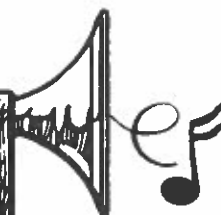




the TUTOR



Vol. 5 No. 4

University of Colorado at Boulder

Winter 1989

Using common sense and kindness in teaching Students with Special Needs

Susan Anderson

Marci Page, Terri Bodhaine, and Doris Schrupp, Office of Services to Disabled Students, presented the workshop "Students with Special Needs" for the Graduate Teacher Program 1989 Fall Intensive. **The Tutor** interviewed them, some of their colleagues, and three students who have used their services.

The **Office of Services to Disabled Students (OSDS)** is a sub-unit of the **University Learning Center** located in Willard Hall. Ruth Fink directs the office, which includes Services for the Deaf and Hearing Impaired, Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired, Services for the Physically Disabled, and the Learning Disabilities Program. The staff of the Office of Services to Disabled Students work with individual students to meet their needs and to help them to function independently and effectively in the campus community.

Though the population of disabled students on the Boulder campus is relatively small, it is concentrated in undergraduate courses. As teaching assistants and graduate part-time instructors work closely with lower division students, knowledge of the resources provided by the OSDS may help them to facilitate the success of their students.

A breakdown of the numbers of OSDS students on the Boulder campus is given in the following chart.

OSDS Students on Boulder Campus		
	Undergraduates	Graduates
Learning Disabled	150	0
Physically Handicapped	25	5
Deaf & Hearing Impaired	15	2
Blind	9	2

In the past there were fewer disabled students studying at the university level, Marci Page, assistant director of the Office of Services to Disabled Students and coordinator of Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired and Services for the Physically Disabled, informed **The Tutor**. Now that the number is growing, the university community is asking more questions concerning the disabled student population.

Learning to recognize students' disabilities and work effectively with students is an important part of the graduate teacher experience. Although teachers cannot be expected to be experts on the different disabilities, potential problems in the classroom can be averted if teachers are knowledgeable and can refer students to the appropriate support staff.

The OSDS staff stress that the majority of their students have met general entrance requirements to the University of Colorado at Boulder. These students are special only in that they might need to develop alternative learning strategies.

Teaching assistants and graduate part-time instructors can attend Graduate Teacher Program workshops that are specifically about the special needs of disabled students (these workshops are led by OSDS staff members). They may also call the OSDS staff and request individual assistance with alternative teaching and learning strategies.

Students With Hearing Impairments

The staff of Services for the Deaf and Hearing Impaired assist deaf and hearing impaired students with a variety of issues including dealing with personal problems; improving academic skills such as journal keeping; obtaining notetakers, interpreters, and tutors. Doris Schrupp, coordinator for Services for the Deaf and Hearing Impaired, says, "Students may come to our office for absolutely anything."

Schrupp explains that graduate teachers and professors may also go to the OSDS if they have deaf or hearing impaired students in their classes and need help with teaching strategies that promote an optimal learning environment.

Schrupp reminds students and teachers that the deaf and hearing impaired world is vastly different from the hearing world. Students who are hearing impaired or deaf may not always know things that the hearing world assumes are common knowledge. The name *Robert Redford* may not hold any meaning whatsoever for a deaf or hearing impaired student because he became famous prior to the widespread use of closed captioning in films, movies, and television. On the



Doris Schrupp signs "Studying is not trivial."

other hand, Lou Ferrigno (*The Incredible Hulk*), Howie Seago (*Star Trek*), Linda Bove (*Sesame Street*), Phyllis Frelich or Marlee Matlin who played in the theater and screen versions of *Children of a Lesser God*, respectively, Kitty Wells (a race car and stunt car driver), or Beethoven are names that would get a definite response.

Every person varies in the ability to hear, but a hearing impaired person has only partial hearing and is what hearing people generally call "hard of hearing." A profoundly deaf person has little or no residual hearing in his or her better ear. In the U.S. today, one out of every 16 persons has a significant hearing loss. There may be around 1000-1500 students on the Boulder campus who have trouble hearing their professors.

