

# Special Populations

This tutorial on Special Populations provides faculty with strategies, resources and tools for addressing students with disabilities as well as those with limited proficiency in English. It contains six modules with four brief video segments, three in the "case studies" section and one in the module called "tips."

The six modules in this course are:

1. Defining Special Populations
2. Interacting with Students
3. Accommodations
4. Tips
5. Case Studies
6. Limited English Proficiency

Read through the six modules, including watching the four short videos online, three in the "case studies" section and one in the module called "Tips." (If you do not have Real Player on your computer, download a free version at <http://real.com>)

There is a seventh module called "Test Your Awareness" which offers some sample questions for reviewing before your assessment if you choose to do so.

**II. After studying the modules, return to this page in Blackboard and take the 20-question exam.** When you have completed the assessment with at least a 70 percent accuracy, email the Instructor at [merrilee@austincc.edu](mailto:merrilee@austincc.edu) and you will receive a completion in the workshop database. You may take the test more than once.

**III. Be sure to fill out the evaluation by clicking on the link "Evaluation" located further down on this page in Blackboard to help us improve our courses.**

*It may help to print out this page to guide you as you move through this course. After you have clicked the "Enter here" link, you will need to navigate using the blue menu on the left side of the page.*

[Enter here.](#)

## Defining Special Populations

The Texas Coordinating Board for Higher Education defines Special Populations as:

- individuals with disabilities



- individuals from economically disadvantaged families, including foster children
- individuals preparing for nontraditional training and employment
- single parents, including single pregnant women
- displaced homemakers and
- individuals with other barriers to educational achievement, including individuals with limited English proficiency.

This definition is important because thousands of people who fit into one or several of the above categories attend community colleges in Texas. According to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board in Texas, 6,910 special population students in Texas received associate degrees in technical fields during academic year 1998-99 while 9,016 received certificates.

The numbers rise and dip slightly each year but have stayed consistently high for the last several years. However, these numbers indicate that a significant portion of community college students have special needs. **The goal of this module is to give community college workforce faculty the necessary tools to address these needs.** Specifically, this module will focus on two categories of Special Populations: Americans with Disabilities and individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP).

## Individuals with Disabilities

**Which one of these individuals does not have a disability?**



**The truth is we all have abilities and disabilities.** But sometimes it's not apparent. Let's see what the law has to say about the definition of a disabled person and the rights they have under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

## ADA & the Law

The law behind the ADA is Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The wording and content of the law are not complicated:

No otherwise qualified person with a [disability] in the United States shall, solely by reason of a [disability], be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.

The portion bolded above needs a bit of definition. A **person with a disability** is an individual with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. An individual is considered to be a person with a disability if he or

she has a disability, has a history of a disability, or is perceived by others as having a disability.

A **qualified person with a disability** is defined as a person who meets the requisite academic and technical standards required for admission to or participation in the postsecondary institution's programs and activities.

### **Coming Example of Disabilities**

Some examples of documented disabilities are:

- blindness/visual impairment
- cerebral palsy
- deafness/hearing impairment
- seizure disorder
- orthopedic/mobility impairment
- a specific learning disability
- speech/language disorder
- spinal cord injury
- Tourette's syndrome
- traumatic brain injury

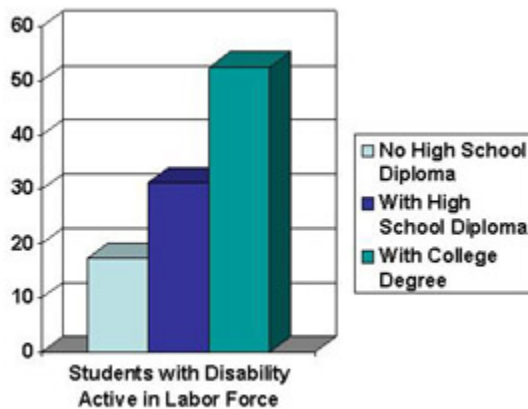
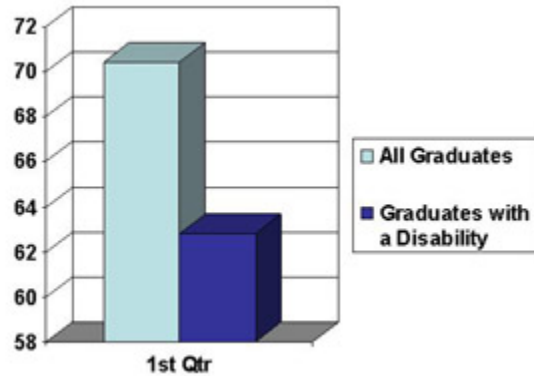
Most of us are aware of the above examples of disabilities, but what is less often known is that individuals with chronic illnesses are also protected. Examples of chronic illnesses are AIDS, ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease), arthritis, cancer, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, and various psychological disorders.

