

Section VII  
Program Development



# Creating WIN/WIN Situations: Innovative Management of Interpreter Services at a Mid-Sized University

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## Abstract

The University of Minnesota Duluth (UMD) has experimented with creatively managing their interpreting staff using a “WIN/WIN” strategy. “WIN/WIN” stands for What Interpreters Need/What Institutions Need to provide quality services to Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind students. This workshop compared the needs of the institution with the needs of the interpreter and explored how to create a “WIN/WIN” program. Particular focus was given to scheduling needs, resources and collaboration, interpreter wellness, and professionalism. The story of the University of Minnesota Duluth’s program development was told and time was given for questions and situational discussions.

## Win/Win Definitions

WIN/WIN stands for “What Institutions Need/What Interpreters Need.” This approach examines the administrative and legal needs of the institution with the employment and working condition needs of the interpreters. This leads to a more balanced and mutually respectful plan for interpreting service provision. At the University of Minnesota Duluth this approach has been implemented in interpreter management with apparent success as measured by administrator interviews, interpreter retention rates and job satisfaction ratings. A WIN/WIN approach will

positively enhance the campus environment and foster a sense of inclusion and respect.

## Institutional/Administrative Needs

Local administrators were interviewed, and interview results indicated that issues were grouped into three major areas: legal requirements, cost factors, and operating processes.

### *Legal Issues*

Administrators were unanimous in their need to have experts available for consultation. Depending on the campus community size, this need could be met by in-house staff or by experts at other colleges or community agencies. Most administrators had no issue with the fundamental legal requirement to provide interpreting services to students who are deaf. Interestingly, the notion of reasonable accommodation was interpreted in different manners at different levels of administration. Administrators who work closer with the day to day operations saw this as being very student oriented. That is, their frustrations had more to do with the determination of reasonableness with student behavior factored in (timeliness of requests, students’ understanding of accommodation, etc.).

### *Cost Factors*

Controlling and predicting interpreter costs was high on the list of concerns for many administra-

tors. At a higher administrative level, “reasonable” often became synonymous with cost. Frustration came in the need to balance the financial needs of several programs under their administrative responsibility. Again, some administrators equate reasonable-ness with the actual budget liability. Another issue among administrators is to have open communication with disability service staff. They felt it is vital to have a consistent reporting system so that administrators may be informed of accommodation needs, alternatives, and options. An “early warning system” for interpreter cost increases would be appreciated by administrators. While the interviewees generally understood that interpreter costs estimates can change rapidly and radically, they felt that whatever level of predictability (or warning) the disability service office could provide would be valuable to avoid surprises and the hostility that may result.

#### *Operating Processes*

Most administrators were supportive of staff interpreters and wanted to look at ways to make them more involved in their greater campus community. Again middle-level administrators, who operated closer to interpreters on a daily basis, saw having staff interpreters as a great benefit to the campus community. Those who had worked with both staff and freelance or contract interpreters believed that staff interpreters brought increased consistency, reliability, and interpreting skill specific to the postsecondary level. Professional staffing was seen as important: having the right people in the right jobs. Administrators also expressed concern about assuring that policies and procedures for students were fair and equitable and that staff policies and procedures for interpreting staff also were consistent and fair.

### Interpreter Needs

Interpreter Needs were evaluated by distributing a survey to past and present staff interpreters. Their responses indicated several areas of interest. They were grouped into the following headings: Professionalism and Working Conditions.

#### *Professionalism*

The issues with regard to Professionalism fell into three main categories: salary and benefits, Professional Recognition, and Professional Development.

#### *Salary and Benefits*

The issue of salary and benefits was of great concern to most interpreters. It was important to interpreters to be offered fair and equitable rates of pay, consistent with the regional market value of interpreter services. In order for a skilled interpreter to accept an interpreting position in a college setting, the salary and benefits package must be a significant motivator.

#### *Professional Recognition*

Appropriate recognition of staff interpreters was also seen as important to the interpreters surveyed. Staff interpreters in postsecondary settings need to be recognized as professionals. They are service providers who work in a team setting, providing communication access so that faculty and student can interact and continue toward their educational objectives. Staff interpreters are also members of the larger campus community and should be so recognized. Almost all employees at post-secondary institutions have some interaction with the larger campus community. Interpreters interact with the campus community in many ways, some which involve providing service to students and some which don't. With longevity of a staff interpreter position comes familiarity, respect, and recognition of the interpreter as a professional providing valuable service not only to deaf students, but also to the entire campus community.

