Lesson 7: Mobility

PURPOSE

The purpose of this lesson is to increase your awareness of the issues and strategies related specifically to accommodations for students with Mobility Impairments.

By reflecting on your course while reading the Lesson Content and by considering the question for discussion, you will be guided to consider possible modifications to your course specifically related to accommodations for students with mobility impairments.

Questions to REFLECT upon while reading the CONTENT

What challenges might students with mobility impairments face in your selected course? What accommodations might they require?

CONTENT

We are now concentrating on accommodations for students with specific disabilities or impairments. This lesson presents issues and suggestions for accommodations for students with mobility impairments.

There are many types of orthopedic or neuromuscular impairments that can impact mobility. These include but are not limited to amputation, paralysis, Cerebral Palsy, Stroke, Multiple Sclerosis, Muscular Dystrophy, Arthritis, and spinal cord injury. Mobility impairments range from lower body impairments, which may require use of canes, walkers, or wheelchairs, to upper body impairments that may include limited or no use of the upper extremities and hands. It is impossible to generalize about functional abilities due to the wide variety of disabilities and specific diagnoses. Mobility impairments can be permanent or temporary. A broken bone, an injury, or a surgical procedure can temporarily impact a student's ability to walk independently and travel between campus buildings in a timely manner. Likewise, some students may be ambulatory with a walker for short distances within a classroom, but may need a wheelchair or scooter for longer distances.

Mobility impairments can impact students in several ways. Some students may take longer to get from one class to another, enter buildings, or maneuver in small spaces. In some cases physical barriers may inhibit entry into a building or classroom. It may also be difficult to get to fieldwork sites without accessible transportation.

Mobility impairments may impact, to varying degrees, a student's ability to manipulate objects, turn pages, write with a pen or pencil, type at a keyboard, or retrieve research materials. Medical conditions such as Arthritis or repetitive stress injuries can impact fine motor abilities and
decrease endurance for longer assignments. A student's physical ability may also vary from day to day.

When speaking with a student in a wheelchair for more than a few minutes, it is best to sit down or move back to create a more comfortable angle for the conversation.

Examples of accommodations for students with mobility impairments may include:
- Accessible locations for classrooms, labs, and field trips
- Preferential and accessible seating
- Wide aisles and uncluttered work areas
- Adjustable height and tilt tables
- All equipment located within reach
- Note takers and scribes
- Audiotaped class sessions
- Group lab assignments
- Extended exam time, alternative testing or alternative assignment arrangements
- Computers with speech input and alternative keyboards
- Access to handicapped parking spaces, wheelchair ramps, curb cuts, restrooms, and elevators
- Course materials available in electronic format
- Access to research resources available on the Internet

SUMMARY

Mobility impairments may make walking, sitting, bending, carrying, or using fingers, hands or arms difficult or impossible. Mobility impairments may be permanent or temporary, resulting from many causes, including amputation, multiple sclerosis, spinal cord injury, and Cerebral Palsy. General accommodations for students with mobility impairments include:
- Note taker, scribe; group lab assignments
- Classrooms, labs, and field trips in accessible locations
- Adjustable tables; lab equipment located within reach
- Class assignments made available in electronic format
- Computers equipped with special input device (e.g., voice input, alternative keyboard)

In all cases, it is important to remember that the student is responsible for requesting an accommodation and providing necessary documentation to DSS. By working together, you, the student, and DSS can assure that the accommodations provided are appropriate and reasonable.

POSSIBLE DISCUSSION

Suppose you have a student in your class who cannot write with her hands. What are some things she might reasonably request to facilitate her learning and participation in your course?
FURTHER INFORMATION

- Read answers to frequently asked questions, explore case studies or access additional resources regarding working with students with mobility disabilities
- Learn more at UCO’s Disability Support Services website
- Learn more at UCO’s DSS Handbook for Faculty & Staff
- View resources for helping instructors accommodate students with disabilities in specific academic activities

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