Quick Tips for Faculty & Staff

Effective Communication
Serving Deaf & Hard of Hearing Students

Communicating with deaf or hard of hearing individuals is an achievable goal, even when accommodations (interpreters, for example) are not present. The tools available are considerable and limited only by creativity and the desire to communicate.

Variables in Communication:
There is no “one size fits all” approach to communication, nor is there a “typical” individual who is deaf or hard of hearing. A hard of hearing students’ access needs may be significantly different from a native ASL user’s. Each student has their own set of communication needs and preferences which may be affected by the setting and the purpose of the interaction. Inquire directly with the student about their communication needs. Writing, gestures, speech, sign language, technology, and visual aids are all possibilities to be explored.

In the Classroom:
• Get the attention of the individual who is deaf or hard of hearing before speaking. If s/he does not respond to speech, a tap on shoulder or another visual signal is appropriate.
• Factors such as background noise, lighting, pace of conversation, number of speakers, accents and facial hair all influence communication.
• Avoid blocking the line of sight between the student and interpreter.
• Provide a written outline of the main topics to be discussed in class. This is especially helpful for individuals who depend on speech reading to pick up on key words in a conversation.
• Speak clearly and at a normal pace; yelling or over enunciating makes it harder to understand.
• Look at the student while speaking, not the interpreter.
• Don’t cover your mouth or look around during a conversation.
• Backlighting from standing in front of a light source can make it difficult to see your face clearly.
• Rephrase the thought if you need to repeat. Only about 30% of speech sounds appear on the lips; rephrasing allows for opportunities to understand what was previously missed.
• Make the class as visual as possible. Use visual aids, gestures, and body language when appropriate. Do not be afraid to use pen and pencil or texting as a tool.
• Use open-ended questions to allow for more opportunities for both parties to check each others’ understanding.
• Deaf and hard of hearing students must meet the same course requirements as all other students. Don’t lower (or raise) expectations for them.

Hearing aids and cochlear implants will not restore hearing to “normal.” While some users are able to use a telephone or recognize music, others are only able to pick up on environmental sounds.

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