

AWAY

TOPICS

International
Student Issue
March 2010

A World Awaits You

www.miusa.org/ncde

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Three Easy Ways to Reach Out to International Students with Disabilities

- 1 Add welcoming language to your materials.**
For example:
 - We provide reasonable accommodations as needed to people with disabilities.
 - Sign language interpreters available upon request.
 - Our facilities are wheelchair-accessible.
 - Our materials are available in accessible formats.

- 2 Make sure local leaders of the disability community are on your email lists.**
Find organizations close to you by searching online at: www.miusa.org/orgsearch

- 3 Provide materials specifically addressing disability-related questions.**
Email clearinghouse@miusa.org for brochures and handouts.



Disability Accommodations for the TOEFL Test

As a journalism professor who is blind and head of her University's Center of Adaptive Technologies, Svetlana Vasilyeva trains people who are blind in adaptive technology so they may use computers to further their education. When Vasilyeva's former English teacher told her about the U.S. Department of State's Hubert H. Humphrey program, which

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Disability Accommodations for the TOEFL Test

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combines mid-career professional development with non-degree graduate courses at U.S. universities, she decided to apply, and started by taking the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) exam.

“At first, staff that administers the exam said that I couldn’t take this test because I am blind. Upon learning that the service who writes the exam is required to make disability accommodations, the staff offered to read the TOEFL exam out loud to me. I didn’t have enough time to request braille accommodations, so I agreed; but it was very difficult for me because I always understand better when I can read texts in braille with my fingers. It works like a visual memory.”

Vasilyeva passed her TOEFL exam and is now studying at Pennsylvania State University in State College.

The Educational Testing Service (ETS) is committed to serving TOEFL test takers with disabilities by providing services and reasonable accommodations that are appropriate given the purposes of the tests.

Advisers need to inform all test takers to register early if they have a disability that will need test accommodations. ETS may require documentation of the disability which can take six weeks to review after receipt of all necessary documents. Production of braille, audio, or large-print formats, or arranging of a qualified reader and scribe, may require up to eight weeks after accommodation approval.

Did you know:

There are approximately 650 million people with disabilities worldwide.



Find more detailed information about accommodations for disabilities on the TOEFL test online at

www.miusa.org/ncde/tipsheets/toefl

Editor’s Corner

The ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities in 2008 focused worldwide attention on the importance of equal access for people with disabilities, including access to higher education opportunities in the United States. Disability should not be a barrier to coming to the United States for study, internships, professional development opportunities, and other exchange options. This inaugural issue of the AWAY Topics, sponsored by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, U.S. Department of State and produced by the National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange (NCDE), focuses on international students with disabilities.

This issue focuses on the questions we receive most often from international education professionals and provides an introduction to core issues of disability inclusion and how to make your programs more accessible.

Together, we can make a difference for international students with disabilities! If you have a story or comment to share, contact us at

clearinghouse@miusa.org or www.miusa.org/ncde

Cerise Roth-Vinson, Chief Operating Officer, MIUSA,
Manager, NCDE



Attitude is Everything

Student 1 walks into an office and asks about Fulbright scholarships. She is deaf and wants to know if she can apply. The Adviser frowns and hesitates, “I’m not sure... I’ll have to check, but I think it will be very difficult for you.” Student 1 leaves thinking that perhaps it was not possible to study in the United States.

Student 2 walks into a different office, but has the same disability and same question. The Adviser welcomes the student and says right away, “I’m so glad you came in! You know, I’ve never been asked this question, but I am going to find out what accommodations are available so you can know your options. This will be a good learning experience for me as well.” Student 2 leaves feeling excited about working with the adviser, and turns her efforts to finding out more about the application process.

[A] significant negative influence on the decision to study in the United States is the attitudes of others...If a person with a disability asks you about study in the United States remember to be excited and encouraging.

Which adviser are you?

