



**DO-IT**

# Equal Access: Universal Design of Your Project

A Checklist for Making Projects Welcoming, Accessible, and Usable  
by Sheryl Burgstahler, Ph.D.

As increasing numbers of people with disabilities participate in academic opportunities and careers, the accessibility of classes, service offices, libraries, computer labs, electronic resources, events, and specific project activities increases in importance. The goal is simply equal access; everyone who qualifies to use your resources or participate in sponsored activities should be able to do so comfortably and efficiently.

## Legal Issues

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 mandate that 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 in public programs. This means that courses, student services, information resources, and project activities should be accessible to qualified individuals with disabilities. This is true for activities funded by federal, state, corporate, or private grants, gifts, cooperative agreements, or contracts.

## Universal Design

An approach to making facilities, information, and activities accessible to and usable by everyone is called universal design. Universal design means that rather than designing for the average user, you design for people with differing native languages, genders, racial and ethnic backgrounds, abilities, and disabilities. Make sure that project staff and volunteers are trained to support people with disabilities, respond to specific requests for accommodations in a timely manner, and know who to contact regarding disability-related issues. The universal design of your project offerings will make everyone feel welcome and minimize the need for special accommodations for individual participants.

For further information about applications of universal design consult [www.washington.edu/doi/Resources/udesign.html](http://www.washington.edu/doi/Resources/udesign.html) or the book *Universal*

*design in higher education: From principles to practice* published by Harvard Education Press and edited by Sheryl Burgstahler and Rebecca Cory. To receive a 20% discount on your order of this book through DO-IT, visit the website [www.washington.edu/doi/UDHE/coupon.html](http://www.washington.edu/doi/UDHE/coupon.html).

## Guidelines and Examples

Addressing the following questions provides a good starting point for making your facility, information resources, and project activities universally accessible. This content does not provide legal advice. Contact the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) about legal mandates.

## Planning, Policies, and Evaluation

Consider diversity issues as you plan and evaluate services.

- Are people with disabilities, racial and ethnic minorities, men and women, young and old students, and other groups represented in the project planning process in numbers proportional to those of the whole campus or community?
- Do you have project policies and procedures that ensure access to facilities, events, and information resources for people with disabilities?
- Are disability-related access issues and other diversity issues addressed in program evaluation plans and instruments?
- Do you address issues related to the inclusion of participants with disabilities in grant proposals, perhaps by partnering with an organization with expertise in this area?

## Information Resources and Technology

If career services uses computers as information resources, ensure these systems employ accessible design, that staff members are aware of accessibility options, and systems are in place to make accommodations.

- Do pictures in your publications and website include people with diverse characteristics with respect to race, gender, age, and disability?



- In key publications of your project, do you include a statement about your commitment to access and procedures for requesting disability-related accommodations? For example, you could include the following statement: “Our project’s goal is to make materials and activities accessible to all participants. Please inform organization leaders of accessibility barriers you encounter and request accommodations that will make project activities and information resources accessible to you.”
- Are all printed publications available (immediately or in a timely manner) in alternate formats such as Braille, large print, and electronic text?
- Are key documents provided in a language(s) other than English?
- Are printed materials in your facility or at an event within easy reach from a variety of heights and without furniture blocking access?
- Do electronic resources, including web pages, adhere to accessibility standards adopted, your institution, or your project or funding source? *Section 508 Standards for Electronic and Information Technology* ([www.access-board.gov/sec508/guide/](http://www.access-board.gov/sec508/guide/)) and *Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI)* ([www.w3.org/WAI/](http://www.w3.org/WAI/)) are most commonly used. For example, are text alternatives provided for graphic images on web pages? Can the content be accessed with a text-only browser and by using the keyboard alone? For general information about making your website accessible to everyone, consult the video and presentation *World Wide Access: Accessible Web Design* at [www.washington.edu/doi/Video/www.html](http://www.washington.edu/doi/Video/www.html).
- Do you include a statement on your website affirming your commitment to accessible design? For example, you could include the following statement: “We strive to make our website accessible to everyone. We provide text descriptions of graphic images and photos. Video clips are open-captioned and audio-described. Suggestions for increasing the accessibility of these pages are welcome.”
- Do videos developed or used in the project have captions? Are they audio-described?
- Do you ask vendors about accessibility features (e.g., captioned video, compatibility with assistive technology) before purchasing computers and software?
- Is an adjustable-height table available for each type of workstation to assist participants who use wheelchairs or are small or large in stature?
- Do you provide adequate work space for both left- and right-handed users?
- Are large-print key labels available to assist participants with low vision?
- Is software to enlarge screen images and a large monitor available to assist people with low vision and learning disabilities?
- Do you provide a trackball to be used by someone who has difficulty controlling a mouse?
- Are staff members aware of accessibility options (e.g., enlarged text feature) included in computer operating systems and of assistive technology available in the facility?
- Are procedures in place for a timely response to requests for assistive technology?

