

Other Duties Not Yet Assigned . . . Urban and Rural Interpreters Taking the Initiative

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Abstract

In today's budget-driven institutions, a change in Deaf and hard of hearing student populations can mean the loss of a job. When interpreting hours decline, interpreters in educational settings are assigned a variety of tasks that often are mundane and unrelated to our profession. Repetitive motion injury can prevent interpreters from interpreting on a temporary or permanent basis. To provide greater job security and increase opportunities to improve their skill and knowledge in a variety of areas, we suggest that interpreters become pro-active partners in their offices and recommend to their coordinators or directors other activities which they can coordinate, organize, and implement that will improve their Deaf and Hard of Hearing programs or the Disability Services Program.

Lisa and Gerri are both interpreter coordinators at very different institutions: Lisa works at a small community college in Cheyenne, Wyoming. For nine years, Gerri worked for both a large university and a large college in the Denver metropolitan area. Both positions have evolved a great deal over the course of their employment, largely due to their actively requesting additions to their responsibilities that fit with their personal and professional goals.

Changing role of interpreters. . . why??

Working in a budget-driven environment may drastically affect the number of employees retained when the number of students declines. This is especially true for interpreters when there is a change in the population of Deaf/Hard of Hearing (D/HH) students. Post-secondary institutions often consolidate duties to make efficient use of all available staff.

Interpreters, hoping to increase their job security, should consider further professional development. They can enhance not only their interpreting skills, but additional training can help them achieve a variety of personal and professional goals. Types of additional training will be discussed further in this presentation.

What 'other duties' are we assigned?

To "enhance" job security at the post-secondary level, interpreters might volunteer to assist in the Disability Services Office during downtime. However, without training for more advanced duties, interpreters are frequently assigned menial tasks around the office, i.e. the "yucky ones", such as: copying, filing, grading papers, running errands, shredding papers, an-

swering phones. These tasks may keep an interpreter busy while ingratiating themselves to the office staff; however, these are probably not the skills they want to develop and be permanently assigned in the event the D/HH student population experiences a serious decline.

What 'other duties' do we
WANT to be assigned?

Preferably, interpreters seek duties that are more interesting and use the vast skills that all interpreters inherently possess or can acquire with training. Institutions may well benefit from using interpreters to:

- Tutor or assist with coordinating a tutoring program for D/HH, as well as students with disabilities,
- Develop & present faculty /staff in-service workshops on working with D/HH students, Interpreters, Notetakers, Captionists, and Assistive Listening Devices,
- Develop a faculty/staff handbook on working with D/HH students and interpreters through your office,
- Develop and present workshops for community members and employers involving ADA as related to Deaf individuals,
- Work with junior high and high schools or community resources to recruit more D/HH students,
- Develop transition and/or summer preparation programs for D/HH high school students,
- Coordinate a workshop for area interpreters,
- Develop and coordinate an interpreter mentor program on your campus or in your area,
- Coordinate a workshop for D/HH students to develop skills such as: leadership, job interviewing, making presentations and working with interpreters prior to formal presentation, requesting interpreters, coordinating assistive listening devices, teaching sign language classes, and providing direct services or training for the use of C-Print in the classroom.

Moving Beyond D/HH Services

To investigate these options further, what is the next step? Initially, it is advisable for interpreters to seek additional training from the members of the office staff and become involved with services for students with other disabilities. From office personnel interpreters can learn to coordinate accommodations and provide assistance with notetaking / C-Print services, test accommodations, and books on tape. If interpreters have computer experience, they can be trained in the use and benefits of adaptive computer technology. These newly acquired skills can be made use of to train students with disabilities.

Further, because of their experience in working with faculty and students, interpreters can use their skills to advocate to faculty on behalf of students with disabilities and present faculty and staff workshops regarding accommodations for all students with disabilities.

When an interpreter shows interest and initiative, acquires proper training, and can secure support from the administration, hourly interpreters may find opportunities for advancement within the department. An hourly interpreter can be promoted to staff interpreter with other duties as assigned, advance to Interpreter Coordinator, Disability Specialist, Associate Director of Disability Services Office, Director of Disability Services Office, Dean of the College, and finally retire with full pension and benefits! With proper training and initiative, the personal and professional goals are limitless.

How do we become qualified
for those 'other duties'?

A college education is essential in today's global market. Most postsecondary institutions require interpreters to have at least an associate's degree in interpreting. For further advancement it is advisable to have a bachelor's degree in Interpreting, Deaf Studies, Human Services, Education, or a related field. For administrative positions, interpreters should seek a masters degree in Public Administration, Education, Interpreting, Leadership Training, or Counseling. A doctoral degree may not be necessary unless you wish to become

a Professor, Dean, or Executive Director of a post-secondary institution.

There are also many resources available in the community from which to gain additional skills, knowledge and training in various services for persons with disabilities. PEPNet Conferences/Workshops and the National and Local Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) Workshops provide training in the areas of interpreting and Deaf services. The Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) and ADA seminars provide training in all post-secondary services for students with disabilities. "Closing the Gap" and the CSUN Assistive Technology Conference provide training in adaptive computer technology. For business-oriented advancement, there are organizations such as Career Track who offer seminars to improve administrative/supervisory skills.

How do we get our supervisors to buy in?

Administrators are unlikely to ask interpreters if the interpreters are interested in career advancement. Therefore, as interpreters we must take the initiative! Make yourself known (not notorious!). Volunteer to help, even if it means doing the menial, "yucky" tasks. Don't wait around to be asked. JUST DO IT! Make yourself indispensable. Show more initiative. If you see a gap, fill it! Make your supervisor aware that you are continuing your education, so when you become indispensable, and the program flourishes, your name will be first on the list when they discuss hiring another permanent administrator.

Presenting Your Plan

If a position or program does not exist which meets your needs, look for missing components in your program, investigate what works in other programs, develop a plan and write a proposal. Make sure you have all the details well thought out. Be sure to include the cost/benefit analysis. Then take the plan to the supervisor. Sell yourself and your ideas. Be ready, willing, and able to implement your plan.

You are on your way!

It is easier for a supervisor to implement a new program, if the details are taken care of and the staff is available. Make sure the details come from you and your supervisor knows you are the right person to execute the plan.

More Questions? Give us a call or contact us!

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