

Let's Talk Notetaking – A Team Approach

Maureen Brady
Kathy Earp
Kathy Smith

Camden County College¹
Blackwood, New Jersey

Theresa White
Dina Rancourt

Rochester Institute of Technology
National Technical Institute for the Deaf
Rochester, New York

Abstract

Notetaker coordinators from the National Technical Institute for the Deaf in Rochester, New York and Camden County College MidAtlantic Post-Secondary Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Blackwood, New Jersey addressed issues relating to the provision of notetaking services to deaf and hard of hearing students in post-secondary settings. The importance of working together as a team in an attempt to provide the highest quality of support services was stressed. A descriptive comparison of these two institutions with distinct size variations provided a framework that demonstrated the effective use of the same notetaking service system. A description of all the consumers as well as support staff was provided. Discussion focused on two principles of management: institutional commitment and the training and retention of notetakers. Guidelines regarding fundamental notetaking management focused on three principal components of institutional commitment: financial, philosophical, and policy/procedures. The institutional commitment component focused primarily on financial support. The training and retention aspect related to fundamental principles, specific retention strategies, overall quality of the service experienced by the consumers, and the quality control system for the notes produced. The remaining time was dedicated to questions and answers and establishing a network of notetaking service providers.



Fundamentals of Notetaking Management Systems

In order to provide excellent notetaking services, it is necessary to have an institutional commitment to quality. There are three basic fundamentals of management that need to be addressed when establishing a notetaking service in any educational institution. These are financial commitment, philosophical commitment, and commitment to policy/procedures.

Financial. The educational institution must be willing to make a financial commitment to the center or department responsible for providing the notetaking services. These costs include remuneration for notetakers and for

the notetaker coordinator, money for supplies (paper/pens), cost of duplication and maintenance of duplicating equipment, office space for notetaker coordinator, and office equipment. These costs will vary according to the size of the program and the number of students requiring the service.

Philosophical. The Americans for Disabilities Act requires that deaf and hard of hearing students have equal access to educational services. As educators and service providers we need to consider this question, “Will our institution do only what is specifically required by law, or will we make a commitment to go beyond basic requirements and provide a standard of services that will enhance the quality of education that our students receive?”

Policy/procedures. Some educational institutions are *service-driven* so that the student is responsible for initiating the request for support services, in this case notetaking. Other institutions have support services readily available and the student can choose to utilize all or some of those services. In both cases, certain policies must be implemented for proper record keeping and efficient scheduling of notetaking services. It is also necessary to have a standard attendance policy established for the student as well as the notetaker. A decision must be made concerning remuneration for notetakers. A question that often arises in this area is that of pay vs. volunteer. Finally, there must be procedures in place for providing consistent and comprehensive training of notetakers. Each of these areas of policy/procedure will be addressed later in this report.

The Notetaking Team

In describing the notetaking team, an analogy can be made to a baseball team. When people attend a baseball game they usually have one main purpose for going: to watch their team win. Most of us know, however, that much of the hardest work goes on behind the scenes. The team’s success requires a collaborative effort from everyone involved: fans, managers and players. It is that way with notetaking also. Let’s identify the notetaking team: who’s on first?

First, in any market or service providing agency, you need a market demand. There must be people who have a need to be met. In baseball, that would be the fans. In providing notetaking services, it is the deaf and hard of hearing student. Students come to us with a need for quality notes, so who will meet this need?

“If you build it they will come,” is a line from the movie *Field of Dreams*. Who are the dreamers and developers? In baseball, quite often, it is the owner of the team. The director and administrator of the educational institution’s deaf/special populations center are responsible for establishing and providing funding for a quality notetaking service.

Once the notetaking service has been established, there needs to be someone to direct the daily activities relating to notetaking, like a head coach. This would be the notetaking coordinator. The notetaking coordinator is responsible for keeping the notetaking service running smoothly. This position requires a person with excellent management skills.

The notetaker coordinator cannot do this job alone. Just like a head coach needs assistant coaches, the notetaking coordinator requires assistance from other staff in order to provide quality notetaking services to the students. Those who assist may be a secretary, an interpreter, or a copy assistant (someone responsible only for copying notes). The assistants can help with training notetakers, copying notes, recruiting, general office work, and so forth.

