

# You Want Me to Interpret *What?* Making Extracurricular Activities Accessible for Students Who are Deaf in the Postsecondary Setting

**Julie Danielson**, Graduate Research Assistant  
Postsecondary Education Consortium  
The University of Tennessee  
Knoxville, Tennessee

**Sharon Downs**, Coordinator  
Arkansas State Outreach and Technical Assistance Center  
University of Arkansas at Little Rock  
Little Rock, Arkansas

**April Kirby**, Outreach Specialist  
Postsecondary Education Consortium  
The University of Tennessee  
Knoxville, Tennessee

**Cheryl Thomas**, Interpreter & Transcriber Coordinator  
The University of Arkansas at Little Rock  
Little Rock, Arkansas

## Abstract

A college education includes much more than merely fulfilling academic requirements; extracurricular activities offer students the opportunity to develop personal interests and share experiences with others. For students who are deaf or hard of hearing, communication access is critical to successful participation. This presentation adhered to a proactive perspective and provided postsecondary educational interpreters some tips on interpreting extracurricular activities in the postsecondary educational setting, offering strategies that go beyond just filling a request for services. Topics addressed in this presentation included regularly scheduled activities such as clubs, fraternities and sororities, and sports events, as well as campus cultural events such as concerts and theatrical performances. Planning, preparation, staffing, coordination, and budgeting were also discussed.

A college education includes much more than merely fulfilling academic requirements; extracurricular activities offer students not only the opportunity to develop personal interests and share experiences with others, but students are also faced with opportunities to

develop leadership roles during their college years. Hurwitz (1992) in *Deaf Students in Postsecondary Education* states:

Postsecondary education must be looked upon for providing students not only with the technical skills to acquire jobs, but with the skills necessary to become leaders in their communities. Too often we focus on those activities in the classroom, and seldom remember to provide support for those activities outside of the classroom. It may be that these are equally as important as what transpires in the classroom, and by paying more attention to the extracurricular world we will ensure that graduates will not only enhance the quality of their lives but the lives of all deaf and hard-of-hearing people (p. 177).

There are countless other reasons that extracurricular activities benefit students. First, a large postsecondary institution can sometimes be overwhelming to students, and students who are deaf or hard of hearing may also face communication barriers at such campuses with small deaf populations. Secondly, students can improve their skills – often in the specific subject areas of their interest. They will also – and this is arguable – get the most out of college; most people seem to agree that college is more than what transpires in the classroom. They may feel at home faster and manage stress better. They may meet professionals in their areas of interest, and this can help them after graduation when networking may be necessary in their occupational lives. Most importantly, they will have fun; this can prove to be very beneficial, due to the stressful nature of students' course loads (Bourgeois & Treubig, 2000).

Indeed, Stinson and Walter (1992) emphasize that when students – deaf or hearing – leave college before graduation, it is often due to the fact that they have failed to adjust in the postsecondary setting's social realm. Hurwitz (1992) also cites research stating that "interaction in extracurricular activities is an important part of life for successful college students" (p. 173). The case can be made, then, that extracurricular activi-

ties could perhaps aid in successful social adjustment for students who are deaf or hard of hearing and allow them to integrate themselves into the school community. Postsecondary programs typically provide many opportunities for students to become involved in activities outside of the classroom. Disability support services providers must ensure that these activities are accessible so that deaf students can take advantage of the many opportunities as well.

Research shows that “the size of the deaf population was the most important factor in attracting {deaf} students to postsecondary programs” (Stinson & Walter, 1992, p. 52). Schools with a large population of students that are deaf or hard of hearing – such as Gallaudet University and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) – are naturally going to attract more deaf and hard of hearing students. Therefore, it is particularly vital that disability support services providers remain committed to making extracurricular activities accessible to deaf and hard of hearing students in postsecondary settings in which those students constitute a minority. If a deaf student is surrounded by students who do not share the same language with him/her, then that student may feel an even stronger need to get involved and make friends.

