Overview

This course invites you to explore a number of different blindness-related issues at both the intellectual and emotional levels. To be effective, the concepts presented must be understood with the mind and responded to with the heart. Depending on your values and lifestyle, some topics will be very personally sensitive and others will carry little consequence for you.

To gain a healthy understanding of living with blindness, this course encourages you to examine and evaluate your personal attitude toward a visual impairment, your feelings about yourself as a blind person, and your reactions to society’s prevailing notions about blindness. If you are a student who is visually impaired, this course can help you develop a healthy sense of who you are, a person of value and worth, which promotes greater self-acceptance and stronger self-esteem. If you are a family member, this course can help you identify how a visual impairment impacts not only on the blind person, but on other family members as well. If you are a professional working in the field of blindness, the course enables you to recognize the psychosocial needs of the students and clients with whom you work. Whether you are a student who is visually impaired, a family member, or a professional working in the field of blindness, familiarizing yourself with this information will enable you to understand and clarify some of the
struggles that result from living with a visual impairment, thereby empowering you to promote healthier self-acceptance and self-esteem throughout the adjusting process.

This course is designed to help you explore a number of different topics and explain how life may be complicated by having a visual impairment. Many of the issues that are discussed are illustrated from biographies and autobiographies of visually impaired persons. You may not react in the same way because the way people respond to life’s challenges depends on so many different personal and environmental variables. On the other hand, Hadley students often report that they are able to identify with many of these quoted excerpts.

The title of this course is perhaps misleading. Some have suggested that the title implies that people who are blind automatically have a problem with self-esteem just because they are visually impaired. This notion needs to be dispelled up front. Not everyone who is blind or visually impaired has low self-esteem. All people, whether blind or sighted, struggle with their self-esteem from time to time. Perhaps the title of the course should read, “The Ups and Downs of Self-Esteem While Adjusting to Life’s Demands with All of a Person’s Attributes, Only One of Which Is Blindness.” Though more accurate, this title is much too long.

Self-esteem is an essential ingredient to people’s well-being. It refers to the way people feel about themselves, their unique set of characteristics and
qualities, their special mix of strengths, interests, and abilities. The extent to which individuals are able to make choices, to exercise some control over themselves and the events in their lives, contributes to feelings of high or low self-esteem.

Just as an individual’s personality is not solely the result of a visual impairment, there is no unique psychology of visually impaired or blind persons. Rather, the general psychological principles that apply to all individuals are adequate and sufficient to explain the behavioral impact of a visual impairment. An individual who is blind or visually impaired is a typical person responding to life’s demands with the added challenge of a sensory impairment.

The information for this course is presented in the textbook entitled *Self-Esteem and Adjusting with Blindness* (second edition) and this study guide. The textbook, written by Dean and Naomi Tuttle, was published by Charles C. Thomas in 1996. The study guide was written by staff and faculty of The Hadley School for the Blind.

Study guides are a popular way to complete a distance education course. They identify what you should be able to do after completing each chapter. They summarize and occasionally amplify the material included in the textbook. They not only include self-directed activities and answers that serve as comprehension checks, they also include the assignments that enable your instructor to evaluate your progress throughout the course. To benefit the most from this type of distance learning,
follow the directions in the study guide, as they explain how to proceed through each chapter of the textbook.

The textbook is divided into four sections. The first one, A Definition of Blindness, includes Chapters 1, 2, and 3. Chapter 1 provides an overview of blindness. Chapter 2 explains the impact of blindness on various aspects of life. Chapter 3 describes the psychosocial implications of blindness.

Section II, The Development of Self-Esteem, includes Chapters 4 through 6. While Chapter 4 examines the external factors that influence self-esteem, Chapter 5 focuses on internal sources of self-esteem. Chapter 6 explains how self-esteem influences the way a person manages life’s conflicts and discrepancies.

Section III, Adjusting with Blindness, includes Chapters 7 and 8. This study guide divides Chapter 7 into two parts. Chapter 7A focuses on the first four phases in the process of adjusting to a visual impairment or blindness. Chapter 7B describes the next three phases of this process. Chapter 8 identifies the internal and external factors that influence the adjusting process.

Section IV, Fostering Self-Esteem, includes Chapters 9 and 10. Chapter 9 provides guidelines and activities that nurture self-esteem. Chapter 10 presents actual testimonies from Hadley students as they’ve worked through issues associated with severe visual impairments.
To complete the course, you will need the materials that The Hadley School for the Blind has provided, as well as writing materials in the medium of your choice. If you are taking the audiocassette version of this course, you also need your own tape recorder. For your convenience, each cassette is tone indexed. When fast-forwarding or rewinding the recorded textbook, you will find that chapters are identified by double tones. When fast-forwarding or rewinding the study guide cassette, you will find that chapters are also identified by double tones, while assignments are identified by single tones.

