

Faculty Guide **BLIND AND LOW VISION**

OVERVIEW AND DEFINITION

In Canada the term “visual impairment” is used to describe a variety of problems with eyesight, from total blindness to variations of partial sightedness. Visual acuity is “normal”, or 20/20, when the bottom line of the Snellen wall chart can be read at 20 feet. Visual acuity of 20/200 would indicate that only the top line can be read at 20 feet, whereas an unimpaired individual can read the same line at 200 feet.

Individuals with visual acuity equal to or less than 20/200 are considered to be **legally blind**. It is impossible to correct their vision by medical or surgical means or corrective glasses. The majority will rely on the use of dog guides or white canes to assist them, as well as on the use of sound and touch. They will use braille, audio tapes, large print or computers with adaptive devices to help them read printed materials.

Partial sight is a category of visual loss that designates individuals with acuity levels between 20/70 and 20/200. Some can distinguish only lightness or darkness, or varying patterns and shapes. Many are able to read with difficulty and may rely on large print materials and optical aids such as magnifying glasses, tactile drawings, and reading machines.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS AND INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Students with visual limitations must use their other senses in the learning process. To help facilitate their learning, teachers should consider the following:

- minimize classroom and/or hallway distractions and noise
- outline lesson at the beginning of class and provide sequential instructions; repeat important information
- use familiar objects when making comparisons and drawing analogies; use specific descriptions rather than words such as “here, there, it, this”
- read aloud any print material being presented to the class, such as handouts or blackboard work
- verbally describe visuals such as slides or overheads
- respond to non-verbal signs of confusion
- during classroom discussions ensure that only one person speaks at a time
- encourage teaming with a peer (e.g., during a film) to describe what is happening
- make reference readings and texts available to the disability support office in your college prior to the commencement of classes, so they can be audio-taped, scanned or brailled (*Preparing materials in alternative format may take several months.*)
- if in doubt about protocol or issues of etiquette, ask the student. For example, never pet a guide dog without the permission of the owner
- students who are blind or visually impaired may use adaptive equipment. It is not necessary for faculty to have an in depth knowledge of this equipment as the student is the expert. Common pieces of equipment include: portable brailier, braille equipment, talking calculators and watches, thermographic pen and paper, screen readers, 4-track portable tape recorder, scanning and text-to-speech devices, large print and braille dictionary and magnifying devices.
- work closely with the disability support office to ensure a successful learning experience for the student

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS

Students with disabilities are expected to accomplish the “core competencies” of their programs. To achieve this, accommodations are provided to minimize or eliminate any disadvantage their disability presents. Accommodations are unique to each individual. The disability support office in your college makes these recommendations based on confidential documentation that the student provides to the college. Some of the most commonly provided academic accommodations to students who are blind or visually impaired include:

- provision of extended time for tests and exams. The amount of extra time is determined by the disability support office.
- provision of a scribe/reader for exams and tests
- provision of a notetaker for lectures
- provision of alternative format materials (AFM), such as braille, large print, audio tapes or electronic files
- preferential seating (to optimize listening and proximity to an electrical outlet)
- tape recording of lectures
- access to assistive/adaptive technology
- alternative evaluation methods such as oral presentations or audio taped assignments in lieu of written papers

RESOURCES

The disability support office in your college will have brochures, books and videos available for loan as well as information about local resources.

Canadian National Institute for the Blind: CNIB services are available free of charge to anyone who is experiencing difficulties as a result of vision loss, or the combined loss of hearing and sight. Contact your local community CNIB office.

This document is a compilation of resources from CCDI member colleges.