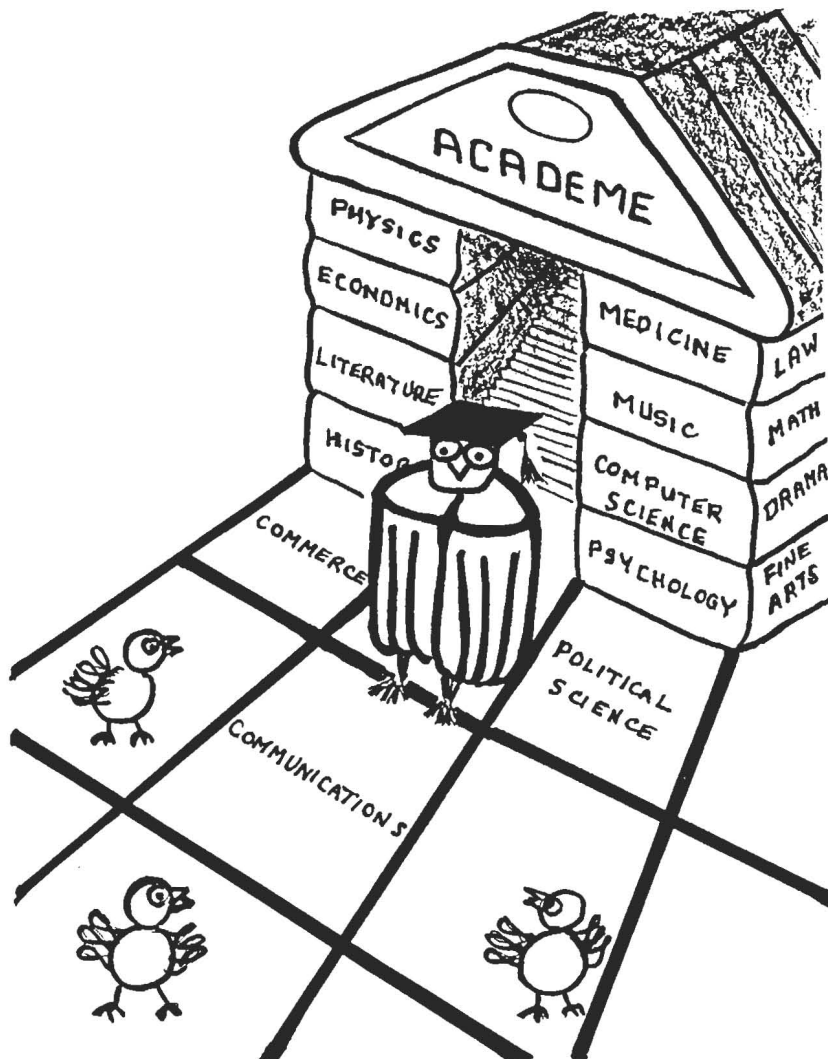

STUDENTS AND THEIR PROFESSORS: A GUIDE FOR THE COLLEGE STUDENT WITH A DISABILITY



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This manual is available in large print, audiotape, computer disk, and braille versions. The reproduction of its contents is permitted provided the source is cited. To obtain a copy, specify the version and write to:

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PART ONE - INTRODUCTION

1. WHY MIGHT STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES NEED THIS GUIDE?

When students first go to college, most have little idea about how to deal with their professors or with numerous other aspects of academic life. Accustomed to high school teachers who take attendance and assign homework, students are confronted by professors who give readings and assignments. Differences between life in a high school and life in college or university are great. There are many college survival guides which describe the differences and make recommendations about what to expect and how to cope (see Section 17 for some good guides). But most such manuals generally do not deal with how to get along with one's professors, especially if one has a disability.

All students have concerns about how to deal with professors.



"I don't understand what the assignment is about. Shall I ask him?"
"I have no hope of getting this paper done on time. What should I do?"
"If I ask for an extension, will I be penalized?"
"Will the professor believe that my reasons are legitimate?"
"I don't understand what she said during the lecture. Should I ask her to clarify?" (Authors' files)

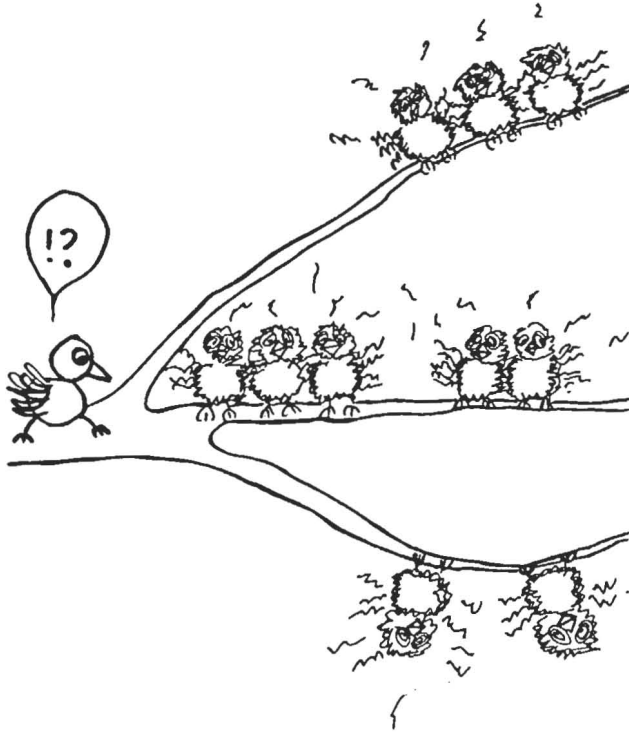
Like other students, students with disabilities also have concerns about their professors. The two main differences are that students who have disabilities may be concerned more often than nondisabled students and they may encounter problems with courses which relate to their specific impairments.

"My adapted transportation system has not been functioning well lately, and I find myself arriving late for classes. The professor doesn't usually allow students in after the lecture starts. I don't want to be treated differently but I also don't want to miss classes. What is the right thing to do?"
"I need to have my books on audiotape. But the professor is very spontaneous and sometimes assigns material to be read only a week in advance. I can't always get my readers organized on such short notice, so I can't always do the readings on time. Should I talk to the professor? If I talk to him, what do I say?"
"I hate asking for things. But if the professor continues to lecture while facing the chalkboard rather than the class, I'll flunk because half of the time I don't hear what's being said as I can't see her lips move. How can I solve the problem?" (Authors' files)

This guide is based on our research concerning the experiences of over 100 college and university students with various disabilities. It was written to help improve communication between students with disabilities and their professors about a variety of issues similar to those noted above. Following the tips and recommendations contained in the manual will help you learn more easily and obtain better grades which reflect what you have learned. A fringe benefit of using the tips is that you will be helping professors to become more effective teachers of the generations of students, both disabled and nondisabled, to follow.

PART TWO - RELATING TO PROFESSORS IN SPECIFIC SITUATIONS

2. DURING THE FIRST FEW DAYS OF CLASSES



"During the first few days of class, I feel like any other student, dazed and confused." (Authors' files)

Issues

Most students, whether they have a disability or not, feel hopeful, but also tense and anxious during the first few days of classes. Common concerns include: What will the course be like? How good is the professor? Will I do well in the course? How heavy is the reading load? Are there lots of exams and papers? Is this the type of course I really want?

Students with disabilities often have additional concerns as well.

*"What are other people going to think of me?"
"Will the professor understand my disability? How will she react?"
"I wonder if he knows what my disability is and what it implies?"
"I am afraid I will be a burden because I have*

special needs."

"Will the professor treat me differently from the rest of the class?" (Authors' files)

What Students Do

During the first few days of classes many students check out the professor and the course to evaluate whether they want to stay in the class.

"Watching professors can help you learn a lot about their style. This can help later on to be effective when you approach them."

"I think about what is expected and about the course outline. Then I plan out a strategy as to how I will handle assignments and exams." (Authors' files)

If they decide to stay in the course, students usually tell their professors that they have a disability. They also talk to the professor about general issues related to how the disability affects learning in the course as well as about specific course concerns and possible adjustments the professor could make. During such discussions, students are likely to tell the professor about their strengths - what they **can** do - and about their weaknesses - what they **cannot** do. Also, they make suggestions about what the **professor can do** to make learning easier. Most students feel that such discussions are best held early in the semester. Indeed, some students approach the professor well before classes start to obtain a course outline and to get more information about the course.

"I'm upfront with professors and tell them about my situation. I make them aware of my needs."

"I will go on the first day of the course and say after class, 'I'm partially sighted - I have a visual impairment,' and tell them what special needs I have."

"I make sure to get to the first class early and set myself up in the front row facing the professor. I approach the professor after the first class and explain that I have a hearing impairment. I ask them to restrict their movement, especially turning their back on me. I also ask them to speak slowly and clearly. I tell them that I would like to tape lectures and explain, if they don't like being taped, that it helps me pick up what they say." (Authors' files)

2. First Few Days of Classes p. 3

Students also do a variety of things that **do not** work out very well for them. In this case, not talking to the professor and doing nothing special during the first few days of classes seem to be popular, but distinctly **ineffective** ways of coping. In these cases, students often don't think much about what they should do or about what they could have done - they simply do nothing.

How Students Feel

It is not always easy to talk to one's professors. Often, **before** talking to their professors, students have a variety of negative thoughts. These focus mainly on feeling uncomfortable and on the professor's possible reaction.

"I don't like to ask for things. I really value my independence."

"I worry a lot about how they will react - if they will be understanding."

*"It's like a Catch-22. I want to ask for help and tell them about my situation, but I don't want them to feel that I'm asking for **special** help. I don't want them to feel that I'm imposing on them." (Authors' files)*

Students also have a variety of negative thoughts about themselves and their own self-concepts. In fact, before talking to the professor, students appear to be engaged in an internal dialogue of conflict.

"I think to myself, 'Do I belong here? Should I be doing this? What if I don't fit in?'" (Authors' files)

After talking to the professor, students generally feel considerably more positive. Their thoughts are characterized by a feeling of self-efficacy and the belief that they did the right thing. Most students believe that talking to the professor was helpful. They also feel good that they did something to resolve potential problems. In addition, they feel better about themselves, are pleased with what they did, and feel more confident about succeeding in the course.

"Nothing gets resolved if you do not speak up and raise issues."

"I think it's good to talk to professors to let them know what I need and to make them feel more comfortable because they usually don't know what to expect."

"It is never easy to make the first contact. But you soon learn there really isn't anything to worry about."

"I feel that getting problems out in the open early is a good idea because it shows that you are concerned and interested."

"When you see professors early and clear up all problems and concerns, you know where you stand, what arrangements are necessary, and how you will manage. Waiting till later in the term is sometimes not effective because you just may not be able to manage the course or the professor may not be accommodating."

"I always feel good after I make the effort - I've done it!" (Authors' files)

Recommendations

TIP # 1

Check out your professors; observe them during the first class, speak to them before registration, ask other students.

TIP # 2

Approach the professor early - preferably on the first day of classes or even before the course starts.

TIP # 3

Tell your professors about your disability. There is no need to go into clinical details. Just tell them the general nature of your disability (e.g., I have a visual impairment. I can see enough to move around but I don't see details clearly).

