

### Understanding Working with Students with Disabilities

Some disabilities will be readily apparent to you—such as mobility impairments. Others, such as learning disabilities, chronic illness, hearing or visual impairments and psychological disorders may not be as easy to recognize. Despite disabilities, it is always important to remember that these students are first and foremost, students. Students with disabilities may require special accommodations to assist them with their coursework, but they should not be regarded as inferior to other students in your classes. These students have been admitted to Cambridge College using the same admissions criteria as each and every other student. Accommodating students with disabilities does not mean changing your standards or academic rigor. It may mean the following:

- Modifying the way course information is presented
- Modifying methods of testing to allow students to best demonstrate what they have learned
- Allowing students to use assistive technology such as tape recorders or voice recognition software
- Adapting administrative procedures

Always remember that you will be notified by email if there will be a student in your class who has identified themselves as having a documented learning or physical disability and the required accommodations will be outlined for you. If you ever have any questions about working with a student in your class, never hesitate to contact the Office of Academic and Disability Support Services.

### Faculty Role

The first step in working with students with disabilities is likely an obvious one: treat these students as you would any other student in your class. Despite the best of intentions, students with disabilities are sometimes treated or set apart from others. Helping your entire class with this simple understanding is often one of the best and most important steps in helping students with disabilities feel comfortable in your class.

### General Teaching Tips

1. Provide a detailed syllabus with textbook information, description of assignments, and list of due-dates.
2. Post the syllabus on the course web page in My CC as far in advance as possible.
3. Provide preferential seating options.
4. Offer frequent, detailed, and timely feedback on students' coursework.
5. Encourage students to contact you in order to clarify assignments.
6. Maintain communication with students in a timely manner.
7. Give students with disabilities extended time to complete assignments as needed.
8. Be aware that students with some disabilities may arrive late or have to miss class at times.

Be aware that if the course requires a field trip or alternate location, it is essential to work with students and the DSS office in advance. Students may need assistance with ASL interpreters, transportation, special seating, or frequent rest breaks.

## Teaching for Specific Disabilities

See also the Disability Support web page, in particular "Common Classroom Accommodations."

<i>Nature of the Disability</i>	<i>Teaching Tips &amp; Tools</i> (see also General Teaching Tips)
<p><b>Limited Manual Dexterity/Other Mobility Impairments</b></p> <p>Mobility disabilities can have many causes: for example, carpal tunnel syndrome, cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, and spinal cord injury. Students with mobility disabilities have varying physical limitations and deal with their limitations in different ways; they may use crutches, braces, or a wheelchair.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow students with limited manual dexterity to audiotape classes.</li> <li>• Be aware that students with mobility disabilities may not be able to raise their hands to participate in class discussion. Establish eye contact with the students and call on them when they indicate that they wish to contribute.</li> <li>• Whenever you are talking one-to-one with a student in a wheelchair, you yourself should be seated so the student does not have to look upward at you.</li> </ul>

<i>Nature of the Disability</i>	<i>Teaching Tips &amp; Tools</i> (see also General Teaching Tips)
<p><b>Learning Disabilities</b></p> <p>Students with learning disabilities often have normal or better intelligence, but they also have severe “information-processing deficits” that make them have significant challenges in one or more academic areas (reading, writing, math). Students with learning disabilities report some common problems, including slow and inefficient reading; slow essay-writing, with problems in organization and the mechanics of writing; and frequent errors in math calculation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be sensitive to students who, for disability-related reasons, may be unable to read aloud or answer questions when called on.</li> <li>• Compose assignments and exams in a format that is accessible to students with learning disabilities. Write clearly or type, in large black text with spaces between lines. To avoid visual confusion, don't put too much information onto one page. Print only one side of the paper.</li> <li>• Suggest that math students use graph paper (or lined paper turned sideways) to ensure neatness and avoid confusion.</li> <li>• Please see also ADD/ADHD.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADD/ADHD)</b></p> <p>ADD/ADHD is characterized by a persistent pattern of frequent and severe inattention, hyperactivity, and/or impulsiveness. People with ADHD have problems similar to the problems of people with learning disabilities: slow and inefficient reading, slow essay-writing, and frequent errors in math calculation and the mechanics of writing.</p> <p>Students with ADHD often have serious problems with time-management, task-completion, organization, and memory.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remind students frequently of impending deadlines.</li> <li>• Start each class session with a summary of material to be covered or provide a written outline. Use broad margins and triple-space, so students will be able to take notes directly on the outline.</li> <li>• Review major points at the conclusion of each class session.</li> <li>• Design the class material to be stimulating and the format varied (e.g., lecture alternating with presentations, small group discussion and whole class discussion). Be sure to permit breaks.</li> <li>• Avoid giving assignments orally; always write assignments on the chalkboard, or (even better) pass them out in written form or refer to their location on the syllabus.</li> <li>• Provide test-sites that are relatively distraction-free.</li> <li>• Help the student break down assignments into component parts and set deadlines for each part.</li> <li>• Please see also learning disabilities.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Psychological Disabilities</b></p> <p>Psychological disabilities include depression, bipolar disorder, or severe anxiety. Students with these disabilities report difficulties with focusing, concentrating, and completing work in a timely fashion. Ability to function effectively may vary from day to day. Medications help with some symptoms of psychological disability, but medication side-effects (e.g., drowsiness or headaches) can contribute to a student's academic problems.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please make every effort to make students feel comfortable if they disclose their psychological disabilities to you. Don't press students to explain their disabilities if they do not wish to do so; with the consent of the student, the DSS office can provide you with further information.</li> <li>• Please see also ADD/ADHD; a number of these suggestions will also be appropriate.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Deaf or Hard of Hearing</b></p> <p>Students who are deaf or hard of hearing are not all alike. Some are extremely adept at reading lips and others are not; some communicate orally and others use sign language, gestures, writing, or a combination of these methods.</p> <p>In class, students who are deaf may have American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters. Students who have some usable hearing may use a device to amplify sounds: in class they may rely on hearing aids alone, or they may use an “assistive listening device.” When students are using assistive listening devices, instructors may be asked to wear cordless lapel microtransmitters.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speak directly to the student, not to the student's interpreter.</li> <li>• Ensure that no more than one person speaks at a time during class discussions. When a class member asks a question, repeat the question before answering.</li> <li>• Avoid giving information while handing out papers or writing on a chalkboard.</li> <li>• Use captioned videos whenever possible. When showing uncaptioned videos, slides, or movies, provide an outline or summary in advance.</li> <li>• When working with the chalkboard or an overhead projection system, pause so that the student may look first at the board/screen, and then at the interpreter, to see what is being said.</li> <li>• Instructors in courses requiring field trips or alternative locations need to work with the student and the DSS office in advance. For example, the students may need ASL interpreters or special seating.</li> </ul>

