

Strategies for College and University Faculty to Promote Equal Access to Post-Secondary Education

People almost universally underestimate the abilities and ingenuity of students who have disabilities to pursue objectives that most of us simply think are impossible. Mechanics who are blind, nurses who are wheelchair users, teachers who are hard to hearing, painters without arms, and chemists with shaky limbs – it's all been done.

Preparing Students with Disabilities for the College Experience
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Achieving equal access to post-secondary education depends on the degree to which faculty ensures accommodation that enables learning but does not compromise academic integrity. Common strategies that can be used by college and university faculty to promote equal access to education are provided for your consideration.

General Strategies

- ❑ Maintain a positive attitude and keep an open mind; focus on students' abilities and not what they cannot do; focus on the person rather than the disability.
- ❑ Provide students with a detailed course outline and reading list in a timely manner to allow for transcription of resource materials into alternative formats (e.g., large print, braille).
- ❑ Encourage students to identify the accommodations and adaptations they require to fulfill their academic requirements. A statement similar to the following could be included in the course syllabus: "If you have a documented disability and wish to discuss academic accommodations, please contact me."
- ❑ Review with students how their disability affects course requirements, including readings, assignments, exams, classroom participation (e.g., note taking, group work), field placements and/or physical environment.

Physical Accessibility

- ❑ Ensure that your lecture room and/or lab space is accessible. It is your responsibility to change the location of your class if accessibility is an issue.
- ❑ Keep classrooms as uncluttered as possible and avoid rearranging desks and chairs unless necessary.
- ❑ Students using a wheelchair should easily be able to reach their seat location.
- ❑ Select locations for field trips and placements that are accessible for all students.
- ❑ Explore whether seating arrangements are a consideration for a student with a disability. For example, permit those who have hearing difficulty to sit in areas with low background noise, and avoid lecturing while standing in front of a light source to help students who may be lip-reading.
- ❑ Be familiar with the evacuation procedures for students with a disability and the expectations for faculty and students.

Course Materials

- ❑ Provide class assignments well in advance of their due date, and provide both oral and written instructions.
- ❑ Consider giving extensions to program completion time limits for students with alternative communication methods.
- ❑ Make your syllabus, assignments and/or handouts available electronically for students who may require this format.
- ❑ Assigned films or videos should have closed captioning available.

Lectures

- ❑ Speak clearly, facing the class. This will benefit not only students who are deaf or hearing impaired, but all students.
- ❑ Explain your actions for the benefit of students who are visually impaired.

- ❑ Rephrasing statements rather than repeating them may be required for a student who is hearing impaired because certain combinations of sound are more difficult to lip-read than others.
- ❑ Select visual materials that provide closed captioning wherever possible.
- ❑ Present new subject material visually as well as orally (e.g., through PowerPoint presentations).
- ❑ Be supportive of instruction-related accommodation such as the use of assistive devices (e.g., FM systems worn by course instructors, computerized note takers in lectures), oral and visual language interpreters, and audio recording of lectures.
- ❑ Provide handouts of all technical terms that you use in your lecture for students who are deaf or hearing impaired. Unfamiliar terms can be difficult to lip-read and interpret.
- ❑ Encourage students to obtain the support they need to fully participate in your course (e.g., note taker, adaptive equipment).

Exams

- ❑ Provide appropriate tests/exams, making accommodations that may include using assistive technology (e.g., computer, text magnifier), providing an individual exam room that has fewer distractions, and extending the exam period.
- ❑ Consider the option of altering the format of the exam to meet students' needs (essay, multiple choice, oral or braille) or use of word processor with spell check for answering questions.



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