

Does No-Show = No Win?

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Abstract

This proposal addressed the need to implement a policy which targets deaf and hard of hearing students who continuously miss class and do not notify the office or service coordinator, specifically regarding sign language interpreters and computer transcription services. The National Center on Deafness modeled its “No-Show” policy and compared and contrasted it with policies of other college institutions. The goal was to identify and implement a working policy that benefits all those involved – students wanting the same freedom as hearing peers and service coordinators trying to utilize limited resources, both fiscal and personnel. Additionally, exercises were provided that proactively sensitized both students and service coordinators to the challenges faced daily with services at the postsecondary education level.

California State University, Northridge (CSUN) is the largest mainstream, liberal arts university in America. The National Center on Deafness (NCOD) at California State University, Northridge has approximately 230 to 250 deaf and hard of hearing students each semester. NCOD is also home to approximately 120 interpreters, 60 notetakers, and 20 captionists. Many disability support services providers also come from institutions with a smaller program for deaf and hard of hearing students. With teamwork and creativity, no-show policies can be implemented at schools with smaller programs.

“No-Show = No Win?” was written and presented to educate professionals about the various no-show policies developed among postsecondary institutions in the United States and the rising controversy from deaf students regarding what they feel are their rights as college students. Many colleges have their own perceptions concerning rules of the school versus students’ rights. The presenters conducted a survey, taking into consideration students’ concerns, and asked service coordinators at postsecondary institutions to provide them with copies of their policies along with what they feel are their programs’ strengths and weaknesses.

Why does NCOD have a No-Show Policy?

NCOD did not impose rules to single out or punish deaf students. Instead, they face limited resources – personnel and financial. Indeed, rules are not set up on a whim to hurt the students; they are designed to maximize use of services. NCOD’s no-show policy enables the administration to provide better services. They enforced a procedure for deaf and hard of hearing students to follow in order to meet everyone’s needs. The Americans with Disabilities Act encourages rules to be applied, as long as the policy has reasonable requirements and consequences.

Staff, under the scrutiny of administrators above them, take caution when providing services to deaf and hard of hearing students and tend to focus on limited resources and a strict budget. Attention to students, their rights, and the services they request are sometimes overlooked, and occasionally disability support services providers lack sensitivity. It is vital that service coordinators and the institutions for whom they work understand the importance of implementing a no-show policy with regard to students’ needs.

Empowerment

Administrators or counselors at postsecondary institutions have the responsibility of providing services to all deaf students on campus and of making sure all deaf students’ needs are met in a reasonable manner. It is perfectly reasonable to have an effective no-show policy, regardless of complaints from students. Minimization of complaints from students is possible, and they can be encouraged to help take responsibility for meeting the needs of all deaf students on campus. No-show policies exist for various reasons, and establishing one should largely benefit all those involved.

Students should feel empowered to take responsibility and successfully advocate for their own educational rights and subsequent workforce settings. Service coordinators should also be sensitive to administrators and their concerns, ensuring that the implemented policy provides fair services to all parties involved while utilizing limited resources. The questions are where to draw the line between advocating for students who want the same rights as hearing students and assisting administrators in distributing service providers fairly amongst many deaf students on campus.

Listed below are some common responses from students in regard to NCOD’s no-show policy.

- “We should have the same privilege as hearing students; they do not have to call the University if they plan to miss class.”
- “It’s my *right* to miss class and to have services. I am deaf, and that’s what the ADA says.”
- “I have to sit down with the counselor and tell them what I did yesterday, but they are not my parents nor my boss. I can do what I want, and if I am late or absent, that is my choice!”

The first approach to implementing a no-show policy is to try and understand what deaf students want. Students at NCOD say the ideal situation would be:

- An educational setting that does not challenge them daily or give them additional responsibilities;
- Meetings with their counselor prior to the beginning of a semester in which the counselor gives them their class schedule;
- No more meetings with a counselor until the following semester or quarter begins (unless special requests are needed or concerns arise);
- No expectations from students after the initial meeting with the counselor;
- Top-level interpreters assigned to all classes;
- Interpreters who stay in class regardless of attendance, late arrivals, or early departures;
- A substitute service provider when one is sick;
- No questions asked of students pertaining to their attendance.

