

## What is visual disability?

Having a visual impairment can mean complete blindness, having a reduced field of vision (e.g. tunnel vision or blank spots), blurred vision (partial or complete field of view), or impaired form vision (e.g. a person may only see at two metres what others may see at 60). Some students' vision is affected by the level (strength) or type of light (e.g. fluorescents). Level of vision may fluctuate, deteriorate or remain constant.

Students with visual impairments can hear lectures and discussions but often find themselves disadvantaged when accessing textbooks, whiteboards, overhead projectors, data displays, maps, videos, printed assessments, laboratory demonstrations, internet websites, etc.

## Academic difficulties

- Physical access
- Written materials
- Non-verbal communication

## Strategies to assist the student

### Lectures

- Students with visual disabilities may require seating near the front of the class to hear clearly what is being presented and to see as much as possible
- All written text on whiteboard or shown on overhead or data show should also be verbalised
- When using an overhead projector or datashow, use a large font size: at least 18 point. Use easily-read fonts such as Arial
- Provide additional time for students with visual impairments to copy the material from the whiteboard, overhead or datashow
- Prior to lectures, provide severely visually impaired students with enlarged copies of handouts and lecture notes and blind students with electronic copies
- New terminology, technical terms, references and names need to be spelt out
- Be verbally descriptive, e.g. verbalise "Fifty plus eight equals fifty-eight" rather than "This number plus that number equals 58"
- It is particularly important for students to have copies of graphs, charts, diagrams and drawings that are being used in class **in an appropriate alternative format**. Please contact the disability office to arrange enlarged text and diagrams or electronic formats (some texts may be read on laptops using screen magnification and screen reading adaptive software)
- Allow students to use a dictaphone to tape lectures (talk about respect for privacy if appropriate)

- When making comparisons and analogies, use familiar objects and not unique objects that depend on prior visual knowledge. Example: a particular dance movement requires a lot of weaving and turning, "like getting from one side of the living room to the other on moving day"
- Always identify yourself when meeting a student with a visual impairment as they may not recognise who is speaking
- Indicate to the student that they are being addressed by using their name
- Remember at all times that the student cannot see non-verbal cues

## **Tutorials, Laboratories and Field Trips**

- Plan for the inclusion of seeing eye dogs and support people for severely visually impaired or blind students
- Pace presentation of written material. If using a textbook or handouts, allow additional time for students with visual disabilities to find or record the information

## **Assignments and Assessments**

- As reading time is significantly increased for students with visual impairments, it is reasonable, and often necessary, to allow extensions
- Consideration needs to be given for any assessments involving use of the internet. There can be problems with the interface between adaptive software packages and the web. Access to web pages and documents may not be easy or even possible. Contact the Disability Office if you require assistance

## **Support services available**

- In-class notetakers (Disability Liaison)
- Peer support (Learning Centre)
- Adaptive technology (Disability Liaison: page magnifiers, CCTV text enlarger in the library, dictaphones, access to electronic formats)
- Alternative assessment arrangements