



DO-IT

Equal Access: Universal Design of Tutoring and Learning Centers

A checklist for making tutoring and learning centers welcoming and accessible to everyone

by Sheryl Burgstahler, Ph.D.

As increasing numbers of people with disabilities pursue educational opportunities, the accessibility of tutoring and learning centers and other student services increases in importance. The goal is simply equal access; everyone who needs to use your services should be able to do so comfortably and efficiently.

Legal Issues

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments of 2008 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. This means that postsecondary student services as well as academic programs must be accessible to qualified students with disabilities.

Universal Design

To make your tutoring and learning center accessible, employ principles of universal design (UD). Universal design means that rather than designing your facility and services for the average user, you design them for people with a broad range of abilities, disabilities, and other characteristics. Keep in mind that students, employees, and visitors may have disabilities such as learning, visual, speech, hearing, or mobility impairments. Designing your program to be accessible to all will make it more usable by everyone and minimize the need for special accommodations

for those who use your services and for future employees as well. Make sure everyone feels welcome, and can

- get to the facility and maneuver within it,
- communicate effectively with support staff,
- access printed materials and electronic resources, and
- fully participate in all learning activities.

Train staff to work with students who have disabilities, respond to specific requests for accommodations in a timely manner, and know whom to contact if they have disability-related questions. Staff who tutor or teach students should understand the learning issues faced by students with disabilities, especially those that affect gaining and demonstrating knowledge.

Guidelines and Examples

The following questions can guide you in making your campus services universally accessible. This content does not provide legal advice. To help clarify legal issues, consult your campus legal counsel or ADA/504 compliance officer or call your regional Office for Civil Rights (OCR).

Planning, Policies, and Evaluation

Consider diversity issues as you plan and evaluate services.

- Are people with disabilities, racial and ethnic minorities, students with diverse gender identities and sexual orientations, young and old students, and other groups represented on your staff in numbers proportional to those of the whole campus or community?
- Do you have policies and procedures that ensure access to facilities, printed materials, computers, and electronic resources for people with disabilities?



- Is accessibility considered in the procurement process?
- Is your staff prepared to respond to requests for accommodations in a timely manner?
- Do you have a procedure to ensure a timely response to requests for disability-related accommodations?
- Are disability-related access issues addressed in your evaluation methods?

Physical Environments and Products

- Ensure that facilities, activities, materials, and equipment are physically accessible to and usable by all students, and that all potential student characteristics are addressed in safety considerations.
- 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 there ample high-contrast, large print directional signs to and throughout the office?
- Do elevators have auditory, visual, and tactile signals and are elevator controls accessible from a seated position?
- Are wheelchair-accessible restrooms with well-marked signs available in or near the office?
- Is at least part of a service counter or desk accessible from a seated position?
- Are aisles kept wide and clear of obstructions for the safety of users who have mobility or visual impairments?
- Are there quiet work or meeting areas where noise and other distractions are minimized and/or facility rules in place (e.g., no cell phone use) that minimize noise?
- Is adequate light available?

Consult the *ADA Checklist for Readily Achievable Barrier Removal* at www.ada.gov/checkweb.htm for more suggestions. For computing facilities, consult the *Equal Access: Universal Design of Computer Labs* video and publication at www.washington.edu/doit/videos/index.php?vid=12.

Tutors and learning facilitators are encouraged to be responsive to the needs of all students. However, students with disabilities may have some additional instructional needs that they should discuss with their tutor or facilitator. The student with a disability is the best source of information regarding necessary accommodations. In postsecondary settings, it is the student's responsibility to request special accommodations if desired (usually to a disabled student services office), but a tutor or facilitator can make a student comfortable by inquiring about special needs or challenges. Following are examples of typical academic accommodations for students with different types of disabilities.

Instructional Needs

All students benefit from working with information and handouts made available in accessible, electronic format. In addition, the following accommodations should be considered.

Low Vision

- Large-print handouts
- Computers equipped to enlarge screen characters and images

Blindness

- Audiotaped, Brailled, or electronic-formatted notes and handouts
- Verbal descriptions of visual aids
- Raised-line drawings and tactile models of graphic materials
- Computers with large monitors and with optical character readers, speech output, Braille screen displays, and printer output

Hearing Impairments

- Interpreters, FM systems, captioned videotapes
- Use of visual aids
- Written instructions and demonstration summaries
- Visual warning system for emergencies
- Use of email for communication and private discussions



Learning Disabilities

- Note takers and audiotaped sessions
- Extra time for sessions
- Visual, aural, and tactile instructional demonstrations
- Computers with speech output, spelling checker, and grammar checker

Mobility Impairments

- Note takers
- Tutoring sessions in accessible locations
- Adjustable tables; materials located within reach
- Computers equipped with special input device (e.g., speech input, Morse code, alternative keyboards)

Health Impairments

- Note takers
- Flexible scheduling or attendance requirements
- Extra time for sessions
- Use of email for communication and discussion

Keep in mind that it will take the disabled student services office time to convert learning materials to alternate formats (e.g., audiotape, Braille, large print). Consult this office for further information regarding accessibility for students with disabilities and a fuller understanding about campus services.