Then, reality kicks in! As much as service coordinators wish the previous conditions for all deaf students, they are not feasible. There are often simply not enough warm bodies. Additionally, there are various levels of skills among interpreters, or an interpreter may not be compatible with a particular student. By implementing a working policy, effective distribution of service providers can occur. Cancellation of services means services for other deaf students. There are rights that come with responsibilities.

NCOD ends up being the training ground for teaching and learning about responsibilities to oneself and others. The self-centered deaf student will naturally assume that the cancellation of her services two hours before class pertains to her deafness and is, therefore, discrimination. Understandably, many deaf students faced ongoing challenges growing up and will expect a modeled center like NCOD to sympathize and structure their policies around nondiscrimination and equal rights. However, what are equal rights when it pertains to responsibilities that involve others? Do deaf students realize that if service providers do not cancel services ahead of time, several other deaf students with sick interpreters are without services? Is this only a “deaf issue,” or is it universal? Consider as an example the hearing woman who schedules an appointment at the dentist’s office and

finds out one week later that she is unable to attend. Unfortunately, she forgets to call to cancel and reschedule. The result is that she is still accountable for the time reserved and legally has to pay, if requested. Another client who needed a root canal could have been scheduled had the woman called. What happens if a person does not show up for jury duty? Again, rights come with responsibilities. Individuals have the right to vote yet the responsibility of educating themselves with reading manuals. They must also go to the poll and vote. Individuals have the right to begin driving at age sixteen, but it comes with responsibilities. The bottom line is that responsibilities play an enormous part in every individual’s life. For a deaf person this is no different.

Students at NCOD often insinuate that – because service coordinators cannot provide enough warm bodies in the interpreting field – NCOD is to blame, not them. They say that NCOD just needs to make sure their rights are met. The challenge is: Whose rights need to be met – the rights of students to always have an interpreter in the classroom, whether or not they attend class, or the rights of students whose interpreters called in sick and are waiting for a substitute? NCOD’s way of solving this challenge is by implementing a working policy that allows them to effectively distribute service providers in a thorough manner.

When asked if requiring deaf students to tell administrators that they will miss class is unequal treatment, since the law requires equal access, Kincaid and Rawlinson (1999) state:

... {S}trictly speaking, when a college imposes a condition on deaf/hard of hearing students, such as class notification, which it does not impose upon nondisabled students, the college is not being “equal.” However, the ADA and Section 504 permit institutions to impose “eligibility” criteria if necessary. As mentioned above, OCR has upheld such a condition in recognition of the importance of balancing the needs of the institution to provide cost effective services while attempting to meet the needs of all students with disabilities (p. 45).

No-Show Policy

When service providers develop a no-show policy, many issues should be considered:

- *Time Restraints/Limitations* – How many hours of advance notice are required for service cancellation? From the survey NCOD conducted, the presenters learned that many institutions require a 48-hour advance notice. Service providers should ask themselves if they remember how many times as a student in college they

knew 48 hours ahead of time that they would miss class? Students should have some rights with limitations imposed; therefore, disability staff should pick a time limitation that is reasonable. · How long should the service providers wait in the classroom? The longer they wait for the student, the less likely it is that they can be re-assigned to another class. Sending an interpreter to substitute a class 20 or more minutes past the start of class is disruptive to the professor and the class.

- *How many chances are given before action and/or consequences are imposed?* Again, this is a question of limitations and what is appropriate or reasonable. A majority of NCOD's survey responders allow three consecutive absences. This is a luxury for deaf and hard of hearing students. There would be concerns regarding retention of service providers after three no-shows, because service providers lose the hours, and therefore, pay. Postsecondary institutions need to find alternate ways to retain service providers — team them with other service providers, have them complete projects, or keep them on standby as a “floater.” This no-show policy applies to students, not service providers. Once the policy is enforced, students begin to realize they will lose their services, and they will learn to be more responsible.

- *Consequences* – Students insinuated that meeting with counselors after a no-show is juvenile and not necessary. Service coordinators must determine if having the student meet with a counselor, service provider representative, or DSPS/DSS chair would be effective. If required, what kind of information should be given to students regarding their absence and their reason for not canceling services? What is expected from the students at this point?

