

## **Project Deaf Prep**

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### **Overview of the College**

Pikes Peak Community College is a comprehensive community college located in Colorado Springs, Colorado. With an enrollment of over 7,000 students, it is the second-largest community college in the state. The college offers courses and degrees at four major sites in the Colorado Springs area, three local military bases, more than 100 out-of-state and out-of-country military sites, and numerous international sites. Pikes Peak emphasizes international education, multi-media instruction, and programs supporting Deaf and hard of hearing individuals. As a HUB of the Western Region Outreach Center and Consortia, it serves as the *Peak Regional Resource Center on Deafness* for Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico.

### **The Pressing Issue**

#### **Our Problem**

Pikes Peak Community College is an open-door college – by philosophy as well as by legislative mandate. We strive to be a student's first, as well as last, chance at higher education. This is a mixed blessing. It allows students to enter who might not be ready for postsecondary education. This has been the case with numerous Deaf and hard of hearing students during the college's 30-year history.

Community colleges are the only entities in Colorado authorized to deliver postsecondary developmental (remedial) instruction. These classes were often the classes of choice for Deaf and hard of hearing students who entered Pikes Peak under-prepared for postsecondary-level work.

We noticed that Deaf students would enter developmental classes such as ENG 030, be provided with excellent interpreters, work very hard, get ample tutoring, and still fail. This failure happened not once, but repeatedly, until it finally seemed that Deaf students were choosing developmental studies as their major course of study! We had assumed that 1 + 1 = 2: one motivated Deaf student plus one qualified interpreter equaled successful access to education. We were faced with the fact that this was not the case.

#### **The Need**

Pikes Peak Community College simply did not have an appropriate instructional methodology for Deaf students who lacked basic competence in English, mathematics, critical thinking, resource management and life skills. Further investigation revealed that the problem we were facing was also being experienced by other colleges, Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind. Deaf students were graduating from high school and leaving for Gallaudet or NTID, only to return in 6 to 12 months because they were under-prepared. Vocational Rehabilitation counselors were having difficulty placing and keeping Deaf individuals in productive jobs because of their lack of basic skills.

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<sup>1</sup> Pikes Peak Community College is a hub of the Western Region Outreach Center & Consortia (WROCC).

## The Response

### **Project Deaf Prep**

The college and the Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind (CSDB) gathered a variety of agencies to form a partnership that would address this problem. Those involved in this effort were: Pikes Peak Community College, the Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind, Colorado Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Pikes Peak Center on Deafness, and the Pikes Peak Mental Health Center.

A task force made up of members of each of these organizations, conducted planning meetings for approximately six months. The task force determined the parameters for this project and designed a rough outline for curriculum. They wanted the project to be:

- A cooperative, multi-agency effort;
- In an adult environment, rather than high school; and
- Held in a Deaf-friendly agency.

They wanted the curriculum to be:

- Flexible and individualized based on authentic assessment of the Deaf student's needs;
- Applied to the Deaf student's chosen occupation;
- One which places behavioral as well as academic demands on the student(s); and
- Taught by Deaf instructors in sign language.

The curriculum consists of:

- American Sign Language Levels I – IV;
- Remedial English Levels I – IV;
- Remedial Mathematics Levels I – IV;
- Study Skills;
- Critical Thinking; and
- Resource Management.

At the end of the task force's work, the college held an open forum for the Deaf community to evaluate the progress to date. Feedback from the community was positive and encouraging. As a result, a four-semester program called *Deaf Prep* was adopted and advertised around the community. This program accepts (1) Deaf high school students who are in their junior or senior year; (2) Deaf high school students who have completed their credits for graduation but are not ready to terminate their connection with their high school; and (3) adults who need remediation in basic skills. Students receive thorough and comprehensive testing to determine their appropriate placement in the curriculum, discuss career options and expectations with an advisor, and prepare an individualized instructional plan.

### **Successes to Date**

We anticipated an enrollment of eight to ten students. However, on the first day of class, 17 students showed up. The enrollment greatly surpassed expectations. The faculty support has been amazing. Deaf instructors from the community were willing to step in and participate in the development of this program.

