

Attachment #2

Greetings to the Millersville University Faculty Senate:

My name is Stephen Patterson. I served as President and CEO of the Susquehanna Association for the Blind and Vision Impaired and the Susquehanna Foundation for the Blind for the past 24 years. I retired at the end of September this year.

The Susquehanna Foundation for the Blind has partnered with the BNY Mellon Mid-Atlantic Trust and Millersville University to create a program at MU that will provide support for students who are blind or vision-impaired. For the past 5 months I have been helping with the launch of this new program and will continue my work here through June 2012.

I have no doubt that any student who has matriculated at MU is capable and independent, regardless of their disability. Nevertheless it is well-documented (American Foundation for the Blind, National Federation of the Blind) that the college experience is unnecessarily more difficult for students with vision impairments, and that college grads with vision impairments have a tougher time getting the jobs for which they are prepared than do their sighted peers. The ultimate purpose of this program is to address these issues insofar as they exist at MU, and through doing so, to establish MU as a university of choice for students with vision impairments.

These are the key objectives of the program:

- To provide a safe and accessible learning environment for students with vision impairments.
- To encourage academic departments to make adjustments that will create/improve access to their curricula.
- To educate faculty and staff regarding myths about blindness and thus facilitate improvements in classroom and study environments.
- To make available the tools needed to overcome any related obstacles to success.
- To build a community of students with vision impairments who can come together for mutual support.
- To assist students with vision impairments to clarify educational and career goals.
- To provide internships in community businesses and professional offices relevant to students' career choices.
- To coordinate with participating businesses to ease transition of the student into the workplace, both as interns and as hired employees.
- To provide guidance to employers regarding the provision of reasonable accommodations for employees who have vision impairments.
- To keep students informed of Foundation and other scholarship opportunities.
- To develop new curricula to include degrees or certifications in blindness rehabilitation, orientation and mobility instruction, and certification as Teacher of the Visually Impaired.
- Through community education and internships address the fears and prejudices that prevent many employers from choosing to hire people with vision impairments

Short-term goals supporting these objectives include evaluation of the existing environment; improvement of accessibility to information; identification of high-potential academic disciplines for development as pilot programs; development of internship programs; development of focused admissions strategies; identification of and contact with current target students; and creation of support network strategies for students.

If any of you would like further information, please feel free to contact me by email at Stephen.Patterson@millersville.edu or call me at 717 587 4943. I will also make myself available to meet with any of you as individuals or in a group.

Stephen Patterson
December 6, 2011

When You Have a Vision-Impaired Student in Your Class at MU: A Short Guide to Success

It can be a little intimidating to have a student with a serious vision impairment in class. *The main thing to remember is that it is a rare activity that is beyond the reach of a motivated student with a vision impairment, especially when he or she is supported by a motivated professor.*

First and foremost, ask the student what types of adaptations s/he may need to be successful. It is likely that you will find that these are relatively easy to accommodate, and doing so places the responsibility for identifying solutions on the student.

The American Foundation for the Blind publishes a book entitled "When You Have a Visually Impaired Student in Your Classroom, A Guide for Teachers." The grant program has two copies – call Stephen Patterson at 5813 if you'd like to borrow one.

Questions and Concerns

- ◆ What kind of adaptations can you make in your instruction that will meet the needs of a blind or vision-impaired student?
 - * Large print copies of handouts and course materials, especially those that are used in class.
 - * Digital copies of all course materials (Word, etc) posted on a pre-arranged site. Students can access these through JAWS or ZoomText.
 - * Simplified Power Point presentations – text should be in san serif fonts, black (or at least a very dark color) on white background. Pale colors, rapid movements, etc can be very difficult for students with vision impairments.
 - * Front-of-the-room seating close to boards and monitors.
 - * Being aware that the natural language of instruction assumes that students have vision and are able to connect projected images, boarded text, and written materials with the spoken words of the instructor. With a little practice you will find yourself saying something like, "I'm referring to a photograph that depicts the signing of the surrender at Appomattox. Lee is on the left, and Grant is ..."
 - * More light is not always better.
 - * Allowing the student to feel free to get up to the board to view written material.
 - * Providing additional time: The student may need additional time when taking a test. It typically takes twice as long for someone with a vision impairment to read a document.

- ◆ As noted above, it can be unsettling to have a vision-impaired student in class, especially if you have no relevant experience. Concerns commonly expressed by teachers:
 - Concern: I might unintentionally say something in class that offends the student, such as "That discovery was made by blind luck."
 - o Solution: don't worry about it. People who are blind are rarely offended by this kind of language. They understand idiom and will not take it personally. You will find that they often will make the effort to ease your discomfort with a wry comment or joke.

 - Concern: Must I provide course materials in Braille? If so, where can I get it?

- o Solution: Depending on your point of view, Braille is either a vital language skill for people who are blind or an outmoded form of accessibility. Braille is preferred by an increasingly small percentage of people who are blind because computers have created accessibility that was unheard of when Braille was developed. Because other adaptations are readily available you are under no legal obligation to provide your class materials in Braille. However, the National Federation of the Blind is a fierce advocate of Braille literacy. This organization is very influential among Americans who are blind and as a result, it is still possible that you will come across a student who prefers this method of reading. If that happens you should refer the student to the Office of Learning Services.

- Concern: What about labs? Obviously, sight is needed both for accurate observation of phenomena, and sometimes for safety.
 - o Solution: This is a challenge, but a little pre-planning can go a long way. If you have a student with a vision impairment in a lab, ask the student to tell you what they need. It is unlikely that the student will have registered without considering the issue – and while it is the University's responsibility to provide reasonable accommodations, it is the student's responsibility to know and to ask for what he or she needs. Depending on the nature of their impairment, they may bring their own solutions, or they may reach out to the Office of Learning Services for support, perhaps in the form of a student assistant or grad student.

- Concern: What about safe travel in the building or across campus? How can I help the student find his or her way? What is my responsibility?
 - o Solution: These students are usually experienced travelers and will not need ongoing support in this regard. Early in the semester they may need to be oriented to the building and the locations of stairwells, fire exits, water fountains, restrooms, computer labs, and so forth. This is not your responsibility as a professor and the student will probably have made arrangements with an agency or with the Office of Learning Services to get oriented early on. BUT – simple directions are appreciated when needed and you should feel free to give them. The best way to approach this on seeing that a student is unsure about a direction or location is to ask if you can help. The student will be very good at telling you what they need.
 - o If you have to rearrange your classroom, meet the student at the door to explain the changes and assist him to his seat. You might make this easier if you send an email in advance.
 - o If a student is having recurring problems in the classroom you should ask the student if there is anything s/he needs. If s/he is not sure, a referral should be made to the Office of Learning Services for further action.

- Concern: What if a student asks me to show him the way to a location?
 - o Solution: The technique for leading a person who is blind is called "sighted guide." It is simple and logical and the basics can be learned in a few minutes. A thorough initiation to this technique can be provided upon request through the grant project, but it is often sufficient to know the essentials: Ask the student which side he prefers to walk on, then offer that elbow. (Don't grab or pull the person you are guiding, let them hold your elbow and take cues from your body movement.) The student will walk half a step behind, lightly holding on. It is helpful to announce that steps up or down are coming, or that there is an obstacle like a puddle or snow that you are going to deal with, or that a doorway is ahead and opens to the right/left, and that they have arrived at a chair (which they will pull out themselves.)

- Concern: what do I do if someone tells a blind joke in class?
 - o Solution: This is almost always an issue for people who are not accustomed to being around people who are blind. Best advice: if it's funny, laugh. The blind student will. People who are blind know them all and may well be the ones telling the joke.