

SSD FACULTY INFO

BLIND AND LOW VISION

OVERVIEW AND DEFINITION

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 is 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 canes to assist them, as well as their 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 lessons at the beginning of class, provide sequential instructions and repeat important information
- 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 nonverbal 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
- 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 Braille, talking calculators and watches, thermographic pen and paper, screen readers, portable tape recorders, scanning and text-to-speech devices, etc.

SUGGESTED ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS

- provision of extended time for tests and exams (usually time and a half)
- provision of a scribe/reader for exams and tests
- provision of peer note takers for lectures
- preferential seating
- tape recording of lectures
- access to assistive/adaptive technology
- provision of alternative format materials (large print documents, audio tapes, etc.)