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Case-Managed Support Services for Students who are Deaf or Hearing Impaired

*Elizabeth T. McNeil
Mississippi State University*

*Susan Kelley
University of Southern Florida*

Abstract

The population of college students who are deaf or hearing impaired on mainstream campuses has grown in recent years. Although support services have expanded in an effort to meet the needs of students with hearing impairments, the range of services provided and program retention rates have been sources of concern. This article presents an overview of case-managed support services program developed specifically to serve this population at major southeastern university. Program components and processes that are integral elements of this model are described.

Providing support services to students who are deaf or hearing impaired in mainstream university settings requires an understanding of deafness, rehabilitation counseling, student personnel services in higher education, and the university culture. Multiple resources and supports need to be accessed, then coordinated in an ecologic, systemic manner to facilitate the interaction between students and components of the academic environment. The purpose of this article is to describe a case-managed support services program that effectively addresses and resolves many of the academic issues and needs of such students in an integrated university environment.

Higher Education and Disability

Access to educational opportunity is a precursor to access to social participation (Biklen, Ford, & Ferguson, 1989). With regard to persons with disabilities, when educational opportunities are impeded by lack of accommodation, then access to social opportunities is impeded as well. This is particularly salient for youth with disabilities for whom the single most important means of achieving social integration is education (Burton, 1979). Research has demonstrated that postsecondary education instills in persons with disabilities, "... a broader perspective on life, a much wider variety of career options, and an appreciation for a greater range of avocations" (Welsh, Walter, & Riley, 1989, p. 11).

In the last decade, the number of students with disabilities on the nation's college campuses has tripled. They now account for slightly more than 10% of all college students (Rothstein, 1991). As this population has expanded, so has the number of programs developed to meet their needs. Today, many major universities and smaller colleges offer a broad array of services for students with disabilities (Wilson, 1992). Although such programs are intended to facilitate the access of students with disabilities to appropriate educational opportunities, full integration has been slow to evolve. For example, despite passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, a benchmark for disability rights legislation, unconditional inclusion of persons with deafness or hearing impairments in mainstream universities has been a difficult goal to achieve (Brown & Foster, 1991). The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 has revitalized the challenge for colleges and universities to integrate and accommodate such students. Historically, college students with deafness or hearing impairments have gravitated to post-secondary institutions such as Gallaudet University and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, both renowned for exemplary services for such students. These institutions have demonstrated clearly that policies, programs, and instructional methods developed for students with hearing impairments are vital and effective in helping these students advance educationally and economically. For students with deafness or hearing impairments, postsecondary education that is tailored to meet their needs acts as a deterrent to the under- or unemployment that is typical among these young adults (Kasen, Ouellette, & Cohen, 1990).

Support Services for College Students who are Deaf

As the population of deaf students has grown in recent years, programs developed to meet their academic needs on college campuses have expanded (Rawlings, Karchmer, & DeCaro, 1988). But the range of services offered by such programs and their retention rates have been problematic (Schroedel & Watson, 1991). Several authors attribute these problems to multiple interacting factors. Aside from funding constraints, these factors include: (a) strong faculty needs for training that facilitates their interactions with students who have minimal or no usable hearing (Lang & Conner, 1988; Sass-Lehrer, Cohen-Silver, & Bodner-Johnson, 1990); (b) classroom environments and university cultures that are less receptive to the communication needs of students who are deaf or hearing impaired (Saur, Layne, Hurley, & Opton, 1986); (c) deficits in the social competencies of such students; (d) absence of a support services counselor who signs (Davie, 1990); and (e) lack of integration of services and resources within the university. Clearly, the synergistic effects of these factors influence educational outcomes.

Hameister (1984) observed that students with disabilities enrolling in postsecondary education often need support in developing social skills, leadership skills, and a positive self-concept. Garland (1985) concurred and suggested that such support be formally structured through cooperative efforts of faculty and staff responsible for student affairs. By identifying evolving student needs and expectations, and by developing strategies to meet those needs, a formal program of support services can play an important role in linking students with disabilities to faculty and peers in the academic environment. Successful linking is best accomplished through case management, a process that has

proved to be effective and practical in a wide array of human services endeavors (Anthony & Blanch, 1989). Case management services have resolved problems arising from fragmented services, provided by too few or too many professionals, in settings that are markedly different from the academic communities where students must function on a day-to-day basis (Rapp & Chamberlain, 1985). When applied in the mainstream university, case-managed support services also promote a trusting relationship with a counselor who can help instruct the student on how to negotiate the academic system.

