

Mentorship for the Working Interpreter

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Abstract

Interpreters employed with the National Center on Deafness (NCOD) are offered the opportunity to participate in an employee mentorship program. This program has proven to be highly effective as a means of professional upgrading and skill maintenance. The concept of a formalized mentoring program is new to the field of interpreting, and has created a ground-swell of enthusiasm.

During the academic year, interpreters of any level of skill may request a mentorship. At the beginning of the semester they are assigned to a Mentor, and participate in the process of program orientation, pre-diagnosis of skills, definition of goals and objectives, assessment, review of the mentorship experience, post-diagnosis and, finally, future recommendations. The mentorship team confers to develop mentoring and diagnostic strategies. Mentors may also participate as mentees to further enhance their experience.

This presentation will provide a complete overview of the employee mentorship process and provide you with the necessary information and background to establish similar programs.

Program Review

This mentorship program is designed to develop interpreter skills through an ongoing relationship between a mentor interpreter and a mentee interpreter. Additionally, the program provides an orientation to the role and function of the interpreter in the academic setting. The program is characterized by an experienced interpreter acting as a mentor to newly hired or continuing employees. This model has proven to be a successful method of training for the National Center on Deafness (NCOD) and is recommended as a model to other programs.

Purpose

- To continuously upgrade the quality of interpreting services provided at CSUN;
- To provide employees with the opportunity to build skills by participation in a long term, ongoing relationship with a mentor;
- To provide employees the opportunity to initiate a self improvement plan (while a mentorship may be recommended by a supervisor, the success rate is greater when it is employee initiated);
- To provide newly hired employees with a semester-long orientation to the role and function of the interpreter in an academic setting guidance from a mentor is also helpful with tasks such as completing payroll documents;

- To offer employees opportunities to earn in-service credit (required for pay increases), preparation for certification, or certification maintenance;
- To provide individualized, private training for a full semester, free of charge to employees;
- To recruit potential employees; and
- To build collegiality.

History

In 1964, the NCOD program was established. The two interpreters that were hired mentored each other. The life long learning adage taught to us by Virginia Hughes has remained the philosophy of the interpreting staff at NCOD. As a result of hosting interns from various interpreter preparation programs, a NCOD staff interpreter requested that the same type of experience be arranged for her. She had specific skill building in mind, i.e. developing use of classifiers in the scientific curriculum. In 1984, NCOD began offering this experience, then called *practicum*, to its employees. Experienced interpreters were called *master interpreters* and the participants were called *practicum interpreters*. Our program has been in operation for over 10 years evolving to the current mentorship for the working interpreters of NCOD. Recently, we published our first handbook.

Criteria for Mentor Selection

Mentors must meet the following criteria:

- employment with the NCOD for a minimum of one year
- achievement of level 3 or above on the NCOD pay scale
- approval of the mentorship team
- demonstration of knowledge of the requirements for a successful interpretation
- reliability in attendance/work record
- ability to work well with others
- completion of an approved diagnostic training for mentors
- model and explain the policies of the NCOD and procedures of classroom interpreting
- assist other interpreters in improving their interpreting skills and professional behavior by modeling the necessary skills
- conduct training seminars on various aspects of interpreting offered by the NCOD
- currently improve their own interpreting skills by working with another mentor interpreter, reading professional journals, attending seminars and meetings sponsored by professional organizations
- function as an exemplary interpreter to the university community. Be regarded as a model practitioner to interpreting colleagues
- possess or be a candidate for the currently recognized professional certification

Role of a Mentor

The mentor should be able to explain the policies of NCOD, procedures of classroom interpreting and respond to questions and concerns of the mentee. During the mentorship process, mentors provide the following services: diagnosis of interpreting skills, goal setting, provision of alternative suggestions for skill enhancement, and professional behavior. Mentors are expected to conduct seminars on various aspects of the interpreting process. The NCOD offers bi-monthly seminars, an annual three day symposium and various special programs that mentors are expected to attend. Mentors often request an opportunity to improve their own mentoring skills by becoming a mentee.

Mentor Training

Mentors may train by observing another mentorship process. They may request that another mentor observe them working with a mentee and provide feedback. Additionally, mentors are required to attend an annual diagnostic training session titled, "How To Mentor". Mentors are strongly encouraged to attend the Regional Interpreter Training Consortium's Mentor Training Program to enhance their skills. The mentorship team meets approximately three times per semester to discuss strategies.

Program Participation

The NCOD has approximately 11 mentors and 40 mentees each semester. Encouraging interpreters to participate in the program is easy and the experience of private, individualized training from experienced mentors is an inspiring learning opportunity. Further, the mentorship experience is an entire semester, free of charge and provides in-service credit toward a pay increase. Mentorships may also be customized to the interpreter's needs, such as, theater or conference mentorships.

Participants

Mentorship participants must be employees of the NCOD. For the new employee, mentoring provides an excellent orientation to CSUN. After the initial mentorship experience, employees may continue the program. Priority is placed on new employees, while seasoned interpreters may work on Sign-to-English skills or prepare for the R. I. D. evaluations.

Program Structure

The mentorship experience begins with the mentee arranging a pre-mentorship diagnostic videotape. The mentee may provide his/her own tape, allowing a chronological study of individual progress, or NCOD will provide a videotape. Deadlines for completion of tapes are strictly enforced. Interpreters failing to meet the deadline lose their reservation for a mentorship.

Two weeks prior to the start of the semester, all mentors meet and are assigned a mentee. The mentors receive the mentee's videotape and are briefed on the background of the mentee. Mentors then watch the videotape and diagnose the production of the mentee in order to prepare goals and objectives. One week prior to the start of the semester, a mentorship orientation is held. All first time participants are expected to

attend for a full introduction to the mentorship experience. The meeting encompasses training that includes the full benefits of mentoring, including modeling of the mentorship process and tips on notetaking and observing. Following this training, mentors and mentees are introduced and meet individually. Key points of this first meeting include:

- discussion and goal setting
- completing the mentorship contract
- expectations
- reviewing the diagnostic tape
- strategies for the interpreting assignment
- establish a weekly meeting schedule

Mid-semester, mentors meet to discuss areas of concern, training techniques, strategies for successful interpretation processes and the progress of their mentees. At the end of the semester, mentees arrange to make a post-mentorship diagnostic videotape. This will be reviewed by the mentor to determine achievement of previously stated goals and to establish new goals for future training. This review will be made in writing, placed in the mentee's file, and a copy is mailed to the mentee.

Conclusion

Although each interpreter service program will have its own goals for its interpreters, the NCOD Mentorship Program has proven to be an invaluable training tool. We encourage you to consider establishing a mentoring process at your institution. We will be happy to assist you.

For further information, please contact:

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