

Accessing Education
A Guide for Faculty and Staff at



The University of Texas
ARLINGTON™

Office for Students with Disabilities

A Division of Student Affairs

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The University of Texas at Arlington is well known for its leadership in program accessibility for students with disabilities. As a result, UT Arlington has one of the largest populations of such students in the region. Currently, according to the 2000 U.S. Census, one in five people have some type of disability; 21.2 million people have a condition limiting basic physical activity; 9.3 million people have a sensory disability involving sight or hearing and 12.4 million people have a mental or emotional condition causing difficulty in learning, remembering or concentrating. To meet the many challenges generated by this unique population, UT Arlington has developed a support service program through the Office for Students with Disabilities.

The University of Texas at Arlington is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of federal equal opportunity legislation; reference Public Law 93-112 - The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended. With the passage of new federal legislation entitled the ***Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)***, pursuant to section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, there is renewed focus on providing this population with the same opportunities enjoyed by all citizens in the United States.

You, as a faculty or staff member, are required by law to provide "reasonable accommodations" for equal access to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of that disability. Student responsibility primarily rests with informing faculty of their need for accommodation and in providing authorized documentation through designated administrative channels. Each faculty member is encouraged to become familiar with relevant federal legislation regarding the rights of students with disabilities.

I. The Law and College Students with Disabilities

a. What is Section 504?

In 1973, Congress passed the Rehabilitation Act (Public Law 93-112). This act guarantees civil rights for Americans with disabilities. The law is grounded in the due process clause of the Fifth Amendment and the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. Section 504 is the section of the law that specifically refers to postsecondary and vocational education services.

Section 504 of Public Law 93-112 provides that " No otherwise qualified handicapped individual in the United States shall, solely by reason of handicap, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance." With respect to postsecondary and vocational education services, "otherwise qualified" means a person with disabilities who meets the academic and technical standards requisite to admission or participation in the program or activity.

b. Does Section 504 mean lowering academic standards?

- ✓ Preferential seating is important for students who are visually impaired. When visual cues are not available, the student must receive all auditory cues possible. Please arrange seating the first day of class.
- ✓ Give the student plenty of advance notice in the event that research papers are to be assigned as someone may have to aid in the literature search, both in finding and in reading materials.
- ✓ Early in the semester, it is a good idea to orient the student to the room by explaining where things are located and guiding the person around the room.
- ✓ Inform the student when classroom furniture has been rearranged.
- ✓ Keep doors fully open or fully closed.
- ✓ If an individual who is visually impaired seems to need assistance, identify yourself and offer your services.
- ✓ If you are walking with an individual who is visually impaired, let him or her take your arm just above the elbow and walk in a relaxed manner. The person can usually follow the motions of your body. Warn the person when you are approaching a step or other obstacle.
- ✓ When giving directions, use descriptive words such as "straight ahead" or "forward." Be specific in directions and avoid vague terms such as "over there."
- ✓ When interacting with students who are visually impaired, use verbal identification when you arrive or leave an area.
- ✓ Guide/service animals are working animals; it can be hazardous if the guide dog is distracted. Never pet the dog without the owner's knowledge and permission. Normally, the dog is "working" when wearing the harness.
- ✓ Do not hesitate to use words like "see" or "look" when speaking with an individual who is visually impaired. Also make sure you identify yourself by name, maintain a normal voice volume, speak directly to the person, and maintain eye contact.

VI. Deafness and hearing impairments

a. Suggestions for teaching students who are deaf or hard of hearing

To communicate effectively with an individual who is deaf or hard of hearing, we suggest the following guidelines:

- ✓ Obtain the student's attention before speaking. A tap on the shoulder, a wave or another visual signal is usually effective.
- ✓ Clue the individual who is hearing impaired into the topic of discussion. Students who are deaf need to know what subject matter will be discussed in order to pick up words that help them follow the conversation. This is especially important to individuals who depend on oral communication.
- ✓ Speak slowly and clearly; but do not yell, exaggerate, or over pronounce. Exaggeration and overemphasis of words distorts lip movements, making speech reading more difficult. Try to enunciate each word without force or tension. Short sentences are easier to understand than long ones.
- ✓ Look directly at the student when speaking. Even a slight turn of your head can obscure their ability to see your lips.
- ✓ Do not place anything in your mouth when speaking. Mustaches that obscure the lips, smoking, pencil chewing, and putting your hands in front of your face all make it difficult for students who are deaf to follow what is being said.
- ✓ Maintain eye contact with the student. Eye contact conveys the feeling of direct communication. Even if a sign language interpreter is present, continue to speak directly to individual who is deaf. He/she will turn to the interpreter as needed.
- ✓ Avoid standing in front of a light source such as a window or bright light. The bright background and shadows created on the face make it almost impossible to speech read.
- ✓ If the student indicates that they did not understand you, first repeat and then try to rephrase a thought rather than repeating the same words. If the person only missed one or two words the first time, one repetition will usually help. Particular combinations of lip movements sometimes are difficult for individuals who are hearing impaired to speech read. Do not be embarrassed to communicate by paper and pencil or computer, if necessary. Getting the message across is more important than the method used.
- ✓ Use pantomime, body language and facial expression to help communicate. A lively speaker is always more interesting to watch.
- ✓ Be courteous to the individual who is deaf during conversation. If the telephone rings or some one knocks at the door, excuse yourself and tell the student that you are answering the phone or responding to the knock.
- ✓ Use open-ended questions that must be answered by more than "yes" or "no." Do not assume that a student who is hearing impaired has understood your message if the student's response is a nod of acknowledgement. Open-ended questions ensure that your information has been communicated.

As I'm sure you've learned, accommodating students with disabilities is a multi-faceted service which requires educators, psychologists, medical professionals, and legal experts to all come together in order to create fair and equal access for all UT Arlington students. This holistic approach is an endeavor to which we are extremely dedicated, but we also greatly value the input of the faculty and staff at UT Arlington. Feel free to contact us for any reason, we are always happy to answer questions or work toward solutions. Thank you for taking time to learn about our office and the process of disability accommodation at UT Arlington.