The community support has been no less amazing. The Pikes Peak Sertoma Club provided a scholarship fund for students attending *Deaf Prep*, and the college stepped up and allowed us to use the indirect cost allocation from a grant to support students. The local school districts and the Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind were quick to send students to the program and provide any additional support we needed.

Perhaps the greatest support, however, came from the students themselves. They threw themselves into what they knew was a pilot program. They participated with enthusiasm and soaked up the instruction like sponges. They provided a rewarding, yet challenging, student population.

The 17 students represented a cross-section of the Deaf community in Colorado. There were recent high school graduates, single mothers who had been in the workforce at one time, high school dropouts, and successful Deaf adults who had “made it” despite mastery of basic skills.

### **The Nitty Gritty**

Students who enroll in *Deaf Prep* become full-time students at Pikes Peak Community College. A full course load is 17 semester hours of non-transferable credit with tuition of approximately \$1,000 per semester.

This tuition is paid in a variety of ways: (1) students pay themselves, or get federal financial aid; (2) parents pay; (3) CSDB funds its students through their IDEA grant; (4) Vocational Rehabilitation pays through case services dollars; and, finally, (5) local school districts pay for this as part of their transition programming. Some districts encourage students who are eligible for *Deaf Prep* to “walk” with their graduating class, but the school districts hold the students’ diplomas. They continue to receive state special education money as well as their per-pupil-operating-revenue until the students complete *Deaf Prep* or become 21 years old. This allows them to pay the college tuition and have money left to provide additional transition or school-to-career services to the students.

### **Who Came to Deaf Prep?**

#### **Meet Jeanette**

Jeanette is a single mother of two children in her mid-thirties. She came to college right out of high school and did not have a successful experience. She was overwhelmed by the academic requirements at the college and felt out of place. When she heard of *Deaf Prep* she was excited, but was fearful of *another* failure.

After three or four weeks in *Deaf Prep*, Jeanette blossomed like a flower. She became much more self-confident and began to excel in the academic components of the program. She also became the class “mother,” providing inspiration, encouragement and an occasional scolding to the other, younger students. She has also become a liaison for the students with the Deaf community. She sees to it that the students are aware of and involved with community events. Her natural leadership qualities have emerged, and *Deaf Prep* has provided an opportunity for her to exercise them.

#### **Meet Tanya**

Tanya is a 21-year-old woman with a cochlear implant. She has had some serious emotional dysfunction regarding her identity as a person and as a member of the Deaf community. Lacking mastery of basic academic and life skills, she had a less-than-stellar high school career and has remained under-employed since graduating.

After one year in the program, Tanya is doing well. The program referred her to a counselor who is fluent in sign language and has had years of experience with Deaf clients. Tanya has thrived in this environment, developing a real sense of self. She has mastered some basic skills in sign language, English and math.

#### **Last, But Not Least, Meet Ken**

Ken was a senior at the Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind. He had tried a vocational program at the college and met with utter failure. Counselors at the school had low expectations for Ken. He was viewed as a “wild child.” Ken’s own goals were unclear. He was certain of what he did not want to do, but had no idea what he desired in life.

He, too, has succeeded in *Deaf Prep*. While not one of the academic “stars,” Ken holds his own. He is considering a degree in physical education and will take his first “mainstreamed” class at the college next fall.

### **What Does the Future Hold?**

#### **What's Next?**

The next step for *Deaf Prep* includes a curriculum refinement process. Based on the successes and failures of the 1997-98 school year, this curriculum will be revised and prepared for approval by the college curriculum committee. The college continues to seek additional qualified instructors. An instructor must not only be Deaf, but have a passion for working with students at the developmental level. That is a formidable task.

We are also looking for more partners, additional living arrangements and, of course, more students. Our desire is to open this to the region, grow, and make the curriculum and a guidebook available to other schools desiring to serve this population.

The program has been successful. The faculty are in the process of compiling quantifiable data regarding student improvement. We are pleased to be involved with a program, which will have such a lasting impact on the lives of students and, eventually, on the delivery of postsecondary education to Deaf and hard of hearing students.