



# Equal Access: Universal Design of Student Services

**DO-IT**

A checklist for making campus services welcoming, accessible, and usable  
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As increasing numbers of people with disabilities pursue educational opportunities at all levels, the accessibility of admissions offices, libraries, computer labs, tutoring 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 its 2008 Amendments 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 student services as well as academic programs must be accessible to qualified students with disabilities.

## Universal Design

You can make your student service accessible and useful to everyone by employing 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, ages, reading levels, learning styles, native languages, cultures, and other characteristics. Keep in mind that students and other visitors may have learning disabilities or visual, speech, hearing, and mobility impairments. Preparing your program to be accessible to them 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 events and other activities.

Train staff to support people with disabilities, respond to specific requests for accommodations in a timely manner, and know whom they can contact if they have disability-related questions.

## A Process for Universal Design

The UD of all student services is a long-term goal. Deliberate, small steps can make that goal attainable for your service department. Below you will find a series of steps to lead you through the re-design of an existing service or the creation of a new one. As you travel through the phases of implementing UD, remember to plan ahead and keep the diverse needs of students at the forefront.

1. *Identify the service.* Select a student service (e.g., library, tutoring center, career services office). Consider the purpose of the campus unit, specific services and resources provided, facility constraints, budget, and other issues that impact the range and delivery of services provided.
2. *Define the universe.* Describe the overall population and then consider the diverse characteristics of those who might potentially use the service (e.g., students and other visitors with diverse characteristics with respect to gender; age; size; ethnicity and race; native language; learning style; and abilities to see, hear, manipulate objects, read, and communicate).



3. *Involve consumers.* Involve people with diverse characteristics (as identified in Step 2) in all phases of the development, implementation, and evaluation of the service. Also, gain perspectives of students through diversity programs such as the campus disability services office.
4. *Adopt guidelines or standards.* Review research and best practices to identify specific strategies for the delivery of an effective service (e.g., best practices for housing and food services, career services, a tutoring center, or other services as identified in Step 1). Create or select existing universal design guidelines and standards for the service. Integrate universal design practices with other best practices within the field of service.
5. *Apply guidelines or standards.* Apply universal design strategies in concert with other best practices, both identified in Step 4, to the overall design of the service, all subcomponents of the service, and all ongoing operations (e.g., procurement processes, staff training) to maximize the benefit of the service to students with the wide variety of characteristics identified in Step 2.
6. *Plan for accommodations.* Develop processes to address accommodation requests (e.g., arrangements for a sign language interpreter) from individuals for whom the design of the service does not automatically provide access. Share the process in signage, publications, and on a website.
7. *Train and support.* Tailor and deliver ongoing training and support to student service staff.
8. *Evaluate.* Include universal design measures in the evaluation of the service, evaluate the service with a diverse group of students, and make modifications based on their feedback. Provide ways to collect ongoing input from service users (e.g., through online and printed instruments and communications with staff).

## Guidelines and Examples

The following questions can guide you in making your campus service unit universally accessible. This content does not provide legal advice. To clarify issues, consult your campus legal counsel or ADA / 504 compliance officer, or call the regional Office for Civil Rights (OCR). This checklist was developed in consultation with more than twenty postsecondary institutions as part of the *AccessCollege* project. It was field-tested at more than twenty postsecondary institutions nationwide.<sup>7</sup> The results of a nationwide survey to test face-validity of checklist items led to further refinement of the checklist.

## Planning, Policies, and Evaluation

Consider diversity issues as you plan and evaluate services.

- Are people with disabilities, racial and ethnic minorities, men and women, 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?
- 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 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 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?







## Cited Web Resources

1. [www.ada.gov/checkweb.htm](http://www.ada.gov/checkweb.htm)
2. [www.uw.edu/doit/Video/equal.html](http://www.uw.edu/doit/Video/equal.html)
3. [www.access-board.gov/508.htm](http://www.access-board.gov/508.htm)
4. [www.w3.org/WAI/guid-tech.html](http://www.w3.org/WAI/guid-tech.html)
5. [www.uw.edu/doit/Video/www.html](http://www.uw.edu/doit/Video/www.html)
6. [www.uw.edu/doit/resources/popular-resource-collections/accessible-technology](http://www.uw.edu/doit/resources/popular-resource-collections/accessible-technology)
7. [www.uw.edu/doit/Brochures/Academics/admin.html](http://www.uw.edu/doit/Brochures/Academics/admin.html)
8. [www.uw.edu/doit/Brochures/](http://www.uw.edu/doit/Brochures/)
9. [www.uw.edu/doit/Video/ea\\_student.html](http://www.uw.edu/doit/Video/ea_student.html)
10. [www.uw.edu/doit/Conf/](http://www.uw.edu/doit/Conf/)
11. [www.uw.edu/doit/CUDE/](http://www.uw.edu/doit/CUDE/)
12. [www.uw.edu/doit/universal-design-higher-education-principles-practice-1](http://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 success of individuals with disabilities in college and careers, such as those in science, engineering, mathematics, and technology. Primary funding for DO-IT is provided by the National Science Foundation, the U.S. Department of Education, and the State of Washington.

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## Acknowledgment

This publication and the accompanying video were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, #P333A020044. However, the contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. 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. 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 are 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.