Teaching students with visual impairments

General Information

The scope and degree visual impairment in individuals varies a great deal, ranging from difficulties in visual acuity to problems with discrimination or perception. Students with visual impairments may need a service animal, may have poor peripheral vision (tunnel vision), may have night blindness, may have photosensitivity (sensitivity to light), may have amblyopia (double vision), or may show random, jerky, uncoordinated movements of the eye (nystagmus). These impairments may or may not be readily visible to a casual observer. Considering the wide range of impairment, functional limitations also vary a great deal. Difficulties may be seen in the reduction of the sharpness of vision, in separating the background from the foreground, or in accurately following printed information. Commonly associated disabilities include: learning disabilities, head trauma, low vision, and blindness.

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:
- Do I need to briefly review acceptable behavior toward a service animal to class members?
- Do I identify myself as I meet or greet the student? Is my tone of voice the same?
- What assistance can I provide the student who is taping lecture notes, using a note taker, or using a Braille writer? What works well for the student and what does not?
- Do I verbalize what is written on the blackboard or overhead projector?
- Do I encourage interaction of other class members with the student?
- What testing formats are appropriate for the student?
- Is assistive technology available to the student on campus? What is it and where is it?

Academic Considerations

- Most people with disabilities do not mind talking frankly about the disability. Understanding and awareness of the facts promotes acceptance and integration.
- If the student’s vision is better than 20/200, he or she may be able to use large print materials.
- Reserved seating closer to the front of the classroom may help a student with low vision.
- Accommodations for special equipment may be arranged. Adaptive equipment is available through the library (Braille translator, Braille printer, screen reader, enlarger, etc.).
- Testing accommodations may need to be considered and may vary according to the degree of impairment, such as enlarged tests, extended time, a scribe, or oral examination.
- The student may require books on tape.
- The student may benefit from use of a tape recorder during lecture or use of a note taker.

Compiled by the LSU Shreveport
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