



# Equal Access: Universal Design of Housing and Residential Life

**DO-IT**

A Checklist for the Universal Design of Housing and Residential Life

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College and university housing facilities and services, whether for single students or families, are important elements of a college education for many students. For students with disabilities, living on campus can facilitate access to academic programs and campus activities. This publication is a resource for campus housing and residential life staff and identifies key areas of concern, offers general guidance, and provides resources regarding disability access issues.

## Legal Issues

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 or 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. Housing programs must also comply with applicable state laws and federal laws such as the Fair Housing Act and Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). This publication does not provide legal advice. Consult your campus legal counsel or ADA/504 compliance officer regarding relevant legislation. Consultation with your regional Office for Civil Rights (OCR) can also help clarify issues.

## Facilities and Programs to Consider

Housing facilities owned or managed by the campus, as well as services they offer, should adopt accessibility policies, guidelines, and procedures. These facilities and services include but are not limited to

- single undergraduate student residence halls and apartments;
- graduate student and family housing;
- academic theme houses, special interest houses, or sorority and fraternity houses;
- off-campus housing referral service (for example, if a referral system is operated by the housing office, especially if landlords are solicited for their listings, it is advisable to collect and disseminate information about disability access);
- cafeterias, restaurants, meeting rooms, common areas, restrooms, recreational facilities, and computer labs operated by housing services;
- childcare facilities;
- transportation services operated by the housing office, such as large passenger buses or small shuttle vehicles; and
- housing leased by or from the campus (e.g., ensure that leasing agreements address disability access issues in facilities, facility renovations and maintenance, and individual requests for facility adjustments such as adding grab bars in a bathroom).

## Whom to Consider

In addition to students who live in campus housing, other individuals should be ensured access to housing facilities and programs. They include the following:

- a student's spouse or partner, children, or other family members with disabilities eligible to live with them;
- friends and other individuals with disabilities who visit students;
- prospective students, parents, and other visitors with disabilities who are touring housing facilities as part of a campus tour;
- newly admitted students who are participating in a "stay-over" program to gain greater understanding of campus life; and
- individuals residing in campus housing facilities as part of summer conferences, workshops, or camps.



### **Coordination with Disabled Student Services**

Staff should respect a student's privacy with respect to disability-related information whenever possible, sharing information only with those who have a need to know and in compliance with legal mandates and campus policies. The housing and residential life office and the disabled student services office should communicate with each other on disability-related issues. These units should consider developing specific housing accommodation policies and procedures and making these available upon request to staff and students. Some campuses have a small joint housing and disability committee that considers policy and procedures and reviews exceptional requests on an individual basis. On most campuses, a disabled student services office is responsible for receiving and reviewing disability-related documentation and for determining or recommending accommodations or appropriate adjustments in campus procedures and policies. This office may forward disability verification and specific recommendations to the housing office. Staff should respect a student's privacy with respect to disability-related information whenever possible, sharing information only with those who have a need to know and in compliance with legal mandates and campus policies.

Obtaining adequate and timely disability-related documentation from students has become increasingly important as growing numbers of students with nonvisible disabilities such as learning disabilities, Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, and psychiatric disorders attend postsecondary institutions. Selecting and implementing accommodations for students with some types of disabilities can present challenging situations in campus housing due to a variety of behaviors that may be associated with these disabilities.

### **Planning, Policies, and Evaluation**

Ensure physical access, comfort, and safety within an environment that is inclusive of people with a variety of abilities, racial and ethnic backgrounds, genders, and ages.

- Are students with disabilities, racial and ethnic minorities, men and women, young and

old students, and other groups represented in the housing planning, review process, and advisory committees in numbers proportional to those of the whole community?

