**Orientation Center for the Blind (OCB) Student Handbook**

Revised 09/25

**Welcome!**

Welcome to Iowa’s Orientation Center for the Blind (OCB)! You are taking an important step in proactively moving toward your career and life goals. At OCB, you will gain the tools, strategies, and real-world experiences needed to pursue whatever path you choose. We will challenge limiting beliefs about blindness and build skills for living, working, and navigating the world with confidence. We are excited to have you join the thousands of other blind individuals who have graduated the program and are working in their chosen vocational fields, raising families, and participating actively in their communities.

As a comprehensive training program, the OCB includes both residential and instructional components. These are designed to give students maximum opportunity to learn non-visual skills, gain confidence, and build positive attitudes related to blindness. Using these skills and attitudes in real-life situations is an important part of the program. Now that you have decided to become a student at the Center, here is important information which you will need as you begin your training program.

**Section 1: Program Rules**

**Tools and Equipment**

* If a student loses or breaks any of the training tools provided by the Center, the student is responsible for replacing those tools.
* Students are given an outdoor keycard for the IDB building, a key to their dorm room, and a standard key for the second-floor north areas. Students who lose the IDB building key must notify the Center’s Director immediately; the replacement cost for the IDB building key is $20.
* Students receive maintenance money from the Iowa Department for the Blind (IDB) for costs directly related to training, such as food, laundry, and program-required activities. OCB staff will instruct students in any requirements for saving and logging receipts in accordance with current requirements by the US Rehabilitation Services Administration, the Iowa Department of Administrative Services, or other relevant entities. Maintenance checks may not be spent on alcohol and cigarettes.

**Learning Shades**

* The OCB is a non-visual training program. Therefore, all Center students who have residual vision, even light perception, are encouraged to wear learning shades during the training day, which runs from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. We find that wearing learning shades significantly speeds up the development of non-visual skills by reducing a student’s reliance on their limited vision.
* While we highly recommend using learning shades in all classes to maximize skill development, we recognize that every student has unique goals, circumstances, and learning preferences. Therefore, each student will decide whether using learning shades is appropriate for their goals in each individual class.
* Students are encouraged to discuss learning shade use with each instructor. Together, they will explore whether and how shades might support progress toward a student’s individual goals.

**Training Expectations**

* Center students must use a long white rigid cane during Center hours and activities. Students must use their canes on evenings and weekends while in the Iowa Department for the Blind building, unless they are in their dorm rooms.
* Students are required to participate in training activities. These activities are designed to build self-confidence and provide opportunities for students to use their skills in a number of different environments. Students are encouraged to suggest activities in which they are interested. These activities are an integral part of the core curriculum.
* Students have access to a refrigerator and microwave in the Home Management area for lunches. Other options include having lunch delivered at the IDB front desk or purchasing items from the vending machines in the lobby area. It is the students’ responsibility to ensure their space is cleaned after eating. Food and beverages without lids are not permitted in the computer or braille rooms at any time.
* To aid speed of learning and transferability of skills, instructors may occasionally give students assignments to be completed non-visually outside the classroom. Students will be expected to complete these assignments on time.

**Workplace Expectations**

* Students must keep phones on silent during class time and mandatory Center activities. If expecting an emergency call, students should alert the necessary Center staff during the class day. Talking time pieces are not permitted without permission from the Center Director.
* As this is a pre-vocational training program, the dress code for Center students is business casual. Students are expected to follow the dress code that has been approved for IDB staff and can be found at [**https://blind.iowa.gov/manual#dress**](https://blind.iowa.gov/manual#dress). Students will be given guidelines for appropriate dress during Center activities. On most Fridays, agency staff and students can wear jeans. Staff will inform students of events where jeans day will not be permitted. If you currently do not possess the required type of attire, let the Center Director know so options can be discussed. It will be useful to have this business casual clothing following training for interviews and employment.
* Center students are prohibited from keeping dangerous weapons on Department premises, including in their dorms. Such weapons include but are not limited to, firearms, explosives, poisonous gas, stun guns, antique and replica firearms, bows and arrows, knives with blades in excess of five inches in length, incendiary devices, switchblade knives, and stiletto. Any such weapons are subject to confiscation by Department staff and will be returned to students when training ends.
* Classes are scheduled from 8:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M. which includes a scheduled lunch. Students are expected to be on time for all classes. Students are responsible for calling in before 7:30 in the morning if they are ill or for some other reason are unable to attend classes. Roll call is taken at 8:00 AM, followed by announcements. A student who is late or absent and does not call the Center by the time roll call is taken will be counted late/absent. Specific details about attendance and absences can be found later in this handbook under attendance guidelines.
* Students are expected to follow the Professionalism guidelines, Anti-Discrimination Policy, and Violence-Free Training Environment Policy outlined below at all times while participating in the Iowa OCBprogram.

