

Successful Job Development and Placement Strategies with Deaf and Hard of Hearing College Students

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For work to be authentically human, it must be about a search, too, for daily meaning as well as daily bread, for recognition as well as cash, for astonishment rather than torpor; in short, for a sort of life rather than a Monday through Friday sort of dying.

— Studs Terkel

INTRODUCTION

Since June 1992 I have served as the Employment Services Coordinator for the Regional Education Center for Deaf Students (RECDS) at Seattle Central Community College (SCCC) in Seattle, WA. Through a variety of creative job development and placement strategies, “job ready” deaf and hard of hearing students at SCCC are successfully finding and retaining gainful employment in their chosen fields upon graduation. I would like to share with you some of our success stories, along with some of the serious barriers and challenges we still face in assisting deaf students and recent graduates in their job search efforts in the Puget Sound area.

This paper will focus on our employment services for deaf and hard of hearing students at SCCC, including specific examples of the types of major challenges we still face. Still to be addressed are ways to overcome these barriers and challenges, particularly in the context of the dramatically changing American workplace, and how these profound and widespread changes especially impact deaf students. The U.S. workplace is becoming ever more demanding of the types of skills deaf students have traditionally been weak in -- written English, critical thinking skills, and problem-solving skills. As a result of rampant corporate “downsizings,” the growing demand for temporary rather than permanent workers, and the generalized loss of long term job security as we once knew it, there is an ever greater need for all individuals to take full responsibility for managing their own career paths. The question is, are our students ready for “Workforce 2000?”

First, I’d like to give you a little overview on why the Employment Services Coordinator position was created at Seattle Central. What documented needs were we responding to? Second, I will describe the range of direct employment services RECDS provides to our students/recent graduates. Third, I will describe the analogous types of direct services we provide to Puget Sound area employers in terms of educating them about deafness and introducing them to our “job ready” students. When qualified, job ready graduates meet deaf-educated employers, some exciting success stories happen!

I will also discuss briefly how on a case-by-case basis we sometimes coordinate RECDS’s employment services with Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and/or other agencies with whom our students may be affiliated. These interagency partnerships allow for a maximizing of employment services to

students--with the different members of the “employment services team” offering different valuable pieces to the overall employment plan. Similarly, I will touch on how we coordinate RECDs’s employment services in the context of a mainstream community college setting. In other words, how do our students have access to and take advantage of campus wide employment-related services--such as the SCCC’s Cooperative Education & Career Placement Office, or the college-wide Career Fair? Finally, I want to discuss a variety of barriers to successful employment we have observed. Some of these limitations are on the part of students -- such as a lack of “job readiness,” or weak English skills. Others, are barriers on the employer side -- such as attitudinal barriers and fears about hiring deaf workers, or culturally biased testing procedures. While yet another class of barriers has recently emerged because of how incredibly quickly our world and society is changing. In an “Information Age” with a global economy we *all* need to be computer literate and we *all* need to be English literate. Employment opportunities in the traditional hands-on trades are quickly disappearing. Generally speaking, these trades are either becoming highly automated and new skills and technologies need to be learned to perform them competitively, or they are being shipped abroad to other countries where labor is much cheaper. With all these points in mind, how can we best prepare deaf college students to be gainfully employed in today and tomorrow’s workplace?

Why Employment Services Are Needed

RECDs was established in 1969 as one of four federally funded post-secondary regional education programs for deaf students. Over the last 27 years, we have provided a wide range of direct support services to students, including: classroom interpreting, notetaking, tutoring, academic and personal counseling, and an extensive college transition (“prep”) program. Nevertheless, it was typically seen that students would graduate or leave SCCC and generally be unemployed or seriously underemployed. And if they were employed, it was often was in a position unrelated to their majors. In other words, deaf students were coming to college, selecting majors, successfully graduating, but then not finding work in their chosen fields, or not finding work at all. Some were continuing to rely on SSI and SSDI for subsistence living, and were not becoming productive members of society. In some cases, VR had supported students through several years of vocational training with a clear employment goal in mind which never came to fruition.

