

# Working with Students with Visual Impairments

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## **Understanding visual impairment**

Students with visual impairments experience varying degrees of impairment, ranging from partial sight to total blindness. Partially sighted students might be able to distinguish shapes or certain colors, retain peripheral vision, or read very large print. What characterizes all students with visual impairment is the difficulty in utilizing the standard visual means of communication in the classroom: printed materials (texts, syllabi, handouts, tests, etc.), audiovisual materials (i.e., PowerPoint presentations, films), information written on the board, and computers without accessibility features enabled. As always, because of the many individual variations, it is important for the instructor to consult with the student to learn about his or her particular capabilities. You might also want to discuss any adaptive technology or other aids the student may bring to class. Some examples of adaptive aids include digital recorders, portable magnifiers, Braille printers, talking calculators, laptop computers, and guide dogs.

Although computer software can convert printed text into audible text, students who are visually impaired might also need to use alternative-format textbooks or textbooks printed in Braille. Please notify the bookstore of your course materials selection by the specified deadline to allow ample time to acquire alternative-format textbooks and other course materials.

Students with visual impairments have a legal right to record class lectures and discussions. Any concerns about the use of digital recorders in the classroom, should be discussed with the Director of Academic Resources.

It is also often necessary to make special testing arrangements for students with visual impairments. For example, in a laboratory setting, it may be appropriate for a student to perform an experiment by giving detailed instructions to an aide.



## **Ways of helping students with visual impairments:**

- It can be very helpful if you identify yourself orally to the visually impaired student when you first meet. Provide clear oral instructions about the arrangement of the room where you meet and inform the student if the arrangement of furniture changes. When you walk with the student, it may be helpful for the student to use your elbow or arm as a guide; do not assume, however, that he or she will need such guidance – let the student initiate the need for assistance such as this.
- Instructors should either provide the syllabus, handouts, and all written communication such as grades, and comments in an electronic format that can be easily converted to speech or Braille.
- Speak distinctly and face the class when you are speaking. This will help the student to make the most effective use of the auditory information he or she is receiving.
- It is important to avoid using purely visual cues in your teaching. For instance, when you are writing terms on the blackboard, it is necessary to read them aloud in order to ensure that visually impaired students have equal access to the information. Avoid using nonspecific terms such as "this and that" or "here and there."
- A guide dog should not be a problem in your classroom. Because they are working dogs, it is important not to distract them by petting them or trying to attract their attention. Remember to include the guide dog in your plans for any field trips or out-of-classroom activities.

## **Resources for Students Who Have Visual Impairments:**

Academic Resource Center – The Academic Resource Center is available to assist students with locating and ordering Braille and taped materials and with any other special needs. It is extremely important to let the Academic Resource Center know about course requirements well in advance. The College will make available Braille copies of the Orientation Week Schedule and other materials and publications given to incoming students. The Catalog and Course Supplement are available on line and can be made accessible upon request.

