

FAQs
Frequently Asked Questions of:

Postsecondary Disability Service Providers and Administrators

Do private colleges have to provide interpreters?

Private colleges must provide access to students with disabilities. According to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (as amended through 1998), “no otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States, as defined in Section 7(20), shall, solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity conducted by any Executive agency.” The Americans with Disabilities Act also supports the requirement that both private and public educational institutions must be accessible for persons with disabilities. Sharaine J. Rawlinson and Jeanne M. Kincaid (in *Americans with Disabilities Act: Responsibilities for Postsecondary Institutions Serving Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students*, 2nd Edition, <http://www.mcpo.org/products.asp> {LINK}) state that “a private institution . . . must provide interpreting services if such is necessary to enable the student to access educational opportunities” (p. 15).

Can you suspend the interpreter if the student doesn't show up for class?

A university or college “may impose reasonable conditions upon student access to and usage of accommodations,” according to Rawlinson and Kincaid (p. 15). The conditions for suspension of an interpreter must be necessary and reasonable, documented clearly in written form, and reviewed by the student who is deaf/hard of hearing before receiving interpreting services. Rawlinson and Kincaid also suggest the development of a written statement that asks for the student's signature, acknowledging the consequences of these unmet conditions. The college should provide the opportunity – if necessary – for the student to grieve the suspension.

What do you do when a student isn't making progress in the same English class he's taken three times?

First, always check the accommodation(s). For example, the Coordinator should inquire and ensure that the interpreter is communicating the information effectively to the student, based on the student's particular communication needs. Does this interpreter have the appropriate skills required to do the job well? You can ask the instructor as well if the communication process is going well between the interpreter and the student.

If no progress is made this way, you can also ask an expert in deafness to talk with the teacher about the writing skills of deaf students and the fact that – for many students who are prelingually deaf – English is a second language.

The Coordinator of Interpreting Services could also suggest that the student explore tutoring in English. Some universities also offer courses with a much smaller class size for students with disabilities who are struggling in a particular course; this allows for more one-on-one interaction with the instructor.

The office providing support services could also suggest the following four basic strategies used by postsecondary institutions to improve the literacy skills of students who are deaf and hard of hearing and struggling with English. These suggestions come from the National Task Force on Quality of Services in the Postsecondary Education of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students. This report, *Basic Academic Preparation*, was written in 1997. The following course formats have typically been offered to students, but success depends greatly on individual circumstances:

- Mainstreamed remedial classes, using an interpreter.
- Self-contained remedial classes – some colleges with many students who are deaf and hard of hearing form small, self-contained classes for grammar, reading, and writing instruction. These are usually taught by instructors with knowledge of and experience in teaching English to such students.
- Mainstreamed ESL (English as a Second Language) classes – for many students who are deaf and whose preferred mode of communication is American Sign Language (ASL), English may be their second language. ESL courses employ a bilingual, bicultural framework in order to teach English to students whose first language is another spoken or signed one. In this situation, it is best to use only interpreters with strong ASL and English grammar competencies.
- Self-contained ESL courses – small classes are better for this type of instruction and are taught by an instructor who is fluent in ASL and ESL methodology.

The self-contained remedial and ESL courses consisting of only students who are deaf and hard of hearing are rare; however, there is an increasing awareness of the need to improve the reading, writing, and grammar skills of such students in the postsecondary setting. Perhaps these types of courses will become more common in the future. According to Rawlinson and Kincaid, when an institution creates such segregated courses as self-contained ones, they risk defeating the purpose of Section 504 and the American with Disabilities Act (ADA), which was created to prevent discrimination and segregation. However, many institutions feel these types of programs are quite successful.

What is the role/responsibility of vocational/technical programs (less than two years) in providing accommodations?

The ADA states that any public accommodation, which includes all places of education, must provide auxiliary aids and services. This includes sign language interpreters, notetakers, television decoders for closed captioning, assistive listening devices and headsets, and telecommunication devices (TTYs or TDDs). Vocational/technical programs have the same level of responsibility as other postsecondary institutions.

What do I do if I can't find an interpreter?

Another type of accommodation should be used while your institution tries to locate a qualified interpreter. It is vital that an interpreter be found; notetaking alone will not suffice for an accommodation. Notetaking services for a student who is deaf allow the student to focus on the interpreter without having to look down to take notes. However, notetaking services typically do

not allow the student immediate access to the information discussion during the class, limiting the student's opportunity to participate in the class.