While we at SCCC did not keep formal statistics on this phenomenon, it was an obvious and recognized problem. And our situation at SCCC was far from atypical. Nationally, it has been well documented that people with disabilities are by far the most unemployed and underemployed of any minority group. Across the country, students with disabilities are entering colleges in record numbers, but they are not yet entering the workforce in correspondingly high record numbers. In 1950, it is estimated there were only about 250 deaf college students nationwide, whereas in 1990 there were an estimated 10,000! While higher education opportunities for students with disabilities have greatly increased in recent years, employment opportunities for such graduates have not kept pace.

Accordingly, the RECDs Employment Services Coordinator position was created in 1992 to address this unemployment and underemployment problem vis-à-vis the deaf and hard of hearing student population at Seattle Central. Over the past 4 years, we have on the one hand developed a suite of employment services for students -- to assist them in developing the job search skills and savvy they need to market themselves effectively to prospective employers. And on the other hand, we have developed a suite of direct services to area employers -- to introduce them to our pool of qualified job seekers and to educate them about deafness. As of December, 1995, more than 50 REDCS students/graduates had been employed or placed in Cooperative Education internships in more than 40 Puget Sound area companies. For some of these students it was their first work experience ever. For some of these companies it was their first experience hiring a deaf employee.

Types of Employment Services Available to Students

RECDs offers a wide range of employment services to current, mainstreamed students and recent graduates. We are a district-wide Center and thus serve deaf students on three different Seattle Community College campuses -- North, South, and Central. Together, the three campuses offer an array of more than 100 fields of study.

Training in Lifelong Learning Skills:

- Self-assessment of one's transferable skills, accomplishments, personal assets
- Professional resume development and resume updating
- How to effectively fill out job applications
- How to write successful employment letters
- Interview skills training
- Presenting oneself professionally
- Training on how to research companies/how to network
- Negotiating the job offer
- Special issues for deaf job seekers -- how to use an interpreter appropriately, understanding your rights under the ADA, how to talk about communication issues during the interview, etc.

Individual employment tutoring is available for students needing extra help with any of the above.

Individualized Job Development and Placement:

- Job development -- for part-time or full-time work
- Cooperative Education worksite placement
- Community Service worksite placement
- Introductions to specific employers
- Setting-up job interviews
- Post-placement follow-up at work/internship sites

Group Job Search Services:

- *Job Preparation Course* (2-credits)
- Scheduled series of campus recruiter visits/informational interview sessions for “job ready” students
- *Job Search Support Group*
- *Climbing the Career Ladder* support group -- offered evenings for working deaf adults
- Special workshops on employment issues, such as “What are Employers Looking for and Why?” “Sexual Harassment in the Workplace,” “The Transition from College to Work,” and “The Role of VR in the Employment Process.”

Additional Services:

- Maintaining a current job listings bulletin board
- Maintaining informational files on numerous Puget Sound businesses for student use in researching their job search
- Educating students on how to take advantage of other employment resources on campus (i.e., College Work Study, Computerized Career Library, Career Fair, etc.)

To receive any of the above employment services, students must sign a formal “Employment Services Contract” with the Employment Services Coordinator. The contract lists the policies they must agree to in order to receive services -- such as arriving on time to appointments, informing the Employment Services Coordinator at least 24 hours in advance if they need to cancel a job interview, etc. Students understand that if they violate the contract, they will have further employment services suspended. The only way services can be restored is if the student requests a meeting with the Director and me to appeal the suspension. Each case is handled individually.