There is a dearth of statistics on the numbers of deaf students currently involved in extracurricular activities in postsecondary institutions in the United States. One way to measure the desire of students to get involved socially is to look at the numbers of students getting involved in those postsecondary institutions in which deaf students are not a minority. A phone call to NTID’s Department of Interpreting Services (DIS), inquiring about the number of hours of interpreting required for extracurricular activities, revealed that – at the time of the call – approximately 80% of the interpreting that occurred was for academic activities, and 20% was for non-academic – 600 to 700 hours a week of interpreting for nonacademic events (for a total of over 1,000 students) (NTID DIS Staff Interpreter, personal communication, July, 2001). It is important to remember that this is a campus in which communication is *not* an issue; this is the ideal communicative setting, if you will, for deaf students, a setting in which language barriers do not exist. We can be so bold, then, as to extrapolate this information to a campus in which a majority of the students are hearing and there is an extremely small population of deaf students. Then, disability support services providers can acknowledge students’ desires to get involved socially and ensure that those students can avail themselves of these activities on campus.

The completion of college by students – whether deaf, hard of hearing, or hearing – requires a certain level of persistence, and it is clear that students desire interpersonal integration into their postsecondary environments. “Deaf and hard of hearing students often face navigating the hidden rocks and sudden whirlpools of

college life without the necessary tools and/or a responsive and supportive campus environment” (Porter, Camerlengo, DePuye, & Sommer, 1999, p. 5). It is the responsibility of disability support services providers to establish that support and to engender an accommodating atmosphere at the postsecondary institutions that deaf students choose to attend.

### **Postsecondary Extracurricular Life: The Consumer’s Perspective**

{This portion of the presentation was delivered as a personal account of extracurricular life as a deaf student; this individual attended a community college, Gallaudet University, and received her Master’s degree at a large university}.

Providing interpreting services is very necessary. It creates an inclusive environment and a sense of belonging. As a deaf student who participated in accessible extracurricular activities, I had the ability to get along with hearing participants as well. Making extracurricular activities accessible for deaf students results in the removal of communication barriers.

I believe firmly in equal access. It is also important to remember that the benefits of inclusion are for both deaf *and* hearing students. For example, if interpreters are needed in sororities and fraternities in order to make their meetings and events accessible to deaf students, then hearing students learn about the role of interpreters and – as a result of being exposed to interpreters – will understand their needs. At the same time, deaf students learn to work with hearing colleagues just as they will in their lives beyond graduation. Deaf students must also learn how to request accommodations, manage their communication needs, and work with support services providers and interpreters as a team. One way to accomplish those tasks is through getting involved in activities outside of the classroom. Again, both groups – deaf and hearing – benefit from such activities.

The provision of interpreters in such settings gives deaf students more choices as well. Prior to the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, deaf and hard of hearing students had limited choices. If an event was not interpreted, they would, most likely, not attend and would dismiss the activity from their minds. When I started college, access to these types of activities had just begun to be more commonplace. I had interpreters in class but no interpreters for extracurricular activities. I wanted to play sports, for instance, but did not do it because of the communication barrier. I simply was not willing to show up without an interpreter. In hindsight, I can see how beneficial it would have been to have accessibility to such activities.

When I arrived at The University of Tennessee, I was worry-free when it came to interpreters. At the same time, though, I learned a lot from that experience. I

quickly realized that I must have a sense of responsibility and independence. Sometimes deaf students are too dependent on hearing people. We must strive for deaf people making their needs known, and they must learn that it is their responsibility to get their needs met.

When accommodations are provided for deaf students in extracurricular settings, such as the provision of interpreting, deaf students also have opportunities to develop friendships. They are also able to take advantage of one benefit of getting involved in activities outside of the classroom – networking. This is great for future job contacts. As an undergraduate and graduate student, I met so many people and developed friendships with hearing students – friendships I still have. As you may know, it is not always common for a deaf person to have a long friendship with a hearing person. Again, feeling that camaraderie and commonality with other students is vital.

Involvement in extracurricular activities also assists students with self-confidence. Students learn about themselves; getting involved certainly helped further me along in forging my own identity. A student has the opportunity to learn his/her own, unique skills set and can become a leader. I discovered and honed my own leadership skills once activities outside of the classroom became accessible to me. As a result, my self-confidence increased. It may take years for some students, but providing the opportunity is vital. For example, for many years, I did not understand the point of knowing parliamentary procedure. Deaf students, too, can go on and on forever; sometimes there is no good way to stop them from talking! You must have an agenda and time limits, and parliamentary procedure can take care of this problem. Students can learn this in extracurricular student group meetings. This is something that deaf students will likely use in future organizations as well. I now see the benefits of deaf students being exposed to and learning parliamentary procedure. Knowledge of it also puts us on more equal footing for those times when we interact with hearing people in organizations and, therefore, gives deaf students a boost in self-confidence.

