

UNDERGRADUATE HEARING IMPAIRED STUDENTS IN THE COLLEGIATE MAINSTREAM: THE WASHINGTON AREA CONSORTIUM OF UNIVERSITIES

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Gallaudet College, the world's only accredited liberal arts college for the deaf, is concerned with the task of encouraging the intellectual, social, and emotional growth of its hearing impaired students. Upon entrance to Gallaudet, many students have had limited opportunities to interact within a hearing society. The College has identified this as a problem area and has responded through numerous programs. Gallaudet College's membership in the Washington Area Consortium of Universities demonstrates just one effort in this area: the possibility of fostering student growth through curriculum offerings at other colleges, permitting Gallaudet students to explore, acquire, and integrate knowledge and experiences from new settings.

The Washington Area Consortium of Universities was founded in 1967. Members include The American University, The Catholic University of America, George Washington University, Georgetown University, and Howard University as full members; Gallaudet College, Mt. Vernon College, and Trinity College are associate members. Students matriculated at a member institution are able to register and take courses at any other member institution at no additional expense. As such, the full range of academic programs and resources in the metropolitan Washington area are available to matriculated students at member institutions.

In the past, however, only a limited number of Gallaudet College undergraduate hearing impaired students have participated in the Consortium. A survey of past Consortium participants showed that since Gal-

laudet became a member in 1972, only 69 undergraduate students from Gallaudet have enrolled in Consortium courses. Problems cited by former students were difficulties in obtaining interpreters, in obtaining course information, reserving space in courses, and finding transportation. These difficulties can pose a problem for any student; however, when they are compounded by a hearing impairment, the impact is greatly increased.

Perhaps the biggest problem, though, is the potential inference that because the students are hearing impaired they cannot or should not participate in the Consortium. The key questions to be answered by the program concerned the possibility of Gallaudet student access, participation, and successful development of self-esteem through the Consortium.

PROGRAM GOALS AND DESIGN

The Consortium Advisement Program was established by the Vice President for Academic Affairs as a one-year program designed to improve the Consortium delivery system to encourage greater undergraduate student participation in the Consortium. The goals of the program were as follows:

- to identify faculty perceptions regarding Gallaudet undergraduate participation in the Consortium;
- to identify critical academic skills and personality characteristics that enable students to succeed in Consortium courses;
- to identify specific support services necessary to improve student participation;

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- to foster greater student participation in the Consortium;
- to develop deaf awareness among the member colleges and universities.

The program was designed to pilot test a process that would identify potential program participants, identify internal and external support systems, monitor student participation in the project, and evaluate the overall impact on the participating students and institutions.

PROGRAM OPERATION

Phase I: Collection of Information

The initial phase of the program consisted chiefly of data and information collection. Students previously enrolled in Consortium courses were interviewed to determine their perceptions of the experience itself, with emphasis on the identification of those factors which tended to block successful participation. The most serious problems identified by these interviews were lack of course information and advisement, difficulties in obtaining interpreters, and lack of information concerning transportation and academic calendars at the other institutions.

The faculty at Gallaudet College was then surveyed in order to determine its perceptions of the role and importance of the Consortium experience for undergraduate Gallaudet students. On a basis of a 40% return of questionnaires, it was determined that the faculty at Gallaudet is in support of the idea of undergraduate Gallaudet students enrolling in Consortium courses. However, faculty members indicated a lack of information available about the Consortium and a subsequent hesitancy to actively consider the use of Consortium courses in their advisement process.

Contact also was made with each of the Consortium member institutions. An individual at each institution was identified as liaison between faculty members at Gallaudet and the respective institutions. Through discussions with these personnel, it was discovered that many faculty members at other institutions felt helpless in terms of working with hearing impaired students in their classrooms: (course rosters in the past had

not indicated the hearing impaired Gallaudet student and few faculty members had any information on what to do with any hearing impaired student).

