

## **Visual impairments**

Visual impairments vary greatly from individuals who have some form of partial sight to individuals who are totally blind. The condition may be permanent or temporary, and/or stable or progressive. The disability may be congenital, or have come about as the result of injury or disease. Consequently, students with visual disabilities present with a wide range of abilities and functional limitations.

Individuals who are blind or visually impaired face unique challenges in the classroom. Instructors can ease these struggles by offering different accommodations for students with visual disabilities and structuring courses around these learners.

\*NOTE: The instructor is responsible for ensuring that all instructional materials, including lecture notes, overheads, handouts, videos, course websites, etc. are available in alternative formats, as needed. If you need assistance please contact Access Services. Partially sighted students often require many of the same accommodations as totally blind students. This includes readers, texts in alternate formats, describing visual cues in class, etc. In addition, depending on their level and type of vision, partially sighted students may use large print textbooks, handouts, and tests; a closed-circuit TV magnifier or other magnifying device; or a large print typewriter. Large print is usually 18 to 22 pt., but varies from student to student.

You can assist a visually impaired student by offering a thorough orientation to the physical layout of the room, indicating the location of all exits, desks, raised floors, low-hanging objects, and your lecture position. Indicate the location of restrooms, as well. When giving directions or describing locations, say “left” or “right,” “step up” or “step down.” Convert directions to the visually impaired student’s perspective.

### **Applying Universal Design Principles**

- Determine which textbooks are course requirements as soon as possible, and share this information with the campus bookstore. It can take up to 60 days to locate or arrange for alternative text formats.
- Have copies of the syllabus and reading assignments ready prior to the beginning of classes to assist with converting materials into alternate formats.
- Double-space all materials and choose a clear, easy to read font.
- Be flexible with deadlines if assignments are delayed by the document conversion process.
- Pace the presentation of material so that when referring to a textbook or handout, students have time to find the information.
- Convey in spoken word what is written on the board or presented on overheads and in handouts.
- Encourage students to identify themselves when engaging in course discussions.
- When using Power Points for lectures, read the headings out loud to indicate where in the presentation the class is.

### **Typical Accommodations for students with visual impairments**

- Alternative print formats
- Preferential seating in the front of the room
- Magnification devices
- Adjustments in lighting, or additional lighting
- Adaptive computer equipment
- Text conversion
- Recorded lectures
- Lab or library assistants
- Note-takers
- Exam modifications:
  - Extended time

- Reader
  - Scribe
  - Adaptive equipment including computer screen readers
  - Alternative formats, such as enlarged text/print (18 pt. or larger)
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- For courses that include field trips, feel free to consult with the student and with Access Services to discuss any needs. We can help you identify and coordinate accommodations.
  - Allow the student who is deaf or hard of hearing the same anonymity as other students (i.e., avoid pointing out the student or the alternative arrangements to the rest of the class.)