With the exception of Chapter 10, which is optional reading, each chapter includes a self-directed activity and an assignment. The self-directed activities are for your personal development only. So do not send them to your Hadley instructor. You are required, however, to submit the assignment at the end of each chapter. Some assignment questions apply only to students who are visually impaired; others apply only to family members and to professionals who work in the field of blindness. Each assignment directs you to complete only those questions that apply to you.

When you complete each assignment, send it to your instructor at The Hadley School for the Blind, 700 Elm Street, Winnetka, IL 60093.

If you are blind or visually impaired, you may send your assignments in an envelope labeled Free Matter for the Blind provided they are in braille or large print (14 point or larger), on cassette or computer diskette. If you are sighted, your
assignments require adequate postage. If you prefer to fax your assignment, use the cover page that was included with the welcome letter. If you would rather send your assignment electronically, contact your instructor for an e-mail address.
Chapter 2:  
The Impact of Blindness

Chapter 1 provided you with a brief overview of blindness. Chapter 2 focuses on the permanent, temporary, or imagined impact of a visual impairment or blindness on everyday life. It examines the obstacles that a blind or visually impaired person faces as he or she tries to accomplish daily living chores. It explains how the ability to travel independently affects an individual’s outlook on life. This chapter explores the implications of blindness or a visual impairment on the ability to read and write. It also looks at the possible consequences a visual impairment has on employment and recreational opportunities. Whether you are a student who is visually impaired, a family member, or a professional working in the field of blindness, familiarizing yourself with this information will enable you to understand and clarify some of the struggles that result from living with a visual impairment, thereby empowering you to promote healthier self-acceptance and self-esteem throughout the adjusting process.

Objectives

After completing this chapter, you will be able to
a. Explain how the ability to accomplish everyday tasks influences self-esteem
b. Describe how the ability to travel independently influences self-esteem
c. Identify how the ability to access the written word influences self-esteem

d. Explain how employment opportunities and job satisfaction affect self-esteem

e. Discuss how pursuing recreational activities influences self-esteem

**Implications for Personal and Home Management**

This section of Chapter 2 explains that, with accommodations and adapted skills, people with a visual impairment or blindness can handle basic everyday tasks quite capably, like personal grooming, eating, and home maintenance. Individuals experience personal satisfaction when they are able to manage their lives more independently. This section illustrates how competence and independence in managing personal needs provide a sense of accomplishment, which contributes to feelings of self-worth, or self-esteem. Soon you will be directed to read Chapter 2 of the accompanying textbook. As you read this section of the chapter, consider how the ability to handle everyday living chores influences feelings of self-worth.

**Implications for Travel**

Undoubtedly, one of the most significant consequences of blindness is the need to navigate through the environment in a competent and safe manner. This section focuses on how travel skills are acquired through orientation and mobility instruction.
It describes the four primary modes of mobility used by blind and visually impaired people—sighted guide, cane, dog guide, and electronic travel aids.

Despite these proven techniques, however, other factors need to be considered as well. This section describes how the unpredictable nature of low vision can cause confusion and even anxiety. Also, some visually impaired individuals struggle with their self-image and therefore reject symbols of their disability, such as the use of a white cane. Likewise, a blind teenager needs to come to terms with missing out on a significant milestone of adolescence when his or her sighted peers obtain their driver’s license. An older person facing a recent vision loss may resent having to rely on other people for transportation. As you read this section in Chapter 2, ask yourself how the potential limitations to navigating the environment independently affect feelings of self-esteem.

**Implications for Reading and Writing**

With the written word undeniably permeating all aspects of life, a visual impairment impacts significantly on someone’s ability to read and write. This section explains how a blind or visually impaired individual can communicate effectively through braille, large print, or recorded materials. Unprecedented technological strides, especially in computer software and adaptive equipment, greatly enhance a person’s ability to communicate.

Regardless of the techniques that are used to read and write, however, this section examines other
less obvious considerations that may affect feelings of competence in this area. As you read this section in the chapter, ask yourself how the ability to successfully read, write, and communicate impacts on feelings of self-esteem.

**Implications for Employment**

Today’s job market offers ever-increasing opportunities for blind and visually impaired persons. Nevertheless, some barriers still exist, such as unemployment, underemployment, and limited career advancement. This section describes some of the obstacles that might interfere with securing satisfying employment, like employers’ attitudes or transportation issues, to name just two. For a blind or visually impaired youngster, early career education is essential and consists of a team approach to carefully orchestrated activities. An individual who becomes visually impaired later in life faces inevitable work disruption until he or she develops the skills to travel, communicate, and handle daily living tasks in a competent manner.

Regardless of a person’s visual impairment, however, current trends allow people to tailor their job search to match their personality, interests, and abilities. As you read this section of Chapter 2 in the accompanying textbook, examine how job satisfaction could contribute to a healthy self-esteem.
Implications for Recreation

Leisure-time activities promote personal satisfaction, creative productivity, and social companionship, whether an individual is sighted or visually impaired. Whatever the activity, opportunity and training allow full participation, with few exceptions. A broad spectrum of choices—crafts, hobbies, sports—allows sighted and visually impaired people to enjoy each other’s company, as well as that of family or friends.

