

Gates to Adventure: Transition to Postsecondary Training for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students

Marcia Kolvitz, Associate Director
Postsecondary Education Consortium
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Knoxville, Tennessee

Debra Wilcox Hsu, Associate Director
Midwest Center for Postsecondary Outreach
St. Paul Technical College
St. Paul, Minnesota

Abstract

The Postsecondary Education Programs Network (PEPNet) developed an online training designed to provide students who are deaf and hard of hearing with information and skills they will need to plan their participation in postsecondary education and training programs. PEPNet is the national collaboration of the four Regional Postsecondary Education Centers for Individuals who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing. The Centers are supported by contracts with the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. The goal of PEPNet is to assist postsecondary institutions across the nation to attract and effectively serve individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing. *Gates to Adventure* is recommended for secondary students who are deaf or hard of hearing, as they begin considering postsecondary options. The training is offered free of charge at <www.pepnet.org>. The training was developed to help students:

- Identify reasons for becoming involved in making future educational/training plans,
- Understand the importance and the components of a postsecondary options personal self-assessment,
 - Understand major career categories,
 - Understand the range of postsecondary educational options available to learners,
 - Understand that the requirements for entry into postsecondary options vary and require advance planning in order to be met, and
 - Describe services that are available for postsecondary students who are deaf and hard of hearing.

Project Development

In the fall of 2000, the Postsecondary Education Programs Network initiated the development of mate-

rials intended to supplement freshman orientation programs for deaf and hard of hearing students attending colleges and universities. During discussions with professionals in the field, concerns have been raised about student transition from secondary education to postsecondary education and training opportunities, including issues such as career planning, postsecondary options, academic skills, life management, access and accommodations, self-assessment, self-determination, and rights and responsibilities.

Each of the four PEPNet regional centers sent several representatives to a planning meeting in Minnesota in December 2000 to begin the project. During a discussion about the project goals, the development team decided to shift the focus to transition skills needed by individuals considering the wide range of postsecondary education and training. Instead of identifying only incoming college freshmen as the target audience, the group agreed to expand the audience to include young adults ages 14-21. Interested persons over age 21 would also be welcome to use the materials. Because of the nature of the material, additional audiences might include school counselors, administrators, support staff, high school teachers, rehabilitation counselors, parents, or student advocacy groups.

A Web-based format was selected for the project to allow for widespread use of the materials. Members of PEPNet previously developed an online training for faculty and staff related to deaf awareness, and the planning team believed that the online format would also be a good strategy for this project. A highly interactive, attractive program with links to additional resources would be a unique way to engage young deaf and hard of hearing adults in the training program. The team planned to develop related supplemental materials for teachers and counselors for use with the student.

Staff members from the Postsecondary Education Consortium (PEC) and the Midwest Center for Postsecondary Outreach (MCPO) shared the leadership for this project. To facilitate the development of the online training, the project team contracted with Seward Learning Systems (SLS), an instructional design company that worked with PEPNet several years ago on the first online training. The SLS instructional designer assigned to this project previously taught deaf and hard of hearing students and was aware of many of the issues related to the presentation of information in the product. The project development team included

16 members from across the country. Eight of the 16 members had ongoing student contact, and six of the team members were deaf or hard of hearing.

The development team helped structure the content of the online training program through feedback at the December 2000 meeting and follow-up online chats. The team maintained regular contact through email during the winter and spring of 2001. In addition to comments about content, the development team provided feedback about the visual treatment and screen design as well as suggestions for making it interesting to young deaf and hard of hearing adults.

The instructional design team created an adventure park theme as the visual treatment for the training. Through this design, related content areas can be explored through various challenges in the adventure park:

- *Lion Pit* addresses issues related to self-awareness and self-understanding;
- *Forest Maze* addresses issues related to career planning;
- *Rope Climb* addresses issues related to postsecondary options;
- *Swinging Bridge* addresses issues related to postsecondary planning.

Utilizing the Training

When beginning the training, participants must sign in and provide some demographic information that is collected to report statistics regarding the summary information about the users. Participants may sign in as a student, participant in a job rehabilitation program, vocational rehabilitation client, teacher, school counselor, vocational rehabilitation specialist, or parent. Students, trainees, and VR clients are asked to provide information about their home state, zip code, country, age, type of program currently attending, and school name and location. Teachers, counselors, and parents are asked to provide more detailed information, including their name, school contact information, and information about the ages and numbers of students with whom they are associated.

The privacy policy states that the activity results are saved only during the learner's current session with the software. None of the answers that a learner gives to the questions within the training program are saved in a database or in any location on the computer that is used to access the training; no cookies of any kind are used as part of this training program. Demographic information about learners that is collected as part of this sign-in procedure is saved and routed to the PEPNet database. This information is strictly used for funding purposes.

