

# **Public Speaking Courses and the Hearing-Impaired College Student: Classroom Communication, Challenges and Rewards**

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This article examines the communication barriers and relationships between hearing and non-hearing college students in a classroom setting. Twelve college students, six female and six males between 18 and 22 years of age took part of this ethnographic study during a sixteen week course in public speaking conducted at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs. This study included participant observations, in-depth individual interviews, and focus groups. These students, which consisted of eleven hearing and one non-hearing student, completed five required speeches during this study; two of which required working within groups of two to three students respectively. During this period, specific non-verbal and verbal communications became apparent and developed into what was considered the “invisible barrier.” The results of this study will offer suggestions for educators who work with the hearing-impaired student in the public speaking courses.

## **Introduction**

For the last two decades, the college enrollment for hearing-impaired students has increased (Luykomski, 2007). The estimated number of high school students with hearing loss going on to college as grown to over 45% (Schroedel, Watson, & Ashmore, 2005). However, the study also found that the number of hearing-impaired college students who actually earn a degree is only one out of every four (Stinson & Walter, 1997). In comparison, on a national average, the number of high school students with no hearing disabilities going on to college has remained at about 65%, with one in every four of those earning a degree (Toppo & DeBarros,

2007). This lack of retention has been attributed to both academic and nonacademic reasons. Many new hearing-impaired college students go through extreme social adjustments and experience significantly higher feelings of loneliness, feelings of isolation, and being cut off from others as they adjust to their new educational environment due to communication barriers (Luykomski, 2007).

Attending a mainstream college is a tremendous environmental adjustment for a hearing-impaired student (Stinson, Liu, Saur, & Long, 1996). For hearing-impaired students, mainstreaming requires a 'Code Switch,' which refers to the challenge of "going from a deaf culture to a hearing culture" (Vigne, 2008). Many situations come into play when leaving a 100% deaf environment and moving on to a mainstream school. Young freshmen with hearing impairments have to adjust to the constant flow of conversation, in the hallways, in the classrooms, and even in the dormitories. Stinson, et al (1996) agrees, stating: "Trying to figure out which conversation to 'listen' to is a challenge for the deaf or hard of hearing; they also have to adjust to people staring at them when they use sign language, especially with those who are unfamiliar with American Sign Language (ASL)" (p. 16). For many young men and women, sticking out from the crowd is uncomfortable; the hearing-impaired just want to fit into this new environment like everyone else (Lukomski, 2007).

### *Learning Environments for Hearing-Impaired Students*

Hearing and non-hearing cultures have different rules with regards to interpersonal communication. This difference is mainly in the content of how each culture communicates (Stinson, et al, 1996). For the hearing, they often watch how they say something as to not offend. For example, a hearing person would not come right out and say, "You look like you've

gained weight.” It would be worded differently, if addressed at all (Vigne, 2008). However, research has shown that the deaf and hearing-impaired tend to “speak” very directly regardless of their method of communication. Directness often can be construed as offensive to a hearing person (Vigne, 2008). As an example, a hearing-impaired person would tell someone straight out, “You’ve gained weight!” The deaf communicate in a very upfront manner, they just say it as it is; there is no guessing what is being said (Vigne, 2008). This is due largely to the fact that within the hearing-impaired culture, communication is key; there is no room for split or implied meanings. This type of blunt, honest conversation is not considered rude, rather is considered normal and accepted in the deaf community (Vigne, 2008).

The hearing-impaired vary in their preferred ways of communication (Gaustad & Kluwin, 1992; Kluwin & Stinson, 1993). While some hearing-impaired students report using verbal speech to communicate with hearing peers, these same students will use an interpreter to understand teachers and hearing peers in the classroom (Stinson, et al, 1996). Stinson, et al (1996) writes that “deaf students vary in their preferred ways of communication, while some students prefer to express themselves using oral speech; others prefer to express and receive communication through signing” (p. 41). However, there are communication difficulties even when an interpreter and support services are provided in the classroom (Foster & Elliott, 1986). Stinson, et al (1996) explains that “The choice to use their voice or signing depends on each student and their own perceptions about their ease or difficulty in communicating” (p. 41). Communication ease is described as having two dimensions: a cognitive dimension and an affective one. On the one hand, Stinson, et al (1996) describes a cognitive dimension as “a concern with self-perceptions about the amount and quality of information that deaf students receive and send” (p. 40). On the other hand, they define the affective dimension as “The deaf

students' subjective responses about their communication experiences, which may be positive (feeling good, relaxed, comfortable, and confident), or negative (feeling frustrated, nervous, and upset) (pp.40-41).