### **Budgets, Compliance, and Commitment: Creating Accessibility**

There are two forces that shape a postsecondary institution's policy on accessibility: compliance and commitment. Compliance refers to following the proper legislation and merely avoiding a lawsuit. According to the Americans with Disabilities Act, universities must make their programs and activities accessible. That includes extracurricular activities that are university-sponsored. Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act states:

No qualified individual with a disability shall, on the basis of a disability, be excluded from participation in or be

denied the benefits of the services, programs, or activities of a public entity, or be subjected to discrimination by any public entity (Kinder, 2002).

The other influence, commitment, refers to a postsecondary institution's philosophy on inclusion and its desire to see students succeed. Postsecondary institutions certainly want to be accessible to students with disabilities who can participate in educational programs and become leaders in society. This perspective is less interested in only avoiding a complaint from the Office for Civil Rights, but rather its focus is the student and how the school can affect the success of students with disabilities by providing reasonable accommodations. When dealing with students at postsecondary institutions, some disability support services providers will tend to respond to the compliance perspective, and others will act more effectively out of the commitment perspective.

Paying for access to extracurricular activities is a crucial issue. Providing sign language or oral interpreters is costly, and there are many ways to approach the issue. When possible, using staff interpreters is advantageous; in that case, the postsecondary institution will not pay more to hire an outside interpreter for the activity.

At the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR), the policy is the following: if an event is sponsored by ticket sales, that entity pays for the interpreter. For example, for theatre productions where patrons must pay to attend, interpreters are provided by the theatre. It plans this every fiscal year and provides for interpreters in its budget. Because the Disability Support Services (DSS) office has contact information for interpreters, they often work with them and assist, when possible, in contacting interpreters.

However, for activities outside the classroom that are not funded by ticket sales, DSS provides interpreters. They ask the students who use interpreters to notify the office as early as possible when they want to attend extracurricular events; DSS can then budget and schedule accordingly. Budgeting for extracurricular activities is difficult at best, because the level varies from semester to semester, depending on who the students are and how active they want to be outside the classroom. One way to project future expenses is to track expenses from each semester. Staff may notice trends when projecting needs for the coming year. This will not be exact, by any means, but it will result in a starting figure with which to work.

Creating accessibility to some activities in particular is not appropriate for a postsecondary institution. At UALR, this is best demonstrated by events sponsored by religious organizations. DSS does not provide interpreters for such organizations; one option DSS often considers is to aid in coordinating the service, yet have the organization pay the bill. If campuses offer religious

activities and/or services, coordinators should be aware of the possible conflict between church and state. It is best for them to discuss this with school administrations to ensure that they are aware of which activities require the provision of interpreters and which are not covered by the disability services office.

For some campus-wide events that are likely to attract deaf students, it is good practice to provide an interpreter even if one is not requested. This improves accessibility awareness on campus and avoids a last-minute rush to fill the need. One example would be a student government forum where the candidates answer questions from students. This is an event that deaf students could attend, and since the entire campus is encouraged to participate, having an interpreter already there avoids potential problems.

Some departments on campus may be tempted to claim undue hardship due to the high expense involved in making extracurricular activities accessible. However, the individual department's budget is not considered in such a claim; rather, the entire postsecondary institution's budget is assessed, so proving undue hardship is extremely difficult.

### **Some Issues in Interpreting Outside Classroom Walls: From the Interpreter Coordinator's Perspective**

Interpreter coordinators often deal with out-of-class activities, and these requests are often last-minute ones. They can, however, be aware of these situations by knowing where these requests are most likely to occur. For example, if a student is taking a performing arts class, coordinators will know that the student, most likely, will have to see a theatre performance. If a student is in a law class, s/he will, most likely, have to observe a court proceeding. By being aware of student schedules, coordinators can be aware of which students will have interpreter requests outside of the classroom.

If a student who uses an interpreter is living in a dorm, coordinators can contact the dorm supervisor to find out what kinds of meetings are mandatory for the student and how often they are held. It is vital to remind the supervisor that they are required to provide interpreters and that a beginning ASL student who is living in the dorm is not acceptable in the interpreting role.

Quite often, venues are excited about providing communication services but have little to no experience in how to do so. This is the coordinator's opportunity to educate and to build bridges between his/her office, the deaf community, and the college or university. Disability support services offices may not be able to pay for the services for a particular venue, but they may be able to provide the names and phone numbers of interpreters or referral agencies. In some instances, coordinators may know about a venue that meets a student's

needs and already has interpreting services provided, so they can point the student in that direction.

