



Equal Access: Student Services

DO-IT

As increasing numbers of people with disabilities pursue postsecondary educational opportunities, the accessibility of admissions offices, libraries, computer labs, counseling and tutoring centers, campus events and activities, and other student services is of increasing importance. The goal is simply equal access; everyone who needs to use your services should be able to do so comfortably and efficiently.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 prohibit discrimination against individuals with disabilities. According to these laws, no otherwise qualified person with a disability shall, solely by reason of his/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 postsecondary student services, as well as academic programs must be accessible to qualified students with disabilities.

To make your student services operation accessible, employ principles of universal design. Universal design means that rather than designing your facility and services for the average user, you design it for people with a broad range of abilities (e.g., people with disabilities, elderly people, non-English speaking individuals). Keep in mind that students and other visitors may have learning disabilities or visual, speech, hearing, and mobility impairments. Preparing your program to be accessible to them will minimize the need for special accommodations for those who use your services and for future employees as well.

Consider all of your potential visitors, including those with disabilities, as you plan services. Make sure everyone can:

- get to the facility and maneuver within it.
- access materials and electronic resources.
- make use of equipment and software.
- participate in events and other activities.

Also make sure that staff are trained to support people with disabilities, respond to specific requests for accommodations in a timely manner, and know who they can contact on campus if they have disability-related questions. With these key issues in mind, you can make your services accessible to everyone.

The following questions can help guide you in making your facility and services universally accessible.

Facility and Environment

- Are parking areas, pathways, and entrances to the building wheelchair-accessible?
- Are doorway openings at least 32 inches wide and doorway thresholds no higher than one half inch?
- Are all levels of the facility connected via an accessible route of travel?
- Is there signage outside the buildings indicating which entrances are accessible?
- Are there ample high-contrast, large print directional signs to and throughout the office?
- Are ramps and/or elevators provided as alternatives to stairs? Do elevators have both auditory and visual signals for floors? Are elevator controls marked in large print and Braille or raised notation? Can people seated in wheelchairs easily reach all elevator controls?
- Are wheelchair-accessible restrooms with well marked signs available in or near the office?
- Are service desks wheelchair accessible?
- Are telecommunication devices for the deaf (TTY) available?
- Are aisles kept wide and clear for wheelchair users? Have protruding objects been removed or minimized for the safety of users who are visually impaired?

Staff

- Are staff members familiar with adaptive technology and alternate document formats available in the office?
- Do staff members know how to respond to requests for disability-related accommodations, such as sign language interpreters?



- Are staff members aware of issues related to communicating with students who have disabilities? (See Helpful Communication Hints at the end of this publication)

Printed Materials

- Is there a statement about your commitment to access and procedures for requesting disability-related accommodations in key publications?
- Are all publications available (immediately or in a timely manner) in alternate formats such as Braille, large text, audio, and electronic text?
- Are printed materials within easy reach from a variety of heights and without furniture blocking access?
- Is a CCTV or large magnifying glass available to enlarge printed materials?

Computers and Assistive Technology

Some student service units use computers to provide information. In this case, the organization will not have special equipment on hand for every type of disability. But you can have available commonly used assistive technology. Start with a few key items, and add new technology as students request it. Purchasing the following products for computer workstations will get you started:

- At least one adjustable table for each type of workstation can assist students who use wheelchairs or are short in stature.
- Large print key labels can assist students with low vision.
- Software to enlarge screen images can assist students with low vision and learning disabilities.
- Large monitors (at least 17 inches but even larger is better) can assist students with low vision and learning disabilities.
- A speech output system can be used by students with low vision, blindness, and learning disabilities.
- Trackballs can be used by some people who have difficulty controlling a mouse.
- Wrist and forearm rests can assist some people with mobility impairments.

Electronic Information and Resources

- Do electronic resources, including Web pages, adhere to accessibility guidelines or standards adopted by the institution or the specific facility (e.g., Section 508 standards for accessible electronic and information technology, Web Accessibility Initiative guidelines for accessible Web design - *see Resources section*)?
- Are text alternatives provided for graphic images?
- Is standard HTML used for Web resources?
- Can the content of Web pages be accessed with a text-based browser?

Events

- Are events sponsored by the organization located in wheelchair-accessible facilities? Is the accessible entrance clearly marked?
- Is information about how to request disability-related accommodations included in publications promoting events?