The hearing impaired student may have the experience of hearing jumbled sounds. Schrupp compares this jumbledness to the difficulty hearing persons would have if they could hear a fan going loudly next to their face, traffic from the street outside, radio music blaring nearby, and people having a conversation behind them while at the same time, they are sitting across from someone who is talking and asking them questions.

Hearing impaired students may also have difficulty understanding if the teacher speaking to them is sitting in the shadows or has light reflecting off her glasses. If the speaker is not directly facing the hearing impaired person, the hearing impaired student has difficulty concentrating on lips and facial expressions that may assist with comprehension.

Hearing impaired or deaf students may have sign or oral interpreters who accompany them to class, notetakers, and tutors who assist them with learning the material.

Schrupp encourages teachers of hearing impaired and deaf students to:

Believe students. If they tell you they have a hearing loss, reserve a seat in the front of the room for them. Contact the OSDS with the name and phone number of the student and have the student contact the OSDS as well.

Investigate the acoustical properties of your classroom. Some rooms have "dead spaces." Know where the dead spaces are and speak loudly into them. Determine whether there are motion sensors in the room that regulate automatic lighting. They may interfere with students' hearing aids.

Experiment with your classroom lighting. Be sure there is adequate lighting on your face and on the board. If windows cause reflections when you are at the board or in the general area at the front of the room, shut the blinds or curtains.

Write on the board. Don't rely entirely on verbal announcements when you teach. All test dates as well as any changes, deletions, or additions need to be written on the board.

An overhead projector may have an electrical hiss that may interfere with some hearing aids.

Develop skill in paraphrasing. When students have difficulty understanding your explanations, find different ways of saying the same thing.

Repeat information. Tell students that anyone having difficulty hearing or understanding may request that you repeat. If you have a hearing impaired student in class, repeat all questions from the student audience, as well.

Be flexible with testing. You might want to arrange more time for hearing impaired or deaf students to take tests. For example, they could take the test in your office or in a room without background noises that may be distracting to hearing aids.

Blind or Visually Impaired Students

Marci Page believes that it is important to move students' expectations beyond their disabilities. She sees teaching problem-solving skills to students as the key to their success.

Teachers can initiate the problem-solving dialogue by being open about the disability and acknowledging that students are capable.

Page believes that blind or visually impaired students should be able to participate actively in any classroom activity.

Even if a lab has to do with changes in the colors of chemicals, the student can participate. The lab instructor can pose questions that enable students to understand the concepts and give meaning to the color changes. Instructors should guard against avoiding a student or a lab activity because of a physical disability.

The TUTOR is produced on behalf of the Graduate Part-Time Instructors and Teaching Assistants of the University of Colorado at Boulder, and is published Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter by the Graduate Teacher Program, Office of the Graduate School. The Graduate Teacher Program office is in Norlin S461, University of Colorado at Boulder, Boulder, Colorado 80309-0360. Telephone: (303) 492-4902. Editor: Laura Border.

Blind students use various strategies for taking tests. These include the use of a reader—a person who reads the test questions to the student and then writes down the answers that the student gives; typing essay tests on the typewriter or computer; or taking the test orally from a TA or the professor. Students may also want to work with TAs or professors to arrange for a separate room in which to take tests.

“We need to dispel the assumption that blind people have a hard time in the classroom. Teachers should expect the same standards from blind students as they would from anyone else.”

James Barbour, blind student

Karen Karsh, a successful local singer and songwriter, who is blind, maintained a four-point average in her years at CU. She recalls with fondness teachers who demonstrated common sense and kindness in their interactions with her.

Karsh says that dealing with a handicap is an opportunity for both the TA and the student to develop a special learning relationship. She suggests that teachers can be more effective in working with blind students if they:

1. Have no expectations about how “blind persons” are. Each person is an individual with individual needs.
2. Ask what works for each student as an individual.
3. Make their syllabus and book list available ahead of time.
4. Think in terms of verbal examples.