Job Preparation Course

We strongly recommend this 2-credit course for all student nearing graduation, especially those who will be seeking immediate employment, and not transferring to 4-year programs. Taught in ASL, this course covers all the standard aspects of job search, such as resume development and interviewing skills. But, in addition, it covers a number of topics of special interest and importance to deaf job seekers: how to appropriately use an interpreter in a job interview; understanding one’s rights in the job application and hiring process under the ADA; how to successfully counter prospective employers’ fears about on the job communication, telephone usage, etc. This course is especially exciting because students learn to effectively critique each other and provide valuable feedback to each other. Peer feedback is sometimes more effective and carries more punch than instructor feedback. Some of the more difficult, but essential, concepts to get across to our students include: a) identifying their personal success stories and accomplishments; b) grasping that they need to look at the job interview from the employer’s perspective,

not their own (i.e., how they will meet the company's needs, not how the company will benefit them); and c) recognizing the special transferable skills and personal assets they have developed in various aspects of their lives, and figuring out how these same qualities can be of great value to employers.

Last year, each student participated in a total of four mock interviews -- all of which were videotaped. By receiving copies of their four sequential mock interviews (with the immediate feedback also videotaped), students could track their progress. It is hoped that by keeping their videotapes, students will find them to be a useful refresher tool in years to come when they have long since left SCCC and find themselves interviewing for future positions. Another highlight of this course has been inviting successful deaf professionals to visit the class -- either to assist with mock interviews, or to make presentations on important issues such as: work ethics, getting off of SSI, or how to have the "American dream." "Dress for Success on a Student Budget" has been another favorite, presented by professional buyers for Nordstrom's Rack in the Seattle area.

Several video clips from last year's job preparation course were shown as part of the presentation. These brief segments were intended to give the audience a sense of the value of mock interviews and also how helpful it is to have inspirational deaf professionals come speak to the class.

Recruiter Visits

A very effective follow-up to the job preparation course, has been scheduling a series of on-campus recruiter visits at our Center. These visits serve several key functions simultaneously. They: a) provide students with additional "real world" interview practice; b) expose students to human resource representatives from a variety of public and private organizations, thereby giving students an appreciation for the different types of employers, work environments, and corporate cultures that exist; c) educate recruiters in an extremely positive and eye-opening way about a previously untapped pool of highly qualified and polished job candidates; and finally, d) do indeed lead to actual job placements. By touring our Center, meeting with our Director, learning how to conduct interviews using interpreters, and meeting our "job ready" students, many recruiters find the experience makes a profound impression on them. Often they remember our students by name, and keep them in mind for future job openings as appropriate positions arise.

Cooperative Education Placements

Our highest job placement priority is to work with graduating students and recent graduates (up to one year post-graduation) and to assist them in finding gainful employment related to their fields of study. However, job preparation for competitive employment at RECDs begins long before graduation. One of these early job preparation steps is to take a Cooperative Education (Co-op Ed.) work experience. Students who have declared majors are strongly encouraged (and for some majors they are actually required) to undertake at least one Co-op Ed. work experience. We find these internships are enormously helpful in making students more employable upon graduation.

Co-op Ed. internships serve several very important functions. They: a) allow students to see if they actually like the type of work their course of study is preparing them for (better to find out now, and make a mid-course change, then wait until after graduation); b) provide students with “real world” experience that simply cannot be duplicated in the classroom; c) furnish students with concrete work experience in their field to put on their resume *before* graduation; d) generally provide a source of professional references and letters of recommendation that will greatly assist students when seeking employment post-graduation; and e) sometimes lead to a permanent position at the internship site.

While some Co-op Ed. internships are paid, most are unpaid. All students earn college credit in their majors. Students must develop a series of measurable “learning objectives” for their internship which they will be evaluated on at the end of the quarter. At SCCC, Co-op Ed. is generally done on a part-time (i.e., 10-25 hours/week) basis during the academic year while students are also taking courses. Additionally, students can sign up for more full-time Co-op Ed. placements during the summer quarter -- which can be in the Seattle area, or elsewhere. We emphasize to students that from the employer’s perspective a “work experience is a work experience,” and they don’t care if you were paid for it or not.

