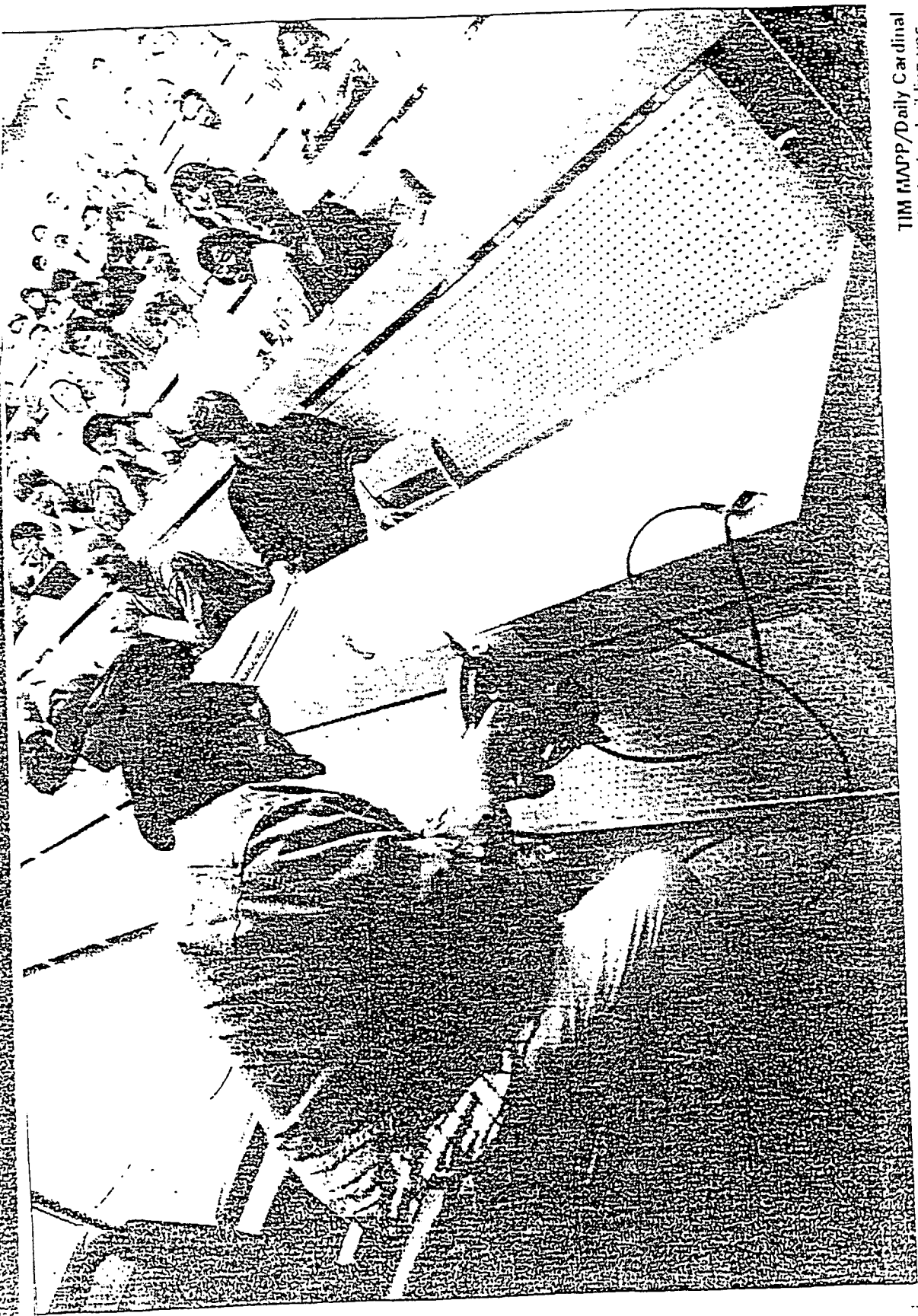


Our Daily Cardinal

Thursday, September 8, 1994



TIM MAPP/Daily Cardinal

Cardinal Timothy Mapp, for the wheelchair bound, made her statement in front of class in the law building, yes.

McGuire seeks to chop away bias

by Nicole Miller
and Kimberly Tucker
of the Cardinal staff

She sits between the door and the garbage can in the back of the lecture hall, or sometimes even behind the professor in front of the class. Bridget McGuire, a University of Wisconsin-Madison law student, is in a wheelchair and fed up.

"I have to sit in front or back of class like a student who's been punished," said McGuire, who also has trouble hearing the professor while seated

behind him or her.

