Students Who are Wheelchair Users

Students may be a wheelchair user for a variety of reasons, including but not limited to paraplegia, quadriplegia, muscle conditions, neurological disorders, and traumatic brain injury. The needs of the student who is a wheelchair user will depend significantly on what parts of the body are impacted by the disability. If, in fact, the student’s legs are the only part of the body impacted, the needs may be as simple as physical accessibility of the environment. This means ensuring that there are limited/no barriers to prevent the student’s mobility around campus, that there is appropriate seating/tables for the student to access, and that classes and labs are located in a physically accessible environment.

For the students whose disability impacts more than their lower body, additional accommodations may be necessary. It is possible for the disorder to impact fine motor skills, such as writing, cognitive skills, and even respiratory skills. It is critical that the faculty member discuss privately with the student the impact of his/her disability within the classroom/lab environment. It is imperative that the faculty member closely follow the accommodations outlined in the Accommodations Letter. Questions about accommodations should be directed to the Disability Services Counselor at the campus.

Teacher Tips

• During the first few classes, invite students with disabilities to meet with you privately to discuss needs. It is also helpful to include a statement in your syllabus encouraging students with disabilities to meet with you.

• Do not make assumptions about the students. Talk with the student privately about the class requirements, any special needs that the student might have, and how those needs are going to be accommodated.

• Allow preferential seating, so that the student may sit in the area that is most comfortable. This may require that a special wheelchair accessible table or lab station be present or made available.

• It is possible that if the room environment is accessible that the student may not need any additional accommodations, if the disability is limited to the use of the wheelchair. Once physical accessibility is in place, this student may function as successfully and independently as any other student.

• Respect the wheelchair. It is an extension of the individual’s body space. Do not lean against or touch the wheelchair without the student’s permission. When carrying on an extended conversation, it is appropriate to sit or to kneel so that you are eye level with the student.

• Speak directly to the student, not to any other third party. Speak in a normal voice. Speaking loudly or in an exaggerated manner makes communication less effective.

• Some students in wheelchairs have other disabilities that impact their functioning and need for accommodations. If the student’s disabilities impact the hands and...
arms, the student may use assistive writing devices or a computer for writing. The student may use assistive technology or a scribe to take dictation (write for him/her). This student will require extended time and testing in a separate area, such as the Assessment Center. The student will require the use of a digital recorder for notes and may request your assistance in identifying another student in class who is taking good notes and is willing to share them. The Disability Services Office will provide NCR paper to facilitate the sharing of the notes.

- Other students may be wheelchair users due to a brain injury. In addition to the accommodations described above, this student may need to ask you to repeat directions. The student may need to make appointments with you during office hours to clarify assignments. The student may also use materials such as textbooks, handouts, and exams in an alternative format. Your Assistive Technology Lab can assist you by converting these materials to the appropriate format. It is critical that materials are given to the assistive technology lab in a timely manner to ensure that students with disabilities have access to curriculum materials at the same time as other students. Converting text to an alternative format is a lengthy process and therefore requires advanced planning.

- A final reason that students may be wheelchair users is due to chronic health issues/illnesses. This student may use many of the previously described accommodations, as documented on his/her Accommodations Letter. He/she may experience a higher than usual absentee rate due to illness and/or hospitalizations. Please work with these students to allow make up work and tests, within the limits that are appropriate. There are times when an incomplete may be appropriate for consideration. As the professor, only you can determine when a student has missed too much class to make up. Please take into account the unique challenges and needs of these students and work with them as flexibly as possible.

- Respect and implement the accommodations outlined by the Disability Services Office. Contact the DS Office if you have questions about a specific accommodation or the process for implementing the accommodation.

- All issues related to disability are highly confidential. Maintain that confidentiality at all times. Make arrangements to talk with the student privately when discussing disability-related issues or accommodations.

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**Remember**

All students satisfy the same standard for academic credit for your class. Standards should not be lowered, nor should the curriculum be “watered down.” Students with disabilities will simply be using accommodations in order to accomplish those standards.