**Reasonable Accommodations**

Students who need reasonable accommodations due to disabilities, health conditions, or mental illness should indicate the need for these on their center application and/or in their initial meeting with their counselor and the Center director, so that these accommodations can be incorporated from the beginning. If a student who is currently in training realizes they need accommodations, additional accommodations to what is on their application, or to modify existing accommodations, they should speak to the Center director or the individual instructors for classes in which accommodations are needed. The Center director will add these to a student’s training plan. If a student and an instructor or the Center director cannot come to an agreement or more information is needed, a student may fill out a Reasonable Accommodations form, which are available from their rehabilitation counselor, the Center Director, or the IDB Director. The form can be turned into the IDB Director’s office for further consideration.

**Exceptions to Policy**

US federal and Iowa state laws must be followed at all times. However, some exceptions may be made to Center policies. Examples may include modifications due to childcare, eldercare, employment, or other factors. If a student needs a non-disability-related exception to a policy, they should indicate this on their center application and/or in their initial meeting with their counselor and the Center director. If a student who is currently in training realizes the need for a policy exception, they should speak to their rehabilitation counselor, the Center Director, or the instructor for the class the exception will be needed. A student, their rehabilitation counselor, or an instructor may fill out an Exception to Policy form and submit it to the Center director. If a student and the Center director cannot come to an agreement, the form can be turned into the IDB Director’s office for further consideration.

**Counseling and Training Professionalism Standards for IDB Staff and Clients**

To provide the most effective counseling and training possible, we need to create a climate of mutual respect. Everyone is expected to conduct themselves in a kind and professional manner. This means:

* Respecting diversity and the human rights of others by engaging in courteous conduct regardless of an employee or client's race, creed, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, physical or mental disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or pregnancy or pregnancy-related condition, as is consistent with applicable state and federal policies and regulations.
* Not engaging in disrespectful behavior, including but not limited to:  offensive or inappropriate behavior, bullying, harassment, emotional abuse, discrimination, unwarranted physical contact, violence, and damaging gossip or rumors.

**Additional Information**

IDB staff are not allowed to make social media friend requests or accept social media friend requests from anyone to whom they are actively providing services.

It is common practice for a teacher or counselor to touch a client’s hand, arm, or shoulder when working on learning to use a long white cane to travel independently, to teach a client how to safely use a kitchen knife, industrial arts tool, phone, keyboard, read or write braille, or other task outlined in your training plan or the program
curriculum. If a request for touch does not seem necessary or appropriate, you have the right to ask the purpose and/or refuse the request.

**What do I do if I have concerns?**

If something has occurred that cannot be addressed directly with the teacher or counselor, please contact the OCB Director or the IDB Director.

**Disciplinary Action**

It shall be noted as a breach of OCB’s guidelines and rules to violate any set of rules set forth in this document. Any violation may lead to discipline up to and including termination from Center training.  The Center Director will conduct an investigation regarding any and all alleged violations of rules and if warranted, disciplinary action may follow. The OCB will generally follow the concept of progressive discipline, beginning with less severe disciplinary measures for the first offense. However, the seriousness of the offense may dictate a more severe disciplinary action and could result in suspension of training at the first offense if such action is warranted by the situation. Disciplinary actions or measures for Center students may include written reprimands and suspension of training.

**Violence-Free Training Environment Policy**

The Department recognizes that violence in the OCB can seriously affect the training, performance, attitude, and morale of Center students. Threats, intimidation, harassment, verbal abuse, or acts of violence will not be tolerated. The Department is committed to a violence-free training environment for all students and staff, and its goal is to prevent any violence from occurring within that environment.

Any student who has been the victim of violence within the Center environment, or who has a concern about potential violence within that environment, is directed to bring the matter to the attention of a Center instructor, the Center’s Director, or the Director of the Department. All complaints will be promptly investigated, and appropriate action will be taken.