Recommendations continued

TIP # 4

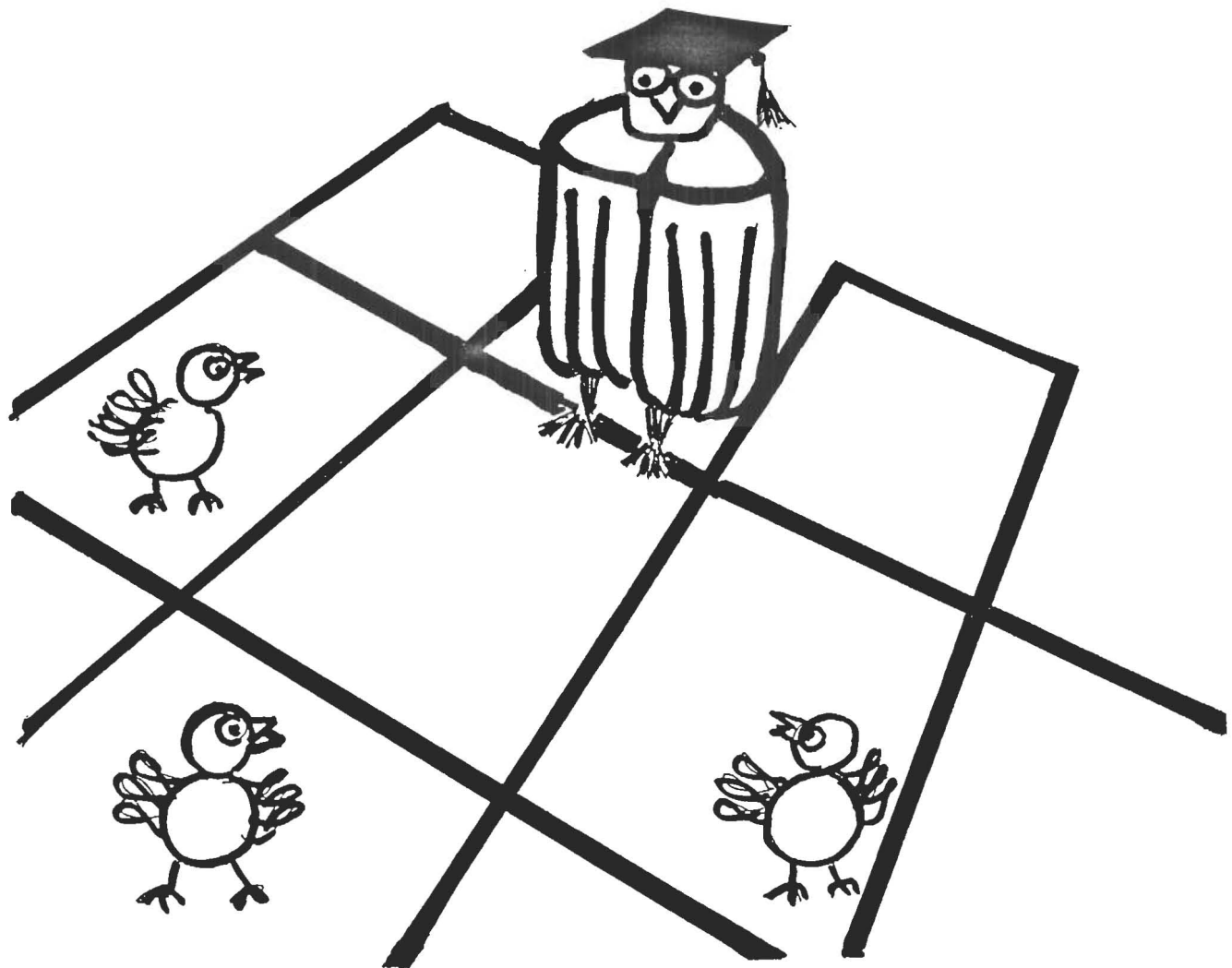
Let your professors know how the disability is likely to affect you as a student in their courses (e.g., if you have a hearing impairment you may tell professors that you need to see their faces because you read lips).

TIP # 5

Talk to the professor about what you **can** and **cannot** do in the course (e.g., I can understand lectures if I can see your lips but I cannot take notes at the same time).

TIP # 6

Educate your professors. Let them know what **they** could do that would be helpful (e.g., I have a visual impairment. It would be helpful if you would read aloud what you write on the chalkboard). Tell **them** about the kinds of adaptations they could make to the course and to their teaching style that would be beneficial for you (e.g., I have weak hands. I will need more time for exams because my hand gets tired).



3. SPECIAL CONSIDERATION DURING THE TERM

"I try my hardest to do things like everyone else and not need extra help. But sometimes I have to ask."

"Because I established a good rapport with the professors early in the semester, I feel comfortable going to see them throughout the term when problems arise."

"Professors helped me immeasurably in getting through bureaucratic stuff."

"It gets easier to approach professors as you go through the year." (Authors' files)

Issues

Students who have a disability may find that the course requirements are very difficult for them to meet because of the impairment. For example, students with visual impairments may find that lengthy optional reading lists pose problems because it is difficult to get all of the material audiotaped on time or because it takes a long time to listen to tapes. Also, it is not easy for a visually impaired student to skim articles or books to evaluate whether to read them in depth or not. Students with learning disabilities may have problems writing exams within the time limit, especially if these are based on lengthy passages of text or use multiple choice format. Students with a speech impairment may find oral presentations in class particularly stressful and may wish to make alternate arrangements (e.g., written presentation, audiotaping presentation at home where one is not so nervous). Students who have a hearing impairment may find it difficult to understand what professors are saying when the room is darkened and slides are presented. They may also find it difficult to follow a class discussion because it is hard to lip read what other students are saying when they are spread out in the classroom. This could cause problems when hearing impaired students are responsible for material from class discussions. Students with mobility or muscular impairments can have problems with exam writing or with assignments or papers which require a great deal of research or travel outside the classroom.

Asking for help or special consideration is not easy. When students need assistance, whether they are disabled or able-bodied, they often worry about the professor's reactions and feel inadequate because they have to ask.

"I don't like having to ask. I have always felt

uncomfortable when I had to ask for things like extensions."

"Will she be helpful and understanding or will she be unpleasant about things?"

"Will the professor believe me or will she think I'm lazy or that my reasons are invalid?"

"Will he think I'm stupid?" (Authors' files)

In addition to such thoughts, students with disabilities often have other concerns as well.

"Will the professor pity me?"

"I don't want to be seen as using my disability to gain special favors."

"I can't do the same as others. I wish I were like everyone else." (Author's files)

Some students have a more "upbeat" way of looking at things. They also think about the professor, but their thoughts are more positive and they feel more comfortable asking the professor for assistance.

"I think the professor will say OK. My request is reasonable."

"Things have worked out all right in the past. I think he'll understand that I've tried my best."

"It's OK for me to ask. It's something I just have to do." (Authors' files)

What Students Do

Before approaching the professor, many students try to handle problems themselves. Depending on the nature of the difficulty, this can be an effective strategy.

"I evaluate how serious the problem is and then, if I couldn't solve it by myself or with help from classmates, I would go speak to the professor." (Authors' files)

If solving a problem by oneself is not reasonable, students generally elect to talk to the professor and discuss how the disability influences their ability to meet course requirements. Some students see the professor after class. Others stop by during office hours or make an appointment. Students find that it is beneficial to plan what issues they wish to raise with the professor and to think about ways of resolving the problem in advance. They then inform the professor about what they have difficulty doing and discuss possible solutions. Also, students believe it is most effective to see the professor **before** the problem is acute instead of waiting until the last minute (e.g. asking for an extension several days before the deadline rather than on the day that the assignment is due).

"I try quite hard and give it a lot of thought so that I can focus on my needs and not be emotional about it. Then I just tell him what area I need help in and why."

*"I first explain what I have already done on my own and **then** I ask for further help."*

"I discuss my position and explain what my difficulties are. Together we would try and work around these difficulties."

"I present a series of options to solve the problem in addition to letting the professor know that there is a problem."

"I do not ask to do less work. I'm not interested in a free ride. Instead, I ask professors to change assignments so that I can do different work of equal value."

"I always listen carefully to their ideas and suggestions and talk out solutions until we come to an agreement." (Authors' files)

If adjustments which professors promised to make are not made, students can remind them. Generally, students do not believe that one should stop requesting needed adjustments or drop the course because promised adaptations have not been made.

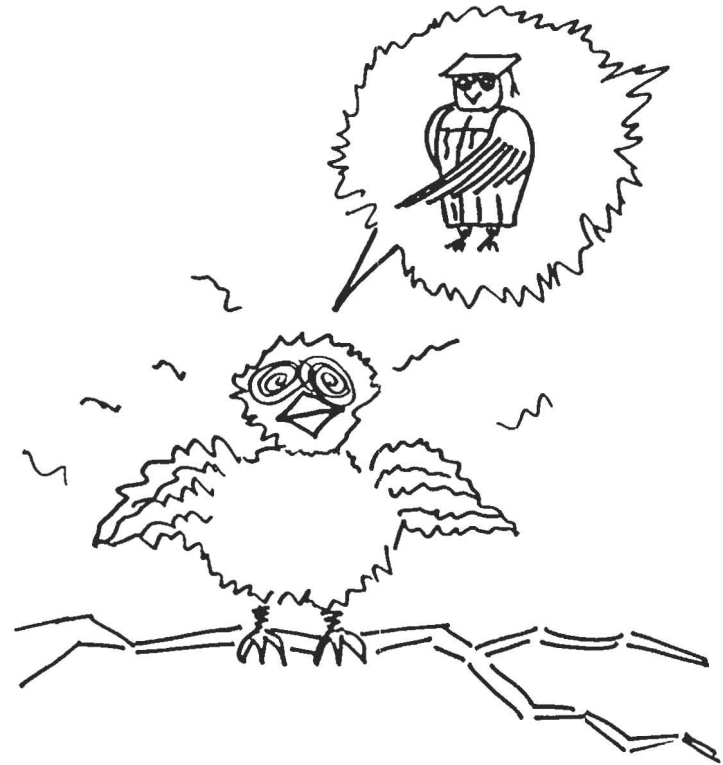
Sometimes students feel that the professor has not been helpful. In this situation some students felt that it is effective to do something else such as talk to the coordinator of services for students with disabilities (someone who assists students in obtaining special support or services they may require - this person's title will differ from institution to institution), the department chairperson, the ombudsman (someone charged with the task of trouble-shooting problems for students) or the dean. In fact, both the coordinator of services for students with disabilities and the ombudsman can help students develop a strategy for dealing with the professor as well as with those who have higher authority, such as the department chairperson or the dean.

Sometimes students simply inform their professors that they have a disability. This, by itself, does **not** appear to be very effective, perhaps because professors are generally **not** aware of the specific nature of the problems which the disability creates in meeting course requirements.

Some students choose **not** to talk to the professor at all. They either do nothing about problems or they try to work things out with classmates. Sometimes, students choose to speak to a coordinator of services for students with disabilities instead. While these strategies can be effective in other situations, when help is needed **from the professor**, these alternatives appear to be ineffective.

How Students Feel

Students feel good when they are able to handle problems themselves. When they feel that they must talk to a professor about difficulties with course requirements, however, they feel inadequate and different from other students. They wonder whether they belong in the course. Also, they have concerns about the professor - whether he or she will be able to treat them fairly - and about what the professor thinks of them. Students also worry whether the professor will think that they are lazy or that they are not trying hard enough. For many, especially for those with non-visible impairments, the issue of credibility also comes up.



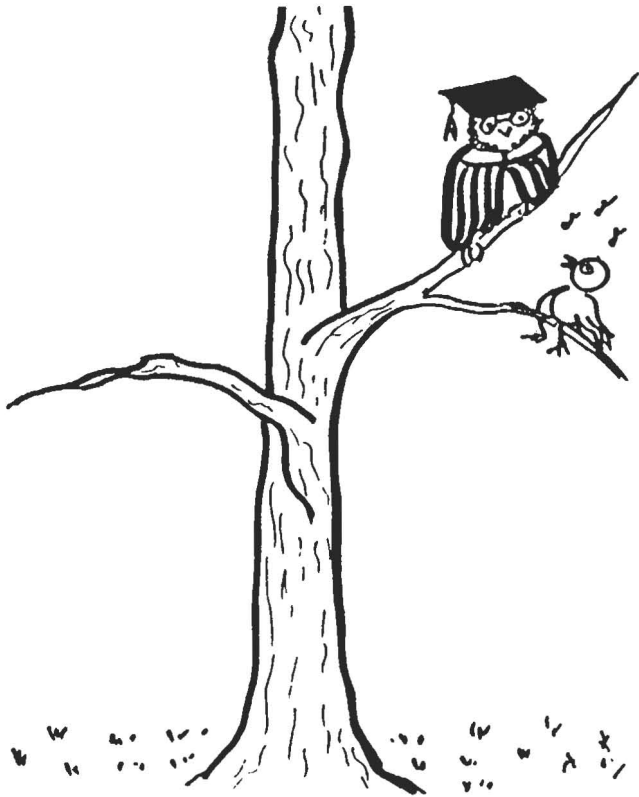
"Will the professor believe me?"

"I was worried that professors wouldn't be willing to adapt the course for me."

"I felt that I was not getting everything out of the course that others were getting." (Author's files)

3. Special Consideration During the Term p. 7

Most students know, however, that it is a good idea to talk to one's professors. Also, students sometimes encourage themselves by thinking about how much better they will feel once it's over.



"I really don't want to be treated differently. But sometimes you just have to ask. It's something I must do."

