

## VISION IMPAIRMENTS

Approximately 500,000 Americans have vision impairments to the extent that they are considered “legally blind.” There are three degrees of vision loss: 1) visual acuity of 20/200—the legally blind person can see at 20 feet what the average-sighted person can see at 200; 2) low vision—limited or diminished vision that cannot be corrected with standard lenses; and 3) partial sight—the field of vision is impaired because of an illness, a degenerative syndrome or trauma. Only two percent of the people with vision impairments are totally blind; most blind people have some amount of usable vision.

### *Some considerations:*

- Some students with vision loss use canes or guide dogs for mobility purposes; however, many navigate without them.
- Like anybody, students with vision impairments appreciate being asked if help is needed before it is given. Ask a student if he or she would like some help and then wait for a response before acting.
- Words and phrases that refer to sight, such as “I’ll see you later,” are commonly used expressions and usually go unnoticed unless a speaker is particularly self-conscious. Students with vision loss can still “see” what is meant by such expressions.
- When talking with or greeting a student with a vision impairment, speak in a normal voice; most people with vision impairments are not deaf. Speak to the student, not through a third party or companion and use the student’s name when directing the conversation to him or her. When entering a room, identify yourself to the student.
- When giving directions, say “left” or “right,” “step up” or “step down.” Convert directions to the vision-impaired student’s perspective. When guiding a student (into a room, for example) offer an arm and let him or her take it rather than pulling the person’s sleeve.
- If a student has a harnessed guide dog, it is working and should not be petted.
- Common accommodations for students with vision impairments include alternative print formats, magnification devices, bright incandescent lighting, raised lettering, tactile cues, adaptive computer equipment, readers for exams, print scanners, early syllabus, taped lectures and lab or library assistants.

### *Instructional Strategies*

- The following strategies are suggested to enhance the accessibility of course instruction, materials and activities. They are general strategies designed to support individualized reasonable accommodations (see “Determining Reasonable Accommodations,” page **Error! Bookmark not defined.**).
- Include a Disability Access Statement on the syllabus (see “Appendix,” page **Error! Bookmark not defined.**).
- Provide students with a list of books they will need for the course 5-8 weeks prior to the course.
- Have copies of the syllabus and reading assignments ready three to five weeks prior to the beginning of classes so documents are available for taping or Braille transcription.
- Provide vision-impaired students with materials in alternative formats at the same time the materials are given to the rest of the class. The student must advise as to the format: large print or tape (see “Document Conversion,” page **Error! Bookmark not defined.**).
- Repeat aloud what is written on the board or presented on overheads and in handouts.
- Pace the presentation of material: if referring to a textbook or handout, allow time for students to find the information.
- Allow students to tape-record lectures.

- When appropriate, ask for a sighted volunteer to team up with a vision-impaired student for in-class assignments.
- Keep a front row seat open for a student with a vision impairment. A corner seat is especially convenient for a student with a guide dog.
- Assist the student with finding an effective note-taker or lab assistant from the class (see “Academic Assistance,” page **Error! Bookmark not defined.**).
- Make arrangements early for field trips and ensure that accommodations will be in place on the given day (e.g., transportation, site accessibility).
- Be flexible with deadlines if assignments are held up by the document conversion process.
- When in doubt about how to assist the student, ask him or her.
- Allow the student the same anonymity as other students (i.e., avoid pointing out the student or the alternative arrangements to the rest of the class).

**Documentation for this disability, as with all disabilities, is required before services can be provided.**