

# **Teaching Students with Hearing Disabilities**

Students who are deaf or hard of hearing may use a wide range of services depending on the language or communication system they use.

Some people who are deaf consider themselves members of a distinct linguistic and cultural group. However, many students with hearing impairments do not consider themselves part of a separate identity group, and work towards assimilation. Often people who are hearing impaired have been deaf for a long time. Some may live in a community or extended family that includes numerous other individuals who are hearing impaired. They may use American Sign Language as their first language. Therefore, members of this cultural group are bilingual, and English is their second language. As with any cultural group, people who are deaf have their own values, social norms, and traditions. Because of this, faculty should be sensitive and attentive to cross-cultural information in the classroom setting. Some students who are hearing impaired may use American Sign Language interpreters in the classroom setting.

Indications that a student has a hearing loss may include a student's straining to hear, intense concentration on the speaker's face, use of loud or distorted speech, requests to repeat or spell words, and consistent failure to respond.

Hard of hearing refers to those individuals who may use speech, reading, and/or hearing aids to enhance oral communication. Hearing aids or amplification systems may include public address systems and transmitter/receiver systems with a clip-on microphone for the instructor. For those who use speech reading, only 30 to 40 percent of spoken English is comprehensible even for those who are highly skilled.

For people who are deaf or hard of hearing who choose to speak, their feedback mechanisms are limited; therefore, vocal control, volume, intonations, and articulation may be affected. These secondary effects are physical and should not be viewed as mental or intellectual weaknesses.

A variety of services are available to students who are hard of hearing. Students may use Signed English, American Sign Language, Cued Speech, or oral transliterators in the classroom – visual systems that enhance the reception and expression of spoken English.

## **Accommodations to Remember**

The following accommodations will assist many students who have hearing disabilities.

- Students who are deaf or hard of hearing will benefit from front-row seating. An unobstructed line of vision is necessary for students who use interpreters and for those who rely on speech reading and visual cues. If an interpreter is used, the student's view

should include the interpreter and professor. If the speaker is in a shadow or standing by a window with movement outside of it, the person who is speech reading may have difficulty seeing or attending to the speaker's mouth.

- Instructors should keep their faces within the student's line of vision and speak in natural tones.
- When an interpreter is being used by a student with a hearing impairment, an instructor should speak directly to and maintain eye contact with the student, not the interpreter.
- Recognize the processing time the interpreter takes to translate a message from its original language into another language (whether English to American Sign Language or vice versa). This processing time may cause a short delay in the student's receiving information, asking questions, and/or offering comments. During translation lag times, the instructor should maintain a comfortable eye contact and postural regard with the student.
- Repeat questions and remarks of other people in the room.
- Use visual aids and the board to reinforce spoken presentations when possible.
- If requested, assist the student with identifying a note taker.
- When possible, provide the student with class outlines, lecture notes, lists of new technical terms and printed transcripts of audio and audiovisual materials.
- Do not hesitate to communicate with the student in writing when conveying important information (e.g., assignments, scheduling, deadlines).
- Do not obstruct the student's view of the interpreter by walking between them.
- If the speaker has a beard or mustache that covers part or all of the lips, remember that a student who speech reads will have a hard time following a lecture or class discussion.
- Use audiovisual equipment that provides good audio clarity.
- Try to reduce the amount of ambient noise in the environment, such as fans or background noise.