

## Partial Sight/Low Vision

### DESCRIPTION AND FACTS:

Between 70 and 80 percent of all “legally blind” persons in the United States have some usable vision. Some “legally blind” persons may be totally without sight, while others in this category may have significant eyesight. A “legally blind” person is one whose vision, while wearing corrective lenses, does not exceed 20/200 in the better eye, or one whose visual field is less than an angle of 20 degrees. In other words, this person, while wearing glasses, can see less at 20 feet than a person with normal vision can see at 200 feet.

### POSSIBLE BARRIERS:

- The student’s vision may be limited to a narrow angle sometimes called “tunnel vision” or the student may not be able to see contrast.
- People have difficulty believing that a student needs to use alternative printed materials because most partially-sighted students do not use white canes for travel and because most are able to get around much like everyone else.
- The student may be viewed as immature or even dishonest.

One student with partial sight commented that, having been observed playing frisbee by one of her instructors, she was sure that the instructor would no longer believe that she was partially sighted. As she explained, she had more peripheral than central vision and was able to see a red frisbee. If any other color frisbee was used, she could not see it well enough to play. Playing frisbee and reading a printed page present quite different visual requirements. This is often difficult for the fully sighted person to understand.

Another difficulty that a student with partial sight experiences is the psychological response that large writing evokes in the sighted reader. Such handwritten communications tend to give the reader the idea that “a child has written this.” Needless to say, this may lead to the conclusion that a student with this kind of handwriting is immature or childish and the written communication is less than sophisticated. In addition, the assumption is sometimes made that the student is merely trying to make an assignment appear longer as in the case of a term paper of a set length. When the number of words instead of pages required is stated, this is not a problem. The potential difficulties can be alleviated if the student and professor discuss the student’s needs early in the semester.

### INTERACTION WITH AN INDIVIDUAL WITH PARTIAL SIGHT/LOW VISION:

1. Use more verbal communication and fewer physical gestures to communicate.

### TEACHING A STUDENT WITH PARTIAL SIGHT/LOW VISION:

1. **Notetaking:** Each student will have his or her own preferred method for note taking. Some students can take notes for themselves by printing large with a felt tip marker. Other students may tape record the lecture or use a Braille stylus.
2. **Seating in Class:** Students should sit as close to the front of class as possible to make maximum use of visual and auditory cues. **Lighting** is very important. The student should discuss this with the instructor.
3. **Chalkboard Work and Visual Aids:** Some students with partial sight can see the board and other visual aids used by instructors. Other students may have difficulty. The following list might aid those having difficulty:
  - When using the chalkboard, overhead projector or any other visual medium, **use precise and full verbal descriptions** of all materials presented. A helpful addition would be to provide copies of the overhead material presented in class.
  - Spelling out new or technical vocabulary.

4. **Tests:** It is the student's responsibility to discuss alternative test-taking methods with the instructor. Testing needs will vary with the degree of visual impairment.
5. **Texts and Required Readings:** Some students with partial sight have no problem reading printed material. Some have problems with poor-quality print or fuzzy copies.
6. **Low Vision Aids:** Some students use individually prescribed low vision aids such as monoculars or magnifying glasses.