

ACADEMIC ISSUES

Our Piece of the Puzzle: A Comprehensive Cooperative Program Helps Students Put it All Together

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Abstract

This paper summarizes the information presented in a poster session highlighting the Cooperative Program for the Deaf and the Blind at Spartanburg Community College in Spartanburg, SC. The Cooperative Program was instituted as the result of a partnership formed between the college and the South Carolina School for the Deaf and the Blind in order to serve deaf, hard of hearing, blind, and low-vision students in South Carolina.



In 1986, the South Carolina School for the Deaf and the Blind and Spartanburg Community College (formerly Spartanburg Technical College) formed an alliance to extend postsecondary educational opportunities to deaf, hard of hearing, blind, and low-vision students from across the state of South Carolina. The program, known as the Cooperative Program for the Deaf and the Blind, offers a variety of support services including sign language interpreters, note-takers, reader/writers, and tutors.

Since it was established, the Cooperative Program has served hundreds of students on the campus of Spartanburg Community College in Spartanburg, SC. During the 2007-2008 academic year, the Cooperative Program served 25 deaf and hard of hearing students. Students pursued several majors at the college which include:

- Associate in Arts/Associate in Science (University Transfer).
- Automotive Technology.
- Commercial Graphics.
- Computer Technology.
- Electronics Engineering Technology.
- Interpreter Training.
- Early Childhood Development.
- Office Systems Technology.
- Pharmacy Technician.
- Pre-Nursing.
- Pre-Physical Therapy Assistant.

The most popular majors pursued by students enrolled in the Cooperative Program were University Transfer (AA./A.S.), Computer Technology, Early Childhood Development, and Automotive Technology.

Interpreters for the Cooperative Program are employed through the South Carolina School for the Deaf and the Blind. The minimum hiring requirements for those interpreters include:

- Certification from RID, NAD, or NIC; or
- Graduation from an Interpreter Training Program plus one year interpreting experience; or
- Three years interpreting experience, preferably in the postsecondary educational arena. (Spartanburg Community College, n.d., p. 4)

Several interpreters currently employed by the program exceed these requirements; several interpreters hold or are nearing completion master's degrees, and others hold or are nearing completion of bachelor's degrees in education or a related field.

The Cooperative Program offers one-on-one and group tutoring for students. The tutoring program, which is designed to meet the linguistic and cultural needs of students, is offered in American Sign Language or the language and communication mode preferred by the student. Students can also request an interpreter to accompany them to the college's Tutorial Learning Center for additional tutoring services.

Students have the option to reside in two-bedroom, furnished apartments near the South Carolina School for the Deaf and Blind (SCSDB) campus. The apartments, which are managed by the Spartanburg Housing Authority, are allocated for the use of SCSDB adult and postsecondary students. The Cooperative Program's residential component provides students the use of SCSDB's dining and recreational facilities, transportation to and from the college, and additional afternoon and evening support personnel. Structured student activities, an up-to-date computer lab, and field trips are also available to all participants.

Many students entering Spartanburg Community College were placed into developmental level courses in English and reading. Many of these students were repeatedly failing these basic courses. The Transitional Studies department head agreed to offer a class in which deaf and hard of hearing students could choose to take Developmental English taught by an instructor using American Sign Language. These courses were approached from a perspective that addressed the unique challenges of English usage that students with a hearing loss experience. The first two English courses were very successful. Student feedback has been positive, and both the instructor and Cooperative Program staff observed increased levels of participation compared with other English courses in which these students had been enrolled.

As a result of this successful class, the college Transitional Studies department head has agreed to form a learning cohort if there are enough students. This cohort would take their first level of developmental studies classes together. The cohort will include classes in English, reading, and a college skills class in which critical thinking and study skills are taught. The college skills class will also address other transition issues that cause barriers for these students. It is hoped that this program can boost students' academic successes early in their college career, provide remediation as a bridge to college level academics, and lower the rate of failure for this group of students.

Conclusion

As this paper demonstrates, the Cooperative Program for the Deaf and Blind at Spartanburg Community College offers a variety of services, activities, and resources. The program's success is

due to the cooperation between two agencies: two pieces of the puzzle that complement each other and help students put it all together.

References

Spartanburg Community College. (n.d.). *The cooperative program for the deaf & the blind: Handbook for interpreters*. Spartanburg, SC: Author.