For more information, consult *Creating Video and Multimedia Products That Are Accessible to People with Sensory Impairments* at [www.washington.edu/doi/Brochures/Technology/vid\\_sensory.html](http://www.washington.edu/doi/Brochures/Technology/vid_sensory.html) and the *Working Together* videos and publications at [www.washington.edu/doi/Resources/at.html](http://www.washington.edu/doi/Resources/at.html). For making distance learning accessible, consult *Real Connections: Making Distance Learning Accessible to Everyone* video presentation and publication at [www.washington.edu/doi/Video/real\\_con.html](http://www.washington.edu/doi/Video/real_con.html).

### **Project and Activity Facilities**

- Ensure that facilities, activities, materials, and equipment are physically accessible to and usable by all participants, and that all potential characteristics are addressed in safety considerations.
- Ensure physical access, comfort, and safety within an environment that is welcoming to visitors with a variety of abilities, racial and ethnic backgrounds, genders, and ages.
  - Are there parking areas, pathways, and entrances to the building that are wheelchair accessible and clearly identified?



- Are all levels of the facility connected via an accessible route of travel?
- Are aisles kept wide and clear of obstructions for the safety of users who have mobility or visual impairments?
- Are wheelchair-accessible and child-friendly restrooms with well-marked signs available in or near the facility?
- Are universally-recognized icons used in signage?
- Is at least part of a service counter or desk at a height accessible from a seated position?
- Is adequate light available?
- Are there ample high-contrast, large-print directional signs to and throughout the facility, that include directions to accessible routes? When appropriate are these signs marked in Braille?
- Are telecommunication devices for the deaf (TTY) available?

Consult the *ADA Checklist for Readily Achievable Barrier Removal* at [www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/checkweb.htm](http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/checkweb.htm) for more suggestions. For computing facilities, consult the *Equal Access: Universal Design of Computer Labs* video and publication at [www.washington.edu/doi/Video/equal.html](http://www.washington.edu/doi/Video/equal.html).

### Staff

Make sure staff are prepared to work with all program participants.

- Are all staff members familiar with the availability and use of a TTY/TDD, the Telecommunications Relay Service, assistive technology, and alternate document formats?
- Do all staff members know how to respond to requests for disability-related accommodations, such as sign language interpreters?
- Are project staff and contractors in specific assignment areas (e.g., web page development, video creation) knowledgeable about accessibility requirements and considerations?
- Are all staff members aware of issues related to communicating with participants who have disabilities? Do staff deliver conference presentations and exhibits that are accessible

to all participants? See “Presentation, Exhibit, and Other Communication Hints” at the end of this publication. For further suggestions, consult *Effective Communication: Faculty and Students with Disabilities* at [www.washington.edu/doi/Brochures/Academics/effective.html](http://www.washington.edu/doi/Brochures/Academics/effective.html).

### Checklist Updates

This checklist was field tested at more than twenty postsecondary institutions nationwide (see [www.washington.edu/doi/Brochures/Academics/admin.html](http://www.washington.edu/doi/Brochures/Academics/admin.html)). The results of a nationwide survey to test face-validity of checklist items led to further refinement of the checklist. To increase the usefulness of this working document, send suggestions to [sherylb@u.washington.edu](mailto:sherylb@u.washington.edu).

### 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 such as those in science, engineering, mathematics, and technology. This publication was supported by the U.S. Department of Education (FIPSE grant #P116D990138-01) and the National Science Foundation (cooperative agreement #0227995). Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation. For further information, to be placed on the DO-IT mailing list, or to request materials in an alternate format, contact:

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## Presentation, Exhibit, and Other Communication Hints

Treat people with disabilities with the same respect and consideration with which you treat others. There are no strict rules when it comes to delivering a presentation, hosting an exhibit, and otherwise 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!
- Provide information in alternate means (e.g., written, spoken, diagrams).
- Do not interact with a person's guide dog 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 instruction 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.
- Repeat questions from audience members.
- Use paper and pencil if the person who is deaf does not read lips or if more accurate communication is needed.
- 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.