Community Service

For students who have not yet declared majors, and do not have strong work histories prior to coming to SCCC, community service is an effective way to gain work skills, add to one’s resume and, at the same time, gain a better sense of what they field might like to pursue. Students may earn 2-credit hours (pass/fail) by performing community service in any non-profit or public organization. While these unpaid work experiences are less structured than Co-op Ed. (i.e., no formal “learning objectives”), they still offer students an excellent way to: a) add valuable work experience to their resumes; b) gain a better sense of what type of work they are drawn to and are suited for; and c) develop professional references and letters of recommendation.

TYPES OF SERVICES AVAILABLE TO EMPLOYERS

The good news is that since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990 and its initial enforcement in 1992, it appears that employers have become very interested in learning more about deafness and hiring deaf workers. Along with a national movement towards diversity in the workplace, there seems to be a fair degree of receptivity on many employers’ parts, that may not have been quite as evident prior to the ADA.

Many larger companies now have “ADA Coordinators” and “Diversity Managers” in their Human Resource (HR) departments, who are interested in visiting about our program and meeting our qualified students/graduates. “Diversity Job Fairs” are popping up all over. In the Seattle area alone, we have at least five major diversity fair each year that are specifically aimed at bringing candidates of diversity together with HR recruiters. One of these, *Access ’96*, is held at the Seattle Center each year and is specifically for people with disabilities.

In addition, I attend at least three other diversity groups that meet regularly -- Puget Sound Diversity Network, Eastside Diversity Taskforce, and the South Puget Sound Diversity Taskforce. These are excellent places to network with just the diversity business recruiters who are especially interested in meeting our students, and working with us regarding reasonable job accommodations, and other types of post-placement follow-up to ensure that our students are successfully integrated into the workplace.

The bad news is that at this same time the United States workplace is changing very fast, and in ways that are not auspicious for many of our students. For instance, employment opportunities are growing fastest among small businesses, and slowest among large corporations (many of which are “downsizing”). Many of these small businesses are not even covered by the ADA because they have fewer than 15 employees.

Services to Employers

- Introductions to qualified and job ready RECDs candidates
- Scheduled business recruiter visits to RECDs to meet qualified and job ready students/recent graduates
- Half-day and full-day workshops at SCCC: *Working Together: Deaf & Hearing People*
- Presenting on-site workshops to educate potential employers on hiring and successfully integrating deaf employees into their workforces
- Presenting on-site orientations in specific departments where RECDs students have just been hired to facilitate co-worker communication and getting the placement off to a good start
- Evaluating the possible need for job accommodations for specific positions
- Assistance in locating and arranging reasonable job accommodations
- Informing employers of RECDs’s evening classes in *Computer Literacy* and *Workplace English* and the *Climbing the Career Ladder* support group offered at SCCC and conducted in ASL to assist deaf adults advance their workplace skills and competencies
- Assistance in setting up sign language classes in the workplace
- Referrals to other Deaf Community resources as needed (e.g., interpreter referral service, TTY relay service, places to buy TTYs and other assistive devices, etc.)
- Providing post-placement follow-up services and consultation as needed on an on-going basis. (Cases are not “closed” after 60 or 90 days; relationships with employers are long-term.)

Interagency Service Coordination

A number of our students are funded by VR or may be receiving some employment services other sources (e.g., Washington Vocational Services; Training, Assessment & Placement Program; Employment Security; Workforce Training; International Rescue Committee). Service delivery can be maximized for students by establishing case management teams in these instances -- because different players can contribute different types of support services.

A case in point was that of a deaf woman from Bosnia who had emigrated to the United States as a political refugee with her teenage niece. Before I met her, she was already connected to both the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and to VR. The IRC had assisted her with living arrangements, and getting her and her niece on public assistance. VR had helped her with getting hearing aids and had referred her to RECDS's evening ESL classes for foreign deaf adults. When I first met this woman, she had no English skills and no ASL skills. What she had was good Croatian lipreading skills, Croatian Sign Language skills, and more than 16 years of work experience as an electronic assembler. Putting all the pieces together:

- 1) RECDS was able to work with this individual (using a Croatian foreign language interpreter) to develop a professional resume and arrange for a job interview with an employer willing to give this individual a chance based on her solid work history.
- 2) IRC provided a Croatian foreign language interpreter for meetings with me and for the job interview.
- 3) VR provided on the job support by supplying a job coach and an ASL tutor after this individual was hired so she could quickly develop the English and ASL skills she would need to work successfully as an electronic assembler in an American company.