Hearing-impaired students also encounter some unresolved problems when taking academic classes, such as science and chemistry. Within the sign language vocabulary only a limited number of gestures communicate meanings in a technical field. For example, in chemistry, only one gesture represents many different words or meanings, which can be very confusing for the student. However, research has also shown that "hearing-impaired students can excel in the math, science, industrial arts and home economics areas since observation, figuring, and experimentation do not require an extensive use of language" (Orlansky, 1977, p. 61).

When there are concerns and confusion, the hearing-impaired student and interpreter need to meet with the professor to get the technical words and meaning (Vigne, 2008). The interpreter would then have to spell every word out since there are not individual gestures that identify specific terms in this field. This is called Conceptual Sign Language (CSL) and is rarely used because it takes up so much time. Using CSL in a classroom environment can cause extreme delays because the interpretation process slows down the class pace for the instructor. It is essential that the student, interpreter, and instructor communicate before and after each class to ensure the information is being sent and received correctly to and by the student. The student is ultimately responsible for reading all the materials and books, but regardless, these classes are a challenge just due to the language barriers (Vigne, 2008).

Students who have hearing impairments vary in their ability to understand speech (Fichten, 1997). Some hearing-impaired students rely primarily on lip reading while they are in class if they don't have an interpreter. Fichten (1997) emphasized in his research that "even good lip reader usually only comprehend about 30% to 40% of what is said and extrapolate the rest, often not very accurately" (p. 23). Another issue is hearing-impaired students are frequently unable to hearing class members' comments and have difficulty reading the professors lips if they face the chalkboard, move round, cover your lips or wear a beard (Fichten, 1997). Whatever communication system a hearing-impaired student uses, they really have to concentrate in order to understand what is being said and taught in a classroom setting. Fichten, (1997) writes, "This experience is much like the difficulty people have in understanding a poor quality film or videotape, it can be a very fatiguing experience (p. 24).

With hearing impairments, students have difficulty in reading lengthy or complex passages, while others may have poor grammar or spelling (Fichten, 1997). These problems are not signs of a lack of intelligence, but of difficulty relating to language in general. Students with hearing impairments may need to have extra time for readings, assignments and exams. This problem is due to their need to consult a dictionary and slow reading speed. Some hearing-impaired students, aware of these problem areas, will have someone proofread their paper. They can also go to the student writing center on campus for help. While the staff will not write the paper for the students, the center will help identify problems and make suggestions on how to improve their writing (Freeman, 2008).

### *Categories of hearing-impairment*

Equally important is to understand there are two categories of hearing-impairment: pre-lingual and post-lingual. Pre-lingual is the loss of hearing before the age of three. Post-lingual is the loss of hearing after the age of three. According to Vigne, a pre-lingual person will have had no experiences with the verbal sounds of speaking. The vowels and the “ch,” “th” and “s” sounds are incomprehensible to the hearing-impaired person (Vigne, 2008). Szelazkiewicz (2002) states that “research has shown that the ability to learn these sounds has been near impossible due to the lack of the basic understanding of how to even form these sounds in their minds” (p.4). A post-lingual person, according to Szelazkiewicz, “will at the basic level have at least heard vowels and some form of speaking to draw from while they are learning language. The first three years of someone’s life are the prime years for communication. If the loss occurred after the third year, the individual still has a language foundation (pp. 4-6).

### *Gaps in research*

A lack of research exists in the area of hearing-impaired students in the postsecondary educational environment. There is also a major gap concerning hearing-impaired students in the classroom environment for public speaking. While there are many documents studies on the adolescent hearing-impaired child, a minimal amount of research has been conducted in the post-secondary education field for the hearing-impaired adult.

## **Settings and Methods**

### *Site*

This ethnographic study was conducted at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs. The course, Comm 210, Public Speaking satisfies the basic communication core requirements for undergraduate students. The setting for the participant observations took place in the classroom on campus which met every Thursday from 8:00 a.m. to 9:15 a.m. for sixteen weeks, or a complete semester. The semester began on January 23, 2008 and concluded on May 15, 2008.

### *Participant Students*

The students in Comm 210, “Public Speaking” consisted of six females and six males. Within this group there were one Latina and one Ukrainian female and one Korean and one Ethiopian male. All twelve students were involved in the participant observation throughout the sixteen-week course. All were informed of this study and approved participation prior to any official documented observation.

### *Hearing-Impaired Student*

Prior to starting any research, the hearing-impaired student, a freshman, approved being the primary subject of this study. All documentation and approval was received through e-mail, verbal communication (lip reading), and sign language. This subject is from Ethiopia and required and/or requested an interpreter for all college classes. The Office of Disability Services from the University of Colorado supported his request. The interpreter was in attendance during all classroom observations, where she provided sign language, verbal, and lip reading support for all communication.

