

## **Communicating with Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing**

An increasing number of students with hearing loss are enrolling in institutions of higher education. Hearing loss varies greatly from one individual to another. Students who are deaf or hard of hearing may use speech, lipreading, sign language, hearing aids or a mixture of all these in daily communications. Different students will have different methods of communication and this may depend on the degree of deafness and the individual's age at the onset of the hearing loss. With most deaf people, speaking loudly or over-enunciating does not aid in the communication process.

### ***For students who are deaf and use a sign language interpreter:***

- If a sign language interpreter is needed, remember that facilitating communication is the interpreter's primary role. Refrain from asking the interpreter to function as a personal assistant to the student who is deaf or as a participant in the class activities.
- Seating in the classroom should ideally keep the instructor and the interpreter in the same (or close) line of vision for the student.
- Provide the interpreter with any class materials ahead of time. This advance review of information will enhance the interpreter's quality of the interpreted message.
- Speak naturally at a reasonable pace.
- If the student does not use his own voice, the interpreter may 'voice' for the deaf student's signs to others.

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- Look at the student, not at the interpreter. Direct eye contact is important when possible, and is a good reminder that the exchange is between you and the student.
- For small class discussions, semi-circles or circles work best so the student can see everyone who may be speaking. It is important that only one person speak/sign at a time.

***For students who have some degree of hearing loss:***

- Provide preferential seating, typically at the front and/or center of the class.
- Face the student when using the blackboard and visual aids. This allows for the student to see facial cues and possibly lipread the instructor.
- When showing videos, provide captioned programs whenever available. During videos, be careful not to speak over sound portions.
- Repeat questions from other students in the classroom before answering.

If a student is wearing hearing aids, note that the aids amplify all sounds equally, including background noise which can be problematic. The instructor's voice is competing with these background noises. Some students will use an Assistive Listening Device (ALD) system in which the speaker uses a microphone/transmitter positioned close to the mouth to send the speaker's voice through the air to the receiver worn by the student. ALDs have been proven to be an effective tool for students with hearing loss.

*If you desire any further information on the topic of teaching and working with students who are deaf or have hearing loss, please contact your campus' disability services office or the DTN.*



**DISABILITY TRAINING NETWORK**