

Foreword and Acknowledgments

Educators have seen significant changes during recent years regarding the provision of services to students who are deaf and hard of hearing. Disability support service offices have been affected by changes within the student population, within the institution itself, within the state system, and within the federal government. Recent legislation such as IDEA, the ADA, and the reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act have further impressed the need to develop good working relationships between and among groups of service providers. *Empowerment Through Partnerships: PEPNet '98* provided a unique opportunity for professionals to interact with colleagues to learn more about best practices and effective strategies for meeting the needs of students at the postsecondary level who are deaf and hard of hearing. The conference offered participants the opportunity to identify and implement theories and practices of managing and delivering effective support services.

The Postsecondary Education Program Network (PEPNet) developed biennial conference as a activity to bring together professionals from across the country who are interested in enhancing the quality of postsecondary educational opportunities for students who are deaf and hard of hearing. The conference offered sessions that were of interest to disability support services staff, administrators, counselors, interpreters, tutors, and faculty members from developmental studies as well as college-level courses. Interested secondary-level faculty and staff and adult service providers from rehabilitation agencies and centers for independent living were also encouraged to participate. Students in related professional areas such as rehabilitation counseling, interpreting, deaf education, student personnel services, social work, counseling, and psychology were also welcomed at the conference. The conference featured sessions that offered practical, replicable strategies for providing services to students who are deaf or hard of hearing and attending postsecondary educational programs.

While this was the first *national* conference that focused on postsecondary education and students who are deaf and hard of hearing sponsored by the Postsecondary Education Programs Network (PEPNet), the biennial conference has been a tradition in the Southern Region. Initiated in the mid-1980s, seven previous regional conferences were held in Knoxville, Tennessee. The Postsecondary Education Consortium at The University of Tennessee once again hosted the conference in the Southern Region.

The response to the conference was phenomenal. More than 400 participants came from across the United States as well as Canada to learn new information, share their experiences with their colleagues, and establish linkages with other service providers. This conference also served as a link between traditional postsecondary programs for students who are deaf and hard of hearing and the numerous colleges and universities across the country who strive to provide quality services even though they might not offer a program specifically designed for deaf and hard of hearing students. Including service providers from vocational rehabilitation and related community agencies further enabled the development of networks and partnerships so that the needs of students could be better addressed.

As a result of this conference, we may feel more prepared as we look toward the future and deal with the changes as they occur. Surely one of the effects of the conference has been to more firmly establish collaborative efforts between professionals sharing a common goal: the most effective educational programs for students who are deaf and hard of hearing. Instead of operating in isolation, we can create opportunities to share knowledge and experiences to do so.

This conference would not have been possible without the involvement of many individuals and the support of their sponsoring institutions. The confidence and support shown by the directors of the four PEPNet centers is greatly appreciated. All of the members of the conference planning committee worked hard during the past year: Dave Buchkoski, Evelyn Cederbaum, Terri Goldstein, Karen Hopkins, Debra Wilcox Hsu, Allisun Kale, and Gary Sanderson. So much of the work behind the scenes would not have been successful without the hard work of the staff members Sherlea Dony, Charles Johnstone, Melinda Kerr, Lisa McFall, Kathy Sullivan Smith, Patricia Tate, Rhoshawnda Turner, Vicki Wolfe, and Paula Zack. Numerous volunteers from each of the four PEPNet centers, state sites, hubs, affiliate programs, and “friends of

PEPNet” offered their services, making this truly a collaborative effort. Ongoing support from the U. S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services enabled us to continue outreach and technical assistance efforts and reach an even larger audience than in the past. Of course, the interest and enthusiasm of all of the presenters and participants made this conference a very meaningful event. To everyone involved, thank you very much.

PEPNet consists of the four Regional Postsecondary Education Centers for Individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing: Midwest Center for Postsecondary Outreach, Northeast Technical Assistance Center, Postsecondary Education Consortium, and Western Region Outreach Center and Consortia. The mission of the Network is to promote opportunities to coordinate and collaborate in creating effective technical assistance to postsecondary educational institutions providing access and accommodation to individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. The members of PEPNet promote quality educational activities and outreach services through nationwide collaboration and information exchange, and serve as a clearinghouse for resources and referrals. The four centers are funded through an agreement with the U.S. Department of Education. This publication was developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) and produced through a cooperative agreement between The University of Tennessee and OSERS. The contents herein do not necessarily represent the Department of Education’s policies nor are endorsed by the Federal Government.

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