Best Practices for Teaching Disabled Students Online

# Things to consider:

* Not all disabled students are registered with the Disability Resource Center. In fact, statistically, most students with disabilities are not registered with the DRC.
* An estimate 60-70% of disabilities are not visually apparent.
* Students may have the same disability, but it may manifest differently; be sure to keep an open mind even if someone discloses a disability with which you have experience.
* Students may choose not to or may not be able to advocate for personal needs or wishes. This may be cultural, personality, or disability related.
* Students may need additional time to process what you are saying. Allow time for responses. Most research indicates internal processors need 7 seconds to hear a question or statement, think about, think about their response, and then verbalize. Some students may need more based on English as second language, cultural differences, or disability. This is particularly true during online meetings. Using a format for online meetings that allows for captions can be helpful.
* Your demeanor and response to a student informs the rest of the class. Be accepting and respectful of disabled students. Be aware of your nonverbal responses during online meetings.
* Consider principles of Universal Design:
* Ensure that documents and slides are accessible to screen readers.
* Offer alternatives for visual and auditory information.
* Offer alternatives means of completing assignments if it does not interfere with assignment outcomes. Example: voice recorded journal entries. Email meetings.
* Only use videos that are close captioned.
* Use online meeting formats that have a captioning option. (TEAMS, for example)
* Clarify symbols, vocabulary, acronyms. Either post a file of common acronyms or refrain from using them even after explaining.
* Use multi-media forms of representation – graphics, illustrations, images, etc. Be sure to describe all graphics so that those with visual impairments can participate. (font should be no smaller than 22 point in power point presentations). Be sure to provide alt-text for images.
* Use a calendar as a visual representation of assignment due dates, in addition to listing due dates. Provide all due dates in writing.
* Supply background knowledge, along with reasons (especially cultural and social customs - be sure to include things like nonverbal communication, including eye contact, dress, email rules, etc.).
* Provide prior exposure to test formats, with ample time for questions. This is especially important if you’ve just moved to a new format!
* Use Plain Language for assignment and other instructions. [www.plainlanguage.gov](http://www.plainlanguage.gov)

# Getting to know your student

* Look for and read over Letters of Accommodation prior to the beginning of class. Contact the [Disability Resource Center](mailto:drc@bellevuecollege.edu) with questions.
* If you do not have a Letter of Accommodation for a student, and they request accommodations for a disability, or appear to need access support, check with the DRC and [Neurodiversity Navigators](mailto:sara.gardner@bellevuecollege.edu) to let them know you have a student who appears to need support. We may not be able to disclose information to you, however, we can give you guidance and can contact the student if applicable.
* Keep in mind that some students need:
* A specific communication method - email, Canvas, in person. An understanding of social communication differences that may come across as impolite over email.
* Access support in joining, meeting with, and communicating with a group. This is especially true during a new online format.
* Additional follow-up. If a disabled student stops attending class, or turning in work, and your efforts to reach out to the student are not successful, contact the DRC and Neurodiversity Navigators for additional support.
* Direct instruction on classroom rules. If a student is breaking a rule, especially an unspoken rule, such as asking too many questions, have a conversation with them and tell them directly what the limits are. Brainstorm with them how they will remember, and how they will get their questions asked outside of class.

*When effectively implemented, social justice should provide equal learning opportunities for all students, help foster respect among individuals, and create individuals who are empowered to not only notice but challenge the inequalities and injustices in society (Levinson, 2009).*

If a student needs more than you can reasonably provide, or they mention they had an IEP or 504 plan in high school, refer them to the Disability Resource Center. [www.bellevuecollege.edu/drc](http://www.bellevuecollege.edu/drc) or [drc@bellevuecollege.edu](mailto:drc@bellevuecollege.edu)

If you need support with ideas for connecting or communicating with a student, contact Neurodiversity Navigators. [www.bellevuecollege.edu/autismspectrumnavigators/](http://www.bellevuecollege.edu/autismspectrumnavigators/) or [sara.gardner@bellevuecollege.edu](mailto:sara.gardner@bellevuecollege.edu)