

LAW CAREERS FOR DEAF PEOPLE: A PRELIMINARY STUDY REPORT

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In May of 1972, the Wayne State University Law School, Detroit, Michigan, received a grant to undertake a Feasibility Study on Careers in Law for the Deaf. The first phase of the Study is now complete, and the purpose of this paper is to report on the results.

Patricia N. Blair, Associate Professor of Law at Wayne State University, was named Project Director with primary administrative and coordinating responsibilities. L. Deno Reed, Sc.D., serves as Project Officer and Boyce R. Williams as Project Manager, both representing the Social and Rehabilitation Service of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. An advisory committee to work on the Project was also named and consists of the above people plus Ms. Edna Adler, Office of Deafness, RSA; Paul D. Borman, Assistant Dean, Wayne State University Law School; Ray L. Jones, Ed.D., California State University, Northridge; Glenn T. Lloyd, Ed.D., New York University; Wanda Milburn, Ph.D., University of Michigan; the Honorable Joseph J. Pernick, Judge of Probate, Wayne County, Michigan; George Propp, Ed.D., Northwestern University; and Robert M. Werdig, Jr., Assistant U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia.

The first meeting took place at the Wayne State Law School in Detroit, Michigan, on September 25 and 26, 1972. The purpose of the meeting was to define the scope of the study and to establish objectives. The agreed-upon objectives were as follows:

- 1) To identify the nature and extent of the problems likely to be encountered by a deaf law student in his educational programs.

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- 2) To formulate a plan of action which would attempt to minimize the problems.
- 3) To identify the nature and extent of problems which might arise in connection with interpreter utilization in the classroom.
- 4) To identify the specific competencies an interpreter must possess in order to ensure accurate relaying of the classroom instruction and discussion.
- 5) To determine specialized vocabulary which requires new signs and to plan for training of interpreters in the specialized vocabulary.
- 6) To identify other services which would be important to ensure maximum academic benefit for the deaf law student.
- 7) To determine the desirability and advisability of utilizing criteria in place of, or in addition to, the usual entrance criteria of the Wayne State University Law School.

A number of problems were identified, at least potentially, which could inhibit the academic opportunity for deaf students and a number of suggestions for resolving these problems were set forth. Many of the problems were similar to those encountered by other programs which have deaf students in college classes with hearing students. Procedures already proven to be beneficial in other such programs were examined and included as parts of the tentative approaches which would be utilized. At the same time, it was recognized that it would be impossible to plan for every contingency and a flexible plan would be essential.

The major effort of the committee during the initial meeting was to determine ways and means of recruiting "qualified" deaf people to take the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT), administered by the Educational Testing Service (ETS), Princeton, New Jersey, and to have the results submitted to Wayne State University Law School. At this meeting, the committee also agreed that the standard criteria for acceptance into WSU Law School would be applied to the results received.

Due to the fact that the first meeting of the advisory committee for the Project took place in late September of 1972, and that Wayne State University Law School's acceptance of application deadline was April 15, 1973, the only realistic test date for those wishing to participate in the Project was December 16, 1972. A later test date (February 10, 1973) was available, but seemed to be too near the April 15 deadline for the advisory committee to have an adequate opportunity to analyze the LSAT scores.

After selection of the test date, the committee formulated a plan for the dissemination of information explaining the possibility of deaf persons being eligible for admission to law school and soliciting applicants for the LSAT. An announcement in the form of a newsletter was drafted by the committee and subsequently distributed by the National Association of the Deaf.

Even with the assistance of the National Association of the Deaf, however, time considerations handicapped the committee in its recruitment of qualified deaf applicants for the LSAT. In order for a person to take the LSAT on December 16, 1972, ETS had to receive his or her application by November 24, 1972. Moreover, if special assistance, such as an interpreter, would be required during the course of the LSAT, ETS had to receive the application to take the test by November 8, 1972. These ETS application deadlines meant that the advisory committee for the Project had less than 7½ weeks in which to publicize the Project and encourage qualified deaf applicants to participate by taking the LSAT. Additionally, deaf persons, once acquainted with the Project, had only a limited time to consider whether to participate in the Project and to file their applications with ETS if they wished to take the LSAT on December 16, 1972.

Nevertheless, 100 deaf persons did respond to the NAD news release and indicated that they wished either to participate in the Project or to receive further information so that they might decide whether to participate. Of these initial 100 contacts, 33 informed Professor Blair that they were planning to take the LSAT, with LSAT scores for 25 ultimately being reported to Wayne State University Law School. The small number of test scores actually reported was neither unexpected nor disheartening to the committee in view of the limited time element. Another aspect of the Project, however, was unexpected.

One of the conditions specified for eligibility to take the LSAT under the Project auspices was that the deaf person must possess a baccalaureate degree, or be a college senior, and have an overall grade point average of B or better for undergraduate studies. Of the 25 scores reported to Wayne State University Law School, five were reported without the grade point average (GPA). Twenty scores were reported with the GPA and of that 20, nine did not meet the "B" average criterion. Three of the remaining 11 scores (or about 27 per cent), when viewed in conjunction with the deaf person's GPA, were high enough so that the overall result was deemed positive by the committee. Even the three participants who received the highest admissions factor (a combination of GPA and LSAT scores), however, failed to meet the admissions criteria for the 1972 Wayne State University Law School entering class. In view of the fact that the trend of the admissions criteria has been consistently upward for Wayne State University Law School, the committee concluded that none of the participants would qualify for admission to the Law School for the 1973-74 school year. Still, the top three participants had earned admissions factors which were sufficiently high to justify the committee in notifying each of the three that application to another law school might very well receive favorable action.

Additionally, the committee felt that results of this first hurried effort were positive enough for a repeated effort and plans to conduct the same

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program again were initiated. Interested deaf people who have a minimum "B" average in undergraduate school should write to:

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Incidentally, a "B" average or better is equal to any of the following:

- On a 100 point scale, 83 or above
- On a 4.0 scale, 3.0 or above
- On a 1-5 scale, 1+, 1, 1-, 2+, 2

Before closing this report, it should be noted that a number of problems did occur and that the committee is attempting to discover means for overcoming these problems. In spite of these problems, however, committee members look forward to the future with confidence and believe that deaf people desiring careers in law will soon have the opportunity to enter this new vocational area.