### **Interesting Statistics**

The following statistics came from the National Center on Education Statistics. They address disability and education for all students under 21 years of age.

- Number of students, aged 21 and under, who received federally supported services for students with documented disabilities in 1977: 3,692,000
- Number who received such services in 1996: 5,573,000
- Percentage that this number increased between 1977 and 1996: 50.9%
- Percentage increase in number of students with documented learning disabilities between 1977 and 1996: 223%
- Percentage increase in number of students with documented emotional disabilities between 1977 and 1996: 54.7%
- Percentage decrease in number of students with mental retardation between 1977 and 1996: 40.5%
- Percentage decrease in number of students with documented hearing impairments between 1977 and 1996: 22.9%
- Percentage of all students in 1977 with a documented disability: 8.3%
- Percentage of all students in 1996 with a documented disability: 12.4%
- Percentage of all students in 1977 with a documented learning disability: 1.8%
- Percentage of all students in 1996 with a learning disability: 5.8%

Other interesting statistics can be found at the Texas Governor's web site, specifically under the topic of the [Governor's Committee on Disabilities](#). For example, the percentage of all 1994 high school graduates who enrolled in postsecondary education was 70.4%, while the percentage of high school graduates with disabilities who enrolled was significantly lower at 62.8%. In 1995-1996, the percentage of male undergraduate students who reported having a disability was only 27.1%; for females, the reporting rate was higher but still low at 31.4%.



Of those disabled people who are a part of the workforce, a much higher percentage have college degrees than have less than a high school degree. Sixteen percent had less than a high school degree, but 50.4% possessed a college degree. Educational attainment is as much a key to success for a disabled person's success as it is to a non-disabled person. The percentage of severely disabled who have no high school diploma and are active in the labor force is 17.3%; 31.2% of those with a high school diploma are active in the labor force, and 52.4% of

those with a college degree are active in the labor force. The statistics above are more than just numbers pulled together through research. They reveal much about a large part of the American public school population. **For example, the number of students receiving federal aid for some type of disability has increased since 1977 by several million.** It is worth noting that the number of students reporting disabilities has increased markedly, but too many still hesitate to report. And, like most other Americans, disabled students must have an education to participate in the workforce. Therefore, it is clear that these individuals must be accorded the same rights as those without disabilities, including the right to acquire an education. In order to accord them those rights, some special services should be available to all disabled persons who **qualify**.

### Achievers with Disabilities

Determined and persistent individuals with disabilities have always been contributors to society when those around them saw past their disabilities and focused on their talents. In fact, many Texans whose lives you studied in your history books were disabled. The following individuals are only a few of the outstanding Texans with disabilities that we know of.



Erastus "Deaf" Smith was hearing impaired yet served as a scout during

the Texas Revolution. Colonel William Travis considered Smith to be the “Bravest of the Brave.”



Thomas Ward lost a leg in the Texas Revolution and an arm when a cannon misfired during a San Jacinto Day celebration. He served as mayor of Austin and Commissioner of the General Land Office.

Criss Cole was blinded during World War II but served as an influential and conservation-minded Texas Legislator beginning in 1955.

Patsy Smith Moore was disabled as a result of childhood polio and served as the first woman judge of the 72nd District Court.

Source: [Famous Texans with Disabilities](#)



Most of us are aware of one of our country's most famous disabled Americans: President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Because of childhood polio, Roosevelt could not walk without assistance. However, he successfully served three terms as a US President (elected 4 times and died in office). Unfortunately, the lack of disability awareness forced him to hide his disability. Photos of him in a wheelchair were never published during his presidency.

Other well-known Americans with disabilities were:

Harriet Tubman, born on a slave plantation, developed epilepsy after being struck on the head by her overseer. After escaping slavery, she dedicated her life to freeing other slaves and to women's suffrage.



