

Teaching Students With Physical Disabilities /Mobility Impairments

Definition

Physical disabilities involve the partial or total loss of function of one or more parts of the body. Physical disabilities which affect mobility are generally either orthopedic or neurological in nature. Orthopedic disabilities include, but are not limited to, arthritis, muscular dystrophy, spina bifida, and amputation. Neurological disabilities impacting the ability to move entail the nervous system and include, but are not limited to, cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, head trauma and spinal cord injury. Students with mobility impairments may utilize assistive devices such as wheelchairs, scooters, walkers, crutches, canes or artificial limbs.

Possible Characteristics and Educational Implications

- Fatigue
- Pain
- Limited physical exertion and stamina
- Limited range of motion
- Poor coordination
- Limited muscle strength
- Limited fine motor dexterity
- Limited gross movement
- Muscle tremors
- Paralysis
- Slow typing speed
- Inability to sit in one position for a sustained length of time
- Negative side effects of medication

Suggestions and Instructional Strategies for Faculty

- Provide clear guidelines and expectations about the course.
- Provide reading lists ahead of time.
- Make sure directions are given step by step.
- Give directions both verbally and in writing.
- Ensure that the physical environment is barrier-free.
- Be aware of the fire evacuation procedures for students with mobility impairments.
- Always ask a student with a mobility impairment if he/she would like assistance before you help.
- If speaking with a student in a wheelchair for more than a few minutes, sit down or move back to create a more comfortable position for conversation.
- Work together with the student and the Disability Resource Center to ensure a successful learning experience for the student.

Possible Academic Accommodations

- Priority seating
- Reduced course load
- Classrooms and labs in accessible locations
- Extended exam time with allowances for breaks
- Extended time on lengthy assignments
- Access to class notes/note taker
- Use of tape recorder for lectures
- Volunteer or paid lab assistant
- Adjustable tables/adapted seating
- Class assignments made available in electronic format

(continued on back)



**Disability
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- Use of assistive technology
- Consideration for absences when disability is exacerbated

This document is a compilation of resources from BRCC, CCDI and NYU.