This article presents a model program developed specifically to accommodate the needs of deaf students in an integrated academic environment of a major southeastern university. By applying the principles of sound case management, the program successfully bridges the service, resource, and support gaps between students who are deaf or hearing impaired and components in the academic environment.

Enhancing Access to the University Community through Case Management

The university, which is the site for this approach to service delivery, is known for comprehensive services for students with mobility, sensory, and learning disabilities. The program is part of a larger support services structure, administered by the Dean of Student Affairs, which provides services to 175 students who have disabilities. These services encompass academic advisement, academic accommodation such as tutoring and notetaking, technological assistance including wheelchair repair, and supportive counseling. The constellation of support services is viewed as a pool of important available resources that play an active role in facilitating the meaningful participation of students with disabilities in the campus community.

In 1991, the Student Support Services program (SSS) expanded to include services for students who are deaf or hearing impaired. The expanded program was designed to have a dual focus - both on students and on the academic environment. A rehabilitation counselor who has interpreting skills was employed to collaborate with faculty, staff, and students in managing the system of 10 integrated services that is shown in figure 1. These services represent those components which are essential for deaf students on a hearing campus.

Program implementation rests in the hands of the SSS Counselor for the Deaf, whose role calls for a blending of clinical and managerial functions and environmental interventions such as identifying and coordinating the multiple resources available within the university; advocacy; social skills teaching, mentoring, and coaching; and personal counseling. When students who are deaf or hearing impaired are not knowledgeable about how to access resources available in the university setting, the SSS Counselor steps in to: (a) match student needs with opportunities and resources in the academic environment, (b) teach students how to access these resources, (c) monitor their interaction, and (d) intervene when necessary. The SSS Counselor for the Deaf performs five fundamental functions in this case-managed support services system, all of which must mutually involve the Counselor and the student to be effective. Each is described along with illustrative case study anecdotes.

Assessment

The purpose of assessment is to determine students' eligibility for academic support services. Methods used in this process range from intake interviewing to reviewing audiological reports. During the intake interview, it is important to ask about strengths, limitations, previous academic difficulties, previous support services, and study habits. Audiological reports provide important information regarding the degree and severity of hearing loss and can be used to assess classroom needs and housing accommodations. The SSS Counselor should use many assessment techniques as well as personal accounts from students as a basis for eligibility determination and service planning. Audiological reports alone are not sufficient for this purpose. For example, one student preferred to communicate manually even though he had some usable hearing. In this instance, the student's preferred communication mode was given priority.

Planning

Once eligibility is established, planning the services necessary for academic success is important to ensure their availability. Delineation of services is accomplished with student participation. The types of services that may be needed include interpreters (oral or manual), notetakers, tutors (content and instructional), and taped or transcribed lectures. Beginning to plan services during the assessment phase allows the SSS Counselor to recruit volunteers, hire personnel, and coordinate their activities, all in a timely manner. Interpreters are obtained from Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) sources or from a local or regional Directory of Certified Interpreters to ensure quality interpreting for students. Content tutors may be needed for students who have vocabulary limitations or trouble with certain concepts discussed in classes. Documentation of the delineation of services is essential for future planning. By documenting services, the SSS Counselor can maintain a record of what services were beneficial, or not, to the student and use this record for future planning.

Linking

The SSS Counselor plays an important role as the link between the student and the university community. The SSS counselor provides technical assistance in situations where questions arise concerning the use of assistive listening devices (ALDs), telecommunication devices for the deaf (TDDs), or the role of interpreters in the classroom. When students with hearing impairments are unaware of the availability of ALDs and look to the SSS Counselor for information, the Counselor shares information, and then refers the student to VR. The SSS Counselor also may be called upon to link students to speech and hearing centers where students can be tested for and fitted with ALDs. The university looks to the SSS Counselor for Deaf as a resource for other personnel that is, the Counselor may be called upon to train incoming counselors, provide guidelines for serving this population, and orient incoming freshmen who are deaf or hearing impaired to the university. Finally, the SSS Counselor is instrumental in facilitating the formation and continuation of support groups for these students.