<b><i>Nature of the Disability</i></b>	<b><i>Teaching Tips &amp; Tools</i></b> (see also General Teaching Tips)
<p><b>Visual Disabilities</b></p> <p>Students with visual disabilities are often frustrated by class syllabi, textbooks, chalkboard diagrams, PowerPoint presentations, films, maps, videos, printed exams, and some Internet websites.</p> <p>Most students with visual disabilities take advantage of assistive technology. Computers can enlarge print; read the text on a computer screen aloud; or scan books, articles, and other printed materials and then read their text. Some students also use audiotape recorders, portable note-taking devices, or talking calculators.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be prepared to work with the staff in the DSS office to provide text titles in advance. For some students with visual disabilities, the DSS office must acquire textbooks in an accessible format.</li> <li>• Handouts such as printed copies of articles may need to be modified so that students can access the information. Please be prepared to work with the student or the DSS office in advance.</li> <li>• When using an overhead projector or PowerPoint, use a large font size, at least 18 points. Provide more time for students with visual disabilities to copy the material on the transparencies, or provide them with printed or electronic copies.</li> <li>• Whenever possible, modify the presentation of material to make it accessible.</li> <li>• Allow the student to audiotape classes or use a notetaker.</li> <li>• Pace the presentation of material; if referring to a textbook or handout, allow time for students with visual disabilities to find the information.</li> <li>• When lecturing, avoid making statements that cannot be understood by people without sight: for example, "This diagram sums up what I am saying about statistics." (Don't worry about using words and phrases that refer to sight: for example, "See you later!" Such expressions are commonly used, and most people with visual disabilities don't find them offensive.)</li> <li>• Read aloud everything that you write on the chalkboard. Verbally describe objects and processes whenever possible.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Speech Impairments</b></p> <p>Students with speech disabilities may communicate in various ways. Some students speak with their own voices, but slowly and with some lack of clarity; other students write notes, point to communication boards, use electronic speech-synthesizers, or communicate through assistants who interpret their speech to other people.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In communicating with students who have speech disabilities, do not indicate that you have understood if you have not. Students with speech disabilities are accustomed to being asked to repeat, so don't be afraid that you'll offend them if you ask them to "say it again" or to spell words that you can't decipher.</li> <li>• When students have speech disabilities, meet with them early in the semester to discuss their communication styles and how they can best function in your classroom. If they will have challenges with the class process, are there other ways the students can demonstrate competency?</li> <li>• If a communication assistant accompanies the student to class, address your comments and questions to the student rather than the assistant.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Chronic Illness or Pain</b></p> <p>Students can have disabilities due to chronic illnesses such as asthma, arthritis, diabetes, cardiopulmonary disease, cancer, chronic fatigue immune deficiency syndrome, lyme disease, and seizure disorders. They can also be disabled by medical conditions that cause intense and continual pain: for example, repetitive stress injury, post-surgery, and back problems.</p> <p>Symptoms can be unpredictable and fluctuating. Students' pain or the side-effects of medications may cause them to become dizzy or confused, making it hard for them to pay attention in classes and complete out-of-class assignments.</p>	<p>Please see General Teaching Tips.</p>