This story and a number of our other placement successes are profiled in our new publication *Deaf Portraits: College to Career*. Copies are available from the Regional Education Center for Deaf Students.

Intra-Campus and Inter-College Coordination

RECDS is a federally funded program that provides support services to deaf and hard of hearing students in a mainstream community college setting. RECDS is not a degree-granting entity. Thus, deaf students must learn how to navigate through our campus to have access to campus-wide services -- such as registration and financial aid. There are a number of areas on campus where accessibility to employment services specifically arises, and over the past four years we have worked hard to make these programs more accessible to our students. These include: Cooperative Education & Career Placement Office; Work-Study Program; Workforce Training; Computerized Career Library; and International Student Services. Some of these programs have purchased their own TTYs, and/or now list a centralized campus TTY number on their brochures so that deaf students can call them directly. Most have learned to list that interpreters are available upon request (with sufficient lead time) for the events they sponsor. Staff members from these offices have made special presentations to RECDS students subjects such as: "How to Apply for Work Study Funds?" "Employment Opportunities for International Students," and "What is Cooperative Education?"

Another valuable key to successful job placement for our students is to work closely with the faculty in their respective programs. The Seattle Community College District offers more than 100 different fields of study. Making employer contacts from scratch in fields as diverse as Accounting, Biotechnology, Commercial Photography, Computer Technology, Culinary Arts, Diesel Mechanics,

Drafting, Graphic Design, Human and Social Services, Office Occupations, and Opticianry, to name a few, is daunting. Sometimes faculty are in the best position to offer job leads in their respective fields, and since they work directly with our students, they are in the best position to have a realistic sense of their skill levels vis-à-vis the industry standards. Having students get letters of recommendation from faculty in their majors is also very effective.

BARRIERS TO SUCCESSFUL EMPLOYMENT

Students' Barriers to Success

Lack of Job Readiness. Students sometimes come seeking employment, but they do not yet have appropriate workplace skills or understanding. While they may have good academic standing, and perhaps even good technical skills, they may still not be employable for other reasons. This often manifests itself with students who fail to follow the Employment Services Contract. For instance, if a student repeatedly shows up late or simply skips appointments with the Employment Services Coordinator, it is not possible in good conscience to recommend this student to a prospective employer. When students have unacceptable excuses for why they are late (i.e., excuses that would be unacceptable in the workplace such as "I ran out of gas." "I lost my keys." "I missed the bus." "My mother needed me to baby-sit my brother."), it is also not possible in good conscience to recommend these students to prospective employers.

Some students, perhaps because of having been overprotected for so many years by family and school systems serving deaf youth, have little understanding of what is expected in the workplace. If they grew up in hearing families where there was not good communication with their parents, these students may have missed some key concepts regarding the world of work. These concepts might include: chain of command; taking direction from a supervisor; going through proper channels to resolve problems; understanding that it is generally *not* appropriate to discuss your personal problems with the supervisor; and the need to "pay one's dues" to climb the career ladder.

As with college students anywhere, many RECDs students are young. At age 20-25 many young adults are not fully ready to say good-bye to college life and take on the adult responsibilities of full-time employment. There may also be the issue of leaving the security of the campus, particularly a "deaf-friendly" campus and the fear of going out into the "real world" where they may be the only deaf person in their new workplace. Sometimes young people need to take time off, to travel, to experiment, to make mistakes, and to "find themselves." Students such as these may come seeking employment, but it soon becomes clear that their hearts are not fully in it when many other things start taking priority over their job searches.

The primary way we identify these types of students is through the Employment Service Contract. Students who are not job ready, tend to eliminate themselves by violating the terms of this agreement. There is then an objective and verifiable method for putting on hold serious job development and placement efforts until students are more fully committed to finding work and keeping it.