Participants have several tools available to assist them throughout the training. A *backpack* includes a copy of an adventure map to guide participants to different content areas. The *Sherlock Holmes cap* provides clues associated with questions presented in the review

section. *Adventure guides* offer tips connected with the content within a given section. The project team wrote descriptions of these individuals and related tips to serve as possible role models or peers; the adventure guides are not real people. The *mentor* symbol links the participant to additional suggestions and advice offered by actual deaf, hard of hearing, and late-deafened professionals in the field.

Participants use the adventure map to select a content area. Although they can begin in any section, starting with the *Lion Pit* and moving around the map will help the participant build the skills and knowledge needed for transition. They may find it helpful to go through each section more than once to more fully process the information. Having access to the adventure map allows participants to complete a section and return at a later time to work through the next session.

Knowing Yourself – Lion Pit

This section was developed to (a) help the participants develop a better understanding of themselves, (b) understand that this knowledge will help them choose a postsecondary option and career, and (c) understand that knowing themselves better includes: hearing loss, communication style, personality, academic skills, and interests/abilities. The content in this section includes the following concepts:

- Knowing oneself better increases confidence to make good decisions about the future.
- People choose jobs or careers that are a good fit with their interests and abilities.

Career Planning – Forest Maze

This section was developed to (a) help the participant have a beginning understanding of the Holland Code system, (b) know more about six career groups included in the system, and (c) understand some of the personal characteristics and academic skills that match up with jobs in the six groups. The content in this section includes the following concepts:

- People identify career areas that interest them and look for postsecondary options with training in these career areas.
- Grouping interests can help a person identify a career direction.
- The Holland Code system can be used to describe career areas:
 - Realistic (physical),
 - Investigative (science),
 - Artistic (creative),
 - Social (helping people),
 - Enterprising (business), and
 - Conventional (practical).

Postsecondary Options - Rope Ladder

This section was developed to help the participant (a) have an understanding of available postsecondary

options, (b) answer questions to find out what option might be best for that student, and (c) understand differences between high school and postsecondary education/training. The content in this section includes the following concepts:

- Employers want skilled workers.
- There are various options for improving skills, including:
 - Short-term training,
 - On-the-job training,
 - Proprietary schools,
 - Vocational-technical schools,
 - Two-year colleges, and
 - Four-year colleges/universities.
- Institutional variables should be considered:
 - Size,
 - Number of deaf and hard of hearing people enrolled, and
 - Location.
- High schools and colleges have different expectations and practices.

Postsecondary Planning - Swinging Bridge

This section was developed to help the participant (a) understand need for advance preparation, (b) understand the application process and deadlines, and (c) understand admissions testing and financial aid. The content in this section includes the following concepts:

- Students need to plan ahead during high school:
 - Courses,
 - Interest inventories.
- Visiting programs can give students a better idea of what is available.
- There are several steps required when completing applications.
- It may be necessary to take admissions/placement tests.
- Students may seek and apply for various types of financial aid.
- Each student must make the decision that is the best fit for him/her.

Interactivity

The project development team wanted to avoid having numerous screens that were full of text. They supported having a very rich visual format that allowed a great deal of interactivity with the concepts. The content experts provided a lot of information that had to be included in a fairly compact program. This created a challenge for the instructional design team.

Through the use of FLASH animation, the graphics were enhanced to create a more interesting visual effect. To get the participant's attention, the instructional design team incorporated FLASH files into pro-

gram menus and buttons. Flash animations that show movement through the areas of the environment also added interest and acted as a reward for finishing a section of content.

Interactivity included the clicking on hotspots that display additional material, dragging objects on-screen, inputting text, and dragging sliders. This helped the participants engage the content, thus enabling them to spend more time thinking about and evaluating that information.

Settings for Use

The online format provides access any time the participants would like to use it. Individuals may work through the program independently or together with a teacher, counselor, mentor or parent. Small groups may work through the program under the direction of a teacher, counselor, or other resource staff. Although not specifically built into the program, there are numerous opportunities for discussion between the participants and their adult mentors. Supplemental materials will be developed for use with this training program.

Accessing the Training

This training program was designed for access via the Internet on either a PC or a Macintosh computer with a mouse or compatible pointing device. A Pentium processor – 200 MHz or higher, using Windows 95, Windows 98, or Window NT as an operating system – or MAC Power PC at 200 MHz or higher is recommended. For best results, participants should use Internet Explorer 4.0 or above or Netscape Navigator 4.0 or higher as their Internet browser; ISDN bandwidth is preferred. A FLASH 4 or 5 plug-in is necessary. A printer is needed to print self-assessment results; email may be used instead printing the results.

Summary

This project was developed to enhance the transition skills of young adults who are deaf or hard of hearing. It is one of many tools that can be used by participants in small group or individual settings. Because there is a great deal of information included in the training, participants may go through the training multiple times as they progress through high school or focus on planning for the future. Results from the self-assessment section may be used as part of the student's Individual Transition Plan (IEP).