

Physical Disability

A physical disability is a condition that substantially limits one or more basic physical activities in life (i.e. walking, climbing stairs, reaching, carrying, or lifting). These limitations hinder the person from performing tasks of daily living. Physical disabilities are highly individualized. The same diagnosis can affect students very differently.

Mobility Impairment

Mobility Impairment describes any difficulty which limits functions of moving in any of the limbs or in fine motor abilities. Mobility Disabilities can stem from a wide range of causes and be permanent, intermittent, or temporary. The most common permanent disabilities are musculoskeletal impairments such as partial or total paralysis, amputation, spinal injury, arthritis, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, and traumatic brain injury. Additionally, conditions such as respiratory and cardiac diseases can impair mobility due to fatigue and reduced stamina.

In the college environment, physical and mobility disabilities often require accommodations to allow students to function successfully in the classroom setting.

The affects of physical/mobility disabilities can be visible or invisible.

They can include the inability to walk and/or use arms, hands, and fingers. Many of these students use wheelchairs, crutches, or canes. These students also may have pain management issues. In addition, students with physical/mobility disabilities may need attendants to help them with personal care.

Attendants may be used for transport and physical classroom assistance. In some cases, such as cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, and traumatic brain injury, there also may be speech, visual, or learning impairments. In the case of traumatic brain injury, fine motor function is often impaired. Students with chronic illness/disorders may also struggle with fatigue.

Most physical/mobility impairments increase the time and effort which students must expend in life activities. Getting to class, using toilet facilities and labs/clinicals can be a major undertaking for these students. It may be especially difficult for them to get to class within the time restraint of schedules. Absences or lateness may occur due to transportation problems, inclement weather, waiting for elevators, or equipment difficulties (maneuvering wheelchairs, crutches). Students with physical and mobility disabilities also often require accommodations to function

successfully in a classroom setting. Accommodations will vary for those with physical/mobility disabilities. There are, however, some general considerations which apply to most students who have physical/mobility disabilities. Typically accommodations may include:

- Making sure the classroom layout is accessible and free from obstructions.
- Provision of classroom space for a wheelchair or a wheelchair accessible desk/table. If needed, an extra chair will be required for the student's personal attendant.
- Advanced notice if the class activity will be held elsewhere.
- Reasonable consideration for lateness due to difficulties in the location of classroom or schedule.
- Use of note taker or tape recorder
- Extended time for tests or quizzes
- Use of a scribe or computer for written work.
- Provision of copies of overheads before class.

General information for Helping Students with Physical/Mobility Disabilities

- Remember that students with physical/mobility disabilities are people. They are like anyone else, except for the limitations due to their disabilities.
- Relax. If you don't know what to say or do, allow the person with the disability to help put you at ease. Always ask the person the best way to give assistance.
- Offer assistance, but wait until it is accepted before giving it. Respect the person's right to indicate the kind of help needed or to refuse help.
- When talking with a person who uses a wheelchair, try to converse at eye level; sit down if a chair is available. Also, remember that a wheelchair is the student's personal space; so do not lean on, touch, or push the chair unless asked.
- Appreciate what the student can do. Treat the student as you would any other student. Because an individual has a functional limitation does not mean they are incapable of doing college work.
- Be considerate of the extra time it might take for the person to get things done. Let him/her set

the pace in walking or talking.

- Don't assume a lack of response indicates rudeness. The student may react in an unconventional manner or appear to be ignoring you. Some students have slowed reaction or processing time due to their medical condition or medications they take for this condition.

Student Responsibilities

Students with physical/mobility disabilities:

- are held to the same academic standards as all MCCC students. They must complete all course work/class requirements.
- should register with Disability Services before the beginning of each semester.
- submit all test accommodation requests through Disability Services. Disability Services will contact instructors to set up test accommodations.
- should try to minimize distractions that may occur due to disabilities (i.e. entering class late, maneuvering wheelchairs, speaking to personal attendant)

**If any questions, please contact:
Disability Services
(located in the Campbell Learning
Resource Laboratory, C-218
(734) 384-4167**

Helping Students with Physical/Mobility Disabilities



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