programs at 370-2154. Lunch is optional at \$10.

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