BRIEF 5: ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY (AT)

The purpose of this brief is to provide an overview of how faculty can better meet the needs of students who use assistive technology (AT). In addition, suggestions are provided to assist faculty in making their materials more available to students who use AT.

Assistive Technology Defined

“Any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially, modified or customized, that is used to increase, maintain or improve the functional capabilities of people with disabilities.”

Importance of AT for the student:

Access to information: This may include screen reading software such as JAWS for students with visual impairments so they can use the Internet or read electronic files.

Access to physical environment: This may include wheelchair ramps, curb cuts, elevators, accessible doors (electronic are best), appropriate classroom seating, etc.

Completion of common daily tasks: For example, large handles on eating utensils, phones that flash when ringing, electronic readers, etc.

Facilitating Use of AT

Ask your students how you can facilitate their use of AT
Be open to the use of AT in class
Think about who is at the “other end” when teaching online
Present information in multiple ways
Think from the bottom up
Allow for flexibility in the way students access and convey what they know
Allow students to record or videotape lectures
Be aware of assistive listening devices and ensure all speakers are using them correctly
Provide hard copies and electronic text copies of PowerPoint presentations
Read all the text on PowerPoint presentations and all other information displayed.
This is particularly useful for students with visual impairments as well as those with learning disabilities
When showing videos/movies use the closed captioned/video description feature
Provide electronic transcripts of audio recording
Ensure books and audio recordings are available as electronic text
Post the syllabus online and make it available well in advance of the start of the course
Follow the guidelines for web design set forth by World Wide Web Consortium (WC3) see link http://www.w3.org
Ensure distance education tools comply with web accessibility guidelines
Post assignments online
When administering exams plan well in advance to allow for transcription into Braille, text, recordings or electronic versions

Please feel free to distribute with the following acknowledgement: Teaching All Students, Reaching All Learners, Center on Disability Studies, University of Hawai‘i, Honolulu, HI. For more information contact Steven (Steve) E. Brown, Ph.D., Project Coordinator at sebrown@hawaii.edu or visit the Web site at: www.ist.hawaii.edu.

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