- Is accessibility considered in the procurement process?
- Are disability-related access issues addressed in your evaluation methods?
- Do you have a review process that provides a case-by-case review of accommodation requests in a timely manner?
- Do you have an internal housing document that details policies and procedures on disability-related accommodations for housing and residential life? Be prepared for students who may request housing for a personal care assistant, first-floor space, accessible bathrooms or kitchens, a special diet, a single room, permission to house a service animal, or accessible fire and smoke alarms.
- Do you have a policy about whether students approved for a single room are charged a single- or double-occupancy rate?
- Do you make exceptions to full-time enrollment rules for living in campus housing for students who must enroll part-time because of their disabilities?
- Is a policy in place regarding accommodations for students with disabilities who require personal care assistants? Personal care assistants may need access to the housing facility and parking; some may need to room with the resident.
- Are procedures established regarding service animals? Service animals may include guide dogs for blind individuals, hearing dogs for deaf or hard-of-hearing people, seizure response dogs to assist people with seizure disorders, and assistance animals for people with other disabling conditions.
- Are there procedures to handle requests for modifications in food selections, listings of ingredients for students with specific food allergies, and flexibility in policy to allow a student to opt out of the meal plan?
- Is a review procedure in place to ensure that disability-related factors are adequately considered in violations of the campus student code of conduct?



## Physical Environments and Products

Ensure physical access, comfort, and safety within an environment that is inclusive of people with a variety of abilities, racial and ethnic backgrounds, genders, and ages. State and federal regulations address most disability access requirements for new housing construction and major renovation projects. Some campus housing programs choose to exceed the requirements in order to provide enhanced maneuvering space in bathrooms and kitchens, as well as kitchen features such as side-by-side refrigerators and stoves with controls on the front edge. Some campuses also provide a greater number of accessible units than the minimum number required by state or federal standards.

- Are there parking areas, pathways, and entrances to the building that are wheelchair-accessible and clearly identified?
- Are all levels of facility connected via an accessible route of travel?
- Are there ample high-contrast, large-print directional signs to and throughout the facility?
- Do elevators have both auditory and visual signals for floors? Are elevator controls accessible from a seated position and available in large print and Braille or raised notation?
- Are wheelchair-accessible restrooms with well-marked signs available?
- Is at least part of a counter or service desk at a height accessible from a seated position?
- Are adjustable-height tables available for study or work areas within the facility?
- Is adequate light available?
- Are aisles kept wide and clear of obstructions for the safety of users who have mobility or visual impairments?
- Are telecommunication devices for the deaf (TTY/TDD) available?

Consult the *ADA Checklist for Readily Achievable Barrier Removal* at <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/checkweb.htm> for more suggestions.

## Staff

Make sure staff are prepared to work with all students and visitors. Housing staff (including resident directors and assistants, custodial and

maintenance, food service staff, facility managers, and programming staff) should know how to effectively communicate and work with students who have disabilities. Training can be developed in collaboration with your disabled student services office.

- Do housing staff receive training about communicating with students who have disabilities including nonvisible disabling conditions? (See “Communication Hints” for content in this area.)
- Do housing staff with more intensive interactions and greater responsibilities (e.g., resident assistants, space assignment staff, facility managers, hall and apartment managers and directors) receive training in disability accommodation procedures and issues and civil rights legislation?
- Do staff members have ready access to a list of on- and off-campus resources for students with disabilities?
- Do staff members have knowledge of accessible travel routes around campus?
- Is the housing Webmaster knowledgeable about accessible web page design?

For more information consult the *World Wide Access: Accessible Web Design* video and publication at <http://www.washington.edu/doit/Video/www.html>.

## Information Resources and Technology

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

- Are videos used in housing and residential life captioned and audio described?
- Is the computer lab wheelchair-accessible?
- Do you ask vendors about accessibility features (e.g., captioned video, compatibility with assistive technology) before purchasing computers and software?
- Do you have at least one adjustable-height table, software to enlarge screen images, a large monitor, and a trackball?



