Lesson 8: Health

PURPOSE

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

By reflecting on your course while reading the Lesson Content, you will be guided to consider possible modifications to your course specifically related to health impairments. By considering and discussing the access issues in a case study reading, you will develop an awareness of additional strategies and accommodations.

Questions to REFLECT upon while reading the CONTENT

What challenges might students with health 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 accommodating students with health impairments.

There are a range of medical diagnoses and subsequent health problems that can have a temporary or chronic impact on a student's academic performance. Common diagnoses include arthritis, cancer, Multiple Sclerosis, Asthma, AIDS, and heart disease. Unless the condition is neurological in nature, health impairments are not likely to directly affect learning. However, the secondary effects of illness and the side effects of medications can have a significant impact on memory, attention, strength, endurance, and energy levels.

Health impairments can result in a range of academic challenges for a student. Problems may include missing class for unpredictable and prolonged time periods and difficulties attending classes full-time or on a daily basis. Health problems may also interfere with the physical skills needed to be successful in laboratory, computer, or writing classes. Individuals with arthritis, for example, may have difficulty writing due to pain or joint deformities, thus making it difficult to meet the writing requirements for some classes. Students with Multiple Sclerosis may not be able to manipulate small laboratory equipment or complete tasks that require precise measuring, graphing, or drawing. Prolonged sitting may pose challenges for an individual with chronic pain or back problems. Illness or injury may result in limitations in mobility which requires the need for a wheelchair or scooter to get across campus. Some students must avoid specific activities that trigger their condition. For example, a student with asthma may need to avoid specific inhalants in a lab.
ACCOMMODATIONS
Instructor flexibility plays a key role in supporting the success of students with health impairments as many health conditions by nature are unpredictable. The provision of course outlines with clear and well organized information regarding readings, materials, assignments, and exams can help the student plan, organize, and prioritize his semester requirements. Posting course information on the Web is another way for a student to acquire important information without the need to be physically present in class. Prior knowledge of deadlines and exams may help the student plan doctor appointments and/or medical procedures around important class dates.

More detailed information regarding flexibility in attendance as deemed a reasonable accommodation may be found by visiting DSS’ Handbook for Faculty & Staff.

COMPUTER-BASED INSTRUCTION, DISTANCE LEARNING, and other options that minimize travel and classroom-based instruction provide feasible alternatives for students with illnesses that make regular class attendance difficult.

Examples of typical accommodations for students who have health impairments include:

- Note takers and note taking services
- Audiotaped or videotaped class sessions
- Flexible attendance requirements
- Extended exam time or alternative testing arrangements
- Assignments available in electronic format
- The use of electronic mail for faculty-student meetings and discussion groups for class discussions
- Web page or electronic mail distribution of course materials and lecture notes
- An environment which minimizes fatigue and injury
- An ergonomic workstation with adjustable keyboard trays, monitor risers, glare guards, foot rests, adjustable chairs, and/or anti-fatigue matting
- Speech recognition computer input devices, ergonomic keyboards, one-handed keyboards, expanded keyboards, or miniature keyboards

SUMMARY
HEALTH impairments affect daily living and can have a temporary or chronic impact on a student's academic performance to the access issues question. Be aware that when health conditions result in permanent or temporary mobility problems, accommodations for students with mobility impairments may be appropriate.

Your flexibility, the student's efforts to plan, organize, and prioritize his course workload, and the assistance of the Office of Disability Support Services in determining reasonable accommodations will all play important roles in supporting the academic success of the student with health impairments.
POSSIBLE DISCUSSION

After reading the following case study, what accommodations would you suggest in order to provide equal access?

BACKGROUND
My name is Karen. I'm a third-year math education student with Rheumatoid Arthritis. On a good day I can attend my classes, take notes, and participate without difficulty. When my arthritis is problematic, I have a hard time gripping a pencil to write. I also fatigue very quickly and cannot work on homework for prolonged periods of time.

ACCESS ISSUES
My arthritis interferes with my ability to type quickly and efficiently as well as to take handwritten class notes. My doctor has recently restricted me from typing and writing for extended periods of time. I also have difficulty carrying out extended math notations and writing my lesson plans for my education class. I also must frequently miss class due to my health issues. What accommodations can be made to help me with these difficulties?

FURTHER INFORMATION

- [Read answers to frequently asked questions, explore case studies or access additional resources regarding working with students with health 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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