"I always feel uncomfortable before asking for help and happy after I go." (Authors' files)

And students do feel better after talking to their professors. They usually feel more comfortable with the professor and find that many of their initial concerns were unfounded. They also believe that they had done the right thing by initiating dialogue, that talking to the professor was helpful, that problems were resolved, and that they were better able to succeed in the course.

"The professor turned out to be OK."

"I feel better after I tell them because then they know the situation."

"Together we find a method for me to complete the assignments without compromising the class standards."

"I asked for accommodation and felt very good because my grades improved tremendously as a result."

"I was a little worried about asking for help, but professors were very willing to assist since I had made the effort."

"I had no choice but to make it known that I have a problem. Talking to the professor is a necessary process that must be done." (Authors' files)

Recommendations

TIP # 1

Do your best to handle problems on your own. But be aware that this may mean working much harder than other students.

TIP # 2

If you cannot deal with the problem yourself or if it is just too difficult to do so, arrange to talk to the professor after class, stop by during office hours or make an appointment.

TIP # 3

Arrange to talk to the professor as soon as you become aware of the problem - do not wait until the last minute.

TIP # 4

Plan ahead of time what you intend to discuss. Think of what it is that you want and about how the professor could help you.

TIP # 5

When talking with the professor, discuss how the disability affects your ability to learn in the course and how it interferes with your ability to meet course requirements.

Recommendations continued

TIP # 6

Tell the professor what you are unable to do (e.g., I cannot read printed material) and describe the specific problem which you are currently experiencing (e.g., I am having difficulty getting the necessary articles taped).

TIP # 7

State the specifics of your request (e.g., I would like to have a two week extension on the paper). Don't leave the professor guessing about how the problem could be solved if you already know the answer.

TIP # 8

Do not simply tell professors that you have a disability. Many professors do not know the implications of an impairment.

TIP # 9

Do not request a reduction in workload or an exemption from course requirements - discuss alternative means of evaluation instead. Also, do not routinely request extensions on assignments - do this only when your disability makes it extremely difficult for you to meet deadlines and you have made a previous arrangement with the professor.

TIP # 10

If the professor is not helpful in getting a problem resolved, you can elect to do something else such as speak to the coordinator of services for students with disabilities (or whoever is responsible for providing assistance to students with disabilities at your institution), the department chairperson, the ombudsman for students, or the dean.

4. HELP FROM CLASSMATES

*"My legs don't work but my mouth sure can."
(Authors' files)*

Issues

All students need help from their classmates occasionally. Missed classes, sketchy notes, unintelligible handwriting and obscure lecture points affect almost everyone and it is perfectly reasonable for students to need help from their classmates. Students with disabilities may also need other kinds of help. For example, those with muscular or hearing impairments may need someone to take notes during lectures. Students with a visual impairment may need a classmate to read a handout to them during the class or to help them obtain materials from the library.

What Students Do

Most students do not ask the professor when they need help from classmates. Instead, they make their own arrangements either by asking classmates

themselves or by discussing the issue with the coordinator of services for students with disabilities, especially when long term help such as note taking during the whole semester is involved.

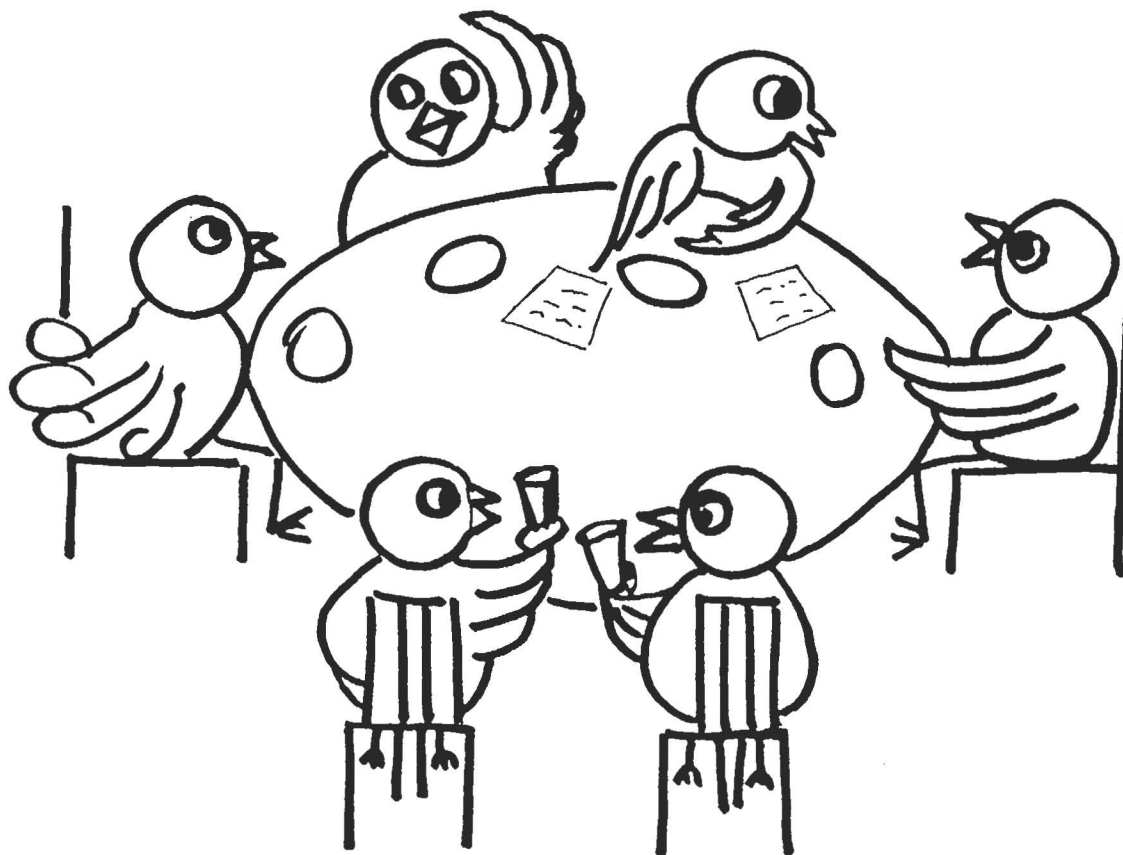
"I ask students for help directly." (Author's files)

If some kind of help from classmates is needed which can only be arranged by one's professors, then thinking about what to ask and then talking to them about it is an effective thing to do.

"I first see if someone from the class could help me with the problem. But if only professors are able to help resolve it, then I go see them. I say, 'I have a problem following you and taking notes at the same time.' Then I ask for help to find a classmate." (Authors' files)

How Students Feel

While students do have some misgivings about the implications of asking classmates for help, nevertheless, most realize that asking classmates for assistance is likely to be helpful and, generally, students feel quite positive about asking.



"I feel bad burdening the students."

"I may pull back the class".

"Asking someone to take notes will lighten my workload".

"I felt more independent asking other students for help directly."

"If I don't ask students myself, the professor probably would not have a good impression of me because I couldn't approach students myself."

(Authors' files)

Those students who ultimately do talk to their professors also feel fairly comfortable discussing their concerns with them. Students are generally optimistic that professors will be helpful and believe that asking them is the right thing to do in order to succeed in the course.

"If I just don't know anyone in class, I'll ask the professors. They usually have a good idea about who would be appropriate." (Authors' files)

Recommendations

TIP # 1

If the help needed is small or occasional, ask classmates yourself.

TIP # 2

If you need ongoing help throughout the term, such as note-taking, discuss this with the coordinator of services for students with disabilities or whoever is responsible for providing assistance to students with disabilities at your institution.

TIP # 3

If the professor is essential in getting you the needed help from classmates, think about what you want or need and only then talk to the professor.

5. TALKING TO PROFESSORS OUTSIDE CLASS TIME

"I feel more comfortable talking to professors outside of class because it is one-to-one." (Authors' files)

Issues

Many students, whether they have a disability or not, talk to their professors outside of class time. Students may want clarification of course material or more information about an upcoming exam. They may also want to talk to professors about ideas for a paper or an assignment. Or they may want to discuss their grades or obtain feedback about their performance in the course. Some students want to talk about a career in the professors' field. Others want to ask about material to be covered during a foreseen absence from classes. Students may also want to discuss personal concerns such as exam anxiety or difficulties with different aspects of the course.

What Students Do

Some students talk to professors only when they feel they must. Others make it a point to talk to their professors and to keep in touch with them during the semester. Many students talk to their professors during the term to discuss course issues related to their disability, specific problems they may be encountering, and things the professor could do to help the student learn more effectively. In many cases, students plan what they want to discuss with the professor and, depending on the topic or the time required, see the professor after class, stop by during office hours or make an appointment.

"I first plan out what I am going to say. I prepare the idea that there is a problem, state what the problem is, explain some ways around the problem or suggest some alternatives, and look for options and help or feedback."

"I phone ahead to see if I need an appointment or whether I can just drop by during office hours." (Authors' files)

Some students choose not to talk to the professor even when they encounter significant problems with

the course. Others elect to limit contact with their professors whenever possible. A few students will even go so far as to drop a course rather than talk to the professor. These strategies are ineffective and were described as such even by those students who used them.

How Students Feel

Most students who talk to their professors outside class time feel quite positive before speaking to them. In fact, many students feel reasonably comfortable talking to professors in general. They believe that the professor will be understanding and expect to be well received. Also, students believe that professors will think well of them if they ask about material to be covered during a foreseen absence. Some students feel that professors become friendlier if students give them a chance by talking to them.

"Most of the professors are OK when you talk to them one-on-one."

"I'm pretty comfortable talking with professors. They get a lot friendlier as you get to know them better."

"Some professors are unpleasant. So I don't talk to them much. But others have been very helpful and considerate. So I talk to them." (Authors' files)

Many students don't hesitate to talk to their professors and don't worry about what the professor will think. Others do have reservations. They wonder whether it is appropriate to talk to the professor about course concerns. Some students even feel that they may be a burden to the professor.

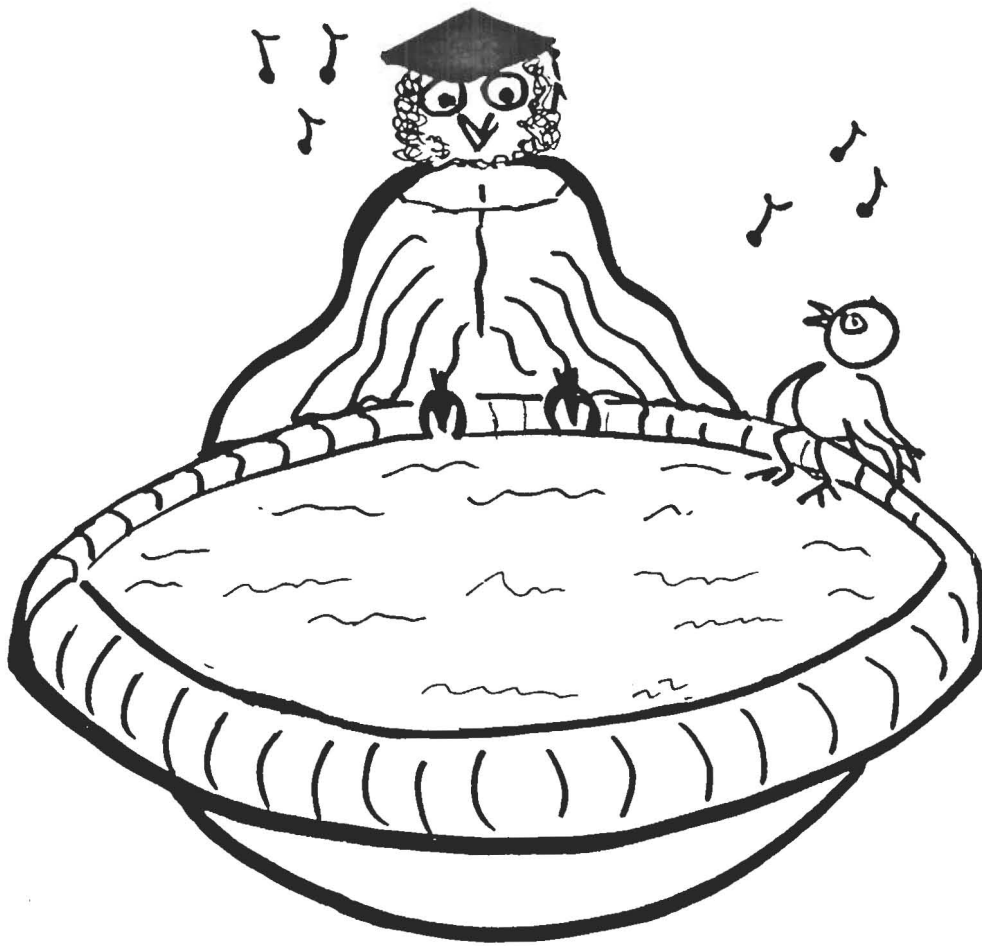
"Do I really need the help?"