- Is a system in place for a timely response to requests for assistive technology such as alternative keyboards and text-to-speech systems?
- Are staff members aware of accessibility options (e.g., enlarged text feature included in computer operating systems) and of assistive technology available in the lab?
- Do pictures in your publications and website include people with diverse characteristics with respect to race, gender, age, and disability?
- In key publications and on your website, including the housing application form, do you include a statement about your commitment to universal access and procedures for requesting disability-related accommodations? For example, you could include the following statement, “Our goal is to make all materials and facilities and services accessible. Please inform staff of accessibility barriers you encounter, and request accommodations that will make activities and information resources accessible to you.”
- Do electronic resources, including web pages, adhere to accessibility guidelines or standards adopted by your institution or your specific project or funding source? *Section 508 Standards for Accessible Electronic and Information Technology* (<http://www.access-board.gov/sec508/guide/>) and *World Wide Web Consortium's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines* (<http://www.w3.org/WAI/>) are most commonly used. For information about making your website accessible to everyone, consult *World Wide Access: Accessible Web Design* video and publication at <http://www.washington.edu/doiit/Video/www.html>.
- 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 all printed materials within easy reach from a variety of heights and without furniture blocking access?

For more information consult the *Equal Access: Universal Design of Computer Labs* video and publication at <http://www.washington.edu/doiit/Video/equal.html>.

### **Emergency Evacuation**

Accessible evacuation procedures are a major concern in housing and residential life.

- Do the disabled student services office and housing and emergency services units on campus collaborate to develop strong and effective policies and procedures related to emergency and safety issues for students with disabilities?
- Do students with disabilities sign a release of information that allows residential staff to compile a list of students with disabilities who may need assistance during an evacuation?
- Do you provide clear training to all students regarding their responsibility in getting themselves safely out of the building in the case of an emergency evacuation and the fire department's responsibility to help those students who may need more assistance?
- Do housing services staff consult with residents who have known disabilities to learn about their preferences for assistance in evacuating facilities?
- Do housing evacuation plans (including written procedures and public notices) and training include specific procedures for the evacuation of residents with disabilities and service animals?
- Do you notify students with disabilities about safety and emergency drills?

### **Events**

Ensure that everyone can participate in events sponsored by your organization.

- Are events located in wheelchair-accessible facilities? Is the accessible entrance and exit clearly marked?
- Is information about how to request disability-related accommodations included in all publications promoting the event?
- Is accessible transportation arranged for events for which transportation is arranged for participants?



### Checklist Updates

This checklist was field tested at more than twenty postsecondary institutions nationwide (see <http://www.washington.edu/doit/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).

### Additional Resources

An electronic copy of this publication as well as additional useful brochures can be found at <http://www.washington.edu/doit/Brochures/>. A 14-minute video, *Equal Access: Student Services*, demonstrates key points summarized in this publication. An online version may be freely viewed at [http://www.washington.edu/doit/Video/ea\\_student.html](http://www.washington.edu/doit/Video/ea_student.html) or purchased in DVD format. Permission is granted to reproduce DO-IT videos and publications for educational, noncommercial purposes provided the source is acknowledged.

*The Student Services Conference Room* at <http://www.washington.edu/doit/Conf/> includes a collection of documents and videos to help you make student services accessible to everyone. They include checklists for career services, distance learning, computer labs, recruitment and admissions, registration, housing and residential life, financial aid, libraries, tutoring and learning centers, and student organizations. *The Conference Room* also includes a searchable Knowledge Base of questions and answers, case studies, and promising practices. For more information about applications of universal design consult <http://www.washington.edu/doit/Resources/udesign.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, such as those in science, engineering, mathematics, and technology. Primary funding for DO-IT is provided by the National Science Foundation, the State of Washington, and the U.S. Department of Education. The contents of this publication and accompanying video were

developed under a grant from the Department of Education, No. P333A020044. However, these contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

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## 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 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!
- 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 instructions 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.
- Use paper and pencil if the person who is deaf does not read lips or if more accurate communication is needed.
- In groups raise hands to be recognized so the person who is deaf knows who is speaking. Repeat questions from audience members.
- 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.