

# The role of the professor concerning students with disabilities

## Simple tips for professors who care

By Stacey Dunn

A new school year has begun and that means new schoolwork, new friendships, and new professors. New professors mean new worries for students. They wonder if they will demand a lot from each student, or be understanding to each student's situation. In a disabled student's case, he or she asks additional questions such as:

--Will my professors accept that I may learn slower than the rest of the class?

--Will my professors see through my disability and realize that I can handle the work?

--Will my professors treat me differently due to my disability?

With effective communication between professors and students, integration in the classroom can be easier.

Communication must start at the beginning of the school year. A meeting with the student and his or her professors should be short and result in simple solutions. For instance, they may agree that note-taking assistance will help the student who is hearing impaired or learning disabled. If the student is visually impaired, he or she may be allowed to tape record the lectures. Also, if the student is mobility impaired the professor must be sure to find an accessible classroom in which he or she would lecture. Overall, the meeting should

accomplish an understanding that the work can be done.

The key word in the prof/student with a disability relationship is treatment. The student appreciates that he or she receives the same attention as other students. However, when the student has specific needs, the prof. must respect those needs. The following list elaborates on how teachers can accommodate various disabilities.

*Students who are mobility impaired:*

--inform the student whether or not the class, lab, or field trip is an accessible place

--make sure that the furniture or equipment is at an appropriate level for students who use wheelchairs

*Students who are visually impaired:*

--make sure required materials are available in braille, large print, or audio tape

--use tactile models, visual relief maps, replicas, etc., to convey ideas

--state aloud what you write on the chalkboard or overhead projector

--inform them of the location of copy machines that will enlarge print

*Students who are hearing or speech impaired:*

*A meeting with the student and his or her professors should be short and result in simple solutions*

--hand out typed or printed notes

--use an amplification system (FM system)

--repeat other students' questions for the benefit of the student who is impaired

--if part of the teaching plan is to have students speak aloud

in class make certain it is alright with the student with the speech impairment to call on him/her to answer

*Students who are learning-disabled:*

--provide a detailed course outline before the course begins

--clearly explain course content and describe assignments

--allow plenty of time for completion of assignments

--allow for alternatives in the assignments and exams, such as an oral presentation instead of a written one, taped responses, and large print materials which proves that the student is capable of completing the course.

These ideas are small but positive steps in the right direction. However, if a problem comes up that may look difficult to solve, profs should keep in mind the various organizations which are aware of individual

needs of persons with disabilities.

The following is a list of some disability groups:

--P.E.I. Cerebral Palsy Association (892-9694)

--P.E.I. Council of the Disabled (892-9149)

--Canadian National Institute for the Blind (566-2580)

--P.E.I. Learning Disabilities Association (892-9664)

--P.E.I. Recreation and Sport for the Physically Challenged (368-4540)

--P.E.I. Association for Community Living (566-4844)

If profs wish to have more information on their student's disability, they can contact one of these organizations.

Professors may not realize at times that they have an influence over students. In a disabled student's case, profs must use this influence wisely and encourage the student to do good work, to participate in extracurricular activities and to advocate for improved conditions.

Professors can arrange disability related discussions at some faculty meetings and/or during other University committee meetings. Whichever way professors support students with disabilities, it shows the commitment made by the University to these students.

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