

Tips for PCC Personnel

Working with students who experience disabilities

Prepared by Portland Community College Disability Services

Relax – Remember that disabilities may be obvious or hidden, permanent or temporary, but are always only one of the characteristics that define a person. Students with disabilities will exhibit the same full range of characteristics found in the general population of students. They will be as smart, funny, talkative, or shy as anyone else.

Listen attentively – If an individual experiences a disability that affects communication, listen carefully. If needed, clarify by asking questions that can be answered by yes or no, **don't pretend to understand if you don't**. If you can't understand a student, or they can't hear you, try writing responses on paper.

Accommodate – Be flexible – **if one approach doesn't seem to work, try another**. Expect to interact in different ways as needed to ensure students get what they came for. For example, if an Individual is blind, you may need to articulate rather than point, to email a document rather than hand it to them in hard copy. Or, if a person uses a wheelchair you may need to come out from behind a counter, or provide a clipboard. Don't be afraid to ask for clarification of what methods will be most effective and most accessible for the student.

Be Fair - Hold all students to the same standards – be clear in terms of expectations

Question stereotypes – Don't assume that a student with a disability is less capable or will automatically have certain needs, let them tell you what they need, ask for clarification if it is needed.

Refer – Any student who discloses a disability to you should have their immediate needs met, but also be referred to our office if they aren't already connected. Let students know we offer individualized support in a confidential setting and that we are here to help. Some will not want to engage, but all should be aware of the option.

