WORKING WITH STUDENTS WHO ARE BLIND OR VISUALLY IMPAIRED

Below are some best practices for working with Blind or Visually Impaired students. Please keep in mind that every student is unique and not all recommendations will work for all students.

- Work closely with the student to determine what accommodations will be helpful.
- People who are blind or have low vision have likely faced and overcome many barriers and will be the best resources for what works and what does not work for them.
- Announce in class that you are available to meet with students who need accommodations for a disability.
- Avoid singling out students in class. Making yourself available to all students is an invitation for the student to approach you. (Also, make sure you have a disability statement in your syllabus about the availability of accommodations.)
- When greeting a student who is blind or who has low vision, identify yourself by name.
- Let the person know if you are leaving the area or the classroom.
- If the student has a dog guide, do not pet or speak to the dog while it is in the harness. The dog is working for the student and distracting the dog may undermine training and put the person in danger.
- Communicate directly to the student. Maintain eye contact as you are talking.
- Avoid talking through a third person such as a sighted guide or note-taker.
- Speak at a normal pace and volume.
- Do not be overly concerned about phrases that you normally use such as "See you later" or "See what I mean"? Most people with vision loss use these phrases as well.
- Be ready to provide reading lists, syllabi, or assignments in advance. This will allow the student time to have the materials translated into Braille, read on CD, scanned or printed in large print.
- The student may need information about the physical layout of the classroom. This is especially important if there are any changes from one class period to the next. Also, consider any obstacles that might present a problem.
- Be prepared to change seating arrangements if necessary to improve the student's ability to see you or others.
- If the student has low vision, a seat in the front of the room may greatly improve his or her ability to participate effectively.
- Consider the impact of the lighting on the student's ability to see. Avoid standing in front of a light source as this may cause a glare and make seeing you more difficult.
- Allow students to record lectures.
- When providing handouts, make sure the copies are legible. Black print on white paper provides the best contrast for most people. Be prepared to make large print copies (ask student which size font is preferred) or provide handouts on a CD, USB drive, email or posted on Canvas if requested.
- Documents that are scanned with a typical flatbed scanner will not produce editable text that can be read by screen readers such as JAWS and other software programs that are utilized by students with visual impairments.

- If you are using the whiteboard or other visual aids, describe verbally what you are showing to the class.
- Be specific in your descriptions. It is ideal to provide the information that is included on your visual aids or overheads to the student in an accessible format before the class begins.
- When pointing to an object of discussion, use the name of the object instead of "this" or "that."
- For students with low vision, place the object in a location where there is good lighting and contrast. Make objects available for them to explore more fully before or after class.
- If you are reading from a textbook in class, remember that the page numbers in your copy may not correspond to large print or Braille versions. In addition to giving the page number, also provide descriptive information about the section you are reading, such as "the fourth paragraph in Chapter 6."
- Be aware that some students may choose to use note-taking devices that make some noise. Some of these devices may include a Braille notetaker (Braill Note or PacMate), a laptop computer, or in rare cases, a slate and stylus. Seating arrangements can be discussed to minimize the impact on other students of the sound of these devices.
- When planning field trips or laboratory activities, remember that students may need to make arrangements for a sighted guide or may need to become familiar with the new setting in advance. Inform students well in advance of such activities.
- Your academic standards or course content is not modified. You may need to modify the presentation of the materials, but hold all students to the same standards.

Terminology:

- "Blind" - the term "blind" is used to describe a person who is more likely to rely on auditory or tactile means of accessing information such as audio CDs or Braille.
- "Low vision" - the term "low vision" is used to describe a level of vision loss in which the person can use residual sight and benefit from large print and/or closer proximity.
- "Legally blind" - A person is said to be "legally blind" if his or her corrected vision is no better than 20/200.

Guidelines for Preparing and Administering Exams:

- Discuss plans for modifying testing procedures prior to the first exam.
- Consider factors such as extended time, the availability of adaptive equipment, and a distraction-free location for taking the exam. The DSS Office is available to assist with the proctoring of exams for students.
- Remember that the use of adaptive equipment or an alternate format such as audio, large print or Braille takes extra time.
- Determine which format will work best for your student. The student may choose to get the exam in Braille, in regular print (and use a magnification device), in large print, or on a CD. Some students may prefer having the test read by a live reader.

- Consider how students will record their answers to the exam as well. They may write their answers on an answer sheet or directly on the test. They may prefer to record their answers on an audiotape or type them on a computer. They may want to type them in Braille and have them transferred into print or onto a digital format. Recognize that it may take time to get the information transferred into a format that you can grade.