Another category of students who are not job ready are those who need to deal with other issues first --such as anger management, independent living skills, or personal hygiene and comportment. Some students may have an additional disability which could also significantly impact their employability (e.g., clinical depression). When students are not job ready for these reasons, RECDS tries to work closely with VR to make referrals to those community-based organizations that can provide the types of one-on-one work skills building, pre-employment training (e.g., community-based assessments, supported employment), and counseling that RECDS does not offer.

Inadequate English Skills. At the community college level, an ever-increasing number of degree and certificate programs are requiring students to successfully complete higher levels of college English to graduate. Within the Seattle Community College District in recent years, increased English standards are being required for students to enter vocational programs such as Carpentry, Auto Body Repair, and Baking. For other majors, such as Printing (now called “Graphic Imaging and Printing”), Graphic Arts, and Photography, the even higher level *English 101* is now required for graduation.

We observe that many of our students are having a tough time with these new, more stringent English guidelines. It is not unusual to see deaf students who have successfully completed all degree requirements in their major, but who either: a) need to defer graduation for several quarters because they have not satisfactorily completed their English requirements; or b) opt to graduate with a certificate instead of a full Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree because they could not, or chose not to, complete the English requirements.

This same trend is widespread at vocational schools as well. For examples, in the Seattle area, what was formerly called “Lake Washington Voc Tech” has been renamed “Lake Washington Technical College.” Along with the name change has been a significant stiffening of the English and math requirements in almost all degree-granting programs.

There are real and practical reasons for these tougher requirements; the world is changing. Many career paths that did not previously require high level reading and writing skills (i.e., the traditional trades) now do -- particularly because of the ubiquity of computers in virtually all sectors of the modern work world.

According to a recent article in *Gallaudet Today* (Fall, 1995) entitled *Literacy: Key to the Future*, “...As we approach the 21st century and as technology becomes increasingly important in the workplace, workers are finding that they must look back to two basic skills still necessary for them to succeed--reading and writing.” Or as Terry Coye, Coordinator of Gallaudet University’s new *English Literacy 2000* program points out in the same article, “The nature of work is changing. People need to use and create information, not just modify it and pass it on.” At Gallaudet, strong recommendations have been made, and are expected to be adopted, that the University should increase its admissions standards in terms of applicants’ English reading levels because they are “...the best predictor of success in college.”

General Knowledge Gaps. Not surprisingly, since deafness generally leads to a profound lack of access to general information, some of our college students have large gaps in their general knowledge base. For example:

- One student wanted to know why money was coming out of his paycheck each week. While he had heard of “taxes,” he really didn’t understand what taxes were, what they were for, and how they worked.
- On his resume, one student listed his phone number as “TTY/V,” even though both he and his housemate were deaf and used only the TTY. He did not understand that this could confuse a potential employer if he/she called on voice and got TTY beeps which in turn could seriously hurt his job search efforts.
- Many of our students, even though they use computers daily and have taken numerous computing classes, still seem to have a poor grasp of some very fundamental concepts. They often don’t fully understand the difference between hardware and software, what an operating system is, or the difference between an operating system and a software application.

Disincentives. Perhaps the most pervasive barrier to students finding and maintaining gainful employment is the disincentive posed by federal entitlements. Sometimes students graduate college and show little interest in looking for work. They seem used to living a student lifestyle on a limited income, and just continue to do so after they graduate. Sometimes students appear to have black and white thinking about SSI/SSDI. Namely, they believe that if they work at all, even part-time or over the summer, that they will be immediately and permanently cut from SSI and SSDI. Often students do not have a good understanding of how their SSI/SSDI benefits are calculated, or the types of exceptions that are possible if they are working only temporarily or part time. Similarly, they are not aware of set-aside plans after they are employed (i.e., IRWE and PASS) that might allow them to convert their SSI/SSDI benefits into major personal purchases, such as a car or a computer, that would make them more independent wage earners. Much more educating of students is needed in this area.

