

Top Ten Lessons Learned

At Virginia Tech providing Braille to a student in a STEM program was a joint effort. Listed below are the top ten lessons learned by our team. Some items are ideas that grew out of challenges faced and difficulties overcome. Others are simply best practices formed over the 5 year process.

1. Communication is Key

- a. Be specific in all communications
- b. Give professors plenty of notice and who they should ask for help.
- c. Follow-up on responses

2. Notify the Provost and Office of Equity and Inclusion

- a. This is necessary for financial support and mediating potential conflicts

3. Choose a Student Liaison, preferably a disability services counselor

- a. To assist student in self-advocacy
- b. To coordinate meetings and communications with professors, teaching assistants, readers, transcribers, and other support staff.
- c. To be the go-to person for faculty and staff questions and concerns
- d. To have the authority to collaborate with faculty, departments, vendors, and Provost's office
- e. To regularly follow-up on the questions or concerns of the student with the professors, teaching assistants, readers, transcribers, and other support staff.
- f. To keep team members from all trying to solve the same problem

4. It takes a village

- a. To facilitate the communication to and from Braille on both the student and faculty side.
- b. To share resources, knowledge, experiences

5. Define the Responsibilities of

- a. The college/university
- b. Student
- c. Disability services
- d. Transcriber(s)
- e. Professors and Teaching Assistants
- f. State disability support services
- g. Academic Advisors

6. Have a support person with STEM degree/experience

- a. Have someone who knows the field/course content to help plan ahead and anticipate technology access issues and is a creative problem solver

7. The goal is an equivalent experience

- a. Help professors focus on getting the student to achieve the learning objectives rather than performing the exact same tasks. Ex. oral exams or written homework rather than online homework.

8. Plan 1 year in advance

- a. Notify professors ahead to request textbook choice and syllabus
- b. Budget appropriately for what materials/textbooks need to be purchased/created
- c. Enroll in classes from a professor who already has course materials ready

9. Get to know the campus climate

- a. Access to: Emergency notifications, inclement weather notifications, campus events, etc.

10. Know who the external resources are

- a. Bookshare ([Bookshare Home](#))
- b. AMAC Accessibility and Research Center ([AMAC Home](#))
- c. ATPC Alternative Text Production Center ([ATPC Home](#))
- d. Louis Database ([Louis Database Home](#))
- e. tBase Communications ([tBase Home](#))
- f. Any transcribers who have previously worked with the student

AND: Document and Protect whatever is put in place

- a. Shelve the Braille for reuse during the student's tenure
- b. Decide who is keeping what when the student graduates
- c. Show the administration that money is being well-spent
- d. Preserve process and materials for reuse