"I worry about making problems or extra work for the professor." (Authors' files)

Generally, students feel much more positive after talking to their professors. They feel more comfortable with the professor, feel that they have done a good thing, and believe that they have opened doors for future collaboration.

"I felt pleased that the professors were flexible and lenient and I was satisfied with their efforts."

"Most of them are nice people and I feel good talking to them." (Authors' files)



Recommendations

TIP # 1

Talk to your professors when you feel that you need to discuss course issues.

TIP # 2

You may want to plan ahead of time what you want to discuss.

TIP # 3

Depending on the nature of what you want to discuss, you may talk to the professor after class, stop by during office hours, or make an appointment for lengthier conversations. Do not discuss issues which affect only you during class time.

TIP # 4

Discuss course issues with the professor, whether these are related to your disability or not, and talk about any specific problems which you are encountering with the course.

TIP # 5

If you know what professors could do that would be beneficial, let them know how they can help.

TIP # 6

Keep in touch with your professors during the term even if you have no problems. Let them know that things are going well.

6. USE OF EVERYDAY WORDS RELATED TO ONE'S DISABILITY

"I try to educate professors about disabled students' needs and let them know that there is no need for them to use a special language." (Authors' files)

Issues

Although most students use everyday words related to their disability in casual conversation, some students are not sure whether they should use these with professors. Also, students sometimes notice that a professor is not comfortable using such words. One student who has a visual impairment related the following.

*"The professor was explaining some course material to me. Then she asked, 'Do you see ... a ... uhm ... er ... sorry, uh, I mean **understand** my point.' It was pretty obvious that she was really uncomfortable using the word 'see' with me." (Authors' files)*

What Students Do

Most students with visual impairments use words such as "see" "vision" and "watch". Students who have a hearing impairment do use words such as "hear" "listen" and "sound." Similarly, words such as "walk" and "run" are often used by students who use a wheelchair as well as by those who have other mobility impairments.

"It's part of the language. I want to use the words or I'll stand out more."

"If I use the same lingo that everyone else uses, you will identify more with me." (Authors' files)

Students sometimes recognize that certain professors are not comfortable using such words and that the professor may not know whether it is appropriate to use such words when speaking to a student who has a disability. In this case, many students try to make their professors more comfortable by telling them that they are not bothered or offended by such words and that using the words is normal. It is also quite effective to put your professors at ease by joking with them about the words.

"I explained to the professor that it's OK to use the words - that it's perfectly normal. They're just words and we all know about figures of speech."

"When they stumble over words I try not to get offended and try to realize that they just have not been exposed to people with disabilities. They don't know what to say to make me comfortable. I tell them it's OK. "

"I tried to help them relax by making a joke out of it. I understood that they might not be used to dealing with such a situation." (Authors' files)

A significant number of students who notice that the professor is uncomfortable do not do anything about it. They don't think about it much and simply accept the fact that some professors will be uncomfortable using these words. Some students are angered at the professors' discomfort. Nevertheless, most students are aware that doing nothing will not make things any better.

"I didn't do anything. I pity them and felt sorry that they'd let words make them uncomfortable." (Authors' files)

How Students Feel

Most students believe that it is perfectly normal for everyone to use such words and don't think twice about using them. A few students do think about the issue and wonder how the professor will feel about students using everyday words related to their disability (e.g., "see" if they are blind). But most students believe that using these words is appropriate and are quite comfortable using them.

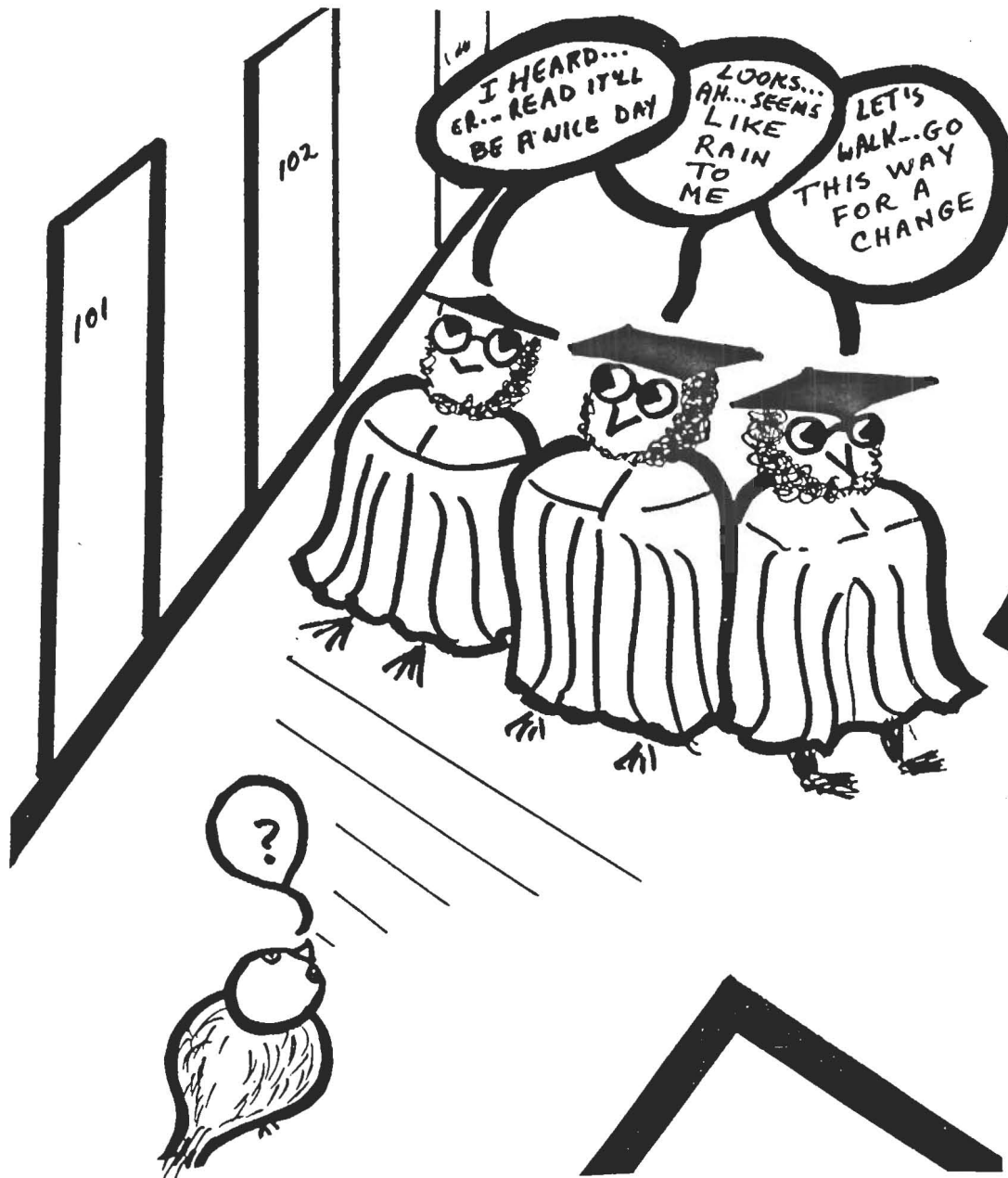
"You're asking me how I feel about using these words. I don't know. I've never thought about it." (Authors' files)

Some students resent that a professor is uncomfortable. Others feel sorry for professors and believe that the discomfort is due to the professor trying too hard.

"I feel a bit apprehensive and angry that they have a crisis about a word." (Authors' files)

After trying to put the professor at ease, most students feel good, both about themselves and about the professor. They believe they have done the right thing and that the professor will interact with them more comfortably and will be more helpful in the future.

"It's like anything else that should be done - it feels good afterwards." (Authors' files)



Recommendations

TIP # 1

Use words such as "see" "hear" and "walk" with your professors when these are part of everyday language.

TIP # 2

Make your professors more comfortable using words related to your disability by telling them that it does not bother you when they use such words or by joking with them.

7. FAILING WHEN ONE'S DISABILITY MAKES COURSE REQUIREMENTS IMPOSSIBLE

"I feel good about going to see the professors if they had already told me that they'd be there for me if I needed it."

"I am afraid that they may think that I am taking advantage of the situation." (Authors' files)

Issues

Ideally, students who are experiencing difficulties because of their disability should have discussed their concerns with the professor well before they find themselves failing. That almost half of the students we interviewed have been in this situation is testimonial to the fact that a lot of students do find themselves failing because their disability makes course requirements impossible to meet.

There are many reasons why students might be failing because of a disability. For example, some courses have requirements which a student with a disability simply cannot meet (e.g., make a film as a student project when one is blind, oral presentation for students with severe speech impairments, recognition of slides of paintings for students with a visual impairment, identification of musical passages for students with hearing impairments, complex laboratory procedures for students with muscular impairments). In other cases, the amount of reading (e.g., in the case of students with a visual impairment or a learning disability) or the nature of exams or assignments make course requirements virtually impossible to meet (e.g., in-class timed essays for students with muscular impairments, nature walks and plant identification for students who use a wheelchair, or summaries of class discussions for students with hearing impairments). Many students with disabilities find themselves in such impossible situations.

What Students Do

By the time one is failing, no single action is likely to be truly effective. At best, one can hope to barely pass and avoid the failure. What most students have found to be relatively effective in this situation is to talk to the professor and discuss the impact of the impairment on their ability to meet the course requirements. Planning what one intends to say to the professor is a good idea. Proposing ideas and specific things which could be done to avert the failure is also helpful (e.g., a make-up exam or an alternate assignment which may require more work).

If this dialogue does not result in a satisfactory resolution of the problem, talking to the coordinator of services for students with disabilities may be helpful. Dropping the course is also a possibility. But students who have dropped a course indicated that this is a very ineffective strategy. The alternative, a failing final grade, is presumably even less desirable.

"I look at the situation first and if I'm going to fail for sure, then I go see the professor. I feel uncomfortable, but at the same time hopeful that they will understand and help me pass the course."

"I just go see them, explain why my disability is causing me to fail and try to work out a solution or acceptable compromise."

"I don't want them to 'give' me a passing grade. I'm willing to do extra work. I let them know this." (Authors' files)

How Students Feel

Not surprisingly, students who find themselves failing because their disability has made it impossible for them to meet the course requirements are generally very upset and often feel anxious and depressed.



Some students question their own abilities. Others have regrets about not doing something about the problem while there was still time. Still others wish they had dropped the course earlier. Some students are frustrated and angry while others feel that if they had only worked harder, failure could have been avoided.

"It is not fair to fail on account of my disability."

"I wondered, 'Was it my fault?'" (Authors' files)

When thinking about talking to the professor, students worry that the professor will not understand the problem. Students are concerned that they will be rejected. Yet, students also tell themselves that they should do something about it.

"What if he doesn't understand about my impairment and thinks I was just too lazy and didn't work hard enough?"

"If I do not talk to her, I'll fail the course. So what have I got to lose?" (Authors' files)

somewhat better, especially when talking has resulted in a satisfactory solution to the problem. They feel less anxious and, regardless of the outcome, feel that they did the right thing by at least trying. Generally, students have fewer negative feelings after talking to the professor than before.

"It was a real relief talking to her because I knew now I would have a chance to pass the course."

"OK. So it didn't work. But I would have hated myself if I hadn't even tried." (Authors' files)

After talking to the professor or to the coordinator of services for students with disabilities, students feel

Recommendations

TIP # 1

Talk to your professor about the situation. You have little to lose by doing so.

TIP # 2

Before going to see the professor, think carefully about what you want to say or propose.

TIP # 3

Discuss the ramifications of the impairment for your ability to meet course requirements.

TIP # 4

Talk about what could be done to allow you to pass (e.g., extra assignments, make-up exam, extra term paper or research, re-distribution of grades to different aspects of course requirements).

