

HELP! I Have a Blind Student in My Class

The challenge of having a disabled student in your class can be daunting. What would be required of you if you had a blind or deaf student on your rolls? What about a learning disabled student or one with a speech or mobility impairment? Do you know where to begin to provide a quality educational experience for those students?

Citrus College Professor of Physical Science and Engineering, **James N. McClain**, had just such a challenge. Mr. McClain was faced with teaching a blind student from USC who returned to Citrus College to take Physics as a prerequisite for another class at USC. The following letter from Mr. McClain to the Director of Disabled Services and Programs at USC, outlines exactly what Mr. McClain did for the student with a disability. (All names have been changed to protect confidentiality.)

April 6, 2001

Assistant Director of Disabled Services and Programs
USC University Park
Student Union #3011
Los Angeles, CA 90089-0896

Dear Ms. Larkin,

It is my pleasure to be serving Mr. Fernando Smith as his professor in the Introduction to College Physics course this semester. Mr. Smith's enthusiasm for learning physics and the support I have received from the Citrus College Disabled Student Programs and Services (DSP&S) staff has made it possible to accommodate him in the three environments in which he must function to succeed in the course: classroom lecture/discussion, the computer lab and the physics laboratory.

To help Mr. Smith prepare for lecture/discussion meetings we have augmented his audio copy of the textbook with my PowerPoint presentations. Transmitted via the campus intranet, the text and graphics in these ancillaries have been reformatted by DSP&S for his perusal. I think this has encouraged him to take a very active role in classroom discussions.

Homework assignments are also accessible via the campus intranet. Fernando is provided with a scribe for exams which he takes' under supervision in our Disabled Students' Testing Center.

In the Physical Science Computer Lab, a DSP&S technician installed JAWS screen-reading software so that Fernando is able to participate in the required one hour per week supervised computer lab time involving interactive quizzes and other software tutorials.

Physics laboratory experiments and activities are proving the greatest challenge. I explained to Fernando that this is not an adapted version of the course, and although we would do everything we could to accommodate him, we might encounter situations where we were unable to do so. This has happened twice; with a lab involving graphical methods of vector analysis and one that required mapping electric fields.

But with the other labs, ten so far, Fernando has been able to participate at the level of any other student. Experiments are performed in teams of two or three. Equipped with his audio calculator and stop watch and other Braille instruments, he performs measurements, calculations and manipulates the lab setups. ("Hands-on experience" has taken on a whole new meaning for me.) Fernando completes his lab report write-ups using Microsoft Excel to graph and analyze his experimental data.

After lab each week we have an hour-long appointment to "debrief" and to discuss the logistics of next week's activities. I then convert lab procedures, questions and report forms to text files and email them to Fernando so that he can prepare for the upcoming lab.

We are fortunate here at Citrus to be in a position to invest extra time, energy and resources in this student. It has certainly paid off in the satisfaction of building a process effective in helping him succeed. I hope this information gives you some insight into that accomplishment and that its success is as encouraging to you as it is to me.

Yours for success in education,

James N. McClain
Professor of Physical Science and Engineering