John Wesley Powell, a 19th century explorer, lost his right arm in the Civil War. Lacking even moral support from his parents, he became a science professor and explorer who founded the Smithsonian Institution's Bureau of

Ethnology.

Judi Chamberlain was hospitalized in a state institution due to depression. The horrifying conditions and lack of legal rights she experienced as a psychiatric patient prompted her to found a Mental Patients Liberation Front and publish an important book on the topic.

## Interacting with Students Who Have Disabilities

You may find the following tips concerning appropriate language and interaction with disabled individuals helpful.

### Appropriate Language

- People with disabilities are people first. The Americans With Disabilities Act officially changed the way we refer to people with disabilities and provided the model that we should see the person first, then the disability.
- Do use the word disability when referring to someone who has a physical, mental, emotional, sensory, or learning impairment.
- Do not use the word handicapped. A handicap is what a person with a disability cannot do.
- Avoid labeling individuals as victims, or the disabled, or names of conditions. Instead, refer to an individual as a person with a disability or someone who has, i.e., epilepsy.
- Avoid terms such as wheelchair bound. Wheelchairs do not bind; they provide access and enable individuals to get around. Instead, refer to a person who uses a wheelchair or as a person with mobility impairment.
- When it is appropriate to refer to an individual's disability, choose the correct terminology for the specific disability. Use terms such as quadriplegia, speech impairment, hearing impairment, or the specific learning disability, like dyslexia.

### Appropriate Interaction

- When introduced, offer to shake hands. People with limited hand use or artificial limbs can usually shake hands. It is an acceptable greeting in our culture to use the left hand for hand shaking.
- Treat adults as adults. Avoid patronizing people who use wheelchairs by patting them on the shoulder or touching their head. Never place your hands on a person's wheelchair, since the chair is a part of the body space of the user.
- If possible, sit down when talking to a person who uses a wheelchair so that you are at the person's eye level.
- Speak directly to the person with a disability. Do not communicate through another person. If the person uses an interpreter, look at the person and speak to the person; do not speak directly to the interpreter.
- Offer assistance with sensitivity and respect. Ask if there is something you might do to help. If the offer is declined, do not insist.
- If you are a sighted guide for a person with a visual impairment, allow the person to take your arm at or above the elbow so that you guide rather than propel.



- When talking with a person who has a speech impairment, listen attentively, ask short questions that require short answers, avoid correcting, and repeat what you understand if you are uncertain.
- When first meeting a blind person, identify yourself and any others who may be with you.
- When speaking to a person with a hearing impairment, look directly at the person and speak slowly. Avoid placing your hand over your mouth when speaking. Written notes may be helpful for short conversations.

# Accommodations

## Accommodations Colleges Must Provide

Colleges and universities are expected to provide very different services to students with disabilities than are high schools. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) applies to elementary and secondary schools but not to colleges. Under IDEA, high schools must do the following:

- Identify students with disabilities
- Provide assessment of learning disabilities
- Classify disabilities according to specified diagnostic categories
- Involve parents or guardians in placement decisions
- Provide certain nonacademic services
- By placement committee with parental participation and approval, place students in programs where they can benefit
- Structure a large part of the student's weekly schedule
- Modify educational programs
- Prepare Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs)
- Provide a free and appropriate education
- Provide appropriate services by school nurse or health service



Note the differences between the above list and the responsibilities of colleges:

- Protect a student's right to privacy and confidentiality
- Provide access to programs and services
- Inform students of the location of the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) and the procedures for requesting accommodations
- Accept and evaluate verifying documentation
- Determine (via documentation) that an impairment causes a substantial limitation of a major life activity
- Determine for students who are otherwise qualified for participation in the program or service whether a reasonable accommodation is possible
- Make reasonable accommodations for students who meet the above criteria
- Provide reasonable access to program and service choices equal to those available to the general public
- Suggest reasonable adjustments in teaching methods that do not alter the essential content of a course or program
- Assure that off-campus and contracted program facilities also comply with Section 504 (Subpart E) and ADA
- Inform students of their rights and responsibilities. Often college faculty assume that they must provide much more support than actually required. In addition,



disabled students first entering college may assume that they will receive the same support they received when they were in high school. Most institutions try to prepare these students for the differences between high school and college, but it is not unusual for a student to expect more from the college than the college is bound to provide. A problem point in this area is often the assumption that a college will reduce or waive any of the essential requirements of a course or program. **But such is not the case.**

