

Working with Students Who have Physical Disabilities

Physical disabilities vary in form and severity.

The best way to understand an individual's needs is to engage in a private conversation with them.

Questions you might ask include:

- What barriers do you experience in a classroom?
- What are the accommodations that help you access the content, the class, the environment?
- How can we create an accessible experience for these elements of the class? (addressing the different types of experiences you create in your class- small groups, large groups, presentations, projects, tests/quizzes, papers, field trips, etc.)

Individuals with physical disabilities have different accommodation preferences and needs. There are many ways of accessing information and environments.

Accommodations may include, but are not limited to:

- Architectural modifications
- Adaptive transportation
- Adaptive technology
- Lab assistant
- Adjustable tables
- Personal care assistant

If you would like verification that a student has a disability, ask the student to provide you with a letter from the Disability Services Office (DSO). The DSO produces these letters only for students who are registered with the office and for whom documentation of the disability is on file. The DSO can send you this letter directly.

As a professor seeking to support a student with physical disabilities, you are asked to:

- **Talk with the student about classroom accessibility** and seating arrangements. Work to make your classroom is barrier-free. If your classroom is inaccessible and a student is unable to get into your classroom, your class location must be moved to an accessible location. Call the DSO immediately for assistance in getting your class location changed.
- **Allow for seating modification** as stated in the student's accommodation letter. A student may be unable to use the type of chair provided in a particular classroom. The DSO will assist the student in making special seating arrangements.
- **You should be seated when talking one-to-one with a student using a wheelchair.** This allows you to speak to each other at eye level.
- **Consult the DSO if you need assistance in making lab courses accessible.** Students may need to be paired with another student or a teaching assistant. A student using a wheelchair may need a lower lab table to accommodate the wheelchair.
- **Make arrangements for field trips as soon as possible** in order to ensure accessibility. Consult with the DSO about arrangements if you need assistance.
- **Talk with the student to arrange any communication needs.** Students who are not able to raise their hand may have another avenue to let you know they would like to speak.
- **Periodically check in with the student privately** to make sure that all class content is being accessed.
- Don't hesitate to call the Disability Services Office (DSO) to arrange for a three-way meeting between you, a disability services staff, and the student to work out any issues and to collaborate on the best instructional strategies for the student.