**Anti-Discrimination Policy**

The Department will not tolerate or condone any form of sexual or discriminatory harassment of students receiving training at the Orientation Center for the Blind.

Immediate action will be taken to stop harassment or discrimination where it exists. Students who believe they are the subject of sexual or other discriminatory harassment by Department staff or other students need to report their concerns to the Center’s Director. They may also report alleged discrimination to the Director of the Department or to the Iowa Client Assistance Program. (CAP can be contacted at [(800) 972-2017](%28800%29%20972-2017). Learn more about CAP at <https://hhs.iowa.gov/health-prevention/disability-services/client-assistance-program>.)

The Department also prohibits any form of harassment or other abusive conduct directed at Center students because of their race, sex, marital status, ethnicity, religion, national origin, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, or mental or physical disability. Any harassment of this kind is also to be reported through the same process described above.

**Building Security**

The IDB building is unlocked weekdays from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. For this reason, personal possessions should not be left out in public areas. Fire doors and dormitory room doors are not to be propped open. In compliance with ADA regulations, the door located on Watson Powell has an automatic door open button; you must wait to confirm that the door has shut and latched before continuing into the building outside of business hours. When leaving the building for the weekend or an extended break, students must check in and out with the staff on duty by calling 515-249-6328. This allows staff to keep track of who is sleeping in the building in case of fire or other need for evacuation. When the building is locked, visitors may be admitted only by the individual they have come to visit.

**Room and Building Keys**

Upon arrival, students are issued a key card for their rooms and a fob for the main building doors. Students who lose a key must notify the Center's director or dorm staff immediately. Doors to the building, fire exits, restrooms, and dorm rooms must never be propped open. If a student locks him/herself out of his/her dorm, the student gets two free “let-ins”, after which the cost is $5 to be let into his/her room. If the key is completely lost and needs to be replaced, the cost is $10. If the outside key is lost, the replacement cost is $20.

**Alcohol and Tobacco Use**

Alcohol and all tobacco products are prohibited on Department premises. Department premises include anywhere inside the building, the building’s roof, sidewalks adjacent to the building, and the Department’s side of the alleys.

**Use of Building Areas After Hours**

Students have free access to the vending area, second-floor communications and kitchen areas, and second-floor south before and after business hours and on weekends. These areas must be kept clean and litter-free. Cigarette butts must not be tossed on the property and, once cooled off, should be properly disposed of.

**Guests**

Family and friends are encouraged to visit Center students, including participating in Center classes. This activity must be scheduled at least three days in advance with the Center’s director. Family and friends can also visit students in the evening and on weekends. Friends are allowed in the first floor lobby and with an escort at all times anywhere else in the building.

Unless permission is given by Center staff, men are not permitted in the women's dorm area and women are not permitted in the men's dorm area. Students who wish to have a sexual relationship with another individual must do so at a location off premises.

Room instruction takes place every other week. Cleaning requirements will be fully explained to each student prior to the first scheduled instruction session. Dorm instruction is provided to make sure living quarters are kept neat and clean, and to identify areas in which students may need additional training. Minor cleaning problems found during instruction must be corrected by the student immediately; major problems must be corrected as designated by the instructor.

**Kitchen use**

The second floor has six kitchen bays for preparing meals each morning and evening, outside Center hours. The kitchens are fully equipped with items such as plates, cups, silverware, mixing bowls, pots, pans, air fryers, instant pots, crock pots, coffee pot and Keurig, ovens, stoves, refrigerators/freezers, etc. When cooking outside of class hours, the Center’s spices may be used. However, any other food items must be purchased by the student.

Bedding for a full-sized bed (sheets, pillowcase, mattress pad, blankets, pillow, and bedspread) will be provided to you, however if you would like to bring your own; you are welcome to do so.

**Section 2: Helpful Information for New Students**

**Living in the Student Dorms**

The student dorms are an integral part of the Center program. Practicing the skills learned in Center classes in the evenings and on weekends will help you learn them faster. Students are expected to use alternative techniques during the time they are in the student dorms and community, and to have their white cane with them at all times when they leave their dorms.

Students are responsible for always keeping their own dorm rooms and the shared living spaces and communal kitchens clean at all times. Clean clothes must be hung in the closet or folded in drawers. Dirty clothes must be kept in a laundry receptacle. Towels must be hung on the towel rack. Bedding must be laundered at least every two weeks. Furniture and floors must be dusted, and clutter must be kept to a minimum. The trashcan must be emptied when full. Any observed concerns regarding cleaning during dorm instruction will be integrated into Home Management class.

