Improving Access to Art and Design Studios

This guide provides faculty members with strategies on developing alternate teaching approaches for students with disabilities to increase access to art and design studios. It also suggests alternate approaches for reevaluating the essential requirements of a course.

Art and design studios can incorporate a wide range of learning spaces, including wood and metal shops, visual arts, jewellery-making, and media and graphics. Each space poses a unique set of barriers for students with disabilities.

Differences in Approaches to Teaching

- Students with some forms of learning disabilities may experience more difficulty with abstract thinking and concept development; faculty, in response, should consider the following:
  - Be aware of differences in learning styles, and be open to offering varied approaches to content delivery;
  - Consult with the student, learning strategists, and staff from the disability services office to determine any accommodations and modifications to the teaching approach; and
  - Be creative in their approach to assignments, methods of assessment, and expectations around laboratory and group work.

Essential Requirements in Art and Design Studios

- Due to the flexible nature of the art and design programs, accommodations can be very individualized to meet various student learning needs.
- In art and design studios, much of the academic evaluation is based on the student's understanding of the concepts involved in designing and creating a piece of art, and an ability to articulate key constructs.
- Students need not "physically" create art in order to demonstrate their understanding of course content, and alternative methods for assessing a student's understanding of concepts in art can be developed.
- Alternative methods for assessing a student's understanding of course content can include:
  - Having the student who is visually impaired verbally describe a piece of art in terms of its meaning and key concepts;
  - Permitting the student to work in groups with peers;
  - Allowing the student to use technology (such as rapid prototyping) that can supplement physically creating a piece of art; and
  - Providing a lab assistant.