Equal Access: Universal Design of Housing and Residential Life

DO·IT

A checklist for making housing and residential life welcoming and accessible to everyone
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College and university housing facilities and services, whether for single students or families, are important elements of a college education for many students. For students with disabilities, living on campus can facilitate access to academic programs and campus activities. This publication is a resource for campus housing and residential life staff and identifies key areas of concern, offers general guidance, and provides resources regarding disability access issues.

Legal Issues

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments of 2008 prohibit discrimination against individuals with disabilities. According to these laws, no otherwise qualified person with a disability shall, solely by reason of his or her disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity of a public entity. Housing programs must also comply with applicable state laws and federal laws such as the Fair Housing Act and Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). This publication does not provide legal advice. To clarify issues, consult your campus legal counsel or ADA/504 compliance officer, or your regional Office for Civil Rights (OCR).

Facilities and Programs to Consider

Housing facilities owned or managed by the campus, as well as services they offer, should adopt accessibility policies, guidelines, and procedures. These facilities and services include but are not limited to
- single undergraduate student residence halls and apartments;
- graduate student and family housing;
- academic theme houses, special interest houses, or sorority and fraternity houses;
- off-campus housing referral service (for example, if a referral system is operated by the housing office, especially if landlords are solicited for their listings, it is advisable to collect and disseminate information about disability access);
- cafeterias, restaurants, meeting rooms, common areas, restrooms, recreational facilities, and computer labs operated by housing services;
- childcare facilities;
- transportation services operated by the housing office, such as large passenger buses or small shuttle vehicles; and
- housing leased by or from the campus (e.g., ensure that leasing agreements address disability access issues in facilities, facility renovations and maintenance, and individual requests for facility adjustments such as adding grab bars in a bathroom).

Whom to Consider

In addition to students who live in campus housing, other individuals should be ensured access to housing facilities and programs. They include the following:
- a student's spouse or partner, children, or other family members with disabilities eligible to live with them;
- friends and other individuals with disabilities who visit students;
- prospective students, parents, and other visitors with disabilities who are touring housing facilities as part of a campus tour;
- newly admitted students who are participating in a "stay-over" program to gain greater understanding of campus life; and
- individuals residing in campus housing facilities as part of summer conferences, workshops, or camps.

Coordination with Disabled Student Services

Staff should respect a student's privacy with respect to disability-related information whenever possible, sharing information only with those who have a need to know and in compliance with legal mandates and campus policies. The housing and residential life office and the disabled student services office should consider developing specific housing accommodation policies and procedures and making them available to staff and students. Some campuses have a small joint housing and disability committee that considers policy and procedures and reviews exceptional requests on an individual basis. On most campuses, a disabled student services office is responsible for receiving and reviewing disability-related documentation and for determining or recommending accommodations or appropriate adjustments in campus procedures and policies. This office may forward disability verification and specific recommendations to the housing office.

Guidelines and Examples

The following questions can guide you in making housing and residential life welcoming and accessible to everyone.

Planning, Policies, and Evaluation

Ensure physical access, comfort, and safety within an environment that is inclusive of people with a variety of abilities, racial and ethnic backgrounds, genders, and ages.

— Are people with disabilities, racial and ethnic minorities, students with diverse gender identities and sexual orientations, young and old students, and other groups represented in the housing planning, review process, and advisory committees in numbers proportional to those of the whole community?

— Do you have a policy about whether students approved for a single room are charged a single- or double-occupancy rate?

— Do you make exceptions to full-time enrollment rules for living in campus housing for students who must enroll part-time because of their disabilities?

— Is accessibility considered in the procurement process?
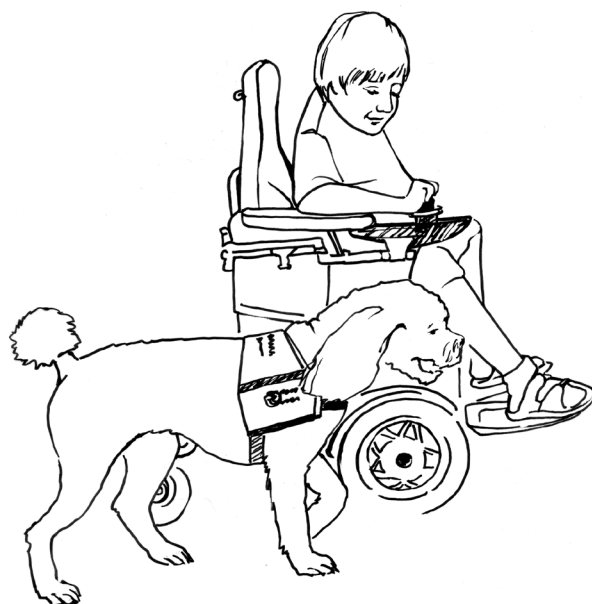
— Do you have an internal housing document that details policies and procedures on disability-related accommodations for housing and residential life? Be prepared for students who may request housing for a personal care assistant, first-floor space, accessible bathrooms or kitchens, a special diet, a single room, permission to house a service animal, or accessible fire and smoke alarms.