If there is not an interpreting agency in your town, your institution must contact the one closest to you in order to schedule and contract an interpreter for the student. Other resources may include local K-12 programs, social service agencies, or the state office of vocational rehabilitation.

What is a qualified interpreter?

The ADA states that a qualified interpreter is one who is able to interpret effectively, accurately, and impartially, using any specialized vocabulary necessary. The interpreter must be able to sign to the individual who is deaf what is being said by the hearing person and voice to the hearing person what the individual who is deaf is signing. Visit the website of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf at <http://www.rid.org/> {LINK} for more information about interpreting.

How do I evaluate interpreters if I don't know sign language myself?

In this case, it would be best to bring in a consultant to help evaluate the interpreters. Sources for consultants may include personnel from the state office of vocational rehabilitation, faculty from interpreter training programs, staff from other college disability services offices, or deaf education consultants.

How do I assess the effectiveness of the communication accommodations?

Always communicate with the student who is deaf/hard of hearing, verifying that accommodations provided are meeting his/her needs. Ask specific questions about the interactions that the student has with the instructor, classmates, and with the interpreter. Also ask about the student's feeling about the class. Is the student adequately prepared for each session? What may seem to be a communication problem may indeed be difficulty with a particular class. If you are not knowledgeable about the particular accommodation the student is using, contact a professional who is.

Am I required to provide both an interpreter and a real-time captionist?

According to Rawlinson and Kincaid, providing both an interpreter and a captionist would be justified "in only the most extraordinary circumstances" (p. 25). The ADA does not require that the student be given every accommodation that exists. It is, however, common practice for a student who is deaf to have both a notetaker and an interpreter so that the s/he can focus on the interpreter without missing interpreted information by looking down at his/her notes.

Get to know the student and understand his/her degree of hearing loss and communication preferences. Ongoing communication with the student is important as well. Be sure to regularly assess whether or not the primary accommodation provided is effective.

How do I read an audiogram?

An audiogram is a chart that visually represents an individual's ability to hear sounds and is a common tool for documenting hearing loss. The following web sites address this question:

How Do We Read an Audiogram?

presented by The Audiology Awareness Campaign

<http://www.audiologyawareness.com/hhelp/audiogrm.htm> {LINK}

How to Read Your Hearing Test

<http://www.earinfo.com/howread1.html> {LINK}

What is an Audiogram and what does it tell me?

from the Amarillo Independent School District Support Services

{Click on “Understanding Hearing Loss”}

<http://www.amarillo.isd.tenet.edu/deafed> {LINK}

You can also take an on-line training session via PEPNet, The Postsecondary Education Programs Network, at <http://www.pepnet.org/> {LINK}. Click on “Deafness and Hearing Loss” to learn more about these issues.

What are standard practices in postsecondary education in paying interpreters (minimums, portal to portal, etc.)?

An interpreter’s pay will depend on one or all of the following: educational background, certification, and years of experience. Most agencies and institutions who contract interpreters on a term basis will pay the interpreter for the first hour if the student who is deaf does not attend the scheduled event. Contract interpreters will be compensated for travel to and from the assignment.

Staff interpreters who are provided a salary have varying incomes, depending on the institution for whom they work.

For more information, contact the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf at <http://www.rid.org/> {LINK}.

What are the pros and cons of hiring interpreters/captionists staff vs. hourly?

There are many benefits to having staff interpreters in a postsecondary setting. Scheduling them can be easier and more flexible, as some hourly interpreters may have to place restrictions on their schedules, due to other freelancing assignments they have accepted. Staff interpreters are also in the position to establish a strong rapport with the faculty, staff, and students who are deaf and hard of hearing, because these people see the staff interpreters every semester. To boot, staff interpreters who often repeat interpret a course will be more familiar with the material in and terminology of the course. This can aid in a smooth interpretation, which will benefit the student. Consistency is another benefit; an interpreter coordinator with a staff of interpreters will know that these interpreters will be there to work a certain number of hours per week. They also benefit from the fact that staff interpreters working in an office setting can fulfill the responsibilities of the coordinator when s/he has to be out. The level of responsibility of a staff interpreter, therefore, can be greater. Finally, a staff interpreter will be more vested in the office of disability support services’ goals and mission. They can be more willing to provide input and discuss solutions for problems. An hourly interpreter’s primary responsibility typically is interpreting only. Also, when using staff interpreters, a higher cost-effectiveness can result when the number of students using interpreting services increases substantially. It can be costly – when such an increase occurs – to rely on contract interpreters only.