If an assignment promises to be ongoing, coordinators are best advised to book the same interpreters. Support groups are assignments in which the consistency of the interpretation, training of the interpreter, and knowledge of the groups' cultures and vocabularies are extremely important. Due to privacy issues, it is also important to all of the participants that the face they see is a familiar one. If the dates have been provided in advance, coordinators can contact the interpreter and book him/her for the entirety of the group's sessions, if possible. Freelance interpreters often welcome the consistency of work, and the deaf person will welcome the consistency of the interpretation. Sometimes the interpreter for the support group may be paid for by rehabilitation services. It is important for coordinators to discover if this is the case for their institution's student(s). If not, they can try to negotiate with the person who is paying the bill and aim to be as flexible as the disability support services office's budget and manpower will allow.

Accessibility with regard to standardized testing is another important issue coordinators face. Some of the standardized tests have similar instructions. Some tests, such as the SAT, already have interpreter policies in place. It is vital that interpreter coordinators have some familiarity with these tests; the student and the test provider may look to them to provide information as to what type of interpretation is appropriate. UALR's DSS office has collected copies of all of the instructions and/or practice tests they could locate. They provide interpreters an opportunity to familiarize themselves with these tests and instruct them on what is the appropriate interpretation provision for any given test.

Law classes sometimes require court observations. Coordinators can call courts in advance and inform them that an interpreter or transcriber will be sent. Sometimes the court will provide the student with a free copy of the transcript or meet with them after the session.

Sometimes disability support services providers may coordinate services for students who are not from their campus. For example, a group of cheerleaders from the Arkansas School for the Deaf attended a cheerleading camp at UALR. DSS does not cover this type of activity, as the students were not from its campus. The coordinator contacted the cheerleaders; they were surprised and vexed to find out that they would have to pay for interpreting services. They stated that their activity was for fundraising and that they would cancel the camp, because they could not afford interpreting services. Rather than have not only deaf students but students from other schools lose out, the DSS office decided to negotiate with the school for the deaf. They agreed that they would search for and pay for one interpreter and

DSS would provide the other. All in all, this was not an ideal solution, but one that at least enabled the students to participate.

Under the ADA, interpreters are responsible for specialized vocabulary. This communication must be conveyed accurately and impartially through the use of any necessary specialized vocabulary. Thus, the preparation of interpreters is extremely important to the success of any assignment. The bulk of this responsibility falls upon the interpreter, but coordinators can make their jobs easier if they can put them in contact with the organization or the student or provide them with documents, texts, or Web sites that contain preparation materials. In some instances, the time for preparation may be greater than an average assignment; if so, coordinators must – in advance and with the interpreter – negotiate a set amount of preparation time for which they are willing to pay.

Sometimes assignments will occur during odd hours (such as, evenings and/or weekends). Some interpreters appreciate these hours, as they may be stay-at-home parents who can only accept assignments during those hours. If comp time is available to them, staff interpreters may also appreciate this opportunity. Providing comp time to staff interpreters can also help minimize costs for contract interpreters, which, in turn, can allow for the provision of more services.

Interpreter coordinators must also be aware of issues beyond the basics of the assignment (time, place, date, etc.). Issues such as gender, cultural issues, and sexuality are extremely important when matching the appropriate interpreter with a consumer and assignment. Interpreter organizations – such as, the National Alliance of Black Interpreters or *Mano a Mano* – can provide much-needed information and support for those coordinators or interpreters who are not familiar with providing services for culturally diverse consumers.

Interpreters are a rare and valuable commodity. Coordinators must be sure to keep them as safe as possible and be aware of such elemental issues as allergies (for instance, pollen during field trips), sunscreen for outdoor venues, wires, stage decorations, etc.

For any venue, the most important notes to keep in mind are the following: Develop a rapport with a contact person; make sure all parties are well-prepared; match the venue with an appropriate interpreter(s); and be flexible and negotiate well.

{Note: A significant portion of this presentation included a discussion about the coordination of performing arts interpreting on campuses – specifically, concert and theatrical interpreting, two components of extracurricular life for students. For information about these subjects and a copy of the presenter's informative hand-out, please contact Cheryl Thomas at <crthomas@ualr.edu>.

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