— Is a policy in place regarding accommodations for students with disabilities who require personal care assistants? Personal care assistants may need access to the housing facility and parking; some may need to room with the resident.

— Are procedures established regarding service animals? Service animals may include guide dogs for blind individuals, hearing dogs for deaf or hard-of-hearing people, seizure response dogs to assist people with seizure disorders, and assistance animals for people with other disabling conditions.

— Are there procedures to handle requests for modifications in food selections, listings of ingredients for students with specific food allergies, and flexibility in policy to allow a student to opt out of the meal plan?

— Do you have a review process that provides a case-by-case review of accommodation requests in a timely manner?

— Is a review procedure in place to ensure that disability-related factors are adequately considered in violations of the campus student code of conduct?
— Are disability-related access issues addressed in your evaluation methods?

Physical Environments and Products
Ensure physical access, comfort, and safety within an environment that is inclusive of people with a variety of abilities, racial and ethnic backgrounds, genders, and ages. State and federal regulations address most disability access requirements for new housing construction and major renovation projects. Some campus housing programs choose to exceed the requirements in order to provide enhanced maneuvering space in bathrooms and kitchens, as well as kitchen features such as side-by-side refrigerators and stoves with controls on the front edge. Some campuses also provide a greater number of accessible units than the minimum number required by state or federal standards.
— Are there parking areas, pathways, and entrances to the building that are wheelchair-accessible and clearly identified?
— Are all levels of facility connected via an accessible route of travel?
— Are there ample high-contrast, large-print directional signs to and throughout the facility?
— Do elevators have auditory, visual, and tactile signals and are elevator controls accessible from a seated position?
— Are wheelchair-accessible restrooms with well-marked signs available?
— Is at least part of a counter or service desk at a height accessible from a seated position?
— Are adjustable-height tables available for study or work areas within the facility?
— Is adequate light available?
— Are aisles kept wide and clear of obstructions for the safety of users who have mobility or visual impairments?

Consult the *ADA Checklist for Readily Achievable Barrier Removal* at *www.ada.gov/checkweb.htm* for more suggestions.

Staff
Make sure staff are prepared to work with all students and visitors. Housing staff (including resident directors and assistants, custodial and maintenance, food service staff, facility managers, and programming staff) should know how to effectively communicate and work with students who have disabilities. Training can be developed in collaboration with your disabled student services office.
— Do housing staff receive training about communicating with students who have disabilities including nonvisible disabling conditions? (See Communication Hints for content in this area.)
— Do housing staff with more intensive interactions and greater responsibilities (e.g., resident assistants, space assignment staff, facility managers, hall and apartment managers and directors) receive training in disability accommodation procedures and issues and civil rights legislation?
— Do staff members have ready access to a list of on- and off-campus resources for students with disabilities?
— Do staff members have knowledge of accessible travel routes around campus?
— Is the housing webmaster knowledgeable about accessible web page design?

For more information consult the *World Wide Access: Accessible Web Design* video and publication at *www.uw.edu/doit/Video/www.html*.

Information Resources and Technology
If residential life uses computers as information resources, ensure that systems employ accessible design, that staff members are aware of accessibility options, and systems are in place to make accommodations.
— Are videos used in housing and residential life captioned and audio described?
— Is the computer lab wheelchair-accessible?
— Do you have at least one adjustable-height table, software to enlarge screen images, a large monitor, and a trackball?
— Is a system in place for a timely response to requests for assistive technology such as alternative keyboards and text-to-speech systems?

— Are staff members aware of accessibility options (e.g., enlarged text feature included in computer operating systems) and of assistive technology available in the lab?
— Do pictures in your publications and website include people with diverse characteristics with respect to race, gender, age, and disability?
— In key publications and on your website, including the housing application form, do you include a statement about your commitment to universal access and procedures for requesting disability-related accommodations? For example, you could include the following statement, "Our goal is to make all materials and facilities and services accessible. Please inform staff of accessibility barriers you encounter, and request accommodations that will make activities and information resources accessible to you."
— Do electronic resources, including web pages, adhere to accessibility guidelines or standards adopted by your institution or your specific project or funding source? *Section 508 Standards for Accessible Electronic and Information Technology* (*www.access-board.gov/sec508/guide/*) and *World Wide Web Consortium's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines* (*www.w3.org/WAI/*) are most commonly used. For information about making your website accessible to everyone, consult *World Wide Access: Accessible Web Design* video and publication at *www.uw.edu/doit/Video/www.html.*
— Are all printed publications available (immediately or in a timely manner) in alternate formats such as braille, large print, and electronic text?
— Are key documents provided in language(s) other than English?
— Are all printed materials within easy reach from a variety of heights and without furniture blocking access?