### What are Reasonable Accommodations?

The above is a commonly asked question, both by students and by faculty. It's probably best to define the term with examples of typical reasonable accommodations. For example, the following accommodations may be provided for individuals with **Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder**:

#### Accommodations for AD/HD

- Providing the student with copies of the material presented on overhead transparencies
- Early registration
- Note sharing
- Use of a tape recorder to facilitate note taking
- Priority seating in the classroom
- Proctored testing in a distraction-reduced environment
- Textbooks on tape
- Alternative testing format
- Extended time for tests in most appropriate setting
- Supervised breaks during exams

#### Accommodations for Visual Impairments

- Use of low vision aids such as a magnifying glass, monocular, or CCTV
- Use of computer with programs like JAWS or ZoomText which enable visually impaired persons to read computer monitors.
- Duplication of overhead transparencies
- Early registration
- Enlarged print for testing
- Note sharing
- Priority seating in the classroom
- Readers for tests
- Scribe for exams
- Tape recorder in the classroom
- Textbooks on tape
- Written materials provided in an alternative format

- Alternative testing format
- Extended testing time in most appropriate setting – classroom, OSD, or Testing Center
- Occasional extension of assignment due dates

**Types of alternate format of printed material for students with blindness/visual impairments include:**

- Audio tape: Most textbooks can be ordered on tape from Recordings for the Blind and Dyslexic (1-800-221-4792).
- Large print: Standard sized materials can be enlarged on a copier using 11" x 17" paper.
- Computer disk: Convert the text of materials to ASCII format.
- Braille: Adaptive equipment will be necessary to provide alternate format in Braille. Braille is probably the least requested alternate format for students who are blind

### Accommodations for Hearing Impairments

- Providing a sign language interpreter
- Insuring that an interpreter is located where the student can see both the interpreter and the lecturer
- Early registration
- Note sharing
- Priority seating in the classroom
- Use of captioned videos, when available
- Alternative testing format
- Extended time on oral tests that require an interpreter in most appropriate setting

### Accommodations for Mobility Impairments

- Special seating in classroom (i.e., chair, larger desk, wheelchair accessible desk)
- Duplication of overhead transparencies
- Early registration
- Learning assistant
- Note sharing
- Scribe for exams
- Tape recorder in classroom
- Extended testing time in most appropriate setting

### Accommodations for Learning Disabilities

- Use of computer with spell check/grammar check during essay exams

- Duplication of overhead transparencies
- Early registration
- Note sharing
- Tape recorder in the classroom
- Testing in a distraction-reduced environment
- Use of textbooks on audiotape for students with reading disabilities
- Use of a calculator during testing for students with math calculation or math reasoning disabilities
- Course substitution for nonessential course requirements in student's major
- Extended testing time that is proctored in most appropriate setting
- Extended time for in-class assignments to correct spelling, punctuation, grammar
- No penalty for misspellings on assignments written in class without dictionary/spell check
- Written materials provided in alternative format
- Reader for tests for students with reading disability

It is important to keep in mind that reasonable accommodations will vary greatly with each student. The recommendations will be made by the Office for Students with Disabilities at your campus. And, it's important that you know you are obligated to provide only the accommodations suggested by that office.

**A Note of Caution** - Faculty do not have the right to refuse to provide required accommodations, ask the student to disclose his or her disability, question whether the disability exists when accommodations have been authorized by OSD, or request to examine the student's documentation. Accommodations give the student an opportunity to comprehend the course material and communicate that comprehension to the instructor. Accommodations may not alter the fundamental nature of the course or program. If a faculty member has questions about the appropriateness of a required accommodation, he or she should consult with the OSD. If a student requests that an instructor provide accommodations for a disability and the faculty member has had no official notification from that office, it is important that the instructor assist the student in contacting the OSD. If the disability is obvious (use of a wheelchair, hearing aids, service dog, etc.) and the requested accommodation is obviously appropriate, the faculty member should provide the accommodation while paperwork is being completed. Otherwise, instructors are not obligated to provide requested accommodations unless properly notified by the OSD.

## Tips That Facilitate Student Learning

Before we look at the case studies portion of this module, we offer the following teaching tips which facilitate not only the learning of students with disabilities but the learning of all students in an academic setting.