The inconvenient seating locations also pose a problem while trying to see the blackboard. "The dean [Robert Corrales] said I should have considered the geography before I came here," she said.

After talking to law school administrators countless times about the seating problem over the past school year, McGuire decided to take action when the assistant dean recommended she transfer. So Wednesday she took matters into her own hands — literally.

"I'd like to take my place among you as your classmate,"

McGuire told her civil procedure class as she started up her circular saw and cut away part of the desk, making a space for her and her wheelchair.

"My hope for this action today is for this law school to get a carpenter in here and do the right thing," McGuire said.

The class' reaction was quite positive. "Now she can take notes, she can see the notes and she can feel like one of us," said Kim Namey, one of McGuire's classmates.

Jane Schacter, the professor of the class, was also encouraging. "I told you we'd try to

make civil procedure interesting," she said.

According to Lori Vande Zande, a member of the National American Disabilities Act Network, section 35.130, section D of the act states, "A public entity shall administer services, programs and activities in the most integrated setting appropriate to the needs of qualified individuals with disabilities."

Vande Zande said that just as a hearing impaired student needs an interpreter to be fully integrated into the classroom, a person in a wheelchair needs

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to be seated among the rest of the classmates.

"Being seated in front of the class isn't considered integration," she said. "She has paid the same tuition, and she is due as part of that tuition to participate as any other student would."

McGuire was a carpenter for 12 years, and broke her back four years ago in an industrial accident. Her injury has forced her to adjust to life in a wheelchair, but she refuses to adjust to the poor seating facilities in the law school.

Although she is frustrated with the situation, McGuire admits the University has been somewhat helpful. They have been flexible by restructuring

her class schedule to her specific needs.

"In general, for academics, the law school has been very accommodating, but in terms of physical space, they have not done anything," McGuire said.

McGuire is not asking for the University to pity her, but she is reaching out for the benefit of herself and others who are also in wheelchairs. "People have shown compassion, interest, and sympathy, but I don't want someone's compassion, interest and sympathy," McGuire said. "This isn't the Jerry Lewis telethon."

McGuire also said that because she has a problem she has been treated by the administration as a problem.

"I want to make the University honest," she said.

McGuire's quest for access leads to injury

by Ingrid Berg
of the Cardinal staff

University student Brigid McGuire prepares for her fourth semester of law school with a team of physical therapists and doctors, support from fellow law students and professors and a gritty determination to get her law degree and eventually practice law.

While many students are buying books in preparation for the spring semester after a month-long winter break, McGuire works through six hours of physical therapy every day as a patient at Meriter Hospital.

McGuire was admitted to Meriter on Dec. 6 for four days and again on Dec. 28 due to spinal cord injuries she received while in the custody of UW Police and Security. McGuire said she will file a personal injury complaint against the P&S.

On Dec. 5, McGuire was arrested and charged with disorderly conduct after she tried to block a tow truck from towing her car, which was parked

on the west side of the Law School Building, near the entrance.

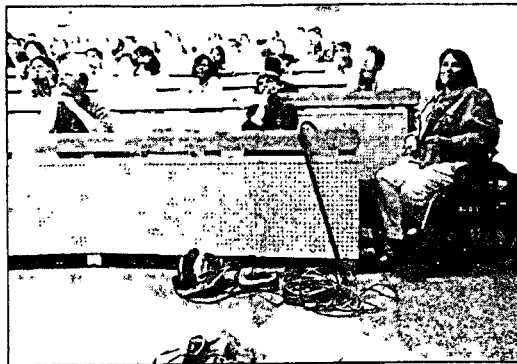
McGuire was in the building for a one-hour class when some law students told her to come outside. Next to the tow truck, McGuire got out of her chair and climbed up the truck on her hands and knees to stop the towing. Her dog sat in the back seat of the car.

McGuire had already received several tickets for parking her car next to the school and had averted previous towings through the helpful watch of other law students who warned her when a tow truck was approaching.

McGuire said one tow truck driver refused to tow her truck because he said it was wrong.

Within minutes of her actions, police arrived. McGuire said some officers called her names. Six officers removed McGuire, who by then was sitting in her wheelchair on the truck after someone had handed the chair up to her.

McGuire said she was shoved into a police van that was not



TIM MAPP/Daily Cardinal

Brigid McGuire continues her activism to gain accessibility for people with disabilities by cutting herself a place in a law class last fall.

accessible and the ride to the police station jostled her so that she repeatedly hit her head on the roof of the van. She said the impact further aggravated an injury she received in a carpentry accident, which requires her to use a wheelchair.

