Teaching Strategies for Deaf or Hearing Impaired Students

Introduction

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an approach to designing instruction to be accessible to a broad range of students from the start. Its three fundamental principles include, presenting content in multiple formats, offering varied forms of assessment, and utilising varied learning and engagement strategies. For more information on UDL, consult the UDL on Campus website at http://udloncampus.cast.org/home#.Wa_GeqhSy1s.

The following strategies are recommended for faculty teaching classes that include students who are deaf or hearing impaired. Many of these are UDL-focused strategies that can improve the classroom experience for all students.

First Day of Class

- Include a statement in your course syllabus regarding accommodations for students with disabilities and inviting students to self-identify, e.g:

   “Any student who requires academic accommodations because of special learning needs, physical challenges or religious obligations is requested to notify the lecturer within the first week of the course. This would facilitate special arrangements as early as possible”.

Lectures and Other Teaching Sessions

- Keep instructions brief and uncomplicated as much as possible. When repeating instructions, repeat exactly without paraphrasing.
- Clearly define course requirements, the dates of assessments, and when assignments are due. Provide advance notice of any changes.
- Present lecture information in a visual format (e.g., chalkboard/whiteboard, PowerPoint slides (with notes), text handouts, etc.).
- Use more than one way to demonstrate or explain information.
- When teaching, state objectives, review previous lessons and summarize periodically.
- Make instructional materials available on-line in text form (use Moodle/eLearning. For material which is graphical in nature, create text-based descriptions.
- Repeat the comments and questions of other students, especially those from the back rows. Acknowledge who has made the comment so students who are deaf or hard of hearing can focus on the speaker.
- When appropriate, ask for a hearing volunteer to team up with a student who is deaf or hard of hearing for in-class assignments.
- **Provide transcripts of audio information presented, including the audio components or videos or use close-captioned videos**
- Allow several moments extra for oral responses in class discussions.
- In small group discussions, allow for participation by students with hearing impairments.
- Face the class while speaking.
- If there is a break in the class, get the attention of the student who is deaf or hard of hearing before resuming class.
- People who are deaf or hard of hearing often use vision as a primary means of receiving information. Use slides, diagrams, captioned videos and other visual aids when teaching students with hearing impairments.
- Assist the student with finding an effective note-taker/s from the class.
- Provide hand-outs (preferably electronically via Moodle/eLearning) in advance of lectures and seminars.
- Ensure key notices e.g. regarding cancellations or re-scheduled classes, are also announced in ways that are accessible to deaf or hearing impaired students.
- In lecture/discussion classes, take care over seating arrangements and encourage people to take turns to speak. Discuss arrangements with the students and find out if they wish any other adjustments.
- When desks are arranged in rows, keep front seats open for students who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Make field trip arrangements early and ensure that accommodations will be in place on the given day (e.g., transportation, site accessibility). Give adequate advance notice so a personal assistant or adaptive equipment can be arranged as appropriate.
- A health and safety assessment for the student may be necessary in certain situations, and should be carried out beforehand. 'Reasonable adjustments' must be considered in the light of any perceived risk.
- Individual induction to laboratory or computer equipment may be helpful.

**Writing Assignments and Examinations**

- Provide assistance with proofreading written work. Stress organization and ideas rather than mechanics when grading in-class writing assignments.
- Encourage the use of spell-check and grammar-assistive devices when appropriate to the course.
- Be flexible with assignment deadlines, particularly if students have had to wait for transcripts of learning sessions.

**General Ideas**

- Break information into small steps while instructing on new tasks.

The UWI Cave Hill Campus Student Enrolment and Retention Unit (SERU). Adapted from a Ferris State University resource.
• For students needing other academic assistance refer them to the **Office of Student Services**.
• Providing review or study sheets for exams is helpful.
• Allow time for clarification of directions and essential information.
• Make instructional materials available in text form on Moodle/eLearning.
• When in doubt about how to assist the student, ask him or her as privately as possible without drawing attention to the student or the disability.
• Face the class while speaking. Be sure that the student and the interpreter (if present) can see you while you lecture.
• Avoiding lecturing or giving out procedural information while handing out papers. Losing eye contact with the student may also mean the loss of information for the student.
• Repeat the comments and questions made by other students during class discussion. Acknowledge those who are speaking also so the student who is deaf or hard of hearing can focus their attention on them.
• Using visual aids and materials during your instruction is beneficial for those with a hearing loss, as vision is their primary means of receiving information.

**Strategies for Working with Students who Lip-read**

Lip-reading is not easy and requires great concentration. Three quarters of it is guesswork and so clear speech and contextual clues are vital for understanding. Here are some of the things you can do to make it easier for a lip reader to follow what you are saying.

• **Position**: The deaf student will know where it is best to sit — this will often be near the front, slightly to one side of you. Try to avoid moving around (this may demand a change in your normal teaching style!)
• **Visibility**: Face the light so you are not silhouetted in front of a bright window, for instance. Make sure you don’t cover your mouth (e.g., with your hands, a cup or pen). Agree suitable cues with the student beforehand to ensure they are looking at you before you start to speak.
• **Speech**: Speak clearly and at a reasonable and natural pace. Do not shout as this will distort your voice and lip patterns.
• **Reinforcing meaning**: Give the student time to absorb what you have said and rephrase it if necessary. Remember sentences and phrases are easier to lip-read than single words. Use gestures where these are relevant but avoid exaggerated facial expressions. If you change the subject, make sure the deaf student knows. Write things down if you need to clarify them.

**Lectures**

• **Advance information**: Lip-reading is easier when the subject area is known, so give the student a copy of lecture notes/PowerPoint slides in advance to help them get familiar

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with content and vocabulary to be used. (If you put this on Moodle/eLearning, everyone else will benefit too). Ensure the deaf student has relevant booklists/readings well in advance, as they may rely more heavily on textbooks than lectures — early access to this information is a great help.

- **Structure**: Well-structured classes are important for all students, but particularly for those who lip-read:
  - Include regular opportunities to review what has been covered.
  - Indicate when the subject is about to change, or a new concept is being introduced, by writing on the board or holding up an appropriate book or article.
  - Try to break up the session with opportunities to look at illustrations, pass round handouts or complete individual tasks.
  - Allow a little extra time for a deaf student to assimilate information and respond before progressing to the next stage.

**Seminars/Group Work**

Seminars/group work can present significant challenges for a deaf person.

- **Size**: The optimum group size for a deaf person is between 6 and 10. If a group is bigger than this it may mean that the deaf student does not have full access to discussions. Divide into smaller sub-groups and use regular plenary feedback so key points can be written on the board, or get each group to write their own summary and use a document camera to project it. Either will help to reinforce key issues. (Document cameras can be obtained from Classroom Technology Services/CITS).

- **Seating**: Where possible, arrange the room so that the deaf student can see everyone by putting chairs in a circle or horseshoe shape. Make sure no one is silhouetted against the light. It may help for the student to sit next to a note-taker so that he or she can pick up on missed discussion and follow changes in subject.

- **Visual cues**: Signalling a change of speaker or asking participants to raise their hand before speaking can be very helpful to allow the student to look in their direction before they start to speak.

**Use of Visual Aids**

- **Slides, Boards and Flipcharts**: When using slides, boards and flipcharts, allow students time to read what is written before starting to speak again. It is not possible to read and lip-read at the same time! In fact, it is not possible for any student to read and listen at the same time.

- **Videos and Tapes**: Always use subtitled videos or provide a transcript of the commentary.