For more information consult the *Equal Access: Universal Design of Computer Labs* video and publication at *www.uw.edu/doit/Video/equal.html.*

Emergency Evacuation
Accessible evacuation procedures are a major concern in housing and residential life.
— Do the disabled student services office and housing and emergency services units on campus collaborate to develop strong and effective policies and procedures related to emergency and safety issues for students with disabilities?
— Do students with disabilities sign a release of information that allows residential staff to compile a list of students with disabilities who may need assistance during an evacuation?
— Do you provide clear training to all students regarding their responsibility in getting themselves safely out of the building in the case of an emergency evacuation and the fire department's responsibility to help those students who may need more assistance?
— Do housing services staff consult with residents who have known disabilities to learn about their preferences for assistance in evacuating facilities?
— Do housing evacuation plans (including written procedures and public notices) and training include specific procedures for the evacuation of residents with disabilities and service animals?
— Do you notify students with disabilities about safety and emergency drills?

Events
Ensure that everyone can participate in events sponsored by your organization.
— Are events located in wheelchair-accessible facilities? Is the accessible entrance and exit clearly marked?
— Is information about how to request disability-related accommodations included in all publications promoting the event?
— Is accessible transportation arranged for events for which transportation is arranged for participants?

Checklist Updates
This checklist was field-tested at more than twenty postsecondary institutions nationwide (see *www. uw.edu/doit/Brochures/Academics/admin.html*). The results of a nationwide survey to test face-validity of checklist items led to further refinement of the checklist. To increase the usefulness of this working document, send suggestions to *sherylb@uw.edu.*

Additional Resources
An electronic copy of this publication as well as additional useful brochures can be found at *www.uw.edu/doit/Brochures/.* A 14-minute video, *Equal Access: Student Services*, demonstrates key points summarized in this publication. An online version may be freely viewed at *www.washington. edu/doit/videos/index.php?vid=11* or purchased in DVD format. Permission is granted to reproduce DO-IT videos and publications for educational, noncommercial purposes provided the source is acknowledged.

The Student Services Conference Room at *www. uw.edu/doit/Conf/* includes a collection of documents and videos to help you make student services accessible to everyone. They include checklists for career services, distance learning, computer labs, recruitment and admissions, registration, housing and residential life, financial aid, libraries, tutoring and learning centers, and student organizations. *The Student Services Conference Room* also includes a searchable *Knowledge Base* of questions and answers, case studies, and promising practices.

For more information about applications of universal design consult *www.uw.edu/doit/ Resources/udesign.html* or *The Center for Universal Design in Education* at *www.uw.edu/doit/CUDE/.* The book *Universal Design in Higher Education: From Principles to Practice, Second Edition* published by Harvard Education Press shares perspectives of UD leaders nationwide. Learn more or order online at *www.uw.edu/doit/universal-design-higher-education-principles-practice-1.*

About DO-IT
DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology) serves to increase the successful participation of individuals with disabilities in challenging academic programs and careers, such as those in science, engineering, mathematics, and technology. Primary funding for DO-IT is provided by the National Science Foundation, the State of Washington, and the U.S. Department of Education.

For further information, to be placed on the DO-IT mailing list, request materials in an alternate format, or to make comments or suggestions about DO-IT publications or web pages, contact:

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Communication Hints

Treat people with disabilities with the same respect and consideration with which you treat others. Here are some helpful hints when it comes to delivering a presentation, hosting an exhibit, and otherwise relating to people with disabilities.

General
- Ask a person with a disability if that person needs help before providing assistance.
- Talk directly to the person with a disability, not through their companion or interpreter.
- Refer to a person's disability only if it is relevant to the conversation.
- Avoid derogatory slang or negative descriptions of a person's disability. For example, "a person who uses a wheelchair" is more appropriate than "a person confined to a wheelchair." A wheelchair is not confining—it's liberating!
- Provide information in alternate means (e.g., written, spoken, diagrams).
- Do not interact with a person's guide dog or service dog unless you have received permission to do so.
- Do not be afraid to use common terms and phrases, like "see you later" or "let's go for a walk" around people with disabilities.
- Do not touch mobility devices or assistive technology without the owner's consent.
- Do not assume physical contact—like handshakes, high-fives, or hugs—is okay.
- Understand that not everyone uses eye contact.

Blind or Low Vision
- Be descriptive. Say, "The computer is about three feet to your left," rather than "The computer is over there."
- Speak all of the projected content when presenting and describe the content of charts, graphs, and pictures.
- When guiding people with visual impairments, offer them your arm rather than grabbing or pushing them.

Learning Disabilities
- Offer directions or instructions both orally and in writing. If asked, read instructions to individuals who have specific learning disabilities.

Mobility Impairments
- Consider carrying on a long conversation with an individual who has a mobility impairment from a seated position.

Speech Impairments
- Listen carefully. Repeat what you think you understand and then ask the person with a speech impairment to clarify or repeat the portion that you did not understand.

Deaf or Hard of Hearing
- Face people with hearing impairments, and avoid covering your mouth, so they can see your lips. Avoid talking while chewing gum or eating.
- Speak clearly at a normal volume. Speak louder only if requested.
- Repeat questions from audience members.
- Use paper and pencil, or type things out on your cell phone, if the person who is deaf does not read lips or if more accurate communication is needed.
- When using an interpreter, speak directly to the person who is deaf; when an interpreter voices what a person who is deaf signs, look at the person who is deaf, not the interpreter.

Psychiatric Impairments
- Provide information in clear, calm, respectful tones.
- Allow opportunities for addressing specific questions.