

## ***College Students who are Hard of Hearing: A National Task Force Publication on Addressing Service Models of an Underserved Population***

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### **Abstract**

Students who are hard of hearing are often forgotten in the classroom, misunderstood in terms of service provision, and overlooked by social service agencies as they transition from secondary education to postsecondary education and training. Many students do not receive accommodations that would be appropriate for their needs. Professionals who are experienced in providing services to students who are deaf frequently do not understand the very distinct and unique communication differences faced by students who are hard of hearing. To address these issues, a national collaborative project developed a publication designed to help state offices of vocational rehabilitation and postsecondary education institutions to better identify and provide more effective services to this population.



It is not uncommon for students who are hard of hearing *not* to request services until after classes have already started. Many students do not fully understand how different a postsecondary education program will be from what they experienced in high school; in that sense, hard of hearing students may be just like any other student. The pace of each class may be much quicker than those in high school. The classes may have many more students, and the professor's expectations may be different. In addition, accessing support services may be a new and different experience for an incoming student who is hard of hearing; the responsibility for requesting services shifts from the school to the student. Some students may decide to "make it on their own" while others realize that the available services are tools to help them compete with parity.

Experienced service providers realize that students who are hard of hearing face very real access issues. It's not as simple as just wearing a hearing aid to make everything clear. With the advances in technology, students have many more choices than ever but individual differences still play an important role in how well the student understands the information presented. An accommodation that works well for a lecture may not be effective in a laboratory. Flexibility and creativity are essential components to providing an accessible environment.

During the 1990s surveys of campus officials led to estimates that between 20,000 and 25,000 deaf and hard of hearing students were attending the nation's 5,000 colleges and universities. By contrast, self-report disability items on federal surveys of students in college on financial aid lead to estimates of between 258,000 and 346,000 college students with hearing loss in 1986 and 1990.

Schroedel and Watson estimate this number to now be over 400,000. Reasons for the significant difference in the numbers can be attributed several factors: a) many hard of hearing students were not disclosing their hearing loss and not requesting Disability Support Services (DSS) assistance; b) some students may not have thought that communication technology or academic support services would be helpful; c) some do not fully appreciate the effects of their hearing impairment upon communication and social interaction; and d) some may have been unaware of services and equipment and did not know how to request them. Both Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and DSS service professionals need accurate information about the numbers of persons their programs are to serve. Knowing the true numbers of deaf and hard of hearing students on campus can greatly aid a program coordinator to advocate for more resources, enhance support services, and train program staff.

In a collaborative effort, the Postsecondary Education Program Network (PEPNet) and the University of Arkansas Rehabilitation Research and Training Center for Persons who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing (RT-31) supported a project to identify and clarify the special needs and issues of students in postsecondary settings who are hard of hearing. Task force members were Heidi Adams (IL), Sam Atcherson (SD), Tim Beatty (CA), Debra Brenner (GA), Randy Collins (AZ), Patty Conway (KY), Cheryl Davis (OR), Carol Kelley (MS), Louise Montoya (PA), Marcie Sacks-Botto (IL), John Schroedel (AR), Larry Sivertson (CA), Pat Tomlinson (NJ), Jim DeCaro (NY), Denise Kavin (NY), Doug Watson (AR), and Marcia Kolvitz (TN). This project provides national leadership to developing recommended guidelines to help postsecondary institutions better identify and serve this population, and complements work that will be done by the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) later this year.

It is with great pleasure that we offer this publication, *Hard of Hearing Students in Postsecondary Settings: A Guide for Service Providers*. Its purpose is to provide up-to-date information and resources about those factors that affect students who are hard of hearing as they plan for or participate in postsecondary education and training. Chapter 1 provides insight into who the population of students is and what it's like to experience hearing loss. Chapter 2 presents demographic information and the implications for service delivery. Preparing for the transition from secondary to postsecondary education is discussed in Chapter 3. The overview of vocational rehabilitation services in Chapter 4 provides other service providers, consumers, and parents with a better understanding of the services available to eligible consumers; in addition, it features several state agencies with specialized services for individuals who are hard of hearing. Chapter 5 offer the service providers a model with specific information about the kinds of services and support that can be offered by a postsecondary education or training program. Because students don't spend all of their time in the classroom, Chapter 6 emphasizes how access in other campus settings can be provided. Finally, Chapters 7 and 8 address technology that can play a significant role in communication access for students who are hard of hearing; these chapters discuss hearing loss and the use of hearing aids and assistive listening devices, and also describe other types of technology that can be used effectively in a variety of settings.

We hope that the use of this guide will not be limited to services providers at the postsecondary level. Information and resources included in it may be very helpful to students and parents as they discuss future plans. Teachers, transition specialists, and other related staff from secondary programs also may use this as a tool when working with students as they transition from secondary to postsecondary education and training programs.

We view transition as a collaborative effort among several groups of people who can provide resources and support. Students and their families may find it helpful to work closely with high school faculty and staff, transition specialists, vocational rehabilitation counselors, educational

audiologists, and other related professionals. We strongly encourage students to visit colleges, universities, and vocational training programs to see where the best “fit” is for them. Meeting with students or consumers at these institutions can provide additional information that can be valuable when making decisions about the future. Other online resources—many of which are included in this publication—can be very helpful throughout the process.

Free downloadable pdf files are available through the PEPNet Dissemination Center. Go to <http://pdcorder.pepent.org> and search for product 1219. Printed, bound copies of this publication are also available at cost through Lulu. Readers can go to <http://stores.lulu.com/pepnet> to view PEPNet resources available through this source.

For those who are interested only in the technology chapters, this information is available as a stand-alone document from the PEPNet Dissemination Center at <http://pdcorder.pepnet.org/media/1221Demystifying.pdf> .

