**Teaching Students with Chronic Mobility Impairments**

Students with mobility impairments may use wheelchairs (manual or powered), scooters, crutches or braces. A personal aide may accompany some students. Others may walk unassisted but sometimes slower and/or with a noticeable difference in gait. And there may be students who rely on a mobility aid (e.g. a wheelchair) only occasionally.

There are a number of medical conditions that affect mobility. Some also affect the individual’s fine or gross upper limb ability. Some can affect the length of time an individual can sit or stand. Chronic medical conditions can include (but are not limited to) spinal cord injury, cerebral palsy, spina bifida, amputation, multiple sclerosis, severe arthritis, dwarfism, muscular dystrophy, severe back injury/pain, severe cardiac conditions, severe sickle cell anemia, and severe respiratory disorders.

Physical access is a primary consideration for students with permanent mobility impairments. The University continues to make improvements in wheelchair access to and within its buildings. The Office of Disability Services maintains current information on buildings and specific classroom accessibility changes. Each semester, ODS will work with students known to require wheelchair access and will coordinate with representatives from the Registrar’s office in re-assigning classroom locations if barriers to physical access are present.

Instructors can provide necessary supports for their students using wheelchairs in the following ways:

* When speaking with a student who is using a wheelchair, try to sit or squat for equal level eye contact if the conversation lasts more than a minute or so. Do not hang onto or lean on the wheelchair.
* Take note of the classroom layout. Chairs and desks moved by a previous class can present abrupt obstacles to wheelchair navigation. Ensure doorways and aisles are clear of obstructions.
* A student who uses a wheelchair should have a choice in the location of seating in classrooms where seating is not fixed. Some students may need assistance to move a chair around a table to fit the wheelchair. This can often be done casually. Offer assistance and if a “no, thank you” is the response, accept it and let the student assist him or her-self. In classrooms with tables, a table may not be high enough for the fit of the wheelchair. If the student prefers to sit under the table, there are a few simple solutions that can be discussed with the student and the Office of Disability Services as needed.
* Where there is an unexpected change in classroom location, expect the student to arrive with delay. Access to and within our University buildings may not be as direct for persons using wheelchairs. The same expectation can be held for days during snow and ice.
* If your office is not accessible for a wheelchair, speak with the student early in the semester. Alternative meeting locations should be arranged. This will require a planned space and meeting times and, while not as spontaneous as a student stopping by during office hours, it is an acceptable alternative.
* Field trips required by the course must consider transportation and accessibility according to the individual student’s requirements.
* Casual or formal gatherings of students outside the structured classroom and related physical activity associated with the gathering must consider accessibility and alternative participation activities. A conversation with the student is advised.
* Laboratory courses may require a modification of tables and the placement of equipment. This is done on an individual basis. Some students may require no modifications