Radio, television, recordings, or computer games may be worthwhile activities for some individuals, some of the time. Still, visually impaired persons can explore many other recreational opportunities to see what they enjoy the most. Engaging in leisure-time pursuits nurtures feelings of achievement and self-worth. As you read this section in Chapter 2, consider how a favorite hobby, activity, or sport can foster someone’s feelings of self-esteem.

Reading Directions

Now that you have an overview of Chapter 2, read it in the accompanying textbook, Self-Esteem and Adjusting with Blindness. Chapter 2 can be found on print pages 17–34. (On the recorded textbook, these pages can be found at the first double tone on Track 2.) Once you have read the chapter, return to the study guide to complete the self-directed activity that follows.
Self-Directed Activity

Test your knowledge of the material in this chapter by completing the following self-directed activity. Then compare your answers with those that follow. Do not send your answers to your instructor, however, as this is for your personal development only.

1. Blindness does impact on the life and lifestyle of a visually impaired person. Name the five areas discussed in Chapter 2.
2. Identify the four primary travel aids available to assist visually impaired persons with their mobility needs.
3. Identify five barriers to employment that blind persons experience.
4. List five recreational opportunities available to blind or visually impaired persons.

Suggested Answers

Compare your answers with those that follow:
1. Personal and home management, travel, reading and writing, employment, and recreation are the five areas of daily life on which blindness impacts.
2. The four primary travel aids that assist visually impaired persons with their mobility needs are sighted guide, cane, dog guide, and electronic travel aids.
3. Barriers to employment could include negative public attitudes, poor self-concept, resistance of employers to hire, poor career planning,
insufficient vocational training, and inadequate transportation.

4. Visually impaired persons can pursue various recreational opportunities, such as hobbies, collections, arts and crafts, games, sports, hiking, dancing, concerts, movies, and so on.

Assignment 2

Complete the following assignment in the medium of your choice. Begin by including your full name, student ID, address, and phone number. Also mention the name of this course, Assignment 2, your instructor’s name, and the date you plan to send this assignment to the Hadley School.

If you are a student who is visually impaired, answer only questions 2.1 through 2.4. If, however, you are a family member or a professional working in the field of blindness, answer questions 2.5 through 2.8 only.

2.1 Which of the five implications discussed in Chapter 2 would you find most annoying and why?

2.2 Some visually impaired persons see themselves as quite different from their sighted companions. Moreover, some sighted persons seem to let differences cloud and dominate the entire relationship. Do you feel that blind persons are more different from or more like sighted persons? Give reasons for your answer.
2.3 A short biographical sketch follows. It is taken from *Lend Me an Eye*, by A. Vajda. As you read it, consider what issues are raised. Is the author really proving that he is independent? Is he comfortable with himself as a visually impaired person or is he pretending? Are there any dangers in pretending?

“At the same time, I hated being dependent on others. And so I invented the ‘change-over method.’ I would leave the house, stop in the street and wait for a suitable passerby. When possible, I chose a woman in a bright dress or coat who stood out clearly against the dull grayness of the pavement and the houses. I would then follow her from a distance of a couple of yards. When she stopped at a crossing, I would stop, too. If she crossed the street, so would I. But if she changed her direction and no longer led me where I wished to go, I would simply ‘change-over’ to another conspicuously dressed woman. This is how I made use, for years, of my fellow humans, who did not even suspect that they were protecting not only their own lives and health against the hazards of metropolitan traffic, but also mine. I felt like a cuckoo that laid its eggs in the nest of another bird and allowed it to bring up its chicks. However, there was nothing else I could do. I had to prove to myself that I could get along on my own.”
2.4 What has been your experience with employment as a blind or visually impaired person?

If you are a family member or a professional working in the field of blindness, answer questions 2.5 through 2.8 only.

2.5 Which of the five implications discussed in Chapter 2 does your family member or client find most annoying and why?

2.6 Some visually impaired persons see themselves as quite different from their sighted companions. Moreover, some sighted persons seem to let differences cloud and dominate the entire relationship. Do you feel that blind persons are more different from or more like sighted persons? Give reasons for your answer.

2.7 A short biographical sketch follows. It is taken from *Lend Me an Eye*, by A. Vajda. As you read it, consider what issues are raised. Is the author really proving that he is independent? Is he comfortable with himself as a visually impaired person or is he pretending? Are there any dangers in pretending?

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2.8 As a family member or professional, what has been your experience with employment for a blind or visually impaired person? If you are the parent of a school-age child, what has been your experience with your child’s education?

Once you have completed this assignment, mail, fax, or e-mail it to your instructor. Then proceed to Chapter 3: Psychosocial Implications of Blindness.