HEARING IMPAIRMENTS

Characteristics and General Information

Students with impaired hearing may vary widely in the degree of loss and the means they use to compensate. Some individuals may be deaf, with little or no useful residual hearing. Many of these individuals do not wear hearing aids because they have too little hearing to augment. Others will wear hearing aids that help improve their hearing somewhat, but even the latest technology provides distorted hearing at best. Some people with a hearing loss develop lip-reading skills; however the most adept lip-reader will only understand 60-70% of a conversation and even less of a lecture.

Deaf students and students with a hearing loss may have a spoken voice that is easy to understand and may choose to communicate orally. Others may be very hard to understand, or may choose not to use their voices. If a student is not using his or her voice, but comes to see you without an interpreter, use a pad and pen or a word-processor to communicate in writing. If a person tries to use his or her voice and you do not understand them, please let the person know you are having trouble and ask him or her to repeat or to write the message down. Conversely, a student with a hearing loss may nod and appear to understand what you are saying, but may miss an important point. It is often a good approach to stop frequently to ask the person to repeat what was understood and to clarify any missed information.

When a deaf student or a student with a hearing loss identifies him or herself to you, it is important to determine how best you can meet that person’s needs. Explain your teaching style (i.e. lecture, board work, group discussion, films or videos) and ask the student to suggest ways he or she can best access the information you present in class

Recommendations to facilitate meetings with a deaf or hearing-impaired student:

- Look directly at the student and speak in a normal pitched voice- speaking louder does not help.
- Try not to stand with your back to a light source or window, which makes it difficult for the student to read lips.
- Address the student even if an interpreter is being used.

Possible Accommodations/Teaching Strategies

- Providing access to lecture overheads/PowerPoint files
- Speaking without back turned to student (i.e. when writing on board)
- Encouraging front-row seating
- Use of a sign-language interpreter or an oral interpreter.
- Assisting the student to obtain a volunteer note-taker and/or share personal faculty notes as is appropriate and feasible
- Give permission to have the student tape record the lectures for later transcription
- Use a phonic ear or FM system. The professor wears a wireless microphone and the individual uses a receiver, and this allows the person to hear only the professor’s voice amplified and screens out background noise that hearing aids would amplify

Methods of Evaluation

Generally, written examinations should not present any difficulties, but an oral presentation or a group project may require a different evaluation. Keep in mind that students who have been deaf since birth and who are sign-language users have a very different concept of sentence structure than a native speaker or writer. This may sometimes result in writing that is somewhat awkward, and the student may need to be referred for some assistance. It does not mean they are not intelligent, but emphasizes that American Sign Language (ASL) truly is a “foreign” language.