

## Loss of Mobility

Loss of mobility may range in severity from limitations of stamina to paralysis. Some mobility challenges are caused by conditions present at birth while others are the result of illness or physical injury.

Injuries to the spinal cord cause different types of mobility impairments, depending on the areas of the spine affected. Quadriplegia refers to the loss of function to the lower extremities and the lower trunk. Students with paraplegia typically use a manual wheelchair and have full movement of arms and hands.

Other cases of mobility challenges include, but are not limited to, amputation, arthritis, back disorders, cerebral palsy, neuromuscular disorders such as muscular dystrophy or multiple sclerosis and fibromyalgia.

### Some Considerations

- Many students with mobility difficulties 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. Character traits (e.g. courageous or manipulative) should not be assumed 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 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 instruction 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 student with a disability to speak or act.
- Allow the student to set the pace of walking or talking. A wheelchair should be viewed as a personal-assistance device rather than something to which one is “confined.” It is also a part of a student’s personal space; do not lean on or touch the chair.
- Mobility impairments vary over a wide range, from temporary (e.g. a broken arm) to permanent (e.g. a form of paralysis or muscle degeneration). Other impairments, such as respiratory conditions, may affect coordination and endurance. These can also affect a student’s ability to participate/perform in class.
- Physical access to a class is the first barrier a student with loss of mobility may face, but it is not the only accessibility concern. A sidewalk that hasn’t been shoveled, lack of reliable transportation, or mechanical problems with a wheelchair can easily cause a student to be late or absent.
- Common accommodations for students with mobility impairments include peer note takers, accessible classroom, location, and furniture, alternative ways of completing assignments, lab or library assistants, and assistive computer technology and time extensions for exams.

### **Instructional Strategies**

- Include a disability access statement in the course syllabus such as: “To obtain disability related accommodations and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact Access Services as soon as possible by calling (507) 457-1465.”
- If necessary, arrange for a room change to an accessible classroom.
- 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 the regular classroom seating.

- Height of tables should permit wheelchair access. Tables can be easily raised using blocks of wood under the legs.
- Make field trip arrangements early 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 assistive 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 mobility impairment. Students with chronic and medicated pain may need extended time or additional explanations of material covered in class or pending assignments.
- Students using wheelchairs or other utility devices may encounter obstacles to getting to class on time. Others may have periodic or irregular difficulties, either from their disability or from medication. Faculty can help by being flexible in applying attendance and promptness rules to such students.
- When in doubt about how to assist the student, ask him or her as privately as possible without drawing attention to the student or the disability.
- Allow the student the anonymity afforded other students (i.e. avoid pointing out the student or the alternative arrangements to the rest of the class).

These guidelines were adapted from guidelines used by the Division of Disability Resources & Educational Services at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.