#### *Professional Development*

Professional development was another priority for staff interpreters at the post-secondary level. Interpreters felt the need for on-going opportunities to continue to improve their interpreting skill, so that they could provide better service to students. Support for staff interpreters pursuing certification was also deemed important for those surveyed. Professional development did not have to be limited to specific interpreting topics. Staff interpreters felt that many types of professional development proved beneficial to their job performance. Computer training, training in other useful technologies, and workshops on human relations, organization, and many other topics presented regularly by university personnel were helpful. To summarize, with regard to professionalism, a post-secondary level staff interpreter position should minimally provide a living wage, a professional level of recognition, and a setting that is conducive to professional growth.

### *Working Conditions*

The three areas of significant concern to respondents were the following: Scheduling, Appropriate and Clear Expectations, and a Healthy Working Environment.

### *Scheduling*

Many staff interpreters preferred a 75% time benefited appointment, which allowed them more options if the interpreter wanted to limit actual interpreting hours or to add interpreting variety through freelancing. UMD interpreters appreciate an open and flexible schedule, which allows for unusual scheduling needs. For example, an interpreter who has a 75% time contract may not work strictly six-hour days, five days a week. They may have a night class one evening and only work three hours another day. Or, they may only work four days or perhaps a split shift, which allows time in the middle of the day to focus on other chosen obligations. It is important to look at the total scheduling needs of the program and the interpreter, not simply the classroom hours. Prep time, breaks, passing time, required paper work, and other miscellaneous duties may also take quite a scheduling toll. The goal is to provide a fair and reasonable schedule, as this will also improve retention of staff interpreters. Strategies must also be found for the unpredictable probability that schedules will change and workloads may vary significantly, even from week to week. Collaborations, special projects, additional duties, and professional development are all possible strategies to handle a reduction in workload. When an unpredicted increase in workload occurs, the institution could offer to augment a 75% interpreters' contract to 100% time, offer an apprentice program to newer ITP grads to work with a staff interpreter, hire more hourly interpreters, or look at schedule changes for students.

### *Appropriate and Clear Expectations*

Communication was of vital importance to the interpreters surveyed. Beginning with the point of hire, interpreter candidates must be fully aware of the nature of the work and the working environment. If the schedule changes quarterly, by semester, or even by month, it must be clearly explained. If interpreters will be expected to work some evenings, weekends, or split shifts, this must be right out on the table. After hire, on-going

communication is important. Regular staff meetings and a clear chain of command were helpful for staff interpreters to be able to discuss working issues and confidently take these issues to the appropriate person or place. Staff interpreters unanimously stated that a high priority was that their supervisor truly understood the interpreters working environment and process and was competent to support their work and handle the difficult issues as they arose.

### *Healthy Working Environment*

Of vital importance to working interpreters is the notion of a pro-actively healthy work environment—not simply a workplace free of physical hazards, but one which actively enhances health and wellness. Two years ago, the UMD Access Center began to implement an innovative program for the interpreting staff called “Interpreter Wellness Program.” This program, in collaboration with the on-campus Department of Life-Fitness, provides staff interpreters with a variety of services and opportunities to help them maintain their personal and professional health. Included in this program were several workshops provided to the interpreting staff on issues related to on-the-job wellness for interpreters. Topics included nutrition, stress reduction, stretching and relaxation, prevention of RMI, and fitness. Staff interpreters were provided with facility passes for the sports complex and were allowed three scheduled sessions with a personal trainer. In addition, they were allowed to use up to 2.25 hours per week of paid work time to be in some kind of fitness/wellness activity.

Another issue, which reflects a commitment to a healthy workplace, is the departmental policy on leaves of absence. Recognizing that all staff, interpreters included, have a real life outside of their workplace and supporting the employee in their real life can be an immeasurable boost to staff retention. When an interpreter needs a leave of absence for health, personal, educational or parental reasons, every effort should be made to allow such a leave. Attitude of the supervisor or co-workers can also have a great impact in this situation. A leave given reluctantly, even to the point of instilling needless guilt for the employee, will be of little value in retaining a good interpreter employee.

## History and Development of the UMD Program

### *About the University of Minnesota, Duluth*

Duluth, Minnesota is a city of 89,000 located on the shores of Lake Superior, approximately 150 miles from the nearest major metropolitan area, the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul. The closest Interpreter Training Programs are located in the Twin Cities. It can be a challenge to recruit and retain qualified interpreters for both the freelance and educational settings in this semi-rural area.

The University of Minnesota Duluth (UMD) has an enrollment of 8,000 students and the number of Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind students enrolled ranges from 2-20. Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind students enrolled at UMD are served through the UMD Access Center. Currently in the Deaf, Hard of Hearing and DeafBlind program, UMD employs four staff interpreters on 75% time, nine month benefited contracts; four part-time, hourly interpreters with no benefits; and one coordinator on a 75% time, twelve month contract.