View a video of special population students' experiences in the classroom by going to <http://www.austincc.edu/spcourse/components/ram/StudentInt-rv8.ram>



- **Required text**  
Select a text with a study guide

### The syllabus:

- Include a statement that students need to inform faculty members of their special needs as soon as possible to ensure that those needs are met in a timely manner.
- The following statement has been recommended for inclusion in your syllabus by Jeanne Kincaid, Esq., an attorney who is also an adjunct faculty of the University of New Hampshire's Graduate School of Education and the Franklin Pierce Law Center, where she teaches special education law:
  - *"Students with disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact the Office of Students with Disabilities at (OSD phone# and room# on your campus) as soon as possible to better ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion."*

### Before the lecture:

- Write key terms or an outline on the board, or prepare a lecture handout.
- Create study guides.
- Assign advance readings before the topic is due in the class session.
- Give students questions that they should be able to answer by the end of each lecture.

**During the lecture:**

- Briefly review the previous lecture.
- Use visual aids such as overheads, diagrams, chart, graphs.
- Allow the use of tape recorders.
- Emphasize important points, main ideas, key concepts.
- Face the class when speaking.
- Explain technical language, terminology.
- Speak distinctly and at a relaxed rate, pausing to allow students time for note taking.
- Leave time for questions periodically.
- Administer frequent quizzes to provide feedback for students.
- Give assignments in writing as well as orally.

**Grading and evaluation:**

- Consider a variant grading system with multiple grades for various tasks weighted differently.
- Work with the student to make arrangements for extended time or proctors for exams early in the semester with the Office for Students with Disabilities.

## Case studies

These videos can be viewed by going to the following URLs:

### **Extended Time for Assignments**

<http://www.austincc.edu/spcourse/components/ram/ADA03-rv8.ram>

**Background:** Today is the day to turn in a significant project for Steve's electronic's class. He realizes that he will not complete the project on time and will lose points for each day that it's late. He goes to the instructor, presents the OSD letter and asks for additional time for the assignment.

### **Classroom Structural & Physical Barriers**

<http://www.austincc.edu/spcourse/components/ram/ADA01-rv8.ram>

**Background:** Bob is a first semester full-time community college student. He uses a wheelchair for mobility. Bob had originally enrolled in four courses and met with an OSD counselor at the main campus he would attend. A few days later, Bob decided to add a Biology course that had a one-hour lab component. After attending the Biology lecture class, he goes to the lab.

### **Disruptive Behavior**

<http://www.austincc.edu/spcourse/components/ram/ADA02-rv8.ram>

**Background:** Sue is completing her last nine credits for an Associates Degree in visual communications. She has set her goal to get all "A's" in her last three classes.

Three years ago, she was diagnosed with ADHD and an anxiety disorder. She began taking medications that improved both her academic performance and behavior. Sue is registered with the Office for Students with Disabilities regarding her ADHD and anxiety disorder and has received appropriate accommodations. Sue has provided a letter from the OSD office to each of her instructors.

Recently Sue was dropped from her parent's medical insurance because she is no longer considered a full-time student. She stopped taking her medications and has become increasingly disruptive in class.

# Limited Proficiency

## Limited Proficiency



Another category of Special Populations is the student with limited English proficiency (LEP), also referred to as English Language Learners (ELL). National and statewide demographics show that population diversity is rapidly increasing. For example, the US Census shows that the number of White Americans dropped from 75.6% of the population in 1990 to 69% in 2000.

The following breakdown by race and ethnicity shows how Texas compares to the nation in its demographics mix:

	Texas	Nation
Native-American	1%	1%
Asian-American	3%	4%
African-American	11%	12%
White	71%	75%
Other or more than one race	14%	8%
Hispanic (may be any race)	32%	13%

[Source: US Census Bureau, 2000](#)

Demographics for students enrolled in Texas public schools clearly show the diversity increase:

	1989-90	1998-99
American Indian & Alaskan Natives	0.2%	0.3%
Asian/Pacific Islander	1.9%	2.5%
Black	14.6%	14.4%
Hispanic	33.1%	38.6%
White	50.3%	44.1%

[Source: US Department of Education](#)

Research reveals that no matter what the ethnic or racial background, a large number of students who are not yet proficient in the English language are in Texas elementary and

secondary school systems. In 1989-90, 309,862 LEP students were in Texas public schools; in a mere six years (1996-97), the number had increased to 513,634 ([US Department of Education](#)).