“SSI Syndrome” can have a significant impact on student motivation. One student was offered a full-time summer job at \$10/hour in his major. This was an incredible opportunity for him. Yet when he was told he had been offered a high-paying summer position, his first response was that he didn’t want it. Initially he said the job was “too far” away and he didn’t want to commute. Then, he said it was “too late” in the summer to take a job (it was mid-July and he had already given up on expecting to find a summer job). Then finally this student said, “SSI.”

Unrealistic Expectations/Lack of Understanding “The System.” Another barrier to gainful employment is that students sometimes have unrealistic expectations of where they fit in the labor market. Today’s employers are demanding more and more high level skills from job candidates even for entry level jobs. I see many more advertised positions requiring bachelor's degrees that never used to, such as secretarial positions. A two-year associate's degree equates to “entry level.” Students sometimes need to be willing to take a job at a lower level or pay scale than desired simply “to get their foot in the door.” And to advance

in the company, one must be willing to put in the time to “pay one’s dues.” It is a slow and painstaking process.

College’s Barriers to Success

Is There a Double Standard for Deaf Students? One tragic hallmark of deaf education in the United States has long been that teachers and educators tend to hold significantly lower expectations for deaf students than their hearing peers. In 1988, the federally appointed Commission on Education of the Deaf, chaired by Dr. Frank Bowe, presented its report and recommendations to the U.S. Congress and the President. In 1988 the Commission found that overall state of deaf education in this country to be “abysmal.”

That perpetuation of a double standard for deaf students sometimes continues into college. There are instructors who feel sorry for deaf students may grade them more leniently. There are instructors who do our students a grave disservice by passing them and letting them graduate even when they are not close to being competitively employable in their chosen fields. This gives students a false and inflated sense of their skills and abilities, and sets them up for some very rude and painful awakenings down the road.

Do Students Understand and Know How to Use Available College Resources? Students sometimes do not know how to successfully navigate through “the system.” They may not be fully aware of resources available to them and/or may let valuable opportunities slip by. Some of these missed opportunities include:

- Not understanding about financial aid, and the tips on how to successfully apply for it
- Not understanding about the federal and state work-study programs and how becoming eligible for work-study greatly increases a student’s chance of getting a job on or off campus since the employer pays just a small percentage of the salary
- Not understanding student reporting responsibilities to VR, to ensure continued support and eventually job placement assistance

Employers’ Barriers to Success

Attitudinal Barriers and Fears. While there is much focus among employers today about hiring candidates from diverse backgrounds and while the ADA has certainly heightened many employers’ sensitivities about not discriminating against a large segment of the job pool, there is still much educating to be done. We find our half-day and all-day workshops, *Working Together: Deaf & Hearing People*, are tremendously well-received and well-attended. These workshops provide a safe and supportive environment for employers to learn and ask questions about deafness and Deaf Culture, participate in a variety of sensitivity training exercises, learn some basic work-related signs, and to generally develop a much better appreciation for how to bridge the communication gap between deaf and hearing workers.

Testing procedures. Some companies have standard testing procedures that all applicants must take to considered for employment. Unfortunately, some of these written tests may unfairly screen out otherwise qualified deaf applicants (and probably other individuals as well for whom English is not their first

language) because of their English level. In other words, they end up testing the job candidate's English skills rather than the subject matter they are really looking for. In some cases, alternative forms of testing that are not culturally biased are needed.

One example of this is the "ethics testing" that a number of large employers now use to predict who will be a loyal and honest employee. In this type of test, applicants are given many hypothetical situations and asked what they would do. When administered to a general population, these tests enjoy a very high ability for predicting who will be a successful employee. However, when Associated Grocers gave their ethics test to a group of 13 deaf applicants last year, only one of the 13 passed. These individuals were applying for general stockroom positions -- jobs that would not require high level English reading and writing skills.