TIP # 5

If all else fails, you may try speaking to the coordinator of services for students with disabilities about the problem.

TIP # 6

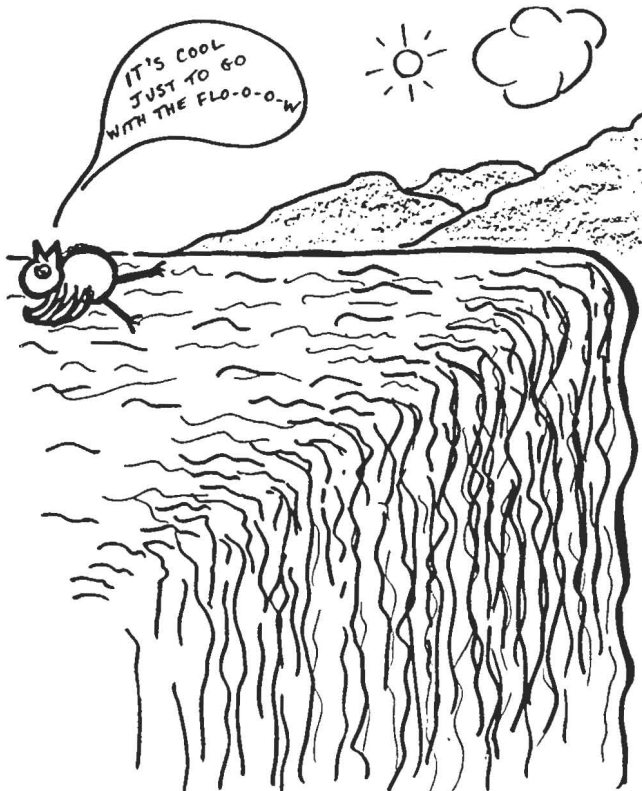
Do not simply drop the course before trying to salvage the credit.

8. FAILURE UNRELATED TO ONE'S DISABILITY

"I'm just like any other student and I have to deal with it."

"I didn't do anything to avert the problem. I thought it was too unpleasant to see the professor when there was still time. The failure was my fault."

(Authors' files)



Issues

For many students, whether they have a disability or not, failing a course is a part of the academic experience. Indeed, almost a third of the students we interviewed had failed at least one course, even when the course requirements were not made impossible by their disabilities. Most of these students indicated that they did not even think of talking to the professor about the matter.

Failing a course is a demoralizing and discouraging experience for anyone. It is especially discouraging for first year students because they have not yet established a successful track record in college or university courses.

What Students Do

Most students who fail a course don't do anything except feel bad.

"I was just lazy and didn't study. Why would I ask the professor to help me?"

"I won't talk to the professor. I would take the responsibility for failing myself. Next time, I will take action earlier."

"I was scared of failing, but I wouldn't talk to them."
(Authors' files)

But about a third of the students who find themselves in this predicament do choose to talk to the professor. Most of them talk about how the disability affected their performance in the course.

In some cases, the goal for talking to the professor is to get the grade changed.

"I'm not a saint. If I can get the professor to change the grade by painting a bleak picture, I will do it."
(Authors' files)

Other students indicated less obvious motives for talking to the professor after a failure. They talk to the professor to avoid having the professor think ill of them or in order to get feedback - to get a notion of their real potential and suitability for academic pursuits in the professor's area of interest.

"I don't want her to get a bad impression of me - that I'm stupid or incapable. I want to explain what happened."

"I want to approach them to find out what I did wrong." *(Authors' files)*

How Students Feel

At best, students are annoyed with themselves for not having dropped the course earlier or for not trying harder. But many students feel very upset and question their own academic abilities. Also, they are concerned about the implications of the failure for their academic standing and worry about the impression their failing grade has made on the professor.

"Do I belong here?"

"My self-confidence dropped way down and I started to doubt myself." *(Authors' files)*

As in most other situations, those students who elected to talk to their professors felt better afterward.

"At least I had the guts to face him and explain myself. Now, when I take the course again, I won't

have to worry so much about what he thinks of me." (Authors' files)

Recommendation

TIP # 1

Most students whose final grade is a failure do not even think of talking to the professor. Others, however, do discuss the matter with their professors. There are different reasons for doing so. You may try to convince the professor to alter the grade (N.B. attributing the failure to a disability when it is not relevant can backfire - the professor may check on this). You may want to get some feedback about your performance so that failure can be avoided in the future or you may simply want the professor to know either that you tried your best or that there were mitigating circumstances and that the grade does not reflect your overall abilities as a student.

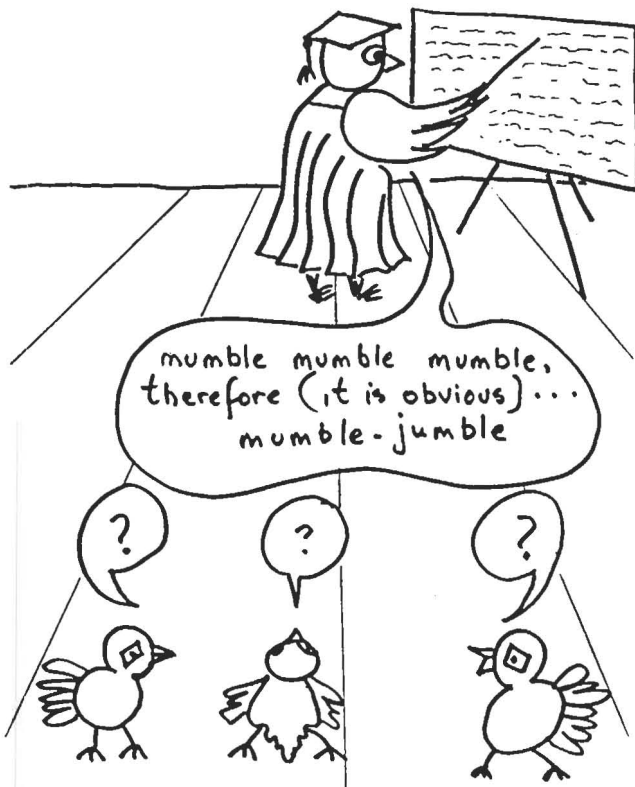
PART THREE - CONCERNS OF STUDENTS WITH DIFFERENT DISABILITIES

9. DIFFICULTY HEARING THE PROFESSOR IN CLASS

"I feel uncomfortable and anxious because I fall behind in my notes, miss parts of the lecture, and have to struggle to just keep up." (Author's files)

Issues

All students occasionally have difficulty hearing the professor in class. Some professors mumble. Others have heavy accents. Still others move about the room while talking, cover their lips, or turn toward the chalkboard and talk as they write. This makes trying to understand what they are saying difficult for everyone, but particularly for students who rely on hearing aids or lip reading.



What Students Do

The most popular strategy for students in this situation is to discuss what the professor could do to solve the problem. Students often think about what

they want to say before such a discussion. Of course, if the student has not told the professor about the hearing impairment and lip reading, he or she should certainly do so. Requesting that the professor wear an FM microphone is also a possibility.

While discussing the problem and possible solutions with professors is fairly effective, talking to them does not always guarantee results - professors often forget to do the right thing and slip back into their old habits. Also, professors may be lecturing while the room is blacked out during film or slide presentations. In this case, students usually ask for an explanation after the class. Some students cope by asking classmates what the professor said or handle the problem on their own by audiotaping lectures, reading up on missed class material, or taking an interpreter to class. Although a number of students who lip read have tried to signal professors whenever they could not hear them, generally, these students do not believe that this was an effective way of dealing with the problem.

"I might go after class and explain why I have problems following the lecture. The professors are usually very nice."

"When she announces tests and assignments, I ask her to write it on the board."

"I move to the front of the class to get closer to the professor."

"I ask professors if I may tape the lectures so I can play them back louder at home." (Authors' files)

How Students Feel

Before they speak to the professor, most students feel anxious and frustrated. They wonder if the professor will think that they are stupid and worry that the professor will not adapt to their needs. Some students are concerned that they may be rejected. Others worry about the possibility that they are imposing on the professor and taking up too much time. Mostly, students are concerned that professors will make an issue of the impairment in front of the class and feel inadequate because they are not like everyone else.

"I think hard about talking to professors when I can't hear them."

"I worry about how they'll react to me. Then I think to myself, 'What will happen if I do nothing?' When

I answer myself with, 'I'll flunk the course,' then I think to myself that I might as well talk to them. I have nothing to lose."

"I'm really shy and I have problems talking to professors."

"This really makes me doubt myself. I sometimes wonder if it's all worth it. But then I tell myself that I can't let fear stop me and I go talk to them."

(Authors' files)

After talking to their professors, students generally feel a little better. They believe that they have done

the right thing and feel more comfortable with their professors.

"Professors are helpful and really do make an effort to look at me and talk louder. If they forget, I'll see them after class to remind them. It also helps a lot to have a tape recorder."

"I always wonder if they get embarrassed repeating the questions or talking louder, so I try and emphasize how helpful they are."

"I am glad that I told the professor. I've accepted my impairment. I don't want to hide it and I sure don't want to fail because of it." (Authors' files)

Recommendations

TIP # 1

Think about what you want to discuss with the professor.

TIP # 2

If you have not yet told your professors that you have a hearing impairment, do so.

TIP # 3

Discuss how the hearing impairment interferes with your ability to hear lectures.

TIP # 4

Request that the professor modify his/her lecture style (e.g., face the class, not talk while writing on the chalkboard, stay put and not walk back and forth, speak louder and clearer, wear a microphone).

TIP # 5

Ask professors after class, see them during office hours, or make an appointment to clarify or paraphrase for you the points you missed during class.

TIP # 6

If you have already tried a couple of times, unsuccessfully, to remind the professor to face you, **do not** bother continuing to do so - this does not seem to work very well according to the students who have tried it.

TIP #7

If talking to a professor doesn't work, try to solve the problem on your own; borrow a classmate's notes, organize to have an efficient note taker, ask a classmate to clarify the point, check on missed material in the text or reference works or, if this works for you, audiotape the lectures and listen to them again. Check at the end of each class whether assignments, exams, or deadlines have been mentioned. You may also take an interpreter to class. Although it may be in your college's or university's bylaws that you have the right to do this, speak to the professor before audiotaping or taking an interpreter.

10. WHEN THE PROFESSOR DOESN'T UNDERSTAND ONE'S SPEECH

"I wonder, 'Do they think that I can't talk, that I don't know my grammar, or that I'm stupid?'" (Authors' files)

Issues

Most students have had the experience of not being understood. They may be addressing someone who is momentarily distracted or inattentive. In a large class, background noise can easily make questions inaudible. Sometimes the other person just doesn't understand what one is trying to say.

Not being understood is a frustrating experience. Students wonder whether what they have said is worth repeating and this sometimes discourages them from further participation. The problem is common for students with speech and hearing impairments.

What Students Do

When the professor doesn't understand what they are saying, most students try to change the way they speak - they slow down and try to enunciate more clearly. They also try to increase professors' awareness of the problem by talking to them and letting them know that being nervous about talking during

class can make the problem worse (e.g., class presentation). Some students also try to facilitate dialogue by telling their professors to let them know when they don't understand.

*"I tell them not to worry - that's the way I talk."
"I ask them to tell me if they can't understand me."
(Authors' files)*

How Students Feel

Most students feel badly when the professor does not understand what they are saying. It is a frustrating experience and makes students feel inadequate. They also wonder about the impression they are making on the professor.

*"How can I rephrase what I was saying?"
"I worried that I was making a bad impression."
"I try not to be too self-conscious because it will make me more nervous." (Authors' files)*

But students also know that they should keep on trying - by slowing down and repeating or paraphrasing what was said. Usually students feel better after trying again, both about themselves and about the impression they are making on the professor.

*"I sometimes must stop talking, take a moment to relax and try again slowly."
"I continue to try and explain what I wanted to say and I say it more clearly." (Authors' files)*

Recommendations

TIP # 1

Don't get flustered - try to speak more slowly and clearly.

TIP # 2

Repeat what you have said or rephrase it.

