



Disability Resource & Support Center

### **Working with Interpreters**

Students attending CSU-Pueblo have a variety of abilities, including those who are deaf or hard-of-hearing. An accommodation provided to these students to ensure effective communication in the classroom and allow participation is the presence of sign language interpreters. The following information offers information regarding their roles and responsibilities and how they might enhance learning in both lecture and lab environments.

#### **Interpreter Roles and Responsibilities**

- Sign language interpreters bridge the communication gap by listening and translating lectures and discussions into sign language. They also translate the student's signed communication into spoken English when the student is called upon, has a comment or question, or makes a presentation.
- Interpreters provide communication access for the student, the instructor, and the class.
- Sign language interpreters are highly-skilled professionals who have studied American Sign Language and interpretation for many years.
- Interpreters have an ethical responsibility to remain neutral. They cannot answer personal questions about the student, interject personal opinions, or assist a student with schoolwork. They are there strictly to translate what is being said. Address questions or comments regarding the student directly to the student.
- Interpreters should not be expected to attend class when the student is absent, hand out papers, take notes, or participate in discussions.
- Interpreters often work in teams. If classes are more than two hours in length or content is complex, there may be two interpreters in the class. One will be up front near the instructor interpreting, while the other is watching visuals and listening in order to assist the primary interpreter with cues as needed. They will switch every 15-20 minutes.
- Situations may occur when it may be necessary for interpreters to share classroom information with other members of the DRSC. However, any notes and transcripts are held to the same confidentiality policy as other disability-related accommodations.

#### **Ensuring Successful Classroom Communication**

- Make eye contact with and speak directly to the deaf student as though the interpreter is not present. This shows the student respect and helps develop the student/instructor relationship.
- Expect lag time: Wait for interpretation and response before continuing to speak.
- Deaf/hard-of-hearing students may or may not speak for themselves. Even if interpreters are present, the student may choose to speak for themselves when commenting or responding to questions in class.

- During class, the speaker and interpreter should both be in the student's line of sight. Interpreters may ask you where you are sitting or standing in order to be seated near you. Make sure you do not stand between the interpreter and the deaf student.
- Keep in mind that the student must try and watch you as well as watch the interpreter. This is not always an easy task. Lecturing from the front of the room rather than walking around the room can help, as can ensuring that you face the class as much as possible and speak at a moderate pace.
- Provide any class materials and handouts to interpreters, and do this in advance whenever possible. Advanced copies of lecture notes, technical terms, hand-outs, speeches, audio recordings, song lyrics, websites, PowerPoint slides, and other materials will help orient the deaf student and allow the interpreter to better prepare to translate the class content.
- If you plan to read something aloud in class, provide the student and the interpreter with a copy before you begin (preferably in advance of class).
  - When reading aloud, people often tend to speak faster than normal. This may affect the interpreter's translation of the material. If possible, try to slow down a bit when reading.
  - You should also be aware that translation into ASL without seeing the written copy may affect the student in terms of the expectation for any exercise associated with the reading.
- To get a deaf person's attention when an interpreter is not available, use a hand motion or wave in their field of peripheral vision.
- If appropriate, clarify disability-related needs with the student directly. Otherwise, contact the DRSC.

### **Working with Deaf Students and Interpreters in Lab Settings**

Often professors in the sciences have safety concerns about having deaf students and interpreters in lab settings. In fact, deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals are no more or no less susceptible to safety issues in the lab than other students. Here are a few things to consider in order to ensure an effective and safe learning environment for all. Please review these with TAs as well.

- Most deaf students have had some prior science background, so they are familiar with the setting. The student is a great resource in determining what will work best in your lab setting.
- The deaf student should have a lab station that provides an unobstructed view of the instructor. The student must be able to see any instruction and demonstration that occurs. The interpreter must be able to hear and see all instruction as well.
- Occasionally, interpreters may ask for clarification so that they can interpret concepts, tasks, and procedures more clearly. However, the interpreters are not instructors, and should not be relied on to explain concepts or show the student how to do procedures in the lab.
- It is helpful if the professor or TA can meet with the student and interpreters before the first lab in order to discuss logistics. This meeting should take place in the actual lab so that everyone can agree on best physical placement of student and interpreters, as well as any other concerns.
- If students are required to wear special safety gear, such as lab coat, goggles, gloves, etc., such gear should be provided to interpreters as well.