### The Early Years:

The program began in 1987 when three deaf students enrolled part-time at UMD, and a coordinator was hired for the program. The coordinator position at this time was more akin to a lead interpreter/student counselor. The position was half time, ten months. Other interpreters were hired on an hourly, basis. In 1989 the first benefited interpreter staff position was approved, and an interpreter was hired at 75%, nine-month basis.

The first years of the program were characterized by:

1. Significant time devoted to scheduling due to predominantly hourly (staff or freelance) interpreters.
2. Developing program policies and procedure,s including an interpreter and a student handbook.
3. Educating faculty via instructor letters and info sheets.
4. Advocating for staff positions for interpreters.
5. Counseling/advising students.
6. Learning the ropes of the job.

The learning curve was quite steep during those first few years! Among the things learned early on were:

1. Conflict of interest arose with the coordinator assuming a regular interpreting schedule. Instructor and students alike were confused by the role ambiguity.
2. Policies and procedures had to be equitable for all students – and let the chips fall where they may.
3. Faculty became supportive with consistency of quality service and a minimum of material to read.
4. Life would be much happier for everyone if UMD had staff interpreters!

When the UMD administration was convinced that the University would benefit from staff interpreters, the next challenge was how to hire wisely.

A strategy was designed for hiring interpreting staff. This strategy focused on these key questions:

1. What's the target market?
2. What do interpreters want and need from a job?
3. What does UMD need from staff interpreters?

In short, this was the beginning of the “WIN/WIN” approach to interpreter management!

With these guiding questions in mind, the UMD Access Center was able to build a program that has provided many students with fair, high quality, and consistent interpreting services and has provided to interpreters a healthy, interesting, fair, and flexible work environment. Retention rates for staff interpreters at UMD are quite high. Several UMD interpreters have been employed for more than ten years with the UMD Access Center.

### *Moving On...Current Issues*

While UMD has a solid history in providing quality service to students and quality working environments to interpreters, there are always new challenges on the horizon. UMD now faces many challenges for interpreters and the program. As workloads change and staff levels remain stable, opportunities for collaborations

with other post-secondary institutions arise. Efficiently managing services across institutions becomes a new challenge. Professional development for interpreters continues to be important, and funding sources need to be identified. Support for staff to pursue certification,

mentorships, or other training, such as cued speech training, will also become a need.

At the University of Minnesota Duluth, the Access Center will continue to look beyond traditional management strategies to implement innovative concepts in service management.

### UMD Access Center Program For Deaf, Hard of Hearing and Deaf/Blind Students, 1987-2000

YEAR	TOTAL	DEAF/ SIGN	DEAF BLIND	STAFF	I-HOURS	T/N HOURS	TOTAL # COURSES	STAFF/HRLY INT NUMBER	HIGHLIGHTS
1987-88	3	3	0	0	NC	NC	NC	H-2	Coordinator/counselor/interpreter hired at 50% time, 10-months
1988-89	4	4	0	0	2330	NC	NC	H-4	Developed policy handbooks for interpreters and students
1989-90	6	5	1	0	2898	204/30	NC	1/3**	First benefited interpreter staff position
1990-91	10	7/1*	1	0	3315	246/1417	NC	3/1	Formal notetaking program established, interpreter staffing increases, apprentice interpreter program
1991-92	6	5/1*	1	0	2232	150/420	NC	3/1	Program name change from Hearing Impaired to Deaf/Hard of Hearing
1992-93	10	5	1	0	2273	150/783	NC	3/1** (3)	Lotsa LOAs this year!
1993-94	16	8	1	3	3681	24/1775	63	3/5**	Coordinator position becomes 75%, 12-month
1994-95	14	5	1	2	2784	0	46	3/5**	Program Initiatives
1995-96	14	4	1	0	1392	0	34	3/5**	Interpreters get private office space
1996-97	11	6	2	0	1841	0	29	2/5/2	Interpreter Wellness program proposed
1997-98	9	4	2	0	1794	0	39	3/4	Interpreter Wellness program implemented
1998-99	16	10	2	1	3991	0	67	4/4** (2)	Very "fluid" interpreter scheduling
1999-00 Semesters	13	5/3*	2	1	2121(F) 4000(E)	0	35/16 51 Total	51 Total	4/4 First year under semesters; Interpreter Wellness continuing

\*Collaboration with other colleges during this year

\*\*Staff LOA during this year

NC - not counted