TIP # 3

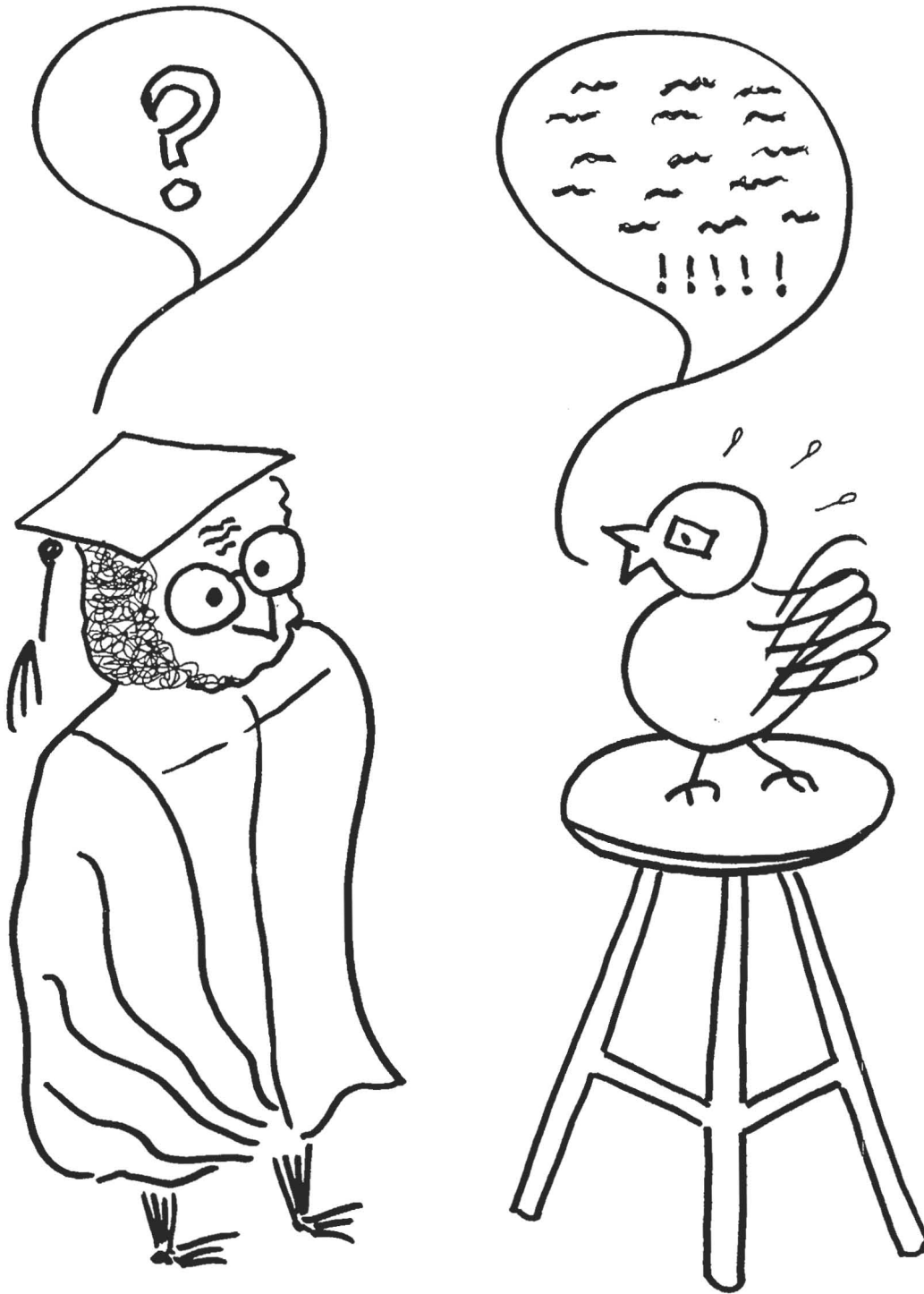
If nothing else works, try writing.

TIP #4

Talk to the professor about the problem and about things which make it worse (e.g., anxiety during class presentations).

TIP # 5

You may also want to tell your professors to let you know if they don't understand you.



11. CONCERNS OF STUDENTS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS AND LEARNING DISABILITIES

Issues

This section was written primarily for students who have a visual impairment. Some of the concerns of students with certain types of learning disabilities are similar. If you have a learning disability you may want to read this section and see if there are issues and tips which fit your situation.

Students who have a visual impairment often need technical adjustments to assist them with the course. For example, books may have to be audiotaped (or obtained from an out-of-town library on audiotape) or magnifying equipment may be needed for reading or for seeing the chalkboard. Some students like to audiotape lectures. For many students with a visual impairment, written exams can pose problems. Students may also need to have exams audiotaped and may need extra time and a typewriter or a computer to write exam answers. Professors may use slides, models or visual presentations such as overheads or diagrams in class. Visual acuity can also be necessary for labs or for field-work and library research. There are many ways that students with visual impairments can compensate.

What Students Do

Many students try to solve problems on their own and get organized early, preferably well before the course starts. They find out about the texts and readings in advance by calling the bookstore or the library to find out about reading materials for their courses and arrange to get needed books on audiotape. Some students cope by making sure that they arrive to classes early so that they can get choice seating (either at the front of the class or near an electric outlet where a portable computer, tape recorder, or other equipment may be plugged in). Also, students often make arrangements with classmates on their own to obtain needed assistance. Some students make it a point to inform themselves about special services and resources that the college provides by talking with the coordinator of service for students with disabilities (e.g., availability of "talking computers," 4-track tape recorders, enlarging equipment such as a photocopy machine or a Visualek, supervised exam rooms where students who need extra time for exams can be tested).

While handling problems on one's own is adequate for a few students, for most students who have a visual impairment this is not enough. Students may need help with the course that only professors can provide (e.g., problems with exams or deadlines). If this is the case, talking to one's professors is usually effective; most students who have a visual impairment do discuss course adjustments and how the disability affects their ability to succeed in the course.

Many students make it a point to talk to the professor early, sometimes several weeks before the beginning of classes, but certainly before problems become serious. Students plan in advance what issues they want to raise, tell their professors exactly what the problem is, tell them what they can and cannot do and, if they know what sorts of adjustments work for them, tell professors what would be helpful (e.g., "Verbalize what you are writing when you write on the chalkboard or overhead." "The college has a supervised special room with a typewriter where I can write my exam.").

"I try to be organized, competent and responsible before I go talk to my professors."

"I have to ask professors in advance for names of texts, reading materials and handouts so I can get them read onto tape or typed in braille."

"I go see them to talk about the problem and list possible solutions, listen for feedback and alternatives, and then work out an agreement we are both happy with."

"If professors don't say what's on the overheads, I ask them if they could read it aloud or loan me the overhead. If they forget, I occasionally remind them."

"I usually say, 'In case I need extra time to write the exam, I need time-and-a-half. But I'll try to finish quickly.'"

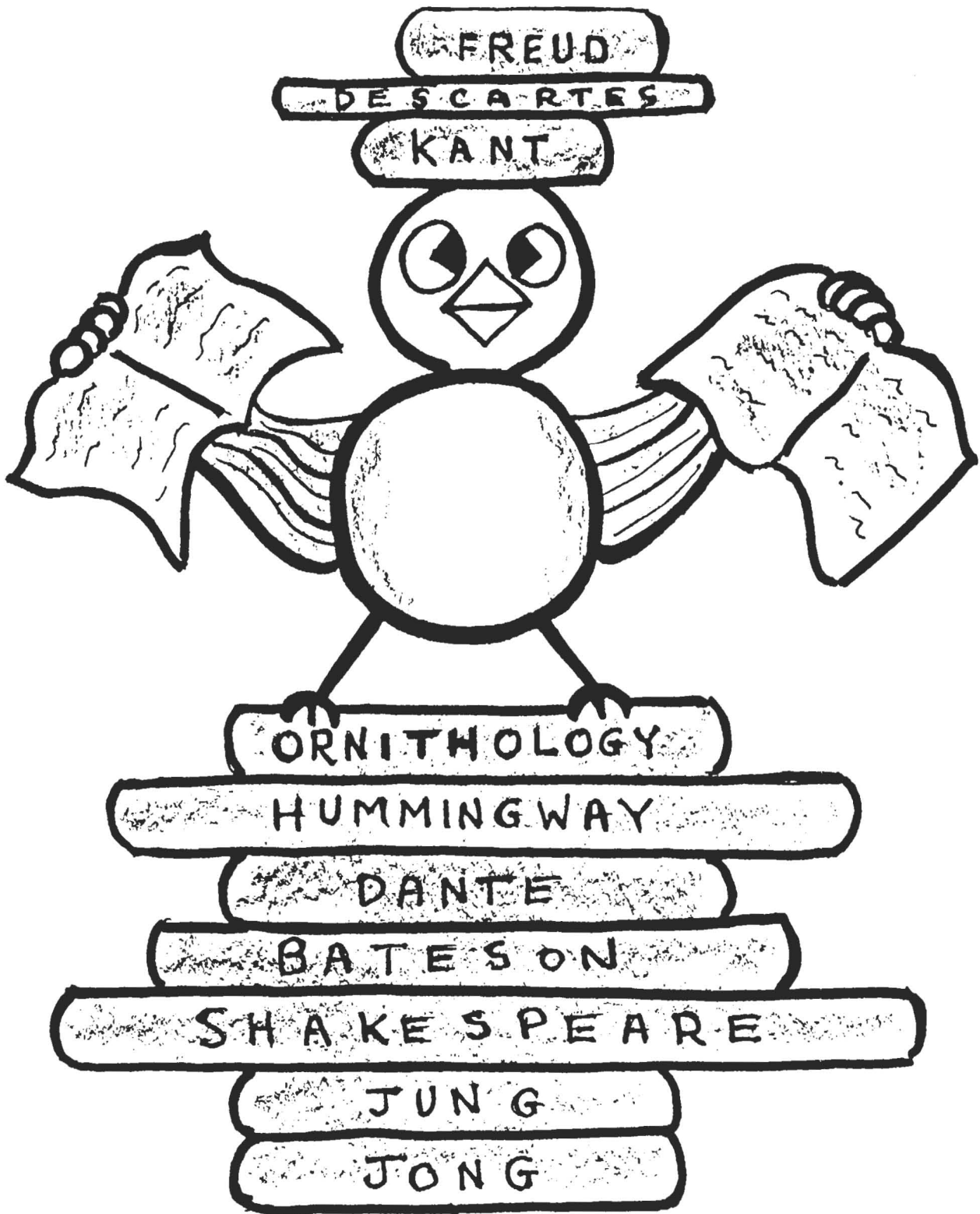
"I tell them I need handouts a week early or as early as possible. I also tell them that I may need extra time to complete assignments." (Authors' files)

How Students Feel

Students with disabilities want to be treated like other students. Whenever possible, they prefer to solve problems on their own. They don't like to ask for help or special consideration.

"It is frustrating to need help to do things."

"I don't like saying that I need extra time because other students ask, 'Why?' and I don't like to be different." (Authors' files)



When they need to ask classmates for help, however - usually for small things such as reading the instructions on an assignment or describing what was on a slide - they usually feel pretty good both before and after doing so.

Students usually feel bad before talking with the coordinator of services for students with disabilities about specialized equipment. But talking to the coordinator is typically judged as being very helpful and after talking to the coordinator, students often feel that they have accomplished something concrete which will have positive consequences.

Before talking to professors about needed adaptations, most students also feel fairly negative. They don't like the whole idea of asking for special consideration. They wonder whether professors will be helpful or if they will give them a hard time. They worry about what the professor will think of them. Some students are concerned about how they affect the professor. They don't want to impose or take advantage. Others feel bad about themselves and

believe that by having to talk to the professor about needed adjustments they are losing their independence.

"I feel uncomfortable asking the professor for an extension because I want to be 'on par' with the rest of the group."

"Will they believe that I have special needs?"

"Will the professor give me more time to write my exam?" (Authors' files)

In spite of their apprehensions, most students do, in fact, talk to their professors. Generally, they feel much more positive afterwards.

"When I first asked for help, it felt like an admission of defeat. But I have now recognized in hindsight that I had to do it. It was OK."

"What the heck, it's part of their job to help me. I'm not asking for special favors. I just want to be on an equal footing with everyone else."

"Professors are helpful. It makes them feel good to help me out." (Authors' files)

Recommendations

TIP # 1

Try to "head off" problems. Talk to professors about texts and readings early - certainly before the problem is acute (e.g., ask for extensions well before the due date when you will not be able to get the needed materials on time).

TIP # 2

Try to solve problems on your own (e.g., ask a classmate for help if it is not a big job, arrange for emergency reading service, large print photocopies, or a library buddy or volunteer). The coordinator of services for students with disabilities at your college or university is also likely to be helpful with these things.

