

## Working with a Student Who Has a Visual Impairment

- The type or degree of a student's visual impairment can vary significantly. Total blindness is actually rather rare; however, a student who cannot see well enough to function in everyday activities such as reading or driving (even with corrective lenses) is considered to have a visual impairment which is covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Some students have near vision but not far. Some see only to the side, others see everything but it is blurry. Thus, do not think that only those with white canes qualify for accommodations. A student who "looks normal" may have a serious visual impairment.
- A visual impairment does not affect the student's ability to think or hear. Therefore, speak directly to the student as you would with anyone else.
- Let the student know that you are available for assistance but do not assume that assistance is needed.
- Ask the student if you may orient him/her to a room and any obstacles you may perceive that it contains.
- When lecturing, use descriptive words such as, "in front of you at eleven o'clock" rather than "over there." Say, "in the upper left quadrant", not "up there."
- Do not avoid visual word such as "look" and "see."
- Students with partial vision who are legally blind sometimes can function very normally until they have to read print. **Please note on the Letter of Accommodation if the student is able to read an enlarged font. A magnifier is available in library for reference or reserve materials.**
- If you are walking with a person who is blind, let him/her take your arm just above the elbow and walk in a relaxed manner. The student can usually follow the motion of your body. If the student is using a guide dog, the dog will usually be kept on the left. The student will take your arm with his/her right hand, but when in doubt, ask.
- Ask before you pet or move toward the guide dog. It can be hazardous for the student if the dog is distracted. Some dogs are in strict obedience programs and are not to be petted when in harness.
- A guide dog has the same social status as a pair of glasses. The dog can attend classes and go with the student anywhere on campus.
- If you are walking away from a person who is blind, let him/her know you are leaving so he/she does not end up talking to him or herself.
- The student is responsible for making sure classroom and academic needs are known. The professor is responsible for assuring education program accessibility.

If there are questions or concerns, talk with the student after class or in private. In addition, the Director of Disability Support Services is available to assist in problem solving. (x7206).