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Barnard College

Disabled Students at
Barnard



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Linda, Pat, Karen, Maureen, Nancy, Irene, Elena, Julia... What do these women have in common? Like all Barnard College students, they are highly motivated and uniquely talented individuals; and each has some kind of physical disability. Each woman, with her own goals and aspirations, has added to the diversity of the Barnard student body and, at the same time, has exemplified one of the special traditions the College maintains. A part of Barnard's commitment to its students, initiated when the College opened its doors in 1889, is to give individualized consideration in all aspects of academic and extracurricular life; this flexibility has always extended to students with physical impairments.

Barnard's policy of individual attention was formalized in 1977 by the establishment of the Office for Disabled Students and its advisory group, the Committee to Meet the Needs of the Disabled, in response to Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act. The Committee and the Office, assisted by Barnard students, offer services to an expanding disabled population, providing an administrative, programmatic, and physical structure in which disabled women can learn, grow, and flourish. The Program has received the support of the entire Barnard community, from the President and the Trustees to the faculty and the staff and to the students themselves. As far as we know, Barnard is the only selective liberal arts college for women to establish and publicize such a program. It is also the only college with a full-time administrator with the title and responsibilities of Dean for Disabled Students.

"There is a very special feeling about Barnard. You are made to feel that you are not only getting a superb education but that you are being groomed to take on a professional role in the world. That's important for women, and it's doubly important for disabled women. At Barnard you are taken seriously. I was made to feel that I was being brought up to be a scholar and that was extremely reassuring to me."

Maureen Nolan '79. A homebound student while at Barnard, Maureen attended classes via telephone hook-up. She is now pursuing her Master's degree in English at Columbia's Graduate School of Arts and Sciences.

"I am proud of Barnard's being at the forefront with regard to education for disabled women... It was a struggle for me in the beginning but everyone was very supportive. I found an incredible record of professors; my training in writing was invaluable."

Nancy Cowles '66. After graduation from Barnard in 1966, Nancy went on to become the first Peace Corps volunteer confined to a wheelchair. She now teaches remedial reading in her home state of Nebraska.

"As a Barnard student I was allowed seven years to complete my degree but in each of those semesters I was forced to extend myself beyond what I thought I could do. Today's students enjoy this same special combination of challenge and support. Barnard is now able to offer these opportunities to greater numbers of disabled women and I am pleased to be a part of this effort."

*Julie V. Marsteller
Dean for Disabled Students and
Assistant Dean of Studies*



"I chose Barnard because, in 1965, there was no other school of the academic caliber I was seeking with the physical facilities that Barnard has. Ten years ago with no help it was a minimal problem for a disabled student to attend Barnard. With a little help and some of the positive attitude that Barnard possesses, I think that Barnard is a place with a tremendous amount to offer. And there aren't many places like it around... Even with physical accessibility now mandated by law, it takes a lot more than obeying the law to create surroundings that minimize problems for disabled students."

Linda Laubenstein '69. Dr. Laubenstein attended New York University Medical School and completed her residency in hematology at Bellevue Hospital. She is now in private practice specializing in hematology and oncology.

"I came here because it was smaller than most schools. I felt I could get much more individual help when I needed it. My teachers are great. They would give help to anybody, disabled or not."

Karen Schiffman '83 is a freshman from Long Island. Although she hasn't decided on her major yet, she spent last year in Israel and is continuing her Hebrew studies at Barnard.

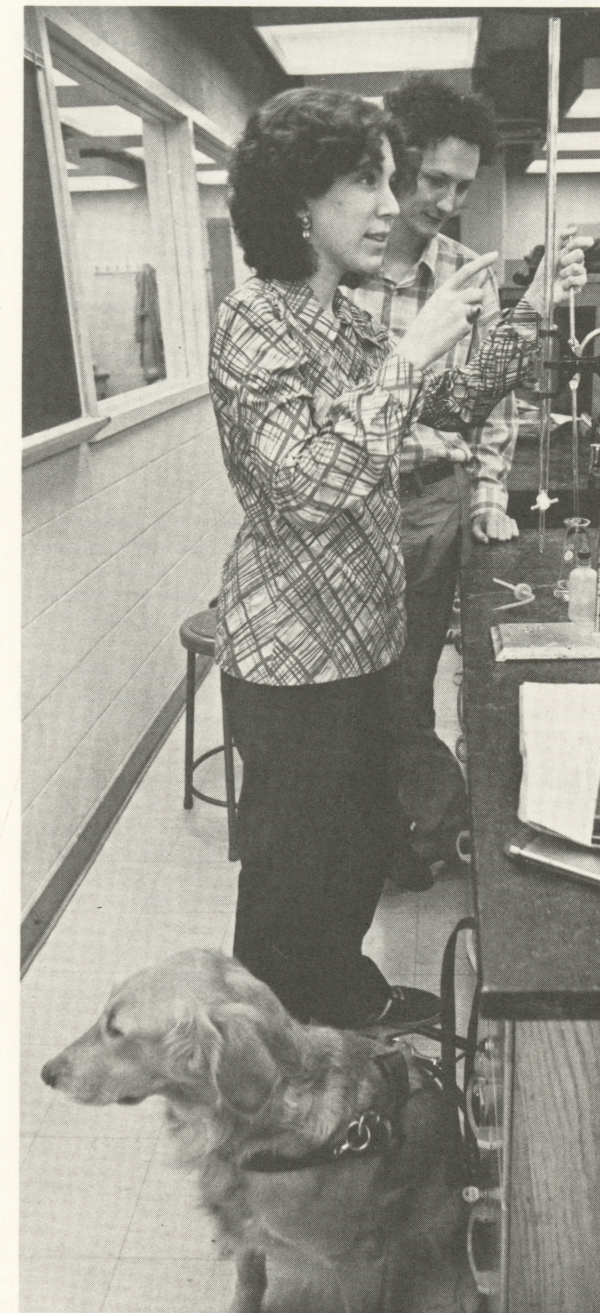
"Barnard seems to be really committed to teaching. The professors I've run into have been genuinely concerned for my academic training. My chemistry professor is brilliant; she has yet to confuse me in class!... My ultimate goal is medical school. People are sometimes skeptical about that and say it's a long shot but still they are very supportive... At Barnard I am made to feel that what I am doing is unusual but not impossible and I know that whenever I need help all I have to do is ask."