In the event of fire, crime or a medical emergency, students should call 911. Students may also call the Center Director once the emergency is reported and the student is in a safe location.

The student dorms are available only for students who are attending the Iowa OCB on at least a half-time basis. Students leaving the Center must immediately relinquish their space in the student dorms, and must take all personal belongings, including their industrial arts project, with them. Any item or industrial arts project left behind becomes the property of the Department for the Blind. Students must leave the dormin as clean a condition as it was when they first arrived. In addition, they must make arrangements with the post office to have their mail forwarded before leaving.

**What to bring with you**

Students are expected to have and practice using a smart phone capable of non-visual access. They are expected to practice using their phone non-visually outside of class hours. If you do not have a non-visually accessible smart phone, your VR Counselor can help you to obtain one prior to entering Center training.

In order to learn and practice non-visual financial management skills, students are expected to have a bank account with a debit card. If you do not have this, your VR Counselor can help you to obtain one prior to entering Center training.

Small appliances which are not provided may be brought with you such as a television set, stereo, or laptop. If you like to cook and/or bake and have favorite kitchen appliances, you may bring these items with you, but you will need to store them in a communal kitchen or your locker. Cooking appliances of any kind are not to be kept or used in your dorm room. If you decide to get cable or Internet service, you will be responsible for paying for these services.

Bedding for a full-sized bed (sheets, pillowcase, mattress pad, blankets, pillow, and bedspread) will be provided to you, however if you would like to bring your own; you are welcome to do so.

You will also need to bring bath towels, hand towels, and washcloths to your dorm room.

At the beginning of your training, the Center will provide you a long, white, rigid cane, a pair of learning shades, a slate and stylus, a braille watch, a talking alarm clock, and a monthly bus pass.

**Traveling to and from the Center**

Students will work with their rehabilitation counselors to determine appropriate modes and providers of transportation to be used before and after training hours.

**Medical Needs**

The center does not have medical staff; therefore, students needing medical care should contact their doctor or the nearest walk-in clinic or emergency room. Students with an illness or medical condition that prevents them from attending classes for an extended period of time are expected to return home until they are again able to participate in classes and complete assignments.

Students are expected to manage their own prescription and over-the-counter medications. Students are also expected to follow their physician’s recommendations for taking medications. Any changes in medical conditions or medications that could impact training or effect the provision of emergency medical care should be reported to the Center Director so that emergency contact forms can be updated.

**IDB Building Security**

The IDB building is unlocked weekdays from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. For this reason, personal possessions should not be left out in public areas. Fire doors are not to be propped open. In compliance with ADA regulations, the door located on Watson Powell has an automatic door open button; you must wait to confirm that the door has shut and latched before continuing into the building outside of business hours. If you will be going home for a weekend or spending the night elsewhere, please notify the staff on duty at 515-249-6328. We need to know that you are not sleeping in the building, so we know not to look for you in case of a fire or other evacuation.

**Emergency Evacuations**

If the fire alarm sounds, the elevators cannot be used. Students must exit the building immediately through one of several fire escapes, for which they will receive orientation when beginning the program. They must meet on the northwest corner of 4th Street and Watson-Powell then wait for the “all clear” signal before re-entering the building. If a tornado warning is announced, elevators can be used. Students must proceed immediately to the basement gym area and wait until an “all clear” announcement has been made. Students who use wheelchairs, other mobility devices, or otherwise cannot navigate stairs will work with center and maintenance staff to develop an evacuation plan.

**Use of the IDB Building Areas After Hours**

Students have free access to the vending area, roof, second-floor communications and kitchen areas, and second floor south before and after business hours and on weekends. These areas must be kept clean and litter-free.

**Section 3: Training Progress Expectations and Evaluation**

The OCB is a pre-vocational training center and thus expects that students will meet or exceed expectations set forth in the training program. If students do not meet expectations, coaching and guidance will follow.

In addition to following the rules set forth in this manual:

* Students are expected to socialize positively with and mentor their fellow students.
* Students are expected to put forth consistent effort in all classes.
* Students are expected to complete in-class and out-of-class assignments as directed.
* Students are expected to communicate with instructors and their VR Counselor regarding changes in their vocational goals.
* Students are expected to work with staff to develop or maintain habits and behaviors regarding time management, personal organization, self-sufficiency, physical and mental wellness in alignment with those expected in their chosen vocational field.

