**Guidelines for Lecturers on Including Students with Visual Impairments**

Visually impaired students at Stellenbosch University have access to the Lombardi Braille Centre, which is equipped with specialised equipment and software. The Centre is situated in HUMARGA on the third floor of the Arts and Social Sciences Building. Three staff members have been appointed as Braille officers by the Disability Unit to assist the students on a full-time basis.

**Processing reading material**

The Centre is responsible for the processing of reading and learning material into Braille and other readable formats, depending on the student’s need. This process involves the scanning and editing of all academic material that is not available electronically (i.e. an editable version such as an MS Word document) as well as the editing of material that is available in electronic format. The assistive software provided does not always support PDF, PowerPoint and other graphic file types, therefore these are also processed in order to make them accessible to visually impaired students (i.e. compatible with speech-synthesis software and Braille embossers). Furthermore, the SUNLearn and Learning Hub platforms do not fully support our speech synthesis software, hence blind students cannot access any material loaded onto SUNLearn/Learning Hub. This includes SUNLearn tests.

The text-conversion process is extremely time-consuming, with the quality of the original material having a direct bearing on the amount of time spent on its processing. Photocopied material particularly can pose a problem for the optical character recognition software due to the poor quality of the original document. The processing of material can, however, be streamlined if the guidelines below are followed:

1. Lecturers are urged to provide their material directly to the Braille officers concerned. This is especially the case when they know that some time may elapse before they see their students in class. The sooner the Braille officers receive the material, the sooner the students can gain access to it (even if the material is only required for the following semester). We have found it most helpful to receive a copy of the course outline with the full details of the prescribed work (including textbooks, readers and slides) and particularly ***in order of priority***. It is problematic when lecturers do not stick to the course outline and do not inform the Braille Centre nor the student timeously.
2. Electronically formatted material is preferable to hard copy. If the original version of typed hand-outs or articles published by the department is available in electronic copy, such as in MS Word, this version should be e-mailed directly to the Braille officers. Kindly include the following information in the accompanying e-mail:

* The name of the student for whom the work is intended
* The relevant module name and number
* The name of the lecturer
* The due date

1. If the material is only available in hard copy, it should be sent to the Braille officers as soon as possible. It will then be scanned and, in the case of books, returned as soon as the processing is complete.
2. Photocopies should be as clear as possible. Please take special care with the photocopying of thick books: they tend not to fold flat, causing shading in the centre of the copy. Try to include as little of such shading as possible. Where possible, do not provide underlined or annotated material. Because underlining greatly affects the quality of the scanning, texts that are marked in this way have to be retyped by the Braille officers – in such cases, rather submit the **unmarked original**.
3. **Test papers** should be sent to the Braille Centre at least three days prior to the test date. We suggest that, if lecturers generate a test on SUNLearn/Learning Hub, they forward a copy to the Braille Centre for further conversion.

**Accommodating students with visual impairments in lectures and tutorials**

In order to fully include visually impaired students in lectures, tutorials and wherever group work is done, please make sure ample time is allowed for hand-outs and PowerPoint slides to be converted by the Braille Centre. If the material is not accessible during teaching time, lecturers and tutors should ensure that hand-outs and PowerPoint slides are read aloud for the benefit of these students during lectures and tutorials. Similarly, the content of graphs and visual illustrations should be described in class for their benefit. Written group work produced in lectures and tutorials should also be sent to the Braille Centre for conversion immediately following tutorials.

**Open invitation**

You are most welcome to visit the Braille Centre to discuss your needs as well as the needs of the blind and visually impaired students. Our task is to assist the students in achieving their full potential during their studies at Stellenbosch University. This can only be done if we as Braille officers work together with lecturers and students to ensure a smooth learning experience.

**Contact details for the Braille Centre:**

Room 367

HUMARGA

Arts and Social Science Building

Preferred e-mail address: [braille@sun.ac.za](mailto:braille@sun.ac.za)

**Braille officers:**

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***Send texts for conversion to*** [***braille@sun.ac.za***](mailto:braille@sun.ac.za)