One might be tempted to surmise that since the majority of the population remains white, dealing with Limited English proficiency students is not a pressing issue. But that conclusion would be a false one. First, almost 40% of the students in Texas schools are Hispanic. In addition, other ethnic groups besides Anglos are categorized as white.

For example, as Alejandra Lopez, of the Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity at Stanford University, points out, "People of Middle Eastern or Arab ancestry are often categorized or expected to self-identify as 'White' on questions about race and ethnicity on the US Census and other demographic surveys." In fact, an article in The Christian Science Monitor indicated "A recent study also found that Texas has one of the fastest-growing Middle Eastern populations in the country, third after New York and California (Axtman)." These new immigrants to the US are often limited in their English proficiency in the same way that a recent South American immigrant is limited.

### Definitions

The term "limited English proficiency" may seem self-explanatory, but, in fact, it is a term filled with difficulties. The following discussion of the topic, taken from Chapter One of Meeting the Needs of Second Language Learners: An Educators Guide, by Judith Lessow-Hurley, provides an excellent explanation of the issues involving LEP or ELL students.

*One of the difficulties in identifying students with limited English proficiency is the lack of agreement among theorists on a definition of proficiency. At a minimum, theorists tend to agree that the ability to use a language is related to the context in which it is used.*

*For example, if you have studied French extensively in college, you may be capable of writing essays in French on topics related to literature or philosophy. Stepping off a plane in Orly, however, you may find your French insufficient to the demands of changing money, finding a bus to Paris, or registering at your hotel. It's not that you don't know any French, but that you are weaker in some language skills than others.*

*Conversely, you may have been born in the United States and consider yourself a native Spanish speaker. In the absence of academic support for your native language, however, you may not have strong Spanish literacy skills. Your ability to use Spanish is perfectly adequate for the requirements of daily life, such as shopping, phone calls, and social events, but you might have difficulty making a professional presentation or writing a research paper in Spanish.*

### Language Proficiency and Schooling

*Schooling appears to require particular kinds of language proficiency because school is a highly specialized context. Cummins (1981) has clarified the issues of*



*language proficiency and context for educators. He suggests that school-related tasks require school-related proficiency, which he has labeled Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). According to Cummins, CALP is the kind of language we use in situations that don't have a lot of context-related clues. CALP is different from what Cummins calls Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS), the kind of language we use for day-to-day communication. In ordinary daily communication we can often extract meaning from the situation or context, which gives us lots of clues.*

*For example, you can generally get something to eat or shop for souvenirs in a foreign country even if you don't speak the language. Shopping and eating in restaurants are contexts that are comparable from place to place. When you go into a restaurant and look at the menu, or enter a store and look at the merchandise, everyone understands what you have in mind. In addition, you can use gestures and facial expressions to communicate. You can also make your needs known with a few simple words like "please" and "thank you." Shopping and eating in restaurants are activities that relate to concrete visible objects and events; they are based on shared assumptions and scripts. That is to say, they are highly contextualized. It is easy to understand and be understood in highly contextualized situations, even if you have limited language skills, or BICS.*

*On the other hand, it is difficult even for fairly competent speakers of a second language to follow a university lecture about abstract ideas. In a lecture, there is little to give you a real sense of the topic or to clarify what's going on. An instructor may provide a lecture outline or make notes on the board or projection screen, but print is, by definition, extremely abstract. University lectures are de-contextualized. That is to say, few communication clues exist in the lecture context. Attending a university lecture requires a particular set of highly sophisticated academic language skills, or CALP.*



*In sum, academic experiences and activities at every level are generally more abstract and lacking in context than day-to-day, real-life communication, so they present difficulties for students who have not developed academic language skills, or CALP. And commonly used proficiency tests do not always assess CALP. As a result, children who have playground English are often judged as English proficient even though they may not be able to handle the demands of schooling in their new language. Failure to distinguish between contexts unfairly sets up those students for failure.*

### Addressing the Needs

Lessow-Hurley's words show that even a student who appears to be proficient in English in his or her social encounters may have difficulty with understanding and communicating in a learning environment.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board studies show that a sizable number of students with Limited English proficiency are enrolled in community and technical colleges. In 1998-99, the number was 52,711. In 1999-2000, the number dipped insignificantly to 51,726, and in 2000-01, the number dipped to 45,818. In spite of the noticeable dip in 00/01, the number still shows that tens of thousands of our students struggle with English in an academic setting.