Doctors at Meriter said McGuire suffered a complete spinal cord compression with loss of movement.

The injury prevented McGuire from taking her finals. She took incompletes.

McGuire will probably miss the beginning weeks of the semester for continued physical therapy and to regain her strength, but she is still taking steps to eventually get back to school.

For McGuire, preparing for the new semester involves

finding a safe and accessible parking spot and route to campus buildings.

On Dec. 16, McGuire, along with one physical therapist and two occupational therapists from Meriter, took a Metro Plus van to campus to figure out the best way for McGuire to get to class this semester.

While the Law School Building is under construction many law school classes will be held in the Commerce Building. One of McGuire's biggest concerns is negotiating the heavy traffic and steep slope of Observatory Drive if she needs to go from the Social Science Building to the Commerce Building.

Although federal and state laws require the University to

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Chronology of McGuire's activism

•June: McGuire contacted Associate Dean of Students Roger Howard with concerns about lack of accessibility to the pool at the Southeast Recreational Facility. After three weeks the situation was resolved.

•August: After receiving hundreds of dollars in parking tickets, McGuire said she went to the University Office of Affirmative Action and Compliance to document several accessibility-related complaints. McGuire said the University refused to provide her with a handicapped parking spot that was accessible to her classes without having to rely on outside help to get to school. Although OAAC administrators recall McGuire's visit to the office, they have no paperwork detailing her complaints. McGuire said the OAAC employees would not produce the proper forms for her to fill out.

•Sept. 7: McGuire used a power saw to cut away part of desk in room 260 of the Law School Building. Removing part of the desk helped her to reposition her wheelchair, which improved her visibility of the lecturer and the chalkboard. The University has not yet taken action against McGuire for her destruction of University property.

•Sept. 15: McGuire announced to a news conference she hired the Madison law firm of Cullen, Weston, Pines & Bach to look into the

accessibility issues and concerns she raised in the last few months.

•Nov. 3: McGuire and her attorney Linda Harfst announced McGuire filed complaints against the University with state and federal agencies for failure to accommodate McGuire's accessibility needs in violation of state and federal laws.

•Dec. 5: University Police and Security arrested McGuire after she tried to stop a tow truck from removing her car, which was illegally parked in a spot accessible to the Law School Building entrance. Police were called and they charged McGuire with disorderly conduct. McGuire said the police verbally harassed her and injured her neck and back when they put her into a van that was not accessible to people with disabilities.

•Dec. 6: McGuire was admitted to Meriter Hospital due to injuries sustained during her arrest. She was released four days later.

•Jan. 17: McGuire notified *The Daily Cardinal* that she had received a letter from the Department of Justice Office of Civil Rights in Chicago validating the complaints she filed against the University and demanding a full-scale investigation.

•Jan. 20: McGuire is to appear in court for a pre-trial hearing on the disorderly conduct charge.

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ANGELA NEWHOUSE/Daily Cardinal

Jugglers practice one last time before the 47th Annual Madfest Juggling Extravaganza last Saturday.

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provide accessible parking and an accessible route to classes, McGuire said the University has not provided an accessibility plan for her that allows her independence and flexibility.

McGuire demonstrated during a November press conference that University solutions to accessibility problems are not always viable. In the area between the Law School Building and South Hall, McGuire showed in her wheelchair how the Law School Building's west entrance, designated as the new handicapped entrance, was not accessible to her. McGuire could not move her chair up the long, steep wooden ramp that led to the door.

When students have accessi-

bility concerns, they can use the resources provided by the McBurney Disability Resource Center, 905 University Ave. But McGuire said the center lacks the authority to initiate campus-wide change. She said long-standing change must come from the top.

McGuire's conflict with the University administration began before her arrest last fall.

She made national news in September when she used a power saw to cut away part of a desk in the Law School Building. McGuire said she cut the desk so she could position her wheelchair facing the professor. Before, she had sat wedged between the garbage can and the door.

Although McGuire will probably have to cut down her class load this semester, she said she is keeping her spirits up.

What keeps her going, McGuire said, is the number of people who approach her with their own stories of accessibility nightmares on campus.

McGuire said, unfortunately some students have not vocalized their complaints for fear it will jeopardize their standing in the University and prevent them from getting into graduate programs here.

"I'm not alone," she said. "We just have to find each other and organize."

The next step is for the University administration to admit it is not accessible to many students and work toward full accessibility.

Until that happens, McGuire said new accessibility problems will continue to surface and the old ones will remain perpetually unresolved.