

OFFICE OF DISABILITY SERVICES
INFO PAGE

VISION IMPAIRMENTS

There are two main functional categories of visual impairments: Low Vision and Blind. **Low vision** students usually are print users, but may require special equipment and materials. **Blind** students are totally without sight or have so little vision that learning is done primarily through the other senses. Only 10-15% of the visually-impaired population is totally blind. Adaptations for visually impaired students have made it possible for them to achieve in the academic arena. Their scores on standardized tests typically are comparable to those of sighted students.

People can lose their vision at birth, through genetic causes, or through illness or injuries. A student who is legally blind may still have a great deal of vision. Some students may be able to see large objects, for example, but have great difficulty seeing smaller things such as small print or a needle or pin. Others may have perfect 20/20 central vision, but have limited peripheral vision, so they appear to be seeing things as if they were looking through a tube or straw. Vision may fluctuate or may be influenced by factors such as inappropriate lighting, light glare, or fatigue. Hence, there is no “typical” vision impaired student.

The **definition of legal blindness** covers a broad spectrum of visual impairments. To be classified as legally blind, an individual must have visual acuity no better than 20/200. What a normal person can view clearly at 200 feet, a legally blind individual must view at 20 feet to achieve the same clarity. Another category of legal blindness occurs when the visual field is no greater than 20 degrees in width.

The major challenge facing visually impaired students in the college classroom is the over whelming mass of visual material to which they are continually exposed, (i.e., textbooks, class outlines, class schedules, chalkboards, overheads, writing, etc.) In addition, the increase in the use of films, videotapes, computers, power point presentations, laser disks, and television adds to the volume of visual material to which they have only limited access. In an educational setting, emphasis is placed on how the individuals use their vision.

A major educational difference between low vision and totally blind students involves their capacity to read. Students who are blind must use adaptive equipment or strategies (e.g., readers, books on tape) to access information from printed material, whereas low vision students use adaptive means to be able to read the printed materials on their own. To assist in overcoming students’ visual limitation requires unique and individual strategies based on that student’s particular visual impairment and his/her skills of communication.

Today, technology has expanded the opportunities for visually impaired students. The following aids are available at B.C.C. in order to enable students to do their work more efficiently and independently.

Low Vision Students

- Books on tape
- Computer screen enlargement program (Zoom Text)
- Magnifiers
- CCTV to enlarge printed material
- Copier to enlarge handouts and exams
- Notetakers, tape recorders

Blind Students

- Braille
- Books on tape
- Computer voice output program (JAWS)
- Readers
- Scanners to “read” printed material
- Talking calculator
- Notetakers, tape recorders
- Raised line drawings and tactile models of graphic materials
- Braille Embosser with Printer
- Braille Translation software

Sources

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4. Taylor, R, Steinberg, L & Richard S. Exceptional Children: Integrating Research And Teaching (2nd Ed.) Singular Publishing: San Diego, 1995.