

V. STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Current Federal laws require that every university take measures to accommodate students with documented disabilities. It is the student's responsibility to initiate the process by which a disability is documented. Further information on this matter is available from the Department's Management Services Officer. The purpose of this section is simply to give some common sense advice on interacting with such students, and it is taken from the handout, "Student-Teacher Relationships," that was distributed by the Center for Instructional Services at Purdue University.

If you have a student with a disability in your class, talk to him or her from the very beginning of the semester. The student may be a useful resource in letting you know how to adapt your teaching so that he or she can benefit from the course as much as possible.

Here is a list of suggestions that may be helpful in creating a good environment in which to discuss needs with the student and to help you in talking with the person.

1. Give the student a chance to demonstrate his or her interests and abilities.
2. Don't be overly solicitous or shower the student with kindness.
3. Don't be overprotective in helping the student.
4. Don't offer pity or charity.
5. Don't make up your mind ahead of time about the student.
6. Maintain eye contact.
7. Talk directly to the person with the disability, even when he or she is using an interpreter.
8. Ask if assistance is needed. It is better not to assume the person needs help. Further, if you ask, the person can tell you specifically what would be most helpful.
9. Use a normal tone of voice and standard language. A physical or learning disability does not mean lack of intelligence. [Some adjustments may be needed for a person with uncorrected hearing disabilities, but these should be kept to an absolute minimum and not draw unnecessary attention to the disability.]
10. When greeting a person with a severe loss of vision, identify yourself and others with you.
11. When directing someone with a visual impairment to a chair, put the person's hand on the back of the chair for guidance.
12. When talking to someone using a wheelchair, do not lean on the wheelchair. It is a part of the person's body space.

Finally, here are two basic suggestions for dealing with a disabled student in class. First of all, the student's confidentiality should be respected. Do not comment unnecessarily on the existence of a student with a disability in the classroom or the reason for related classroom changes. Second, the instructor's attitude towards a student with a disability will affect the rest of the class and will often be emulated by the class. It is important to be aware of your attitudes and the barriers which they can create.