

Working with Students Who are Blind or have Vision Loss

Vision loss varies from mild vision loss to severe vision loss or blindness.

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- groups, presentations, tests/quizzes, etc.)

Individuals who are blind or have vision loss have different accommodation preferences and needs. There are many ways of accessing information.

Accommodations may include, but are not limited to:

- Screen magnifiers
- Text-to-speech software and screen readers
- Large print texts, handouts, signs, labels
- Braille and braille screen display
- Tactile representations of visual information (charts, graphs, maps, 3-d concepts)
- Adaptive lab equipment
- Guide dog

As a professor seeking to accommodate a student with blindness or vision loss, you are asked to:

- **Provide all print class materials well in advance (3-5 weeks) of the first class.** Students may need all print material in alternative format which means converted to audio files, scanned onto disks, secured in Braille, enlarged or image enhanced. Conversion of materials takes time. **It is important that students have access to class materials at the same time as others in your class.** DSO will need lead time to coordinate the alternative formats.
- Identify yourself when greeting the student, and let the student know when you are leaving. **Speak directly to the student**, not through a third person.
- **Verbalize visually presented material**, such as slides, overheads or information on whiteboard.
- **Discuss seating arrangements with the student.** Students with visual impairments may need preferential seating.
- **Create a noise-free environment**, as unnecessary sounds can be distracting.
- **Talk and act naturally.** The use of words such as "see" and "look" are quite appropriate.
- **Answer questions orally.** A nod or gesture will not be seen.
- **Be descriptive when giving directions.**
- **Keep doors either opened or closed;** half-opened doors create a serious hazard.
- **Ask the student if he/she would like an orientation to the physical layout** of the room with locations of steps, furniture, lecture position, low-hanging objects or any other obstacles. If you need to escort the student, let the student grasp your elbow rather than taking the student's arm.
- Keep in mind that **guide dogs are working animals.** Do not feed or pet a guide dog. Since they are working, they should not be distracted.
- *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.*

Useful Resources

American Council for the Blind, <http://acb.org/>, provides general information about the Council, including recent issues of a monthly publication, The Braille Forum.