TIP # 3

When you cannot solve the problem on your own, talk to your professors. Think about what you need to discuss with them and tell them about how the disability affects your performance and ability to learn in the course.

TIP # 4

Ask professors for specific adjustments that you need (e.g., extra time for exam, extension on a paper, interpretation of what is depicted on slides).

TIP # 5

Tell the professor what you can and cannot do by yourself (e.g., "I cannot read the assignment if it is not enlarged but I can write my answers in class").

TIP # 6

If you know of solutions to problems which have been effective for you in the past, tell your professors. Don't wait for them to suggest solutions which may or may not work for you.

12. CONCERNS OF STUDENTS WITH MOBILITY AND MUSCULAR IMPAIRMENTS

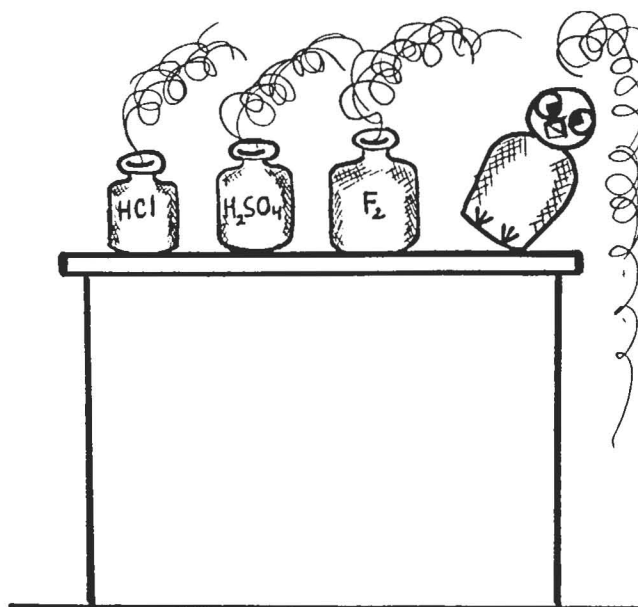
"You have to ask for help - professors can not read your mind".

"I merely consider my disability an inconvenience." (Authors' files)

Issues

If the campus has elevators and is fully accessible, some students with mobility or muscular impairments have no special difficulties. But many students do encounter problems. For example, there may be problems with accessibility inside the classroom or laboratory (e.g., desks and lab benches are at the wrong height, fixed seating units or stairs in the auditorium).

CHEMISTRY 101



There can also be problems with attendance in case of illness or difficulties with transportation. Poor weather, such as heavy snow, may cause students to arrive late for classes. Some students also have difficulties with writing, especially if they have to write rapidly (e.g., lecture notes) or for a long time (e.g., exams).

What Students Do

Students usually prefer to work out problems by themselves or with the help of classmates. This may not always be practical. For certain types of problems, such as accessibility of furniture in a classroom, students usually speak to the coordinator of services for students with disabilities. For other issues, students typically talk to the professor. They discuss how the disability interferes with their ability to meet course requirements, tell the professor what is difficult for them to do (e.g., "I cannot write quickly enough to take good lecture notes.") and discuss their specific request (e.g., "I would like to audiotape classes." "I need to have my note-taker attend classes."). If students know ahead of time that they will be absent or late for some classes, they often inform their professors and ask them what will be covered during the absence.

"If I can't manage on my own or with friends' help or if I have a problem with an assignment or exam, I go see the professor."

"I always prepare and write down points or questions I want to talk about with the professors because then I won't waste their time or mine and I won't forget what I want to say."

"I usually go to professors with a solution to the problem, not just to tell them that I can't do it."

"When I'm going to miss classes because I will be hospitalized, I go tell them and find out what I'll be missing and what they will be covering." (Authors' files)

Some students with mobility or muscular impairments find that professors occasionally try to do too much for them - that a professor is giving help that the student does not want or need. In this case, instead of accepting what is being offered and gritting one's teeth, students sometimes tell the professor to treat them like any other student and note that they will approach the professor if assistance is needed. Some students, even though they might recognize that there is a problem which they cannot resolve on their own, do nothing about it. According to these students, this is an ineffective strategy and things don't generally improve through neglect.

How Students Feel

Most students are not happy about needing assistance from professors. They feel good if they can handle a problem by themselves and generally feel comfortable asking classmates for help.

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Doing things by oneself and asking classmates will not always suffice. In this case most students realize that if they have a problem, they should talk to someone in order to resolve it. Nevertheless, many students hate to ask for things and are frustrated and annoyed that they have to do it - they simply don't like any special treatment. They worry that professors will be uncooperative or that they will think that the student is lazy. Often, students feel that they have to prove themselves to the professor and fear that the professor won't believe that their request is legitimate.

"I don't want to be perceived as using my disability to gain extra favors."

"There might be doubt or hesitation because my impairment is sometimes not visible. But I nudge myself and go anyway."

"I always have the doubt, 'Will they be nice to me just because I'm disabled?'" (Author's files)

After talking to the professor, however, students generally feel much better. The only exception to this occurs when students already dislike a professor and know that he or she will not respond positively to requests.

Students usually feel more comfortable after talking to the professor than they had anticipated and most students believe that talking to the professor was helpful. Also, students feel that they have done the right thing by approaching their professors and that the discussion had concrete, positive consequences such as getting a needed extension on an assignment. When students ask about material to be covered during a foreseen absence, they believe that the professor will think well of them for asking ahead of time and they feel that asking will help them to keep up with the course.

"I find that professors can be of help when they know what is wrong and what help you need."

"I felt comfortable talking to them and often found it helpful and interesting." (Authors' files)

Students are generally not comfortable with the idea of having to talk to the coordinator of services for students with disabilities - they just don't like to ask anyone for assistance. Most students who have done so, however, feel fairly positive afterwards and believe that they have accomplished something which will make things easier in the future.

Recommendations

TIP # 1

If it is feasible, try to solve the problem on your own or with the help of classmates.

TIP # 2

If it is not possible to solve the problem on your own, you may want to speak to the coordinator of services for students with disabilities in order to find out about resources and services available from your college (e.g., library helpers, volunteer note-takers, accessible desks).

TIP # 3

If you need assistance with something that only professors can provide (e.g., extension on an assignment, extra time to write exams), talk to them and discuss course issues related to your disability.

TIP # 4

Tell your professors about the specifics of the problem and let them know what you cannot do (e.g., "I need extra time to write the exam because I cannot write non-stop for long periods." "I have no control over my transportation system - it is unreliable and I may arrive late to class occasionally.").

TIP # 5

If you know in advance that you will not be able to attend classes on certain days, tell your professors ahead of time and ask what material will be covered during your absence.

TIP # 6

If professors are overly solicitous and try to help you with things that you prefer to do on your own, tell them that you would like to be treated like any other student and that you will let them know should you need help.

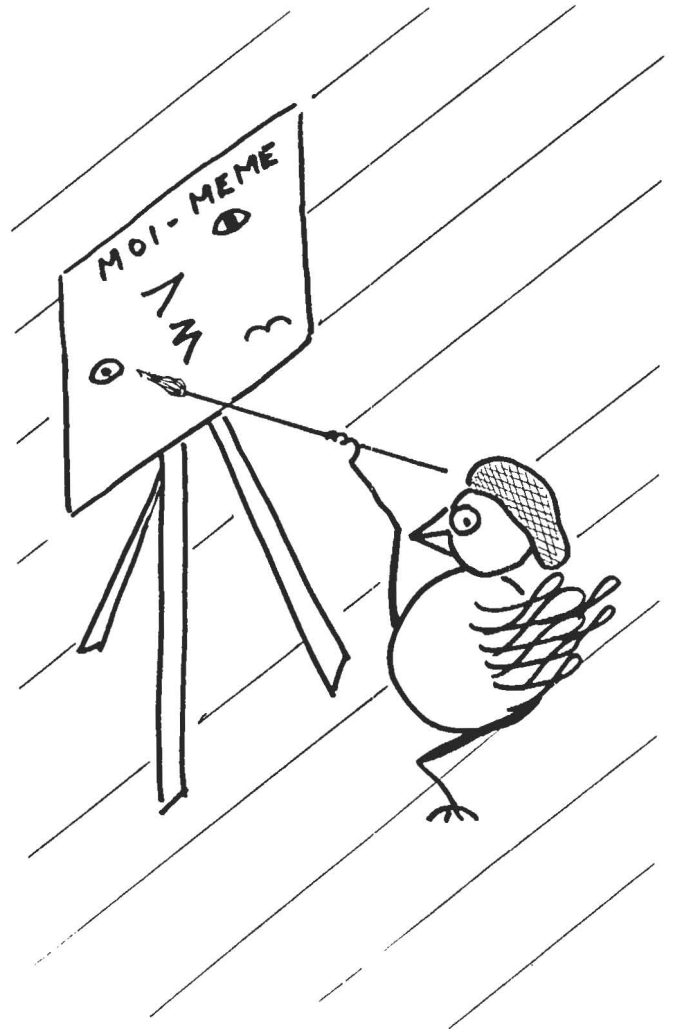
PART FOUR - KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

The following lists contain a general summary of the suggestions presented in the manual. In addition, we detail suggestions made by both students and professors about what students could do to succeed in higher education and to facilitate the teaching-learning process. Many of these suggestions do not appear elsewhere in this manual. The tips presented here incorporate suggestions for coping with a broad range of experiences and difficulties which students with disabilities may encounter.

13. WHAT TO DO VIS À VIS ONE'S PROFESSORS

Before Classes Start and Early in the Term

1. Check out your professors and your courses: check the content of optional courses to make sure you can meet course requirements, speak to professors before registration, observe them during the first class, ask other students.
2. Where possible, approach your professors before the term starts to let them know that they will have a student who has a disability in their class, to make special arrangements, and to find out about texts, course requirements and evaluation methods.
3. If this is not possible, approach professors early - preferably on the first day of classes.
4. Inform professors about the nature of your disability and discuss how the disability is likely to affect your performance and ability to learn in their courses.
5. Talk to professors about what you can and cannot do in the course.
6. Educate professors about your needs so that necessary course adjustments can be made (e.g., talk to your professors about the implications of your disability for the course, equipment used, physical limitations and abilities, problems and strengths, help needed).
7. Inform professors of your resources (e.g., braille materials, note-takers, volunteers), of the services available to you, and of the assistance you will be receiving. You may also want to ask your professors about additional resources that may be helpful.
8. Give your professors suggestions about what they could do to make the course more manageable for you (i.e., give feedback on test design, grading and evaluation, state your opinions, talk to your professors about previous teaching methods, problems and solutions).
9. If you need to use equipment (e.g., tape recorder, computer) in class or if you need to have an interpreter or someone to take notes for you, speak to the professor about this.
10. Don't ask for special treatment unless it is necessary. If you can handle problems by yourself, do so. But do not fail to request assistance when you need it.