Irene Hecht is a student in Columbia's School of General Studies. She and her guide dog Lynn are welcome additions to one of Barnard's chemistry labs.

Disabled women choose Barnard for the same reasons that able-bodied applicants do. They may select Barnard because it is an academically vigorous liberal arts college; or possibly because it is a women's college affiliated with a major university; perhaps because it offers the cultural and social opportunities available only in New York City. Whatever their reason, they discover a college with a long-standing commitment to provide a Barnard experience to academically strong women, including those with physical disabilities. The Office for Disabled Students aids the College in seeking out qualified applicants. The program offers support to disabled women of any age at Barnard and assists them after graduation.

Left: Dr. Linda Laubenstein examines a patient from her wheelchair.

Right: Irene Hecht, a blind Chemistry student, works in the lab



What does the Program for Disabled Students do?

- ▶ Counsels in academic planning, personal adjustment, and vocational guidance
- ▶ Provides note-takers, readers, attendants, and interpreters
- ▶ Obtains special equipment
- ▶ Distributes tactile, print, and oral maps of the Columbia University campus
- ▶ Serves as an advocate for students in obtaining medical care, financial aid consideration or career planning services, both within the college and in the community
- ▶ Arranges extensions for completion of academic and physical education requirements
- ▶ Maintains a resource collection on specific disabilities, rehabilitation, accessibility, and other related issues
- ▶ Supervises the completion of architectural modifications for total accessibility

"When I was at Barnard there was an individual method of dealing with problems. If I stated a need, which at times I was reluctant to do, then someone was there to help me out. The situation is even better now because the Office for Disabled Students is there to act as a clearinghouse. They can deal with so many different situations."

Pat Herring '77 is now in the process of completing her law degree and preparing for her marriage next fall. She plans to remain in New York City in the future.

"Here I am asked what I need. My needs are different from a person in a wheelchair or even from someone who is completely blind. Everything here is done on a one-to-one basis... I'm happy that I came here. I had looked at other schools but it seemed like at Barnard giving special attention came naturally. That wasn't true at the other places I considered."

Julia Sear '83 has lived in New York City all her life and is planning on concentrating in computer science and technology.

"I've had some problems here at Barnard but basically they are problems that everybody goes through... I'm having a normal experience, which is not and should not be a perfectly smooth ride. I have to go through the bad with the good, just like everyone else. I think that if my time here were perfect then that would indicate that the College was doing everything for me. Well I don't want that. I want to do those things for myself. I may need some compromises here and there but I don't want a free ride. I think that the people at Barnard understand that. The Dean for Disabled Students is disabled herself and that makes a huge difference. She knows how hard it is to go down a steep ramp or how much time I need to get from one class to the next because she is in an electric wheelchair herself."

Elena Alvarez '82 is deciding between majoring in sociology or psychology and wants to become a teacher. She was a camp counselor this summer and is living on campus for the second year.

Barnard is proud to be at the forefront of the movement to provide equal access to quality education for all women, regardless of physical disability. Our tradition of individualized consideration of special students illustrates our commitment to this goal.



Above: Karen Schiffman, a disabled student in the freshman class.

For more information, please contact the Office for Disabled Students, 106 Milbank Hall, Barnard College, 606 West 120th Street, New York, New York 10027. The telephone number is 212-280-4634.

Cover Photo: Patricia Herring, President of the Senior Class, speaking at her graduation in 1977. Ms. Herring is now a third year student at Columbia Law School.

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