**Progress Monitoring**

Periodic checkpoints will be held with each student, Center staff, and their VR Counselor throughout the training program. This will help to ensure that students are on track for meeting their graduation timeline. Students will discuss their goals and progress monthly with each of their instructors.

Meetings with the Center Director, a student, and their VR counselor may be called to discuss concerns or make arrangements for additional service needs.

**Key Work Behaviors**

Because the Iowa OCB is a pre-vocational program, students will be evaluated and coached on their demonstration of key workplace behaviors. These behaviors are necessary for success in employment; center training is an excellent opportunity to learn and strengthen these behaviors. VR Counselors and Center Instructors will discuss with students how these behaviors would be enacted in each student’s chosen vocational field. Instruction and support will be provided to students to help them with these skills.

* Shows up on time to class.
* Gets to work and will self-start rather than waiting for instructor.
* Completes out of class assignments.
* Treats colleagues with respect and acts in a professional manner with instructors.
* Maintains professional appearance.
* Work is thorough and tasks are completed thoroughly.
* Communicates issues and concerns in a professional manner.
* Attempts to problem-solve before seeking assistance from others.
* Follows time-off request procedures.
* Contributes to group projects.
* Works to increase efficiency and proficiency with important work tasks.
* Works steadily and stays on task through the entire class period.
* Brings needed tools for writing down and reading back notes and other important information.

**Graduation Requirements**

In order to receive a signed graduation certificate from the OCB, a student must
1. Complete a post-center plan that is approved by the Center Director and IDB Director.
2. Be determined eligible to graduate based on the criteria agreed upon by the student, Center staff, and the student’s rehabilitation counselor.

**Section 4: Attendance Expectations**

Regular attendance in the OCB is critical to success both in the Center and in future employment. Students are expected to demonstrate progress in learning the alternative techniques of blindness and to demonstrate effort in meeting their stated goals.

**Lateness**

If you are going to be late at the beginning of the day, you must call the Center’s Director at 515-802-8162 by 7:30 a.m. If you are going to miss or be late for a class, you must let your instructor know as soon as possible. Do not ask another student to make these calls for you unless absolutely necessary.

**Appointments:**

Students must discuss any appointments or vacations outside of scheduled Center breaks with the Center’s Director. Unauthorized or extended absences from training may lead to suspension in training.

**Illness**

If you will miss classes due to illness, you need to notify the Center’s Director at 515-802-8162 by 7:30 a.m. Do not ask another student to make this call for you.

**Extended Illness**

If your illness lasts longer than three days, you will be asked to visit a medical clinic for a written diagnosis, which you must give to the Center’s Director. Students who are ill for four or more days and/or are experiencing an acute illness may be sent home to receive care from their primary physician. These students may return to the program at the discretion of the Center’s Director and with a written release from their physician.

**Center Schedules**

A standard Center Schedule for all students is Monday through Friday 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. with a lunch from 12:30 p.m. - 1:10 p.m. Unless leave has been approved, all students are expected to be in their classes from the designated starting time to the designated end time. All Center activities, large meals, graduations, and any other special events requested by the Director will be mandatory.

**Unscheduled Absences**

Students must follow the rules as outlined in the student handbook for the day of leave and leave requests should be submitted on the day the student returns to classes. If the student is unable to fill out a leave slip, they must meet with an instructor for instruction and/or guidance to complete.

If attendance continues to become a problem, participation in the OCB will be reviewed and the student may be suspended from training.

**Requesting Time Away**

We understand that there may be times when you need to be away from training due to vacation, medical appointments, or other personal reasons. If possible, we ask that you submit a leave request to the Director at least 24 hours in advance. This helps us plan accordingly and ensure your training stays on track.

**Acknowledgement**

This handbook is a statement of the laws, rules, policies and expectations used to promote and maintain high standards of behavior and promote a positive, productive, and professional environment in preparation for the working world following graduation from the Center.

I understand these rules and guidelines and agree to abide by them during my Center training in the Orientation Center for the Blind. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and obtain clarification. I understand that if I have any questions about these policies I am able to discuss these with the Center Director and/or the IDB Director. I understand that my failure to do so may lead to disciplinary action up to and including suspension of training or termination from the program.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_                               Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_