

# Working with Students with Mobility Impairments

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It is very difficult to generalize about mobility impairments, because there are many conditions that can limit movement (arthritis, multiple sclerosis, polio, and spinal cord injuries are common causes of physical disability) and because there are so many degrees of physical limitation. Some students can stand and walk short distances unaided, some can maneuver manual wheelchairs, and others may have no use of their arms and legs and may require a power chair as well as the assistance of an aide. While there are some helpful principles to follow when working with a student with a mobility difference, your best resource for how to approach a particular situation is to work directly with the student.

If you have a student with mobility impairment in a class that is held in an inaccessible location, call the Registrar promptly to arrange an alternative location. Also, remember to include the student's physical limitations and requirements in planning required field trips or field assignments. Accessible transportation must be provided.

## **Ways of helping students who have mobility impairments:**

- Understand that students who have limited mobility may need longer than ten minutes to move between classes. This is especially true if they need to navigate between buildings, take circuitous routes, or wait for elevators.
- Always direct your conversation to the student, even if an aide is present. Do not ask, "Would she be able to...?" but instead ask, "Would *you* be able to...?"
- Offer assistance when you think it is appropriate, but be willing to accept "no" for an answer. Many people with disabilities prefer to be as independent as possible.
- Be aware that many physical settings such as laboratories, art studios, computer stations, etc., might require modification in order to become accessible. If you become aware of a situation that is inaccessible



and/or is causing a problem for a particular student, please discuss it with both the student involved and Julia Dunn, Associate Dean of Students.

- Students in laboratory and other "hands-on" courses might be able to participate most fully by dictating instructions to an aide or another student. In this way, the student might be able to participate in every aspect of the learning experience except the physical manipulation of equipment.
- Carrying or lifting a student to an accessible location is discouraged and not recommended.

