Students with mobility impairments or motor control difficulties

General Information

There are varied origins of orthopedic and/or mobility impairments which are manifested in mobility loss ranging from loss of fine motor coordination in one hand to total paralysis from the neck down. Therefore, functional limitations also vary a great deal. Students with mobility impairments may experience difficulties with physical barriers like stairways or distances between campus buildings. Difficulties may also be seen in writing by hand, walking, and/or using standard equipment in the library or laboratory situation. Some of the more common disorders include: cardiovascular disorders, traumatic brain injury, spinal cord injury (quadriplegia, paraplegia), cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, amputation, and arthritis.

While each instructor knows the demands of his/her own class, the following questions may be considered so that classroom information is accessible to the student:

- Does this student need note taking assistance during class? Would a tape recorder be appropriate to use in this class?
- Is it possible for me to reduce the amount of writing in class by using handouts and other supplementary materials?
- Does the student need extended time for a test or assignment because of handwriting difficulties?
- Is it appropriate for this student to be tested orally, by tape, or with the use of a scribe?
- Is the classroom arranged effectively so that the student can access a desk from a wheelchair or situate a wheelchair without blocking emergency exits?
- Are all classroom activities accessible to the student (laboratory activities, slides, etc.)?

Suggestions for Communication

- Most people with disabilities do not mind talking frankly about the disability. Understanding and awareness of the facts promotes acceptance and integration.
- Offer assistance before giving it in order to allow the person the option of accepting.
- Direct questions, concerns, and comments to the person with a disability, rather than communicating through a third party.
- During an extended conversation with a person in a wheelchair, either sit down or try to move to a comfortable eye to eye level.
- Hanging or leaning on a person’s wheelchair is comparable to hanging or leaning on the person. Unless you are close friends with the person in the wheelchair, this is not appropriate.

Academic Considerations

- If the classroom is inaccessible, finding an alternative classroom is appropriate.
- Make sure the classroom layout is accessible and free of obstruction for a student using mobility aids (wheelchair, crutches).
- It is common for students with mobility impairments to fatigue easily, take longer to travel between classes and/or have difficulty with reliable transportation, causing them to be tardy more frequently than other students.
- If courses are taught in a laboratory setting, provide an accessible work station. The Student Development & Counseling Center has adjustable tables for students with special needs.
• In cases of fine motor impairments, students may need adjustments in writing assignments (i.e., access to computer lab or audio taping)
• Many students with fine motor or mobility impairments may need to plan for alternate methods of obtaining class notes.
• Many students with mobility impairments may need testing accommodations, such as extended time, use of adaptive equipment, and/or scribes.
• Alternative testing formats may be appropriate.

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