Monitor

The purpose of monitoring is to maintain the student's appropriate academic progress and personal well-being. Evaluations at midterm and final periods of the academic year document performance in coursework and provide indications of difficulties. Regular meetings with the student are necessary for feedback on their academic progress. They are encouraged to share specific information such as test scores with the Counselor. Faculty are encouraged to monitor progress as well, contacting the SSS Counselor at the onset of perceived problems. Addressing personal needs via individual counseling allows the counselor to help students with the social, relational side of life in the university. In one situation, a student was experiencing distressing problems with a roommate who complained about the student's need to turn up the volume on a television they shared. The SSS Counselor mediated their dispute, taking care to consider both sides, then provided information about closed-captioned televisions and economical captioning decoders. The students decided to purchase a decoder, installed it, and resumed watching their favorite programming in mutual comfort.

Advocacy

Perhaps the most important function is that of advocating for the academic and personal rights of students with hearing impairments. The purpose of this function is to ensure reasonable accommodations in the university and community. "Dave's" dilemma illustrates how essential advocacy is in this case-managed system. Dave entered the university as a freshman in 1991 . He had a profound hearing loss and wore bilateral hearing aids; his aided speech recognition was 40-60 percent. During the semester, Dave encountered difficulties in a class in which instructional materials were presented as slides. To complicate matters, Dave's professor, who wore a full beard and mustache, totally dimmed all lights during his presentation and moved about the classroom while discussing the slide material. Dave could not lip-read under these conditions. The SSS Counselor went to the professor with Dave, explained why Dave was experiencing difficulty, and suggested reasonable accommodations. The professor agreed to stand at a lighted podium while presenting slides and even trimmed his mustache and beard so that Dave could better read his lips.

Conclusion

This article has described an innovative case managed program designed to meet the needs of students who are deaf or hearing impaired in a mainstream university setting. The success of such a program relies first and foremost on the clinical knowledge and managerial skills of program staff. It is essential that the SSS Counselor for the Deaf have a working knowledge of hearing impairments, including associated medical and psychosocial implications. Several students have offered their insights regarding the benefits of the program. One student reported her appreciation for knowing that someone in the university setting understood why it upset her when she would ask for something to be repeated and was told, "I'll tell you later." Another student, who is deaf and blind, was appreciative of the Counselor's knowledge of ALD's. In this instance, the Counselor introduced the student to a Personal FM System, which greatly aided his speech recognition in the classroom, and successfully advocated for VR to purchase one for him.

Numerous publications and training programs can contribute to staff's fund of knowledge about deafness or disabilities in general. Training programs for postsecondary service providers are located at Regional Resource Centers for Deafness throughout the nation. If in-service training is not an option because of funding or geographic constraints then many informative and useful publications can be requested from institutions such as the National Technical Institute on Deafness or Gallaudet University.

The integration of students with minimal or no usable hearing on a mainstream university campus involves not only the obvious academic accommodations, such as interpreting and notetaking, but also the consideration of the relational side of life in academia. Social interaction and supportive relationships constitute a substantive dimension of college life that can be facilitated by a case-managed approach to support services for deaf students.

The process of integrating students who are deaf or hearing impaired on a hearing college campus requires careful planning, patience, perseverance, and the mobilization of resources and supports. As this model program demonstrated, attention must also be given to the coordination of multiple, simultaneous services in order to ensure continuity in the academic experience.

The system of services in this model creates the capacity for successful integration; but, it is the SSS Counselor who nurtures those clinical and environmental strategies that are essential to ensure opportunities for integration. For example, by successfully advocating for an ALD for 'Dave', his grade rose from a 'D' to a final of 'B' simply because he could better understand the lectures. By applying the principles of sound case management, the SSS Counselor can successfully serve as a partner with students who are deaf or hearing impaired in negotiating the university system. Monitoring and advocacy are necessary to ensure that such students obtain the help they need.

More mainstream universities need to incorporate case-managed functions into existing or developing support services programs so that there can be increased opportunities and choices for students who are deaf or hearing impaired. In order to fully live up to the

expectations of the Americans with Disabilities Act, there needs to be an increase in the number of mainstream support service providers who are knowledgeable in the aspects of deafness and can effectively serve this population.

Resources

National Technical Institute on Deafness
Rochester Institute of Technology
One Lomb Memorial Drive
P.O. Box 9887
Rochester, NY 14623
(716)475-6400 - V; (716)475-6400 - TDD

Gallaudet University
800 Florida Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002-3625
(202)651-5373 V/TDD

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