

Suggestions for Advising Students with Disabilities:

In her publication A checklist for making advising services welcoming and accessible to everyone Sheryl Burgstahler (2012) provides advising offices information about universal design and how to make themselves welcoming to as many people as possible. The following information was extracted for core advisors at Loyola University Maryland. Please contact Disability Support Services if you would like more information regarding core advising for students with disabilities at dss@loyola.edu.

As increasing numbers of people with disabilities pursue educational opportunities at all levels, accessibility to student services, including advising, is of increasing importance. The goal is simply equal access; everyone who needs to use student services should have access to them.

Advising services are an important aspect of most students' educational experiences. There are many different kinds of advisors—faculty advisors, advisors in a specific academic department, general advisors—and they should all be aware of unique issues of people with disabilities and other groups so that they can communicate effectively and provide sound advice as students plan their studies. Considering how their disabilities might impact academic and career plans is essential to the success of students with disabilities.

Legal Issues

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments of 2008 prohibit discrimination against individuals with disabilities. According to these laws, no otherwise qualified person with a disability shall, solely by reason of his or her disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity of a public entity. This means that student services as well as academic programs must be accessible to qualified students with disabilities.

Physical Distance and Length of Time Between Classes

Physical distance and time between classes should be considered when planning a course schedule with a student who has a disability. Many campuses are large and, for a student with a mobility impairment or a student who is blind, it can be difficult to get from one class to the next promptly if there is too little time between them.

Length of time between classes can also be a concern for a person with a learning disability. A student who is receiving extended exam time as an accommodation in one class should not schedule another class immediately following. Otherwise, the student will be late to the second class on days when there are tests in the first class. Having sufficient time between classes also facilitates learning by allowing a student to review the content presented and organize notes immediately after each class session.

Format and Time of Classes

An issue to consider for all students, but particularly for students with learning disabilities, Attention-Deficit Disorder (ADD), or Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), is class format. It may be difficult for some students to succeed in several lecture classes in the same quarter. Students with health or other impairments may need to avoid classes where attendance at every class session is essential; online courses should be considered. These students may also have trouble attending classes that take place at certain times of the day, such as very early in the morning or in the evening. Their advisors can help them develop appropriate schedules.

Communication Tips:

Treat people with disabilities with the same respect and consideration with which you treat others. There are no strict rules when it comes to relating to people with disabilities. However, here are some helpful hints.

General

- Ask a person with a disability if he or she needs help before providing assistance.
- Talk directly to the person with a disability, not through the person's companion or interpreter.
- Refer to a person's disability only if it is relevant to the conversation. If so, mention the person first and then the disability. "A man who is blind" is better than "a blind man" because it puts the person first.
- Avoid negative descriptions of a person's disability. For example, "a person who uses a wheelchair" is more appropriate than "a person *confined* to a wheelchair." A wheelchair is not confining— it's liberating!
- Do not interact with a person's guide or service dog unless you have received permission to do so.

Blind or Low Vision

- Be descriptive. Say, "The computer is about three feet to your left," rather than "The computer is over there."
- Speak all of the content presented with overhead projections and other visuals.
- When guiding people with visual impairments, offer them your arm rather than grabbing or pushing them.

Learning Disabilities

- Offer directions or instructions both orally and in writing. If asked, read instructions to individuals who have specific learning disabilities.

Mobility Impairments

- Sit or otherwise position yourself at the approximate height of people sitting in wheelchairs when you interact.

Speech Impairments

- Listen carefully. Repeat what you think you understand and then ask the person with a speech impairment to clarify or repeat the portion that you did not understand.

Deaf or Hard of Hearing

- Face people with hearing impairments so they can see your lips. Avoid talking while chewing gum or eating.
- Speak clearly at a normal volume. Speak louder only if requested.
- Use paper and pencil if the person who is deaf does not read lips or if more accurate communication is needed.
- In groups raise hands to be recognized so the person who is deaf knows who is speaking. Repeat questions from audience members.
- When using an interpreter, speak directly to the person who is deaf; when an interpreter voices what a person who is deaf signs, look at the person who is deaf, not the interpreter.

Psychiatric Impairments

- Provide information in clear, calm, respectful tones.
- Allow opportunities for addressing specific questions.