Of course, the most obvious members of the team are the players themselves, in this case the notetakers. The goal is to provide training for the notetakers and back-up notetakers which will enable them to take high quality notes and to make the classroom lectures and information accessible to the deaf and hard of hearing student body.

¹ Camden County College is the Northeast Technical Assistance Center (NETAC) site for New Jersey.

Last, but certainly not least, on the notetaking team are the instructors. They, like the umpires, call the game. It is the classroom instructor who can provide both the student and the notetaker with valuable feedback as to the quality and best use of the classroom notes.

The deaf and hard of hearing students, the center director and administration, the notetaker coordinator, the interpreters, secretaries, copy assistants, the notetakers, and the classroom instructors all make up the notetaking team. The team includes the people behind the scenes as well as the players. Each one is a vital link to the ultimate success of the team.

Notetaker Coordinator Responsibilities

The person(s) coordinating notetaking services must handle a myriad of responsibilities. These responsibilities include, but are not be limited to, the following tasks:

- Recruiting
- Interviewing
- Hiring
- Training
- Evaluating
- Rehiring/terminating
- Data management
- Liaison activities
- Developing/maintaining process for handling notes

Recruitment

Certain strategies for recruitment of notetakers have been proven successful. The following are suggested as resources in the recruiting process.

Student employment office. The educational institution may have an office or center where students apply for part- or full-time work. These students may also be part of a co-op and in need of work experience in order to earn college credits.

Instructors/department referrals. Classroom instructors can often recommend students they know who have the necessary requirements to be notetakers. Deans and department heads can also make excellent referrals.

Honor societies. Most colleges and educational institutions have an honor society on campus. These students are highly motivated and are often required to perform certain community service activities as part of their honors program.

College newspaper. Advertisements should be placed in the college newspaper. This ad should list specific qualifications for the notetaking position.

Referrals from notetakers. A database can be established listing names/sources who have been referred by notetakers who are currently employed. It can also include names of students who have expressed an interest in becoming notetakers. Experienced notetakers provide valuable reference and resource information.

Interpreter training program. A valuable source for potential notetakers is the interpreter training program. Some institutions are fortunate enough to have an interpreter training program on campus. If that is the case, these students are highly motivated and are an excellent resource for the notetaking program.

Flyers. Flyers should be eye-catching, brief, and to the point. Include all requirements, any perks, and the name and phone number of the person to contact. These flyers should be posted before the semester begins and should

also be sent to the college newspaper to be included as a recruitment advertisement. Flyers can also be mailed to any former or potential notetakers.

Qualifications

Another aspect of recruitment is the consideration of the notetaker's qualifications. In order to provide the deaf and hard of hearing students with quality notetaking services, it is necessary to establish certain qualifications for the notetaker position. Although some of these qualifications seem to be common knowledge, it is necessary to be specific when recruiting potential notetakers. The qualifications listed here are suggested as guidelines for recruiting/hiring. Applicants should:

1. Have legible handwriting.
2. Maintain a grade point average of 3.0 or above.
3. Have knowledge of class content in which they'll be taking notes.
4. Be willing to work with deaf and hard of hearing students.
5. Be coachable.
6. Be dependable.

Paid Versus Volunteer

There is some question regarding paid versus volunteer status when it comes to filling notetaking positions in the educational institution. There are many reasons for this. Perhaps there is a small program with a limited budget and few deaf and hard of hearing students. In this case adjustments can be made to satisfy the need to limit spending, provide some type of remuneration for the notetaker, and still provide quality services for the deaf and hard of hearing students in the program.

There are certain benefits to paying notetakers who work for the providers of the notetaking service.