Staff

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

- Are all staff members familiar with the availability and use of 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?
- Do staff members have ready access to a list of on- and off-campus resources for students with disabilities?

- Are all staff members aware of issues related to communicating with students who have disabilities? (See Communication Hints at the end of this publication.)
- Are staff members aware of the benefits of universal design of instruction and accommodations for students with different types of disabilities?

Information Resources and Technology

If your learning center 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 and on your website, do you include a statement about your commitment to universal access and procedures for requesting disability-related accommodations? For example, "Our goal is to make all of our materials and services accessible. Please inform staff of accessibility barriers you encounter, and request accommodations that will make 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 language(s) other than English?
- Are printed materials within easy reach from a variety of heights and without furniture blocking access?
- Is software to enlarge screen images and a large monitor available to assist students with low vision and learning disabilities?
- Is an adjustable-height table available for each type of workstation to assist students who use wheelchairs or are small or large in stature?



- Do you provide a trackball to be used by someone who has difficulty controlling a mouse?
- Do electronic resources, including web pages, adhere to accessibility guidelines or standards adopted by your institution or your center? *Section 508 Standards for Accessible Electronic and Information Technology* (www.access-board.gov/guidelines-and-standards/communications-and-it/about-the-section-508-standards) and *World Wide Web Consortium's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines* (www.w3.org/WAI/) are most commonly used. For information about making your website accessible to everyone, consult the *World Wide Access: Accessible Web Design* video and publication at www.washington.edu/doit/videos/index.php?vid=35.
- Is adequate light available?
- Do you provide adequate work space for both left- and right-handed users?
- 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 about assistive technology, consult the *Adaptive Technology* videos and publications at www.washington.edu/doit/resources/popular-resource-collections/accessible-technology.

Events

Ensure that everyone can participate in events sponsored by your learning center.

- Are events such as group meetings and presentations located in wheelchair-accessible facilities? Is the accessible entrance clearly marked?
- Is information about how to request disability-related accommodations included in publications promoting activities?
- Is accessible transportation available if transportation is arranged for other participants?

Checklist Updates

This checklist was field-tested at more than twenty postsecondary institutions nationwide (see www.washington.edu/doit/do-it-admin-project-help-postsecondary-student-services-administrators-work-successfully-students). 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@uw.edu.

Additional Resources

An electronic copy of the most current version of this publication as well as additional useful brochures can be found at www.washington.edu/doit/resources/brochures. A 14-minute video, *Equal Access: Student Services*, demonstrates key points summarized in this publication. It may be freely viewed online at www.washington.edu/doit/videos/index.php?vid=11 and purchased in DVD format from DO-IT. Consult www.washington.edu/doit/videos/index.php for access to this and other videos that may be of interest. The *Equal Access: Computer Labs* and *Real Connections: Making Distance Learning Accessible to Everyone* videos and publications are particularly relevant to tutoring and learning centers. 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 www.washington.edu/doit/distance-learning-course-serving-students-disabilities 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 Student Services 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 www.washington.edu/doit/resources/popular-resource-collections/applications-universal-design or *The Center for Universal Design in Education* at www.washington.edu/doit/programs/center-universal-design-education/overview. The book *Universal Design in Higher Education: From Principles to Practice, Second Edition* published by Harvard Education Press shares perspectives of UD leaders nationwide. Learn more or order online at www.uw.edu/doit/universal-design-higher-education-principles-practice-1.

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.

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Communication Hints

Treat people with disabilities with the same respect and consideration with which you treat others. Here are some helpful hints when it comes to delivering a presentation, hosting an exhibit, and otherwise relating to people with disabilities.

General

- Ask a person with a disability if that person needs help before providing assistance.
- Talk directly to the person with a disability, not through their companion or interpreter.
- Refer to a person's disability only if it is relevant to the conversation.
- Avoid derogatory slang or 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.
- Do not be afraid to use common terms and phrases, like "see you later" or "let's go for a walk" around people with disabilities.
- Do not touch mobility devices or assistive technology without the owner's consent.
- Do not assume physical contact—like handshakes, high-fives, or hugs—is okay.
- Understand that not everyone uses eye contact.

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 projected content when presenting and describe the content of charts, graphs, and pictures.
- 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

- Consider carrying on a long conversation with an individual who has a mobility impairment from a seated position.

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, and avoid covering your mouth, 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, or type things out on your cell phone, 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.