Finally, the Interpreter Referral Services (IRS) at Gallaudet College was contacted to determine its perceptions of its role in serving Gallaudet students enrolled in Consortium courses. Problems identified by the IRS included insufficient notification of student interpreter needs as well as insufficient notification of course times, course scope, and the vocabulary covered within the course.

Phase II: Information Dissemination

Several activities were undertaken to improve the flow of information. First, course catalogues and schedules for the coming semester were placed in each academic department and the various Deans' offices. In addition, activities informing students of Consortium opportunities were conducted in various dormitories at Gallaudet College.

With the assistance of the Office of Public Relations, a small brochure advertising the Consortium was developed and distributed to all students on campus. This brochure emphasized the proximity of other campuses to Gallaudet as well as the various course opportunities available to Gallaudet students through Consortium participation.

A Consortium Advisement Manual was developed and placed in each academic department for use by faculty advisors. This manual contained information about the various member institutions, an overview of Consortium academic advising, information for hearing impaired Consortium participants, academic calendars for each Consortium institution, explanation of the function and role of interpreters and notetakers, a listing of Consortium resource persons at each institution, and Consortium transportation information.

Finally, a workshop covering such areas as the nature and degree of hearing impairment, impact of hearing impairment on the educational process, role of interpreters and notetakers, and sign language systems was developed for presentation to faculty mem-

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bers at the other Consortium institutions. Opportunity was provided for those faculty members attending the workshops to ask questions concerning speed and content of presentation of information as well as any other concerns or questions that they might have.

Phase III: Program Presentation

As a result of these activities described in the previous section 48 undergraduate students made contact with the Consortium program to receive more information about possibly enrolling in Consortium courses. Of this group, eight decided to enroll in courses in the Consortium. In addition, six hearing impaired graduate students also elected to enroll in Consortium courses. These 14 students comprised the largest number of hearing impaired students to date from Gallaudet College enrolling in Consortium courses in any given semester. Contact was made with the Interpreter Referral Service for the provision of interpreters, as well as with liaison personnel at the various institutions to inform them as to the students' names, courses, faculty advisors, and other related information to be passed on to each instructor of the courses in which Gallaudet students were enrolled. Periodic checks with liaison personnel were made throughout the semester and with the students themselves to determine any problem areas that might be developing.

FINDINGS

Through a survey evaluation instrument developed for eliciting student responses of the program, the following were determined:

- 90% of Gallaudet students selected courses related to their program major. The Consortium course selections were not viewed as an opportunity to broaden the scope of the academic program as much as to add increased depth to major focus areas.
- An emphasis on depth of program rather than breadth of program indicated a need to provide interpreters with special vocabulary skills. Over 60% of these students indicated a need for

interpreters to have a specialized knowledge of the vocabulary associated with the course field.

- Over 50% of the students stated that the Consortium courses involved more work than Gallaudet courses; 60% rated the Consortium courses as better than a Gallaudet course.
- Students felt they could understand the technical vocabulary used, the materials and handouts, as well as the assigned reading. 80% of the students indicated the assigned readings related to the course and helped clarify key course concepts.
- The students indicated that assistance was still needed in the areas of interpreters, information about the Consortium, and transportation.

CONCLUSIONS

The students who participated in the Consortium generally perceived the experience as a beneficial one. The fact that none of the undergraduate students had had previous experience with the Consortium indicates that the outreach activities conducted had been successful in recruiting students. There was also general satisfaction with the advisement manual and with notification of faculty members at other institutions of the presence and needs of hearing impaired students in their classroom setting.

The overall success of the program will continue to be dependent on the provision of information to students and academic advisors in time for it to be incorporated into the appropriate academic advising time frame. In addition, work must continue on addressing the difficulties associated with obtaining appropriate interpreters at the various class times. Nevertheless, the Consortium Advisement Program at Gallaudet College has demonstrated that with the appropriate delivery system of support services, the hearing impaired college student is able to compete successfully and is able to take advantage of the full range of programs, services, and benefits afforded at institutions of higher learning.