Several advantages to hiring contractual or freelance interpreters also exist. First, having a long list of freelance interpreters to access in order to fill assignments provides more diversity in many institutions. A staff of interpreters will have variety as well, but most institutions have a greater number of hourly interpreters than staff interpreters, and this allows for more variety. Another benefit lies in the fact that the institution in need of interpreters does not have to provide benefits to hourly interpreters; therefore, hourly interpreters are less expensive. It also may be easier for an institution to terminate employment when necessary for an hourly interpreter, as they are less vested in the institution than a staff interpreter. Using contract interpreters most often occurs in an institution where there are fewer students who are deaf and hard of hearing. Contract interpreters will also most likely be used when students who are deaf are taking courses sporadically, as opposed to many courses clumped together, if you will, in which interpreters are needed.

What are the pros and cons of paid notetakers vs. volunteer notetakers?

Volunteer notetakers, according to some disability support services staff, sometimes lack commitment. They may not take a great deal of responsibility upon themselves to provide quality notetaking. However, there are always exceptions. Some volunteer notetakers are very committed to providing high quality notes, and they are often students in the class themselves, sharing notes they are already taking for themselves. Often, the student for whom the notes are being taken has a say in the quality of the notetaking when the notetaker is being compensated for his/her work. Again, though, this depends on the situation and the institution. At St. Petersburg Junior College (SPJC) in Florida, for example, the students using volunteer notetakers can and do complain when the quality of the notes they receive is questionable. If a complaint is made, the staff from the disability support office will check with the instructor to see if the notes are actually incomplete. If the notes are consistently poor, then the staff will work with the notetaker. Sometimes the instructor supplements the student's notes with hand-outs and/or outlines, or a new volunteer notetaker is recruited. With paid notetakers, a support staff person may have more leverage and can even require the notetaker to take a training session in better notetaking. It is important to remember, however, that steps can be taken and alternative solutions can be found if the notes from the volunteer notetaker are poor as well.

The obvious primary advantage of volunteer notetakers is the money saved by an institution, as these notetakers are not paid. Another advantage is that the community can become aware that students are involved with helping their peers through volunteerism. Also, it's not uncommon for an institution with a volunteer notetaker program to see students become repeat volunteers, as they may see their own success in class increase as a result of being a notetaker. However, it may be extremely difficult to locate notetakers for some classes.

If an institution decides not to pay notetakers, other rewards might be offered, such as community service credit/recognition, a certificate of appreciation, a recognition ceremony, offers to write letters of recommendation, etc. The institution mentioned above, SPJC in Florida, offers a 10% discount at the college bookstore and early advising, which results in the first choice of classes for the session following the one during which the student volunteered.

In summary, it is important to remember that hiring a notetaker does not necessarily guarantee quality. Hired notetakers may create sketchy and incomplete notes if they have no stake in getting the information themselves; however, the volunteer notetaker could perhaps do the same if they are not motivated by payment. Some disability support staff report that the budget for maintaining hired notetakers can be staggering and that it is often difficult to recoup the money spent on a paid notetaker who drops a class or simply does not work without telling the disability support office until weeks after failing to continue notetaking.

To add, some institutions report that disability support offices must be careful about assuming that students with a 4.0 GPA are the best notetakers. Often they know the information already and, therefore, may take sketchy notes, or they may only need to write a few words to trigger their memories, which results in incomplete notes for the student needing the notetaker.

Volunteer *and* paid notetakers can take pride in what they do and take detailed, elaborate notes; it truly depends on the individual.

Do I have to provide communication accommodations for out-of-class activities?

The general rule is that any out-of-class activity should be made accessible, as long as it is sponsored by the college or university for whom you work.

An adult who is deaf is taking a photography class through the local technical institute. The technical institute said that since it is not an academic course, the school does not have to pay for interpreting services. The individual paid for the class; does he have to also pay for the interpreter?

The student who is deaf pays the course fee (like all students in the class), and the institution is responsible for providing any accommodations. Students who are deaf and enroll in community education programs (like this photography class) are not responsible for providing their own interpreters. It does not matter that it is not an academic class. Since this is a course that is open to anyone in the community, it needs to be accessible for people with disabilities. Even if the course is being offered for free, classes that are sponsored by the institution or held on the property of the institution must be accessible, and the technical institute is responsible for this. It would not be unusual for the technical institute to consult with local educational programs or other community agencies to locate possible interpreters; however, it is the technical institute's responsibility to make sure the service is provided (i.e., pay for it).