

Teaching Students with Other Disabilities

Many other conditions may interfere with a student's academic functioning. Some of their symptoms, like limited mobility or impaired vision, and the types of intervention required may resemble those related to other disabilities. Below are brief descriptions of some of the more prevalent disabilities among students, as well as recommended accommodations.

Speech Impairments

Speech impairments range from problems with articulation or voice strength, to complete loss of voice. They include difficulties in projection, as in chronic hoarseness and esophageal speech; fluency problems, as in stuttering; and nominal aphasia, which alters the articulation of particular words or terms.

Some of these difficulties can be managed by such mechanical devices as electronic "speaking" machines or computerized voice synthesizers. Others may be treated through speech therapy. Speech impairments can be aggravated by the anxiety inherent in oral communication in a group.

Teaching Strategies

When interacting with a student who has a speech impairment, instructors should consider using the following accommodations:

- Give students the opportunity, but do not compel them to speak in class.
- Permit students the time they require to express themselves, without unsolicited aid in filling in gaps in their speech. Don't be reluctant to ask the student to repeat a statement. While waiting for a student to find a word or to complete an expression, maintain comfortable eye contact and posture with the student.
- Address students naturally and in a regular speaking voice. Don't assume the "spread phenomenon" – that they cannot hear or comprehend.
- Consider course modification, such as one-to-one presentations or the use of a computer with a voice synthesizer.

HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS is caused by a virus that destroys the body's immune system. This condition leaves the person vulnerable to infections and cancers that can be avoided when the immune system is working normally. The virus is transmitted primarily through

sexual contact or needle sharing with intravenous drug users. It is not transmitted through casual contact.

Although manifestations of HIV/AIDS are varied, depending on the particular infections or diseases the individual develops, extreme fatigue is a common symptom. Because of the different manifestations, classroom adaptations will likewise vary.

Students with HIV/AIDS may be afraid to reveal their condition because of the social stigma, fear, and/or misunderstanding surrounding this illness. It is therefore mandatory that confidentiality be maintained. In addition, if the issue should arise it is important for faculty to deal openly and non-judgmentally with it, and to foster an atmosphere of understanding.

Cancer

Because cancer can occur in almost any organ system of the body, the systems and particular disabling effects will vary greatly from one person to another. Some people experience visual problems, lack of balance and coordination, joint pains, backaches, headaches, abdominal pains, drowsiness, lethargy, difficulty in breathing and swallowing, weakness, bleeding, or anemia.

The primary treatments for cancer (i.e., radiation therapy, chemotherapy, surgery) may engender additional effects. Radiation therapy can cause violent nausea, drowsiness and fatigue, thus affecting academic functioning or attendance. Surgery can result in amputation, paralysis, sensory deficits, and language and memory problems.

Traumatic Brain Injury

Students with traumatic brain injuries are becoming increasingly more prevalent. These students often exhibit one or more of the following symptoms: short-term memory problems, serious attention and concentration deficits, sensory dysfunction, cognitive deficits, behavior problems, problems of judgment and organization, anxiety attacks, and difficulties with mobility.

Respiratory Problems

Many students have chronic breathing problems, the most common of which are bronchial asthma and emphysema. Respiratory problems are characterized by attacks of shortness of breath and difficulty breathing, sometimes triggered by, either physical or mental stress. Fatigue and difficulty climbing stairs may be major problems, depending on the severity of the attacks. Frequent absence from class may occur, and hospitalization may be required when prescribed medications fail to relieve the symptoms

Seizure Disorders

There are two types of seizures: generalized or partial. Generalized seizures cause a loss of consciousness; the whole body is affected when the electrical discharge crosses the entire brain. Tonic-clonic seizures (once known as grand mal) and absence seizures (pronounced ab-SAHNZ) are generalized seizures. A student who has a tonic-clonic seizure falls, loses consciousness, and has a convulsion, which is a sudden involuntary contraction of a group of muscles. During an absence seizure, the person loses consciousness, but only for a brief period lasting from a few seconds to a half minute or so. The student, teachers, and peers might not realize a seizure has taken place. Absence seizures can occur up to 140 times a day and severely affect learning.

Sickle Cell Anemia

Sickle Cell Anemia is a hereditary disease that reduces blood supply to vital organs and reduces oxygen supply to the blood cells. These conditions make adequate classroom ventilation an important concern.

Because many vital organs are affected by Sickle Cell Anemia, the student may also suffer from eye disease, heart conditions, lung problems, and acute abdominal pain. At times, limbs or joints may be affected. The disease is characterized by crisis periods with extreme pain, which may necessitate hospitalizations and/or absence from class. Completing academic assignments during these periods may not be possible.

Substance Abuse

Substance abuse is a condition of physiological and/or psychological dependence on any of a variety of chemicals, such as illegal drugs, some prescription drugs, or alcohol. Individuals who are recovering from drug or alcohol abuse, or who are in treatment programs to assist their recovery, are covered by federal anti-discrimination legislation and are eligible for college services for students with disabilities.

These students may experience psychological problems, such as depression, anxiety, or very low self-esteem during their treatment and rehabilitation. They may exhibit poor behavioral control and, if they are using medication as part of their treatments, they may experience undesirable side effects.

Pervasive Development Disorder

Autism and its related disabilities under the Pervasive Development Disorder (PDD) classification are neurobiological-based developmental disabilities that are characterized by difficulties in communication effectively (e.g., asking for help or clarification), developing social relationships, and interacting with others appropriately.

The significance of impact varies widely, but an estimated 20%-25% of individuals who have been diagnosed with this disability have the ability to perform academic functions at or beyond the level of other university students. People with PDD, specifically Autism and Asperger's Syndrome, often have difficulty in processing abstract language and can benefit from visual accommodations (such as an advanced copy of overheads, or specific written directions about assignments) to support auditory information provided during a lecture.

The preceding list is only a few of the conditions listed in the category of Other Disabilities. Other conditions that require an administrative or academic adjustment (e.g., class schedules, parking, and course adjustments) and do not fit into any of the above categories may qualify the student for disability services.