At Nordstrom stores applicants must pass a business math test to be considered for anything but the most entry level positions. The business math test is partially composed of word problems, and almost all deaf students who have taken the test have failed it. Again, it is important to separate out what part of the test is assessing math and problem-solving abilities versus what part is testing English skills. A future goal is to work with these and other companies to help develop alternate testing formats (i.e., videotaped in ASL) when appropriate.

Concerns about Worker Safety. Despite facts and figures to the contrary, many employers are still nervous about deaf workers and safety issues. Some cases are very poignant. One former student has been working part-time for United Parcel Service for more than three years. He is an excellent employee who has twice been named "Employee of the Month," and would normally have been promoted to a full-time driver long ago based on his excellent work performance. But the driver position required a Commercial Drivers License (CDL), and the CDL requires passing a hearing test. This individual is still stuck in a catch-22. Even though he drives his van to work and back every day, UPS is not legally able to allow him to drive one of their vans on the job.

Again, more education is needed to alleviate employers' initial fears and to inform them of straightforward and rather inexpensive accommodations that will make the workplace safer for *all* workers --such as visual fire alarm systems, strobe lights on fork lifts, flashing lights of office machinery and other types of equipment, use of a "buddy system," use of alpha-numeric pagers, etc.

Lack of Thinking of Alternative Ways to Do the Job. Sometimes employers are used to thinking of a job being done in just one given way (i.e., the job includes some phone work), without necessarily having analyzed fully which job duties are truly "essential" and which are "non-essential." By sitting down with the employer and openly discussing the demands of the given workplace, we have found it is often possible to come up with a modest restructuring of job duties that works for everyone. The key is to start the dialog and to engage the employer in some creative thinking.

Telephone Impressions. Unfortunately, the telephone still presents a formidable barrier to RECDs students who attempt to undertake the job search process on their own. Despite the availability of a 24-hour TTY relay service and/or the availability of telephone interpreters, employers do not tend to respond well to

direct telephone calls from our students. Generally, students who attempt to call employers directly for the first time through either the relay service or through an interpreter meet with rejection. Like it or not, we find that employers are still not familiar enough nor comfortable enough with operator-mediated or interpreter-facilitated calls to have this be an effective means for a first contact with a potential employer. Following an interview, the use of the relay service and telephone interpreters is fine. But that initial first impression to an employer is critical, and the telephone represents a significant disadvantage to a deaf candidate. However, if the employer has a TTY line, then this seems to be an effective and positive way for the student to make contact with the potential employer, providing the student has good English skills.

CONCLUSION

It has been very gratifying and exciting to see so many of our RECDs students/graduates enter the job market in a wide variety of fields. Especially thrilling is seeing our students break into fields and industries that have traditionally not been well-represented by deaf people. For example, last June our first student graduated from SCCC's Biotechnology program and is now working full-time at Targeted Genetics as a research technician. He is their first deaf employee. Next week this graduate and I have been invited to speak to a group of human resource managers from at least 20 more Puget Sound biotechnology companies specifically on the topic of how to hire and successfully integrate deaf employees into this fast-growing industry.

Another recent graduate is now a full-time computer service technician at Active Voice Corporation in Seattle where he is their first deaf employee. At one of our recent *Working Together: Deaf & Hearing People* workshops aimed at employers, this graduate and his supervisor were part of an employee/employer panel discussion. They shared with workshop attendees what steps they had taken thus far to make workplace communication and integration happen. This RECDs graduate currently teaches a weekly sign language class to his co-workers at Active Voice. These and many more of our success stories are highlighted in a new RECDs publication entitled *Deaf Portraits: College to Career*.

At the same time, however, there are still many barriers and challenges that lie ahead. There are barriers on the student side, barriers on the employer side, and brand new barriers cropping up due to the sweeping and dramatic changes we are currently witnessing in the overall structure of the U. S. workplace. English competency is more important than ever, and employers are demanding more than ever. By the year 2000, it is predicted that 80% of all jobs will require the equivalent of at least a 2-year college degree. Incredibly rapid technological advances are changing the very nature of how we do our jobs and where we do them (i.e., telecommuting). These are all factors we must consider when thinking about the employment future for our students