

## Section 2. Suggestions for Working with Students with Disabilities

### 2.1 Preferred Terminology

We all know that the language we use and the words we speak are important. Certainly the way we refer to or portray people in speech and writing may enhance their dignity and promote positive attitudes. Politically correct vocabularies are constantly changing. Still, the following suggestions appear to be a constant:

Refer to the person first, rather than the disability. This emphasizes the person's worth and abilities rather than the disability.

The proper term is "disability"—not "handicap." The only time the term "handicapped" is used now—or at least should be—is in relation to parking or other physical structures, and that will probably endure because of the cost of changing signage.

Avoid using a term for a disability as an adjective. For example, instead of saying an "Id student," or a "blind student," say a student with a disability or a student who is blind. Again, the focus is on the person, not the disability.

Avoid "clumping" or labeling—for example, the disabled, the blind, the deaf. However, there is one exception to this general guideline. Some people who are deaf are very proud of their deaf culture and prefer to be called *deaf* rather than *a person who is deaf* or *a person who has a hearing impairment*. When in doubt, ask the individual.

Avoid euphemisms, such as "physically challenged." These suggest that barriers are good or that disabilities exist to build a person's character. Simply stated, the person has a disability.

### 2.2 Etiquette and Respectful Practice

Advisors and instructors may want to consider general recommendations for etiquette and respect when interacting with a person with a disability. . Equal Access to Software and Information (EASI) suggests the following:

#### a. In General

Ask before doing. People with disabilities want to be as independent as possible, so don't assume people with disabilities need or want your help. Ask, "May I get the door for you?"

Make eye contact. Speak directly to the person, not to or through his or her companion.

It's acceptable to use *common phrases* that contain action words the person is not capable of doing. For example, you could invite a person in a wheelchair to walk with you or to ask a blind person if he or she "sees what you mean."

Treat people with disabilities with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else--not as if they are invisible or as if they are children (when they are not).

b. Visual Impairments

Be descriptive. In helping to orient people with visual impairments, tell them what or who is approaching, if they need to step up or down, if a door is to the left or right, or what kind of handle it has. Warn them of any possible hazards.

People with visual impairments usually can hear just fine, so it is not necessary to speak loudly to them.

Offer to read written information for a person with a visual impairment.

If you are asked to guide a person with a visual impairment, offer your arm—don't grab his or hers.

c. Speech Impairments

Listen patiently. Don't complete sentences for them unless they look to you for help.

Don't pretend to understand what a person with a speech disability says just to be polite.

Ask them to write down a word if you're not sure what they are saying.

d. Hearing Impairments

Face people with hearing impairments when you talk with them so they can see your lips. This is especially important in the classroom where it is too easy to talk while facing a chalkboard.

Speak a little more slowly when talking to a person with a hearing impairment.

Raise the level of your voice a *little*.

Communicate in writing, if necessary.

e. Mobility Impairments

Try sitting or crouching down to the approximate height of people in wheel chairs or scooters when you talk with them. Don't lean on a person's wheelchair unless you have permission

Be aware of what is accessible and what is not accessible to people in wheelchairs.

Give a push only when asked. Or ask, "May I help you with that?"

f. Learning Disabilities

ASK students with learning disabilities whether they understand or agree. Better yet, ask a question that can't be answered with "yes" or "no." Don't assume people are not listening just because you get no verbal or visual feedback.

People with learning disabilities do not necessarily have a problem with general comprehension.

Offer to read written material aloud, when necessary, and in the classroom write assignments and important terms or names on the board.

## 2.3 Teaching and Learning Suggestions

With appropriate accommodation, qualified students with all types of disabilities have been successful in postsecondary education. Disabilities Services uses a case-by-case analysis to determine reasonable accommodation for a student with a disability, making each student's accommodations personal to him or her. However, there are some general pedagogical techniques which are effective for a wide variety of students with disabilities and are considered effective teaching strategies—for *all students*. Consider incorporating the following suggestions into your teaching repertoire:

Select a text with a study guide when possible.

Include a statement on your syllabus about disabilities. For example, "Students with disabilities should contact Disabilities Services in Duke 108 to request accommodations. Then, be sure to make an appointment with me to give me an accommodation form from Disabilities Services as soon as possible so that we can discuss the accommodations you need."

Make course expectations clear.

Ask for volunteer note takers at the beginning of the course.

With each class, briefly review the previous lecture.

Write key words/technical terms/proper names on the board or provide a lecture handout.

Begin each lecture with an outline of material to be covered during that class.

Provide guided lecture questions.

Face the class when speaking and speak directly to students.

Use gestures and natural expressions to convey meaning.

Briefly summarize material at the end of class.

Give assignments orally and in writing.

Provide frequent opportunities for questions and answers.

Well in advance of an exam, provide study questions that illustrate the format as well as the content of the exam.

Explain what constitutes a good answer and why.

Be sure exam questions are clear and include a lot of white space on the page.

Use a multi-sensory approach—visual aids, overheads, handouts along with lectures.)

Distribute samples of finished papers as examples or post a model on your web page.

Use captioned videos whenever possible. They have proven helpful to not only students with disabilities, but international students as well.

Administer frequent quizzes to provide feedback.

Provide PowerPoint slide copies before the lecture.

Have students work in groups with hands-on activities or very specific group assignments.

Think about seating arrangements and match student needs with location.

See **Appendix C** for recommendations specific to particular disabilities.

## 2.4 Confidentiality in the Classroom

Following are examples of how faculty may avoid breaching confidentiality or creating uncomfortable situations for a student with disabilities. Faculty members should:

Avoid making any statements or implications that a student with a disability is any different from the general student population;

Make testing arrangements early rather than asking the student to come to the classroom and then leave with a test in hand.

Arrange for testing in a quiet, private setting rather than in an open, public place;

When asking for a class note taker, say this service has been approved by the University for “another student in the class” without giving the name of the student(s) needing the notes.

Do not ask the student for documentation other than that provided by Disabilities Services.

Discuss the student’s disability, needs, or accommodation in a private place;

Look at the student as an individual without comparison to other students, even other students with disabilities;

Hold students with disabilities to the same standards as the rest of the class. The idea of the law is to provide meaningful opportunity through reasonable accommodations—not to provide two different sets of requirements.