Studying with a visual disability
Facts & Figures, Focus points, Tips and Tricks

1. Facts & Figures

☐ A visual disability hinders the distinction or interpretation of visual information.

☐ These problems can manifest themselves on different domains such as reduced visual acuity, a smaller field of vision, color blindness, reduced depth perception, problems adjusting to light and darkness and problems interpreting a visual signal.

☐ The influence of the visual disability on daily life and studies is strongly defined by the severity of the disability, the experience with assistive tools, the extent of training with the tools and/or how long the student has been visually disabled. Contextual factors such as the accommodation of the environment and the time of day have an influence on the barriers the student experiences.

☐ Students with a a visual disability can experience problems with:

   ☐ The accessibility of study materials (e.g. courses, slides, graphs, video's), the consultation of digital study material (e.g. websites, digital learning environment), the manipulation of materials and/or reduced or inefficient accessibility of software tools.

   ☐ The accessibility of buildings and rooms, where problems with the orientation and localization of class rooms and labs can occur.

   ☐ Problems with mobility and accessibility of the campus, class rooms, internship locations.

   ☐ Studying: the speed of processing and studying the courses, difficulties with subject matters that have a strong visual component (e.g. statistics, geography).

   ☐ Access to non-verbal communication, difficulties with giving a presentation.

   ☐ Contact with fellow students due to reduced participation in student activities.

- ☐ Self-reliance due to the fact that some daily activities cannot be performed independently.

- ☐ In the age group of 15 to 49, the number of blind people is estimated at 0.1% and the number of people with low vision at 0,13%.

2. Focus points, Tips and Tricks

☐ Attending classes

Focus points

- ☐ The lesson and course materials can cause accessibility issues.
- ☐ Taking notes is difficult.
- ☐ There can be problems with the perception of non-verbal communication.
- ☐ There can be problems with the manipulation and usability of materials (e.g. readability, safety, installation).
- ☐ Independent transportation to and from campus and lecture rooms can be difficult.

Tips and Tricks

- ☐ The use of technological tools (e.g. computer with braille, reading magnifier, enlargement software), providing the PowerPoint and syllabus digitally before class enhance the processing of the course content.
- ☐ In specific situations a conversion to braille or large print is necessary.
- ☐ Using a laptop can contribute to taking notes, which facilitates information processing.
- ☐ A description of charts, figures and visual materials but also a written description of video materials contribute to the information processing.
- ☐ Lecture recordings that are made available online after classes, offer the opportunity to review difficult passages and complete notes.
- ☐ Choosing a location within the classroom can help make the lecture as comfortable as possible.

- ☐ Fellow students that help manipulate specific materials (e.g. taking the laptop out of the bag), or provide digital notes are a valuable contribution.
- ☐ Support in mobility issues is sometimes needed e.g. transport to and from campus/ lecture rooms.
- ☐ Accessible signalization and route signing can enhance the navigation on campus.

☐ Planning and organizing study-related activities

Focus points

- ☐ Getting a clear overview on all assignments and study activities can be difficult.
- ☐ Delivery times of digital books and conversions can have influence on the planning and organization of study activities and whether or not deadlines can be met.

Tips and tricks

- ☐ Providing an overview of all assignments and tasks in time helps to create an overview and make up an efficient study plan.
- ☐ Study coaching can be useful to help make up a realistic plan and help determine which tasks have priority, how much time can be spent on specific tasks , …

☐ Processing and rehearsing study materials

Focus points

- ☐ Delivery times of digital books and conversions can have an influence on the planning and organization of study activities and whether or not deadlines can be met.
- ☐ The visual problems can affect the speed of processing.
- ☐ The processing of subject matters with a strong visual component can be difficult.

Tips and tricks

- ☐ The use of pedagogical assistance should be encouraged.
- ☐ Offering study coaching to help make up a realistic planning enhances the processing of course materials.
- ☐ An individual trajectory with a reduced study load can be needed.
- ☐ It can be helpful to postpone deadlines.

☐ Assignments

Focus points

- ☐ Manipulating and looking up materials, and finishing assignments with the required precision can be difficult. An alternative or adapted assignment can be necessary.
- ☐ The disability can affect the speed of processing which leads to difficulties meeting deadlines.
- ☐ Active participation in group assignments can be difficult.

Tips and tricks

- ☐ Changing deadlines can be advisable in specific situations.
- ☐ An alternative assignment that has the same learning goal can be necessary.
- ☐ For group assignments additional agreements on the division of work load by the lecturer are necessary.
- ☐ Using assistive tools and pedagogical assistance for specific subject matters can be supportive.

☐ Exams

Focus points

- ☐ The evaluation form and exam copy can cause accessibility issues.
- ☐ There can be problems with the manipulation and usability of materials (e.g. readability, safety, installation).
- ☐ Independent transportation to and from campus and lecture rooms can be difficult.
- ☐ The processing of an exam can require more time.

Tips and tricks

- ☐ Providing an accessible exam format is essential.
- ☐ The use of technological tools or a laptop during an exam, can be supportive.
- ☐ In some cases assistance to make information accessible or to take down answers can be required.
- ☐ Extra time for the preparation of an oral exam or written exam can help compensate for the concentration difficulties.
- ☐ Providing the opportunity for an alternative exam form can be supportive.
- ☐ An optimal spread of exams within an exam period can compensate for the overload and slower processing speed.

☐ Internships

Focus points

- ☐ Transportation to and from the internship location can be challenging.
- ☐ The internship may require the use of different assistive tools.
- ☐ It can be difficult to manipulate the materials in a safe way.
- ☐ It is difficult to finish tasks with the necessary precision or with sufficient speed.

Tips and Tricks

- ☐ A prospection at the internship location with regard to accessibility can be useful.
- ☐ An accessible internship location can remedy mobility issues and reduce exhaustion. A mobility training for the trajectory to and from the internship location can be necessary.
- ☐ Accessible signalization and route signing can enhance the navigation on campus.
- ☐ Specific assistive tools and the use of a laptop with compensating software can be supportive.
- ☐ It is recommended to deliver documents in a digital format.

- ☐ In specific situations conversions to large print or braille can be necessary.
- ☐ A description for tables, figures and imagery that are used, is supportive.
- ☐ Large assignments are best split up in partial assignments where progress is monitored and intermediate feedback is given.
- ☐ It is useful to monitor the progress at a regular base and provide clear feedback. Working points that are formulated very concretely create learning opportunities.
- ☐ Spreading an internship over a longer period of time can be useful.

☐ Student life

Focus points

- ☐ Participation in student activities and the associated social contacts with peers can be challenging.
- ☐ Living independently and being self-reliant can be challenging.
- ☐ Finding a new balance between attending classes, medical procedures, living in dorms (grocery shopping, cooking, studying, …) and creating a new network can take time.
- ☐ These challenges can have an impact on the general well-being. Stress, anxiety and loneliness can occur.

Tips and tricks

- ☐ Support in finding an accessible dorm with adequate space for the supportive equipment can make a great difference. Adjusted housing can be necessary. When a guide dog is used, this needs to be taken into account when choosing a dorm.
- ☐ Support can be provided in ADL-activities through projects such as framed living. Additionally, support in the development of structure, new routines and the organization of the paramedical support system (physiotherapy, nursing, …) is important.
- ☐ Mentoring or buddy programs (where students are assigned a mentor) can play an effective supporting role.

- ☐ A fixed contact person in the study program can help monitor the load limit and help look for solutions in case of difficulties.
- ☐ Staff members of student facilities provide for coaching in case of psycho-social problems.