FACULTY TIP SHEET
Teaching Students with Hearing Loss

Developed by Patricia Carlton and Jennifer Hertzfeld
The Ohio State University Partnership Grant
Improving the Quality of Education for Students with Disabilities

Introduction

Students with hearing loss often bring auxiliary aids and adaptive equipment to the classroom (e.g., sign language interpreter, real-time captionist, assistive listening device.) These aids assist in gaining access to the classroom; however, they do not ensure access. The classroom instructor is responsible for considering the needs of every student when teaching. For example, your instruction including lectures, website, videos, overheads, handouts, and textbook must be accessible to the students.

If you would like verification that a student has a disability, ask the student to provide you with an Academic Accommodation Plan from the Disability Resource Center (DRC). The DRC produces these letters only for students who are registered with this office and for whom documentation of the disability is on file.

Description

Individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing rely upon visual input rather than auditory input when communicating. Using visual aspects of communication (body language, gestures, and facial expression) often feels awkward to people who are accustomed to using auditory aspects of communication; however, it is essential that faculty learn to effectively communicate with students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Utilize the guidelines outlined in this document to assist you when interacting with deaf or hard of hearing individuals.

Students who are deaf or hard of hearing do not all have the same characteristics. Some have a measure of usable residual hearing and use a device to amplify sounds (FM system). Some choose to speak; others use very little or no oral communication. Some students are extremely adept at speech reading, while others have very limited ability to “read lips.” For some, sign language and/or finger spelling are the preferred means of communication; other communication choices include gestures and writing. Most students who are deaf or hard of hearing have experience communicating with the hearing population. Let them be the guide on how best to communicate.

For more information please visit the UNLV Disability Resource Center website at unlv.edu/studentlife/drc

NOTE: This tip sheet is available in alternate format upon request. Please call the DRC at 702-895-0866.

This publication is funded by the U.S. Department of Education under grant #P333A020033-03.
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Guidelines

Gaining Attention: Make sure you have a deaf student’s attention before speaking. A light touch on the shoulder, a wave, or other signal will help.

Preferential Seating: Offer the student preferential seating near the front of the classroom so that he/she can get as much from visual and auditory clues as possible or clearly see a sign language interpreter if one is used.

Effective Communication: Don’t talk with your back to the class (for example, when writing on the chalkboard). It destroys any chance of the student getting facial or speech reading cues. Your face and mouth need to be clearly visible at all time. Avoid sitting with your back to a window, chewing gum, biting on a pencil, or other similar obstructions.

Videos and Slides: Provide videos and slides with captioning. If captioning is not available, supply an outline or summary of the materials covered. If an interpreter is in the classroom, make sure that he/she is visible.

Class Discussion: When students make comments in class or ask questions, repeat the questions before answering, or phrase your answers in such a way that the questions are obvious.

Class Notes: Students may need your assistance in getting class notes. When a student is using a sign language interpreter or captioning or lip-reading, it is difficult to take good notes simultaneously.

Sign Language or Captioning Services: When a student uses a sign language interpreter, discuss with both the student and the interpreter(s) where the interpreter(s) should be located to provide the greatest benefit for the student without distracting other class members. When a student uses a captioning service, discuss with the student and captionist the appropriate location.

Role of the Interpreter/Captionist: The interpreter is in the classroom only to facilitate communication. He/she should not be asked to run errands, proctor exams or discuss the student’s personal issues. He/she should not participate in the class in any way or express personal opinions.

Interpreter Class Etiquette: The interpreter is in the classroom to facilitate communication for both the student and the instructor. Speak directly to the student, even though it may be the interpreter who clarifies information for you. Likewise, the interpreter may request clarification from you to insure accuracy of the information conveyed.

Collaboration: Don’t hesitate to call the DRC to arrange for a three-way meeting between you, the student’s assigned disability counselor, and the student to work out any issues and to collaborate on the best instructional strategies for the student.

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