Karsh encourages teachers to “be alive to helping students so they can get the job done in the most efficient and effective way possible.”

Physically Disabled Students

Approximately 90 percent of the campus is accessible to physically disabled students. There is also special equipment available to help the physically disabled student fully participate in the social and academic life of the campus. A van equipped with an electric lift is available to provide transportation. Notetaking, assistance with meals, and personal services are also available to these students. Generally, these students do not need other special academic accommodations. Teachers can refer students with temporary physical disabilities from accidents or surgery to the OSDS Office.

Students With Learning Disabilities

“Learning disabled students are very bright but have difficulty achieving their full academic potential at the university level when their disability stands in the way of performance,” says Laura Fischer, learning disabilities specialist. Learning disabilities are not immediately apparent and are sometimes very difficult to detect because students have learned to mask their difficulty in school.

What is a learning disability? It is a neurological dysfunction that interferes with an individual’s information processing.



Tennis on wheels at CU-Boulder.

Learning disabilities manifest in many ways. Students with learning disabilities must learn to use a variety of alternative learning strategies in order to succeed academically.

Terri Bodhaine, coordinator of the Learning Disabilities Program, stresses how important it is for teachers to be sensitive to the possibility of discovering a learning disabled student. For example, a student may be strong in verbal ability, but submit work that is of very poor quality. A learning disability is a possible explanation for this discrepancy in a student’s performance.

A student may be studying very hard yet receive very poor grades. A student may wonder what is wrong or may be aware of the disability but not tell anybody. If a teacher sees a difference between written performance and cognitive performance, then it is time to initiate dialogue with the student. Of course, it’s not up to a teacher to diagnose the student as learning disabled, but teachers can open a dialogue with the student to determine if the student should be referred to the OSDS.

“Having a disability is a way of learning differently. Professor Brock Brown in Geography and Professor Covert in Anthropology really understand and take the time to listen to what a person has to say. If a teacher is flexible you have a better chance at learning what you need for the course.”

Kelly Garrison, LD student

To begin with, it is important to talk to the student and acknowledge the positive aspects of his or her performance. It is essential to validate the student's effort in the classroom. A question such as, "What do you think is happening?" may open up a dialogue without your labelling the student or jumping too quickly to the incorrect conclusion.

The LD staff believe that certain strategies are helpful when working with LD students. They encourage instructors to:

1. Develop a clear and complete syllabus and refer to it often.
2. Adjust the presentation style to reflect a variety of teaching and learning styles.
3. Be a good role model for students in terms of organization.
4. Model the critical thinking process and the behavior of conceptualizing by showing students how to work through assignments.
5. Help students to anticipate test questions and review the material appropriately.
6. Ask for verbal feedback from students to make sure they indeed understand, rather than assuming that they have received the information you presented.
7. Start with a goal when presenting new material, and work backwards so that the parts are identified and each part relates to the whole.
8. Dialogue with students about subject matter. This strategy monitors understanding of material orally, encourages active learning, and discourages passivity.
9. Write the information on the board and say it aloud; then repeat it, using different words.
10. Ask students to rephrase information in their own words when necessary to check for comprehension.

Fischer and Bodhaine work with both students and their teachers. If you suspect that a student has a learning disability, call and talk to them yourself, or refer the student directly to the Learning Disabilities Program, telephone: 492-8671.

Susan Anderson is a graduate student in English and works as a graduate assistant to the Graduate Teacher Program.



Words from the Wise

"As things/come
let's destroy
them we can destroy
what we be/come
let's build
what we become
when we dream"

Nikki Giovanni

"Deaf people can do anything except hear."

Dr. I. King Jordan

"It is better to be wise than seem wise."

Origines Adamantus

"To teach is also to learn."

Japanese Proverb

"Education is our sixth sense."

Clive Bell

"A great many people think that polysyllables
are a sign of intelligence . . ."

Barbara Walters

"If prejudice could reason, it would dispel itself."

William Pickens



Graduate Teacher Program Newsletter

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TO ALL:
Graduate Part-Time Instructors
Graduate Teaching Assistants
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