

## **VISUAL IMPAIRMENT**

Only a small minority of people are actually totally blind; most are considered "legally blind." Even with correction, a legally blind person's best eye sees less at 20 feet than a normal eye sees at 200 feet. Difficulties experienced by many visually impaired students may include: recurring eye strain while reading, inability to read standardized print, inability to read poor quality print or certain colors of print, and sensitivity to bright light.

Students who have been blind since birth or shortly after have no visual memories. Their concept of objects, space, and distance may be different from those who became blind later in life. Mobility skills of individuals may vary also, depending on the age of onset of blindness and the quality and extent of mobility training and mobility talent. Some blind students will use Braille with competence, but many do not use it. Most visually impaired students acquire information through listening. Some blind students are competent typists, but their written communication and spelling skills sometimes reflect their natural dependency on audio transmission of information.

Because of these varied factors it is important to meet with the student as soon as possible to arrange specific accommodations. It can take up to eight (8) weeks when taped books have to be ordered, so the student should make contact with you before the semester begins.

DRS hires assistants to act as scribes, readers, research/lab assistants, and proctors of tests. The student should be well aware of the procedure and responsibility involved with managing assistants and can explain to you what the individual needs may be. Coordinating these services requires advance notice and time is crucial. If you make an assignment on short notice, remember that the student who must coordinate his work with an assistant will need more time than the student who can work independently.

### **ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES TO CONSIDER WHILE WORKING WITH VISUALLY IMPAIRED STUDENTS**

Treat the visually impaired student very much like you would any other student. Use words like "see" without being self-conscious. If you are in a room alone with a blind person try to remember to explain what you are doing, such as taking notes of a meeting or shuffling papers. Tell him/her when someone comes in the room or you leave the room.

A student may use a Seeing Eye Dog. These dogs have been trained to guide blind people, to keep out of the way, and to be quiet so as to not inconvenience anyone. These working dogs should not be treated as pets and should not be petted while working.

If classes involve field trips to out-of-class locations, discuss traveling needs with the student. In most instances all that will be required is for a classmate to act as a sighted guide.

Visually impaired students may find it necessary to arrange substitutions or waivers for courses that are extremely "visual" by design; however, it should not be assumed automatically that this will be necessary.

When using visual aids, drawings or diagrams in the class try to be as descriptive as possible. Words like "this" or "that" can be confusing. Consider making copies of overhead materials or diagrams, so later the student can ask an assistant to describe the information in detail to understand the material better.