Planning and Evaluation

- Do you have policies and procedures that assure access to facilities, printed materials, computers, and electronic resources for people with disabilities and demand that accessibility be considered in the procurement process?
- Do you have a designated staff member and/or committee who assures that services are accessible to students with disabilities and responds to requests for accommodations?
- Are people with disabilities included in the student service planning process?
- Do you have a procedure to assure a quick response to requests for disability-related accommodations?
- Is there a written description on how to request disability-related accommodations in service-related publications?

For further information regarding accessibility for students with disabilities and a fuller understanding about campus disability services, contact the Disabled Student Services office on your campus.



Videotape

A new 10-minute videotape (expected availability 12/03), *Equal Access: Student Services*, will demonstrate key points summarized in this handout. It may be ordered by sending a check for \$25 to DO-IT. Contact DO-IT for a list of over 25 other videotapes that may be of interest. Permission is granted to reproduce DO-IT videotapes for educational, non-commercial purposes as long as the source is acknowledged.

Resources

The following Web sites provide a good place to begin searching for more information about making your services accessible to everyone.

Accessible Technology

Access to the Future: Preparing College Students with Disabilities for Careers
<http://www.washington.edu/doit/Brochures/Careers/future.html>

The ADA Checklist for Readily Achievable Barrier Removal
<http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/checkweb.htm>

Adaptive Technology for the Internet
http://www.ala.org/Content/NavigationMenu/Products_and_Publications/Books/Editons/Adaptive_technology_for_the_Internet_Mates_Barbara_T.htm

The Ad-a-p-t-a-b-l-e Approach: Planning Accessible Libraries
<http://www.rit.edu/~easi/itd/itdv02n4/article2.html>

DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology)
<http://www.washington.edu/doit/Brochures/Technology>

Equal Access: Computer Labs
<http://www.washington.edu/doit/Brochures/Technology/comp.access.html>

Northeast Technical Assistance Center Tipsheets
<http://netac.rit.edu/publication/tipsheet>

Real Connections: Making Distance Learning Accessible to Everyone

<http://www.washington.edu/doit/Brochures/Technology/distance.learn.html>

Section 508 Standards for Accessible Technology
<http://www.access-board.gov/sec508/guide/>

Web Accessibility (WAI) Guidelines
<http://www.webaim.org>

World Wide Access: Accessible Web Design
<http://www.washington.edu/doit/Brochures/Technology/universal.design.html>

About DO-IT

DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology) serves to increase the successful participation of individuals with disabilities in challenging academic programs and careers. Primary funding for DO-IT is provided by the National Science Foundation, the U.S. Department of Education, and the State of Washington. This handout and accompanying videotape are based upon work supported by the U.S. Department of Education under Grant No. P333A020044. Any questions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the federal government.

For more information, to be placed on the DO-IT mailing list, or to request materials in an alternate format, contact:

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Your gift is tax deductible as specified in IRS regulations. Pursuant to RCW 19.09, the University of Washington is registered as a charitable organization with the Secretary of State, State of Washington. For more information, call the Office of the Secretary of State, 800-322-4483.



Helpful Communication Hints

There are no strict rules when it comes to relating to people with disabilities. However, here are some helpful hints.

General

- Treat people with disabilities with the same respect and consideration that you do with others.
- Ask a person with a disability if he /she needs help before helping.
- 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.
- Refer to the person first and then the disability. "A man who is blind" is better than "a blind man" because it emphasizes 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."
- Ask a person with a disability if they need assistance prior to making an assumption that they do.

Blind or Low Vision

- Be descriptive for people with visual impairments. Say, "The computer is about three feet to your left," rather than, "The computer is over there."
- When guiding people with visual impairments, offer them your arm rather than grabbing or pushing them.
- Always ask permission before you interact with a person's guide or service dog.

Learning Disabilities

- If asked, read instructions to users with a specific learning disability.

Mobility Disabilities

- Try sitting or positioning yourself at the approximate height of people in wheelchairs when you interact.

Speech and Language Dysfluency

- Listen carefully and ask people with speech impairments to repeat what they have said if you don't understand.

Deaf or Hard of Hearing

- Face people with hearing impairments and speak clearly when you talk to them so they can see your lips.
- Consider the use of transparencies or PowerPoint™ rather than using the board or flipcharts to write on if you are doing a presentation. Students with hearing impairments can continue to read your lips.

Psychological Disabilities

- Provide clear information in clear, respectful, matter-of-fact tones.
- Provide written along with verbal information .
- Allow opportunities for questions/ answers, and for experiential practice .