

# Focus on Disability Awareness

An Occasional Bulletin from the Office of Disability Services for LVC Faculty, Staff, and Administrators

## Students who are Hard of Hearing

According to the American Council on Education's 1999 Profile on College Students with Disabilities, one in eight freshmen report having a hearing impairment. There is, of course, variation in the degree of severity and need of accommodation among this group of students, but because of the social stigma associated with hearing loss, even those most in need of accommodations are frequently reluctant to request them, and thus experience a great deal of difficulty in fully participating in the educational experience of college.

The needs of students who have residual hearing differ from those of students who are congenitally deaf or who experienced profound hearing loss in early childhood, partly because of the differing educational communities in which they have grown up. Students who are hard-of-hearing are much more likely to have attended mainstreamed schools than are students who are deaf. They do not usually consider themselves to be part of the deaf culture and frequently deny the degree to which their hearing loss impacts their ability to function in academic or other settings. They are less likely to disclose their hearing loss to their teachers and friends. It is therefore imperative that the college community is sensitive and responsive to the needs of these students, demonstrating a willingness to learn about and utilize various technologies that facilitate hearing, and thus, learning.

Students who are congenitally deaf tend to rely on sign language as their primary means of communication. However, less than 5% of the hard-of-hearing population can use sign language. Students who have residual hearing usually augment their hearing by speechreading and/or the use of hearing aids. Speechreading is usually insufficient in a lecture environment, as only approximately 30% of the English language is visible on the lips. Additionally, speechreading requires instructors to stand still and continually face the student. Many students with hearing loss attend carefully to nonverbal communication signals, such as facial and hand gestures, but understanding of complex academic information is not likely to be enhanced by such cues. The sole use of hearing aids is also usually insufficient, as they provide amplification of sound but do not help the listener to discriminate speech sounds, nor do they isolate speech from background noise. Hearing aids tend to be more useful in one-to-one interactions and less useful in large groups of people, or in large rooms where there is distance between the speaker and the student. Thus, relying exclusively on speechreading and hearing aids will frequently cause the student to miss critical information.

Technology such as assistive listening devices (Frequency Modulation, Infrared, or Audio Induction Loop systems) and visual communication systems such as CART (Computer-Aided Realtime Translation), CAN (Computer-Assisted Notetaking), or C-Print (Computer-Aided Speech to Print) is often essential to breaking down barriers to full access to the college's programs. Assistive listening devices require the use of special microphones, transmitters, and receivers; usually, instructors need to wear a small mike and carry a transmitter in their pockets or attached to a belt. The student wears a receiving unit and headphones or earbuds. Visual communication systems require a stenographer or a trained captionist, one or more laptop monitors, and/or a projection system. They provide either verbatim or summarized readouts of the lecture, including questions or statements made by students during discussion. Determination of which system(s) will meet the needs of a student with hearing loss is made through consultation with the student and his or her audiologist.