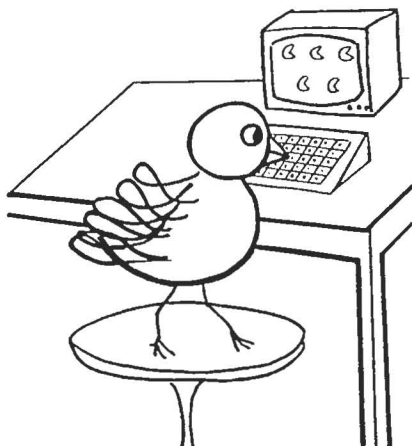
13. Key Points: Relating to Professors p. 29

During the Term

1. Talk to the professor before problems become serious. Do not wait until there is a panic situation or until it is too late to solve the problem.
2. Plan in advance what you want to discuss with the professor. Think of what it is you want and how your professor could help you.
3. Tell the professor the specific nature of any problems you are experiencing (e.g., I cannot take notes and lip read at the same time, my transportation system is very unreliable).
4. Propose solutions to problems. Tell professors what has worked for you in the past - don't leave them guessing or trying to come up with solutions which may be ineffective for you (e.g., ask for extra time for exams, tell professors that you want to audiotape lectures, suggest that the professor repeat other students' comments during class discussion because you can't hear these).
5. Be insistent and don't be shy; make professors listen to your view of what can and what can't help.
6. If professors are overly solicitous and try to help you with things that you prefer to do on your own, tell them that you would like to be treated like any other student and that you will let them know should you need help.
7. **Do not** request a reduction in work load or an exemption from course requirements (although you may offer to do **extra** work or **different** work of equal value). Also, do not **routinely** request extensions on assignments.
8. If this would be helpful, ask professors to outline what will be covered in each lecture, to present lectures slowly and clearly, and to point out what is important.
9. Ask questions during or after class if you have not understood the professor. If you need a lengthy explanation, see the professor during office hours or make an appointment.
10. Keep in regular contact with your professors. Talk to them after class, stop by during office hours, or make an appointment.
11. Use words such as "see," "hear," "walk," etc. with your professors when these are part of everyday language. It will help them to become more comfortable when talking to you.
12. Help professors feel comfortable with you (e.g., tell the professor that it's OK to use everyday words related to your disability such as "see you," "do you see my point," "listen to me," "let's walk to the cafeteria"). Let them know that if they have special concerns that they should ask you.
13. If the professor doesn't understand your speech, don't get flustered. Try to speak more slowly and clearly. Repeat what you have said or rephrase it. If the problem is that you speak very softly, move closer to the professor. If nothing else works, try writing.
14. If you know in advance that you will not be able to attend classes on certain days, tell your professors ahead of time and ask about what material will be covered during your absence.
15. Give your professors feedback (i.e., let professors know whether your needs are being met and remind them to make adjustments when they forget).
16. If you are failing because of your disability, talk to the professor about what could be done to allow you to pass (e.g., extra assignments, make-up exam, extra term paper or research, redistribution of grades to different aspects of course requirements). **Do not** simply drop the course before trying to salvage the credit.
17. If you are failing and the failure is not related to your disability, you may choose to do nothing or you may want to talk to the professor to explain the reasons for the failure or to get feedback about what went wrong.
18. **Do not** ask someone else to talk to the professor on your behalf. But if you need some help with suggestions about how to approach your professors or with developing ideas about how adaptations can be made, talk it over with the coordinator of services for students with disabilities (or whoever is responsible for providing assistance to students with disabilities at your institution). This person can draw on the previous experiences of other students with similar concerns or with particular professors.

14. WHAT STUDENTS CAN DO ON THEIR OWN

1. Work hard and take a keen interest in your courses.
2. Be a good student (e.g., be attentive in class, attend class regularly, do your reading assignments).
3. Although this can sometimes be difficult, make a special effort to arrive to classes on time.
4. Try to solve problems on your own: borrow a classmate's notes, ask a classmate to clarify the point, check on missed material in the text or reference works or, if this works for you, audio-tape the lectures and listen to them again or take an interpreter to class (talk to the professor before audiotaping or bringing an interpreter).
5. **Do not** use your disability as an excuse.
6. Plan ahead and be organized; start studying and preparing assignments early.
7. Identify problems before they arise or whenever you anticipate one and not when it's too late.
8. Accept and know your limitations (e.g., take a lighter workload if necessary).
9. Sit in the best physical location (e.g., in front of professor, adjacent to an electric outlet for equipment).
10. Be aware of technology that supports learning and use it both in and out of class.
11. Learn to type or to use a computer or word processor.
12. Use the college's or university's learning center or get a tutor if necessary.
13. Be sure that you have adequate lecture notes (e.g., tape lectures, ask other students to take notes in class for you, borrow good notes, check your notes with others). Before taping lectures, however, you should talk to the professor. Also, ask to borrow another student's notes, **not** the professor's - they don't like to lend these and their notes are often meaningless to anyone but the professor.
14. Befriend other students in the class - work with them and ask for their help (i.e., set up a support system).
15. Get volunteer help or a study-buddy.
16. If you need help from your classmates and the help needed is small or occasional, ask classmates yourself. If possible, try to reciprocate by helping them with something they need.
17. If you need ongoing help throughout the term, such as note-taking, discuss this with the coordinator of services for students with disabilities at your college or university.
18. You may want to speak to the coordinator of services for students with disabilities in order to find out about resources and services available from your college (e.g., library helpers, volunteer note-takers, accessible desks).
19. Inform members of your class, conference or discussion group about your disability if this becomes an issue or if you need their help.
20. If all else fails, you can speak to the coordinator of services for students with disabilities, the department chairperson, the ombudsman for students or the academic dean.
21. If you have concerns about social life, transportation, elevator keys and the like, discuss these issues with the appropriate college personnel (e.g., coordinator of services for disabled students, counselor) rather than with the professor.
22. Understand the needs of other students in your class (i.e., think of other students' needs).
23. Be patient and "keep your cool". But demand equality if evidence of discrimination exists.



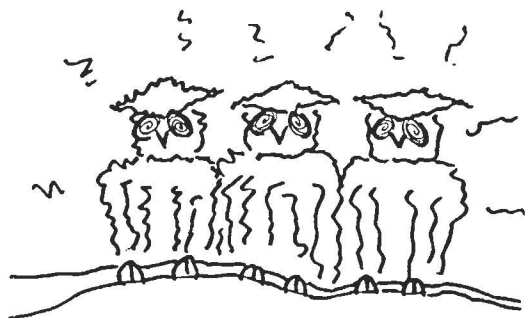
15. SOME FINAL WORDS

After reviewing the evidence from our research and summarizing the findings for this manual, it has become clear to us that there are many things that students, professors, service providers, and postsecondary educational institutions can do to help both students and professors in the joint enterprise of education. Suggestions about what professors and institutions of higher education could do are summarized in a companion manual entitled "Teaching College Students with Disabilities: A Guide For Professors". Tips for students with disabilities on how to get along with their professors are, of course, summarized in the pages which precede this section.

What has not been made explicit but is only implied by these tips is that students with and without disabilities often find themselves in similar predicaments. Students with disabilities may, however, feel different and believe that it is only **they** who are confused and troubled by needing special consideration from professors. Both our research and our experiences as students, teachers, and psychologists converge on one theme - **all students** need special consideration at some time in their academic careers. When this happens, students, whether they have a disability or not, feel tense and uncomfortable. What is also abundantly clear is that when students need assistance from their professors, they feel more positive about themselves, their professors, and their chances of doing well **after** discussing problems with the professor.

It is important to bear in mind that when you ask professors to make adjustments in their teaching styles, these changes are probably helpful for your whole class. Everyone benefits from lectures which are audible, clear and well organized and from readings and assignments which are specified early.

It might be of interest to you that professors, who are expected to be experts and to know it all, also have doubts and concerns about their ability to teach students with disabilities effectively and that they, too, feel better after dialogue takes place.



Although they are experts in their disciplines, professors are not experts in how to best adapt their courses to students with special needs. Here, in many cases, the student is the expert. When both parties are baffled, trial-and-error, with good intentions and good faith on both sides, usually carries professors and students through. Sometimes, the coordinator of services for students with disabilities (or whoever is responsible for providing assistance to students with disabilities at your institution) can be consulted. These student services professionals have encountered many problems similar to the ones you may be experiencing and they have valuable expertise and resources to contribute.

Of course, it would be naive and simplistic to suggest that **all** academic and course concerns of students can be resolved through dialogue with their professors. Some problems have no solution that is acceptable to everyone. Also, there are bad professors, just as there are bad students.

When students encounter a professor who is not helpful or one who is insensitive, they may do a variety of things. Of course, a student can always drop the course. Alternately, the student can appeal to mediators, such as the coordinator of services for students with disabilities or the ombudsman for students, as well as to a higher authority, such as the department chairperson or the dean.

But bad professors are not the norm at most colleges and universities. Most professors are sympathetic and willing to help when asked. They do need to be asked, however. Professors are not mind readers. Also, they typically believe that students have the responsibility for initiating dialogue and making their needs known.

In some cases, professors do not know how to relate effectively to their students who have disabilities. They would like to help, but often do not know how and may not feel comfortable about approaching their students. Other professors try too hard and, with the best of intentions, inadvertently patronize their students with disabilities, actions which are often resented by students who find this demeaning and frustrating.

The best solution to these types of problems is, again, for students to initiate dialogue. Although, sometimes difficult to carry out, our research shows that dialogue between professors and students is the most effective way to resolve course problems, get on with the work which is required to master course material, and succeed in higher education.



PART FIVE - RESOURCES AND REFERENCES

16. WHOSE RECOMMENDATIONS ARE INCLUDED IN THIS MANUAL?

The suggestions included in this manual are based primarily on the experiences of college and university students who have physical disabilities. We believe that the best advice for students is by students. There are many things to learn from students who have succeeded. One can also learn much from students whose experiences in higher education have been less positive. To compile this manual, we have conducted a series of studies in which we investigated concerns and issues both of students who have a physical disability as well as of the professors who teach them.

What Can Students Do?

Thirty-seven students with various physical disabilities participated in our first study. All of them had completed at least one semester of postsecondary education. Most of the participants were currently students in college or university. Others had graduated or dropped out during the previous 3 years. We made sure that the participants represented different types of academic programs in various colleges and universities. Some students had just completed their first semester. Others were in graduate school. Some students were young - just out of high school. Others were older and had returned to school later in life.

We asked these 37 students as well as 74 professors who had experience teaching students with physical disabilities the following questions. "What can students do to help the professor teach students with disabilities more effectively?" "What can students do to make courses more manageable for themselves?" The student and professor participants made almost 500 recommendations about what would be helpful. We grouped these suggestions into categories and included them in this manual (see Sections 13 and 14).

What Should Be Done in Problematic Situations?

The next step was to ask some students with disabilities and some professors who have had experience teaching disabled students to identify those academic situations where they had concerns or had encountered problems in the past. Once this was

done we asked them to indicate what both students and professors typically did in these situations. Initially, we didn't ask people to state whether these were desirable or undesirable things to do - the students and professors simply told us what happened. We then compiled a long list of these behaviors, some of which were student initiated and some which were professor initiated. Then we asked all 37 students with disabilities and all 74 professors to rate the appropriateness of each of the behavioral options available to both students and to professors in these frequently encountered problematic situations. The findings about appropriate and inappropriate behaviors identified by these students and professors are also included in Sections 13 and 14 of this manual.

The results of the study on appropriate behaviors showed that, generally, professors and students agree on what are desirable and undesirable things to do. One finding of particular interest indicates that both students and professors believe that it is more desirable that the student approach the professor concerning needed course adjustments than it is for the professor to approach the student. The results also showed, however, that students with disabilities evaluated requests for special consideration made by disabled students more negatively than did professors. This raised the next question of whether students with disabilities are underestimating the appropriateness of requesting special consideration from their professors or whether their doubts are justified.

Students With and Without Disabilities

To answer this question, 37 disabled students and 62 nondisabled students from similar programs and postsecondary education institutions rated the appropriateness of requesting and receiving special consideration. We found that, generally, students with disabilities felt that it was **less** appropriate for a student with a disability to request or be granted special treatment than their nondisabled peers believed was the case for able-bodied students. This suggests that in the process of ensuring that they are treated equally, students with disabilities may feel less comfortable than nondisabled students when approaching the professor to discuss course concerns. Perhaps more important, students with disabilities may be requesting **less** consideration than their nondisabled peers, a situation which could

impede the student's academic progress and turn the disability into a handicap.

What Do Students Actually Do and What Works?

The findings of these three studies formed the basis for understanding what students and professors **should** do and led to the following question in a fourth investigation. What do students **actually do** and what do they **think** and **feel** in commonly experienced situations involving their professors? To study this question we selected the most common academic situations in which students and professors interact and interviewed 75 students with various physical disabilities about their experiences. For each of these situations we asked students the following series of questions. "In this situation, how did you feel? What did you do? How did you feel about what you did? How effective was what you did?" Students' responses to these questions are summarized in Parts Two and Three of this manual.

We also asked these 75 students to nominate some of their favorite professors. We interviewed 57 of these outstanding professors and also asked them

about **their** thoughts, feelings and behaviors. We summarized their responses and included these in a companion manual for professors. Of concern in the present manual are suggestions made by these professors regarding what students with disabilities could do to manage better academically and to make it easier for professors to teach them effectively. These suggestions are included in Sections 13 and 14.

Tips For Students By Students

In summary, this manual reflects the views, experiences, and recommendations of students with disabilities. In Part Four - Key Points to Remember - we have combined suggestions made by students and by professors. Our contribution has been to carry out the studies, to interpret the results and to compile the suggestions into this manual. We have not editorialized or provided our own opinions - that would have destroyed the concept of tips **for students with disabilities by students** who have disabilities and by the professors who have taught them.

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