INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR STUDENTS WITH MOBILITY IMPAIRMENTS

Mobility impairments range in severity from limitations on stamina to paralysis. Some mobility impairments are caused by conditions present at birth while others are the result of illness or physical injury. Injuries cause different types of mobility impairments, depending on what area of the spine is affected.

- **Quadriplegia**, paralysis of the extremities and trunk, is caused by a neck injury. Students with quadriplegia have limited or no use of their arms and hands and often use electric wheelchairs.

- **Paraplegia**, paralysis of the lower extremities and the lower trunk, is caused by an injury to the mid-back. Students often use a manual wheelchair and have full movement of arms and hands. Below are brief descriptions of other causes of mobility impairments.

- **Amputation** is the removal of one or more limbs, sometimes caused by trauma or another condition.

- **Arthritis** is the inflammation of the body’s joints, causing pain, swelling, and difficulty in body movement.

- **Back disorders** can limit a student’s ability to sit, stand, walk, bend, or carry objects. They include, but are not limited to, degenerative disk disease, scoliosis, and herniated disks.

- **Cerebral palsy** is the result of damage to the brain prior to or shortly after birth. It can prevent or inhibit walking and cause a lack of muscle coordination, spasms, and speech difficulty.

- **Neuromuscular disorders** include a variety of disorders, such as muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, and ataxia, that result in degeneration and atrophy of muscle or nerve tissues.

Some considerations:

- Many students with mobility impairments lead lives similar to those without impairments. Dependency and helplessness are not characteristics of physical disability.

- A physical disability is often separate from matters of cognition and general health; it does not imply that a student has other health problems or difficulty with intellectual functioning.

- People adjust to disabilities in a myriad of ways; students should not be assumed to be brave and courageous on the basis of disability.

- When talking with a wheelchair user, attempt to converse at eye level as opposed to standing and looking down. If a student has a communication impairment as well as a mobility impairment, take time to understand the person. Repeat what you understand, and when you don’t understand, say so.

- A student with a physical disability may or may not want assistance in a particular situation. Ask before giving assistance, and wait for a response. Listen to any instructions...
the student may give; by virtue of experience, the student likely knows the safest and most efficient way to accomplish the task at hand.

- Be considerate of the extra time it might take a disabled student to speak or act. Allow the student to set the pace walking or talking.

- A wheelchair should be viewed as a personal-assistance device rather than something one is “confined to”. It is also part of a student’s personal space; do not lean on or touch the chair, and do not push the chair, unless asked.

- Mobility impairments vary over a wide range, from temporary (e.g., a broken arm) to permanent (e.g., a form of paralysis). Other conditions, such as respiratory conditions, affect coordination and endurance; these can also affect a student’s ability to perform in class.

- Physical access to a classroom may not be the first barrier a student with a mobility impairment encounters on campus. A temporary construction project on a pathway, a lack of reliable transportation, or mechanical problems with a wheelchair can significantly impact a student's experience.

- Common accommodations for students with mobility impairments include priority registration, notetakers, accessible classroom/location/furniture, alternative ways of completing assignments, lab or library assistants, adaptive computer technology, exam modifications, and conveniently located parking.

**Instructional Strategies**

The following strategies are suggested to enhance the accessibility of course instruction, materials, and activities. They are general strategies designed to support individualized reasonable accommodations for which a student is eligible, as determined by the Office of Student Life.

- If necessary, arrange for a room change before the term begins.

- Special seating arrangements may be necessary to meet student needs. Students may require special chairs, lowered tables on which to write, or spaces for wheelchairs. In laboratory courses, students who use wheelchairs may need lower lab tables to accommodate their chairs and allow for the manipulation of tools or other equipment.

- If possible, try not to seat wheelchair users in the back row. Move a desk or rearrange seating at a table so the student is part of regular classroom seating.

- Students with upper body weakness may not be able to raise their hands to participate in class discussion. Establish eye contact with the students and call on them when they indicate that they wish to contribute.

- Make arrangements early for field trips and ensure that accommodations will be in place on the given day (e.g., transportation, site accessibility).

- Make sure accommodations are in place for in-class written work (e.g., allowing the student to use a scribe, to use adaptive computer technology, or to complete the assignment outside of class).
• Be flexible with deadlines: assignments that require library work or access to sites off-campus will consume more time for a student with a mobility impairment.

• Please understand that for reasons beyond their control, students with severe mobility impairments may be late to class. Some are unable to move quickly from one location to another due to architectural barriers, inadequate public transportation or temporary obstacles on campus.

• Not all mobility impairments are constant and unchanging; some students experience exacerbations or relapses requiring bed rest or hospitalization. In most cases, students are able to make up the incomplete work, but they may need extra time.

• When in doubt about how to assist the student, ask him or her.

• Allow the student the same anonymity as other students (i.e., avoid pointing out the student or the alternative arrangements to the rest of the class).