- Paying notetakers ensures quality control. Many well meaning people will be happy to take notes for free just to help out deaf students. However this does not ensure that the quality of the notes will be acceptable or that the notetakers will continue to show up on a regular basis. By paying notetakers you are better able to monitor the quality and regularity of the notes. Paid notetakers will receive a job description.
- Another benefit of paying notetakers is that when you pay them, you can also require that they receive training. Mandatory training will absolutely enhance the quality of service and overall performance the notetakers in your center.
- Notetakers who are paid will make more of a commitment to their notetaking responsibilities. They will also feel more like members of the team, thus taking a deeper interest in the students for whom they provide the notes.
- Paying the notetakers will help them to recognize the importance of their role as part of the educational team. They will feel that their service is of value.
- An extremely beneficial result of paid versus volunteer notetakers is increased retention. Notetakers who work and are paid for one semester often request to be hired back for the next semester. The added benefit is that you have notetakers who know the system, have completed training, have classroom experience, and most likely have developed a rapport with deaf and hard of hearing students.

Training Notetakers

Proper training of the notetakers will enhance the quality of your notetaking service and alleviate potential problems. The training aspect of the notetaking service requires a great deal of time and effort from the notetaker coordinator and other assistants who work for the deaf and hard of hearing program. However, the time and effort put into developing a notetaker training workshop will provide lasting rewards for the program. Notetakers who have completed training will become assets to the program and will produce a higher standard of notetaking services to the deaf and hard of hearing students. It is recommended that notetakers be compensated for the time they are involved in the training process. Below are some other reasons why training is important.

Training develops confidence. Training provides guidelines and procedures for notetakers to follow. Notetakers who understand these guidelines and know what is expected of them will in most cases act more confidently.

Training provides for quality assurance. By providing training you are also making provision for certain standards of quality. There may be notetakers who cannot or will not follow these standards. Those who wish to continue will make the effort to satisfy the quality standards.

Training includes a description of the nature of the notetaking position. A job description should be developed for the notetaking position. Along with the job position there should be a paraprofessional code of ethics. A model of a notetaker job description and paraprofessional code of ethics have been developed and may be obtained by contacting any of the presenters of this presentation.

Training helps to ensure retention of notetakers. One of the most critical elements of a successful notetaking program is establishing a high rate of retention. Training provides the means for incorporating notetakers into the educational support team. Notetakers who have gone through a training process will not only perform more effectively, they will also be more likely to continue to take notes and to help with recruitment and training of future notetakers. The topic of retention deserves more attention, and so it will be the final topic in this presentation.

Evaluation

The notetaker coordinator is responsible for designing a system for evaluating the quality of notes provided to the deaf and hard of hearing students. It is essential to have a constant and effective stream of communication among the educational support team. For this reason a system must be set in place to monitor the quality of the notes and to identify and address potential problems. As mentioned earlier, all deaf and hard of hearing students are given the opportunity to evaluate the notes that they receive in their classes. This is done anonymously with an evaluation form distributed at least once each semester. Serious problems should immediately be brought to the attention of the notetaker coordinator. Here are some steps that can be taken to help in the evaluation process. The notetaker coordinator should adhere to the following procedures:

- Evaluate the notes each semester.
- Receive feedback from the faculty, interpreters, students, and tutors.
- Keep copies of notes on file for each semester.
- Review completed evaluation forms submitted by deaf and hard of hearing students.
- Have regular contact with students and notetakers.
- Provide awareness training and educational opportunities for support staff and faculty.

Retention

One of the final and most critical aspects of a successful notetaking program is retention. Notetakers who see themselves as part of the educational support team and have done an effective job are assets to the notetaking program. The ability to keep effective notetakers throughout several semesters is an indication of a strong notetaking program. There are several strategies for retaining notetakers. These strategies serve as incentives for notetakers. Some of these include:

- Desirable pay levels.
- Free auditing of college courses.
- Opportunities to meet interesting students and develop friendships.
- Opportunities for scholarships.
- Recognition awards and/or certificates.
- Parties, receptions, food!
- Co-op and/or job references.
- Community service recognition.

Establishment of a Notetaking Network

One of the goals of this presentation was to establish a network for professionals who are interested in working together towards enhancing notetaking services in educational institutions throughout the country. We are currently in the process of establishing a notetaking network and mentoring program. We look forward to hearing from those of you who are currently involved in providing notetaking services or who have an interest in establishing a notetaking service.



Author note:

The handouts distributed at this presentation are available upon request by contacting the presenters at either Camden County College or the Rochester Institute of Technology.