Based on an years of learning from people with disabilities interested in study in the United States, the National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange finds that the attitudes of others is a significant negative influence on the decision to study in the United States. This is not surprising given that it is common for people with disabilities to hear more often what they cannot do than

what is possible. **You can help turn this around!** If a person with a disability asks you about study in the United States, be excited and encouraging. There is no guarantee that any student will be successful, but students with disabilities should have an equal opportunity to try.



Welcome!
¡Bienvenidos!
Добро Пожаловать!
SELAMAT DATANG!
Willkommen!
Karibu!





Are Your Materials Accessible?

What materials would you be able to provide to a student who was blind or visually impaired and came into your office looking for information? Someone to read out loud? Braille? Large print? All offices advising students interested in study in the United States should have at least basic information available in alternative formats accessible to people who are blind and visually impaired. What of the options below are the best choices for your office?

Electronic Formats Whether you offer electronic files on disk, USB drives, or on your website, students who are blind and visually impaired will often have screen-reading software such as JAWS or ZoomText on their personal computers to help read out loud or enlarge the

files on the screen. If you have computers in your office for student use also consider installing these types of software. Remember, PDF files are not always accessible so make sure the documents are also offered in Rich Text format (i.e. .rtf), or Word (i.e. .doc) formats.

Braille A system of raised dots on paper, braille is an important literacy tool for people with vision disabilities. There is no universal braille system, so it may be a good idea to have some materials in both the local braille as well as American English Braille. Contact local organizations that serve people with vision disabilities to get referrals on services that convert print to braille.

Large Print Having hard copy materials available in 18-point font is easy to do and very helpful for people who are low vision.

Personal Reader If a blind person comes into your office and you do not have any alternative format that the student is able to use, offer to have one of your staff read the information to the student and help fill out any necessary forms.



For more detailed information on providing materials in alternative formats please go online to

www.miusa.org/ncde/tools/altformats

Reasonable Accommodation:

A policy with the intent of providing access to services for people with disabilities as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Examples include providing wheelchair ramps or extended time to take tests.

Featured Student:

Mahjoub Boulhaj

Home Country: Morocco

Institution Attended in the US:
University of Arkansas, Fayetteville

Degree: MA, Translation

Disability: Blind

Path to the United States: Boulhaj, a graduate in English from Qadi Ayyad University in Marrakesh, was determined to make the most of his remarkable talent for languages and inter-personal communication. He quickly mastered specialized computer equipment to enhance his productivity and expand his horizons, and soon proved himself one of the brightest students in his class. He did so well that he received a Fulbright scholarship and the University of Arkansas offered him a scholarship to complete a doctorate degree.

Extracurricular Activities while in United States: Boulhaj played an exemplary role as cultural ambassador in Fayetteville. Elected president of the local Muslim Association, he supervised the creation of its webpage and organized an Islamic awareness week. He also gave public talks about Islam and the Arab World, not only on campus, but also in local high schools and churches. Boulhaj also fought successfully to give women a greater role and voice in the Association.

Occupation: Mahjoub is working as a simultaneous translator for the United Nations in New York where his mastery of Arabic, French and, of course

English, serve him well. He often returns to his native Morocco where his deepest concern is helping other visually impaired people, in particular he is exploring ways and means of promoting computer technology for people who are blind.



Does your student have a question about disability accommodations at a specific school? Advise the student to contact the **office of disability services** on campus. Students may also contact the NCDE directly with any disability-related questions:
clearinghouse@miusa.org.



Online Resources from the National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange

Opportunities in the United States for Non-U.S. Citizens

www.miusa.org/ncde/comingtousa

General information about disability rights in the United States, how to work with a US higher education institution to arrange disability accommodations, disability culture in the United States, preparing for the exchange experience, and more.

International Students with Disabilities Accessing Community Resources

www.miusa.org/ncde/tipsheets/communityresources

For international students in the United States, on-campus resources can fulfill almost every need. But, where do they go for disability-related needs that are not easily solved with resources on-campus, or by program staff? In this tipsheet, several community disability resources are explored.

