

Managing an Academic Career
as a Person who is Blind
Talk for Enabled–Épauler

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Awareness Matters!

Email I received on 10/12/19

Hi again Curtis. Again, we are so sorry about this. We have already put a planter there to help folks avoid this in the future. As for our sign, we plan to put it near one of the two Crepe Myrtles Instead of the middle of the sidewalk. I know the owner of This & That and will mention this to him and see if they can move their sign out of the middle of the sidewalk too. This was a very humbling day and it reminds us to be more cognizant of folks with different abilities.

Terri Turner, Weaver Street Realty

- Reading, performing analysis, and web searches are all significantly slower than for a person with sight.
- I do math in braille and write papers and slides in LaTeX.
- In Early years I Tried to substitute quality for quantity.
- More recently I co-author with sighted colleagues and grad students.
- PDF and scanned documents as well as many websites are often not accessible.
- Duke pays grad students to record technical articles and papers for me.

Teaching

- Lecturing and grading can be complicated.
- I don't write on the board.
- I post my lecture notes on the Internet (not good for attendance).
- Last year I switched to slides for my undergrad course (about 15 hours prep per lecture).
- I try to anticipate questions because they can be difficult to answer in real time.
- Course exams graded by TAs, and qualifying exams graded by me with assistance of a reader.

- The Logistics are sometimes daunting!
- Traveling to Rice to give a seminar last spring required the help of 10 strangers just to get there.
- I often feel like a piece of freight or luggage being handed off.
- I don't attend large conferences much any more because of logistics.
- When I was on the job market, I hired a teenager to run with me between interviews.
- International travel is especially tricky!
- Duke let's me use research funds to bring my wife on international trips.

Professional Support

- My colleagues, staff and grad students are a big help.
- I typically get rides to seminars and other functions from colleagues.
- One of my grad students is actually my gym workout partner.
- I am generally treated with respect and dignity (maybe it's the grey hair?).
- The university provides me with funds for a driver and reader and clerical support.
- There are, however, some institutional and professional *blind spots*.
- My departmental task force on diversity did not recognize different-abled people as an under-represented group.
- Duke's employee Learning Management System is not accessible.
- I had to have my female assistant read me online exam questions about discrimination and sexual harassment!

Reasonable Accommodations?

Different-abled academics should probably receive:

- more time on the tenure clock,
- fewer teaching preps,
- priority classroom locations,
- fewer referee requests (PLEASE!)
- General awareness that we do good work – it just takes a little longer!