- *Service coordinators should get everything in writing and obtain signatures.* Without their signature, students who are considered no-shows can simply say they were not made aware of the policy or did not understand the policy. · When registering students for classes, service coordinators should take time to thoroughly explain the policy and require the students to sign it. Counselors should also sign somewhere, indicating that they have explained the no-show policy to the student. It is recommended that this occur every semester. Kincaid and Rawlinson (1999) state:

The college may {legally deny services to a student if the student refuses to sign a written service agreement}. Again, the conditions imposed within the agreement must be reasonable and fully explained to the student. Some colleges have moved to such a requirement, especially with respect to the provision of paid services, such as interpreting services, due to cost considerations and to assist students in responsibly accessing services. If the

agreement is read and signed by the student, it better protects the college in the event it decides to suspend services should the student not abide by its terms (p. 45).

Communication Access

The disability support services office should be accessible. Service coordinators must ensure that students have flexibility in contacting the office in several ways and that messages are properly handled by office personnel:

- Phone (TTY and Voice) that works properly;
- Email – One suggestion is to select one computer to take all incoming emails from students;
- Fax;
- In person – One area where students should report cancelled classes can be targeted.

Allowing students flexibility when contacting the office will encourage a positive atmosphere. Students will be less intimidated and more willing to work with the policy and the staff.

It is crucial that service coordinators be as specific as possible when creating or modifying a no-show policy. Some words have multiple meanings and can be perceived differently between a college student and a staff member. Here are some words that the presenters pulled from no-show policies sent to them from several colleges:

- “Consecutive”: If a student has class once a week, does this mean they miss three weeks worth before services are suspended? Is this the same for a student who has class everyday and misses three days in a row?
- “Cancelled” vs. “suspended”: Cancelled – One time? Permanently? For the day and/or all classes? For the week? Suspended can sometimes mean permanently for staff, but students may interpret this as for one day only.
- “Waive” vs. “reinstate” vs. “return”: Waive – All of them? Just the 1st? 2nd? 3rd? No-show? Or the day of the no-show? Does reinstate mean to start over with a clean slate? Services for that one time? Letting the 2nd or 3rd no-show off the hook? Does return mean permanently?
- “No-Show” vs. “Late Notice”: What’s the difference? They were *not* in the classroom during the specified time. If it is a late notice, does this mean they did not cancel their services?
- “Permanently” vs. “first,” “second,” “third,” or “fourth”: Does permanently mean the student will not receive services again for the rest of the semester? Year? Just that week? When the disability support services office has waived the first one, does that mean the student has another “first” chance, or is it now the second one?

If s/he misses the morning class, that is the 1st no-show. Suppose the student misses the afternoon class. Is this a 2nd no-show? Or only for the same class missed?

- “Supervisor” vs. “counselor” vs. “service personnel”: Who must the students contact? With whom do they meet to rectify their absence?

Listed below are comments made by several schools regarding their no-show policy:

- “There is always a deaf consumer somewhere who needs interpreter coverage. Utilizing finite resources wisely benefits the deaf community. This instills a sense of responsibility in students.” – The University of Wisconsin
- “Service providers like it, and it helps us retain them, because the no-show policy is very liberal. They have three consecutive paid class sessions (no-shows) before they are cancelled.” – Cerritos College
- “Our no-show policy is clearly stated and well defined. Consequences are clearly spelled out, and there are opportunities for appeal after each violation.” – Montana State University-Bozeman
- “Having a no-show policy will continue to be an on-going challenge, because some students are quick to figure out how to ‘play the game.’ They will attend a class, skip class, attend class again, and the following class they will enter ‘no-show’ status again. This will allow them the flexibility and freedom like their hearing peers to not attend class and not have their services suspended.” – American River College
- “The interpreter will wait his/her time in class; if the student is a no-show, I can use that interpreter to substitute in other classes. Then the student shows up, looking for his/her interpreter, and realizes the interpreter has been placed elsewhere for the day. This makes the student know to be on time or call ahead!” – Ohlone College
- “It is verbally explained during training sessions that interpreting services will not be suspended if it defeats the spirit of accessibility laws and the institution’s educational mission. For example, I will not suspend interpreter coverage if a student misses two classes in a row and the third class session is a review for an exam. I prefer a strict policy with plenty of situational exceptions.” – The University of Wisconsin

When should deaf and hard of hearing students be exposed to the no-show policy?

- 1) First appointment after acceptance at school: After classes are selected and service needs are determined, NCOD’s written no-show policy is shown and explained to the student. After reading it and asking questions, students are asked to sign the form, acknowledging that it was explained to them.
- 2) Orientation: A two-hour workshop is presented to incoming deaf students at CSUN. The no-show policy

is again emphasized. More questions are asked and answered in a group environment.