How can a community or technical college faculty member offer support to a Limited English Proficient student? Actually, what works to aid the learning of these students is not much different from what aids your other students.

A recent posting on the Tomorrow's Professor listserv, out of Stanford University, addressed this topic. What follows is the text from that posting, which was taken from the work of noted educator and ESL expert, Dr. Kate Kinsella.

### Facilitating Equitable Class Discussions Within the Multicultural Classroom

#### Resource A

Typically focused class discussions potentially offer English learners rich exposure to new vocabulary and usage in their second language, along with opportunities to interact in a variety of academic situations - reporting information, summarizing, synthesizing, and debating. Frequently, however, linguistically and culturally diverse students remain passive participants in whole-class discussions for varied reasons, including insecurity about their listening comprehension, pronunciation, word choice, and culturally appropriate interactional strategies. Instructors may employ the following strategies to lead carefully orchestrated class discussions that provide language-promoting assistance and facilitate more active participation for English learners:



1. Create a supportive classroom environment for less confident English users by encouraging all students to talk in turn, to listen actively while others talk, and to offer assistance rather than impatience and intolerance for classmates who need help in understanding or responding.
2. Show your students that you expect them all to participate in oral activities by consistently inviting every member of the class to participate.
3. Allow students to first share and rehearse their responses to a key question or comments on a topic with a partner to increase learning and ESL student confidence and motivation to contribute to a unified class discussion.
4. Be sensitive to the linguistic and conceptual demands of discussion questions and activities. Don't inhibit participation by pushing students to communicate too far beyond their current level of English proficiency.

5. The easiest content for less proficient English users to handle is often related to their everyday lives and activities. Make a concerted effort to build in opportunities for language minority students to share information about their cultures, communities, families, and special interests.
6. Pair less proficient English users with a sensitive classmate who can ideally clarify concepts, vocabulary, and instructions in the primary language and also coach the classmate in responding.
7. Attempt to activate students' relevant background knowledge on topics, and provide through "schema"-building activities (e.g., brainstorming, mapping, advance organizers) requisite linguistic, conceptual, and cultural information that would otherwise prevent them from active learning and participation.
8. Move purposefully around the room to enable as many students as possible to enjoy having close proximity to the teacher, which should also encourage students to remain more alert and willing to ask and answer questions.
9. Do not constantly pose questions to the group at large, allowing a minority of more confident or impulsive students to dominate the discussion.
10. Ask a question before naming the respondent to encourage active learning by allowing all students to "attend" and decide how they would answer.
11. Draw in less confident students by asking them to respond to an open-ended question after they have heard a variety of responses from their classmates.
12. Call on English learners to answer not only safe yes/no questions but also more challenging, open-ended questions that provide opportunities for thoughtful and extended usage of their second language.
13. Increase wait time (3-9 seconds) after asking a question to allow adequate time for the student to successfully process the question and formulate a thoughtful response.
14. When calling on a specific ESL student, it often helps to first pose the question and make eye contact with the student while stating his/her name; then pause a few seconds and restate the question verbatim.
15. Discourage classmates from blurting out responses and intimidating less confident English users from taking risks with their second language.
16. Do not interrupt a student's thought process after asking an initial question by immediately posing one or more follow-up questions; these tandem questions confuse rather than assist English learners who may not realize that the teacher is actually rephrasing the same question.
17. Encourage students to talk through nonverbal means, such as waiting patiently, smiling, and nodding in approval.
18. Make any corrections indirectly by mirroring in correct form what the student has said. For example, suppose a student says, "Majority immigrants San Francisco from Pacific Rim." You can repeat, "That is correct. A majority of the immigrants in San Francisco come from the Pacific Rim."
19. Use these conversational features regularly and in so doing model for your students how to use them in class discussions, lectures, and small-group work:

### **Confirmation Checks**

*Is this what you are saying?*

*So you believe that . . .*

**Clarification Requests**

*Will you explain your point so that I can be sure I understand?*

*Could you give me an example of that?*

**Comprehension Checks**

*Is my use of language understandable to you?*

**Interrupting**

*Excuse me, but . . .*

*Sorry for interrupting, but . . .*

Source: Kinsella, 1993, p. 16.