Blind Visitors to the United States: What You Need to Know

www.miusa.org/ncde/tipsheets/blindvisitorstousa

Information and resources for international visitors to the United States who are blind or have low vision. Specific tips for navigating professional, community or academic environments.

Disability Culture and Outreach to People with Disabilities Overseas about Exchange Opportunities in the USA

www.miusa.org/ncde/tools/disabilityculture

General information about differences between the Medical versus Human Rights models of disability rights, intercultural disability issues, cultural models of providing disability accommodations, and specific tips for doing outreach to people with disabilities.

Health and Travel Considerations for People with Disabilities

www.miusa.org/ncde/tools/insurance

Disability and health should be considered separate issues. However, there are some considerations that people with disabilities should be aware of when arranging for insurance in the United States. This tipsheet gives a broad overview of disability-related insurance issues both for people with disabilities coming to the United States as well as US citizens traveling abroad.

Funding for People Coming to the USA

www.miusa.org/ncde/financialaid/fundingtousa

Lists of funding opportunities and tips covering everything from contacting local community organizations, such as Rotary Clubs, to information about prestigious fellowships, such as those from the Ford Foundation.

Disability Rights Laws in the United States

The **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** is a law that protects the rights of people with disabilities in the United States, both citizens and people from other countries. U.S. universities and exchange programs are not allowed to discriminate against any person because of a disability. International students and professionals are protected by the ADA when they are in the United States.

Another law protecting the rights of people with disabilities when they are in school is **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act**. Section 504 is a federal law designed to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities in

programs and activities that receive federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education.

Read more about the ADA in the free book *Rights and Responsibilities: A Guide to National and International Disability-Related Laws for International Exchange Organizations and Participants*, which is free to download at www.miusa.org/publications/books/rr

More information about general disability law in the United States can be found in a comprehensive guide at www.disability.gov

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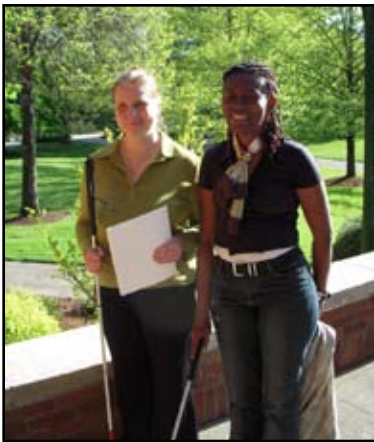
From the Field

“We are excited when we have candidates with disabilities applying for these prestigious awards, especially from developing countries in our region. Students or scholars with disabilities who compete for these Fulbright awards have been just as successful as anyone else in our programs.”

Alain McNamara, Executive Director of the Jordanian-American Commission for Educational Exchange (JACEE) - the Binational Fulbright Commission in Jordan

“As I began to interact with the student, I thought about some of my own preconceptions of people with disabilities. Acknowledging these attitudes is half the battle in addressing them. This [realization] ultimately helped me to instead devise strategies to help her with the logistical challenges she would face in planning her program.”

Dr. Sunrit Mullick, head of US Educational Foundation in India’s Kokata office on advising a student with cerebral palsy



“I am back in France and everyone around me finds that I have changed, and especially that I am more autonomous. My year abroad enabled me to be more independent and made me more confident.”

Sophie Cicekli, who uses a wheelchair and spent an undergraduate university year studying at Georgetown University

“I consider it extremely important that we, people with disabilities, be integrated into regular settings and attend different educational programs that can contribute to our personal and professional development.”

Reina Estrada, from Guatemala, who is blind and studied English for one summer at the University of Oregon

“The first few months at an American college quickly expanded my mind. I believe that a college education in the United States will give me the opportunity to do something different and learn the skills I desire so that I can return to my home country and advocate for a better quality of life, including expanded options for post-secondary education and jobs for the deaf community in Zambia.”

Francis Phiri, a Deaf student, on studying at Ohlone College in Fremont, California

Read first-hand articles and follow blogs from other people with disabilities who have participated in international exchange at www.miusa.org/ncde/stories