3) Freshman Experience Class: First-time students are strongly encouraged to take a one to three units orientation course at California State University, Northridge during the Fall. NCOD’s Freshman Experience course for deaf students was initially created, because deaf students wanted a class in direct communication. They also wanted an opportunity to explore more deeply the issues that would impact them in college. If necessary, the no-show policy is again highlighted in class. In both Orientation and/or Freshman Experience class, role-playing is performed to maximize each student’s exposure to situational-type responsibilities. One example used in a role-playing situation is the following:

A student is complaining that he does not like to inform the front office when he is missing class. He decides to fight for “equal rights as hearing students.” He wins, and it is decided that deaf students no longer need to cancel services. Furthermore, service providers need to stay in class for 20 minutes in case students arrive late. Place this same student in the role of another student whose interpreter is sick. She has a test in class the following week, and the professor is reviewing what will be on the test. Because of the new policy, she cannot get a substitute interpreter.

Kincaid and Rawlinson (1999) state:

- A university or college may impose reasonable conditions upon student access to and usage of accommodations. If the consequence of misuse is as severe as suspension of services, it must be emphasized that the conditions need to be
- 1) Reasonable and necessary
 - 2) Clearly spelled out
 - 3) Put in writing
 - 4) Thoroughly reviewed with the student beforehand

I would encourage the college to develop a written statement that contains the student’s signature acknowledging receipt if it intends to suspend services. In all such cases, the college needs to carefully consider individual circumstances. Imposed conditions must allow students good cause exceptions for circumstances beyond the student’s control. Certainly, the college must afford the student the opportunity to grieve the suspension. As a practical matter, providers need to educate their superiors about consequences. Administrators should avoid undercutting the

effectiveness of the disability services office by enabling the student to do an end-run around it (p. 15).

Traditional One-Man Show vs. Team Approach

The traditional one-man show can be considered risky. A team approach is the ideal situation when setting up a no-show policy. Size of programs is obviously an important factor. NCOD at CSUN or Ohlone in Fremont have a larger deaf population and their staff consists of counselors, administrators, a financial person, and deaf professors. Many small programs have generalists, or one person that oversees deaf students *and* disabled students. These people do not always have much experience in deafness. Sometimes there is one person who is in charge of all services to deaf students, but s/he does everything: hires service providers, plays counselor to the deaf students, manages payroll, supervises interpreters, etc. The risk of the one-man show – where one person makes all the subjective judgments regarding the development of policy and the evaluation of “exceptional situations” – is that someone has to play God, so to speak.

Having a team of people develop the no-show policy provides a more concrete foundation and allows all bases to be covered. For larger programs, service coordinators can empower students by getting them involved with responsibilities. For instance, they can ask them to give feedback or be involved with the creation of a new no-show policy. Students can role-play. An example would be: “Three interpreters are out sick. Determine which of the three students waiting for a substitute will get the one available interpreter.”

There is always a time for all postsecondary institutions, including NCOD, to revisit their no-show policy and see what revisions are possible. Some facts are simply not arguable. Each program is given a block of money, but that does not necessarily change or affect the number of service providers. Interpreters and captionists do not grow on trees. No-show policies help organizations become adept at providing the best possible services given limited fiscal and personnel usage. The deaf CSUNians is a Political Action Committee at CSUN that coordinates all the complaints students have about service.

There are some flexible elements in NCOD’s no-show policy. These flexibilities are a result of input from students:

- Generally, students must contact NCOD two hours before class begins. For 7:00 and 8:00 a.m. classes, students can contact NCOD one hour before class begins.
- There are four ways for the student to contact the office to cancel services – by phone, by person, by fax, and by email.

- A first no-show does not require a student to meet with a counselor. S/he merely needs to request service again (via front desk, phone, email, or fax).

Programs with a small number of deaf and hard of hearing students may want to tap into other resources. This means asking deaf and hard of hearing students for their feedback. Offices can also ask a counselor from the counseling center on campus to help or a generalist from the disabled office for advice. Contact with other colleges can also occur in order to find out what their no-show policy is and to determine what they do differently and why. Finally, offices can invite two or three students to set up their own Political Action Committee (PAC).

References

Kincaid, J. M., & Rawlinson, S. (1999). *Americans with Disabilities Act: Responsibilities for postsecondary institutions serving deaf and hard of hearing students*. St. Paul: Midwest Center for Postsecondary Outreach.