

Section IV  
Best Practices



# Job Placement Services Enhancement Model

*Catherine Burland*  
LaGuardia Community College  
Program for Deaf Adults

## Abstract

The following is a description of a Job Placement Services Enhancement model program that the Program for Deaf Adults at LaGuardia Community College, City University of New York, developed to serve students who are deaf or hard of hearing. It is hopeful that this model program will help to improve the employment outcomes of deaf and hard of hearing students who attend mainstream institutions. This model project was funded through a three-year federal grant from US Dept. of Education (OSERS).

This model project involved the collaborative efforts of two departments: The College's Job Placement Office (JPO), whose database includes over 2000 companies; and Program for Deaf Adults, which serves nearly 45 degree Deaf and hard of hearing students annually. Together a Deafness Specialist and a designated Job Placement Counselor created a series of training workshops for deaf students; adapted a handbook to include accommodative information for deaf and hard of hearing students; created a resource manual for the job counselors; and developed a handbook and a videotape for the prospective employers of deaf and hard of hearing individuals. They also modified the mainstream office to meet the job placement needs of deaf and hard of hearing students by making the office physically accessible and by orienting the JPO staff members to deafness-related issues. In the second year of the three-year grant activities, a second workshop was also

given to JPO counselors, due to the turnover of staff. It is important to note that we continue the orientation from time to time. The Deafness Specialist was able to assist JPO in identifying and recruiting potential staff who were well-versed in Title 1 of the American with Disabilities Act, who understood the various communication modes used by deaf individuals, and who were fluent in the use of ASL.

A reference manual was developed for the use of JPO counselors, which covered different information pertaining to the interviewing and hiring of deaf and hard of hearing students. A TTY has been installed in the JPO and still is being used in good condition. The JPO handbook, modified to include deaf and hard of hearing students to be used as a guide to the JPO services, also included disclosure guidelines and accommodations available to these students.

The Deafness Specialist and the JPO counselor have met on a regular basis to review progress of project activities, which included preparation of students' surveys, conducted in year one, and follow-ups of the questionnaire responses. A focus group of Deaf and hard of hearing students was also formed in the second year to address the concerns and issues that the students have raised.

The major indicators preventing students from using the JPO services, as cited in the survey and focus group outcomes, pertained to the JPO's lack of communication access and a limited awareness of issues related to working with deaf individuals as well as the concerns related to the employers who are seeking applicants. The survey also showed the need for these students

to attend a series of workshops, which covered the range from job-readiness skills to self advocacy to entitlements (SSI and other fiscal incentives).

The questionnaire was also sent out to the employers who are selected from the JPO's database files, and a handful (approximately 5%) have replied requesting for more information pertaining to the communication tips, accommodation and strategies to meet the needs of Deaf and hard of hearing job holders.

The handbook and videotape, targeting the employers, have been developed in the third-year of the grant for the purpose of aiding the employers who are scheduled to interview Deaf and hard of hearing students. This effort was a result of the employers' and deaf students' response to the questionnaires, which stressed the need to educate and sensitize the companies who may be hesitant to hire this group. The videotape portrayed three different deaf employees communicating and interacting with hearing supervisors and colleagues as well as an expert on the reasonable accommodations in the job setting. In this packet, possible employers' barriers to employment of deaf and hard of hearing students have been noted and addressed in the following areas:

- Attitudinal barriers and fears
- Lack of understanding regarding Deafness/Culture
- Potentially biased pre-employment testing procedures
- Concerns regarding phone usage on the job
- Concerns regarding safety on the job
- Negative first impression of Deaf job seekers in person, on the phone via Relay Services, TTY, or phone interpreters.

At the end of the funding period a significant increase in the number of students/graduates who were seen by the JPO counselors (by 50%); and an increase of these students being placed in the competitive market (66%) was noted. A majority of these students who visited the office were seeking part-time work while attending classes here at LaGuardia. The College students are required by their majors to be placed in the Cooperative Education internship. This is usually beneficial, as the companies hire a majority of our students who they interned with them. Some of the students continued their education after their graduations by transferring to a four-year college.

The JPO Director who was appointed during the funding period has been instrumental in these project activities and stated that he wishes to continue the work that has been begun as his staff has learned a great deal about the deaf culture and the "mistrust" many students have about the office. He agreed it is critical to develop a method to integrate the JPO into the minds of the students/graduates.

If you are interested in the packet of the Employers' handbook and videotape, please feel free to contact me at <Katb@lagcc.cuny.cuny>.