

# Tipsheet

SERVING STUDENTS WHO ARE HARD OF HEARING

## IMPROVING SERVICES TO 500,000 COLLEGE STUDENTS WHO ARE HARD OF HEARING OR LATE-DEAFENED

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### KEY CONCEPTS

Hard of hearing and late-deafened persons represent the largest number of Americans with a chronic physical impairment. About 414,300 such students were enrolled in higher education during 2004. To better serve these students, it is important to know some of their key attributes. Because they vary widely in personal characteristics such as resiliency, self-esteem, and fortitude, it is important to not stereotype them.

A national study in 2002 of working-age hard-of-hearing adults found that 75% reported either a mild or moderate hearing loss with the remainder having a severe or profound loss. Moreover, 3 in every 4 had an onset of hearing loss during adult life, and three-fourths had a slow rather than sudden decline in their ability to hear. Almost three-fourths attended college, with 40% earning a degree. A majority worked in professional, managerial, sales, and clerical jobs. Many late-deafened workers experienced communication deprivation, interaction strains, and limited career prospects. Their perceptions of their hearing loss were more important than the hearing impairment itself in terms of adjustment.

The condition known as “off-and-on hearing” is perplexing to those experiencing it. They can hear one-to-one conversations in a quiet room, but miss out in large groups and outdoor chats. Those with a progressive hearing loss may endure stresses in communication and interaction that can accumulate. These inconsistent features of hearing loss can lead to reduced self-respect, social withdrawal, underachievement and even depression. These emotional difficulties can intensify as hearing ability decreases.

### How Many College Students Have a Hearing Impairment?

Among 15.9 million students aged 18-44 attending 6,900 colleges and universities, including branch campuses, during 2004, an estimated 414,300 were

deaf or hard of hearing. Among these are an estimated 305,300 individuals who were hard of hearing at birth, 101,300 were deafened after age 19. Those who are hard of hearing had difficulties in understanding speech and those who are deaf are unable to understand speech. A predicted 43,200 new students with loss of hearing will start college each year. By contrast, an estimated 50% or about 22,000 students drop out of college yearly, resulting in a net gain of about 20,000 students. Thus, approximately 534,000 students will be enrolled in college by 2010.

At a typical college 2.5% of the student body can be expected to have a hearing impairment. Thus, a college with 25,000 enrolled can anticipate having 625 such students.

### What is a Student Access Center?

The traditional Disabled Student Services (DSS) program has been renamed as Student Access Center (SAC) for this tip sheet. This was done because most hard of hearing and late-deafened students do not consider themselves to be disabled. We estimated that the average SAC program can be equipped to have about 20 hard of hearing and late-deafened students. What are some characteristics of these students with loss of hearing? It is known that they reside in all 50 states, most are enrolled part-time, and only 5% use hearing aids or related assistive listening devices. Unfortunately, most are unaware of special campus support services.

### SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION

#### Use Effective Means of Communication

- Directly face the student while speaking naturally, clearly, and at a moderate pace.
- Use appropriate facial expressions and body language.
- Encourage the student to interrupt if she or he does not understand.

- Rephrase statements to ascertain if the listener comprehends.
- Make modifications to your office environment: turn off noisy electrical equipment, have sunlight reflecting on your face, not the student's face, and have a phone amplifier.

### **Help the Student Accept His Hearing Loss**

- Ask questions to learn the exact nature of problems in areas such as communication, social interaction, academic performance, and decision making.
- Many students have difficulties in specifically identifying the extent of their inability to hear.
- Reassure them that it is normal to grieve about their loss of hearing, belong to general society, and "think hearing." Self-acceptance leads to forming an affirmative life coping style and enhanced self-esteem.

### **Overcome Resistance**

A student who resists making changes can benefit from consumer-focused counseling in which she or he is encouraged to express his/her feelings; the counselor mainly listens.

- Help the student recognize key problems.
- Pledge confidentiality of all information.
- Assist the consumer to specify concerns underlying major problems to foster self-understanding. Share with them that other hard of hearing students feel the same way and such feelings are normal. Once the student expresses acceptance of their hearing loss, encourage them to embrace change. They may be ready to try positive actions such as using a hearing aid.
- Encourage the student to return for follow-up sessions to facilitate their confidence in making changes. Demonstrate that you understand the student's needs and are willing to listen further.

### **Take Actions that Increase Retention**

The four pillars of effective retention include the student's academic abilities, available campus access services, social peer support, and a viable career goal. Comprehensive personal, academic, and vocational counseling are needed to keep students enrolled. Because students are most vulnerable to dropping out during their first year, this inter-professional process needs to begin promptly after registration.

### **Train Campus Personnel**

- Assess the needs of potential trainees to better understand how to meet their needs. Personnel training must be on-going; one session is insufficient.
- Consider a train-the-trainer approach such as involving a few selected faculty members from each department who in turn can train their colleagues.
- Printed materials and other media can supplement in-person training.

### **Establish Peer Mentoring and Self-Help Groups**

- Introduce well-chosen pairs of students, such as an experienced student and a new student, to each other. Such pairings can lead to friendships and cathartic sharing of personal stories. Older students can help younger students learn strategies for adjusting to college life.
- Encourage small groups of students to attend weekly sessions where they can share success and concerns to discuss whatever is on their minds. A staff person may attend only to facilitate communication.

### **Create Student Outreach Programs**

SAC and Vocational Rehabilitation staff can collaborate to present and demonstrate assistive listening devices (ALD's) and other communication technologies.

- Promote a "Hearing Loss Information Session" to generate campus awareness. Further announcements about SAC services can be disseminated in registration materials and professors' course handouts.
- Encourage hard of hearing and late-deafened students to proactively describe their communication accommodation needs to their professors.

### **Maintain Vocational Rehabilitation Contacts**

- Specialized counselors should visit hard of hearing and late-deafened students at clusters of colleges to check on clients' progress and confer with SAC staff as needed.
- Encourage students to keep in touch with their VR counselors via e-mail and other means.
- Communicate with audiologists who can make referrals and supply documentation of the hearing loss.

For more information contact:

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