### *Data Collection*

The data collection process involved participant observations, one-on-one individual interviews, e-mail interviews and focus groups which were all collected and stored on a flash drive.

*Participant Observations.* During the sixteen week semester, participant observations were conducted weekly while in the classroom. These observations were written as field notes. Each week the notes were transcribed and put into NVivo7 for qualitative research that supports recording, organizing, coding, and sorting data.

*Interviews.* Interviews were conducted in two steps: one-on-one individual interviews and through e-mail. The one-on-one individual interviews were conducted with most of the hearing students. Some students requested the questions be sent through e-mail so they could have the time to answer each question properly. All students, excluding the hearing-impaired student, were given the same questions to answer. These questions focused on concerns of communication barriers, obstacles or perceived obstacles, while working with a hearing-impaired student and also allowed for additional comments as each student deemed necessary. The hearing-impaired student requested his questions be sent through e-mail so he could take his time to answer each question. Written approach was the best method to respond to the questions without the need of an interpreter. His questions were different than those of the hearing students. These questions focused on his personal observations as to how the other students dealt with his disabilities and communication issues as well as any additional comments he deemed necessary. Additional interviews included The Director of Special Education from the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind, the head student counselor from the Colorado School for the Deaf

and Blind, and the Director of the Writing Center at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs.

*Focus Groups.* The focus groups were developed from groups that formed within the classroom and had worked with the hearing-impaired student. They were encouraged to discuss personal experiences to include perceived obstacles and/or barriers, communication issues and other opinions they wished to express.

*Data Analysis.* The data was analyzed through the use of NVivo7. NVivo7 is an application that applies “character-based coding, have the facility of formatted text available and allows researcher to freely write or edit text, without invalidating earlier coding” (Bazeley, 2007, p. 6). NVivo7 will sort, sift through and code common themes that emerge. All information will be submitted and transcribed into NVivo7 by interviewer. Each interview will be identified by a number to allow confidentiality to remain and also by gender. Participant interviews will be submitted by dates of observation.

## **Preliminary Results**

The instructor, who was also the observer, was present for all classroom participation. The instructor was also responsible for providing feedback to all students, grading all public speaking presentations, outlines, midterm tests and final test for semester.

As the semester progressed, regardless of their age, disabilities or gender, the students were all beginning to show the strain of their workload. This stress was exacerbated when sorting out the challenges involved in working with someone who was hearing-impaired. There were some major themes that emerged from the research conducted. Each theme came from three different elements of this research: the hearing-impaired student, the hearing culture and

the instructor. These findings and/or themes have been put into three categories; classroom communications, challenges and rewards.

### *Hearing-Impaired Student*

In interviews with the hearing-impaired student, the responses were put into three categories; classroom communications, challenges and rewards. All correspondence from the hearing-impaired student will appear as received.

*Classroom communications.* The attitude of the hearing-impaired student towards his fellow students was mostly positive. However, he did admit that it was frustrating when they would not even attempt to communicate with him. He stated, "It's hard when they just point to things then to me, like I am incapable of understanding their question or request." [sic] He continued: "I am really good at reading lips, if they would just ask the question and remember to look at me; I can almost always understand them. And if I don't understand, I ask them to repeat the question." [sic] In a subsequent interview, his frustration surfaced again:

"Some of the students just think I'm incapable of understand a conversation so  
They either point or just write a note. I think they believe I wouldn't understand  
them any other way. Nothing new, but I'd hoped for a more open-minded group  
in college." [sic]

While working with his group for an informative speech he was asked by the instructor if he felt like the communication dynamics changed within his group when his interpreter was not around. He replied:

“Well in some ways yes. because some people who think that i will not understand what they are say so they would not even try to talk to me or they would just write back and forth. It’s another good way for me to communicate with them as well but they don’t always try talking to me. i really get nervous when i am around people. Basically i am out of my comfortable zone. i really do not talk a lot and I really get Shy.” [sic]

*Challenges.* One topic the hearing-impaired student emphasized was the desire that other students at least try to talk with him. “It’s a challenge,” he stated during a one-on-one interview, “It is really not that hard to communicate with me, I guess some students are just afraid to.” [sic] He added, “But I wish some of them would at least try.” [sic] He further expressed frustration about barriers:

“When I have to sign in front of hearing students, I feel that I really stand out and I get shy because they stare at me a lot. I feel there is a barrier between the hearing and non-hearing cultures. It’s different than when I was at the deaf school where I was just like everyone else. At this school, well, this is a whole new environment for me and I’m trying to fit in. I don’t think some people are comfortable about the signing. It’s like they don’t know what to do, but I have to communicate.” [sic]

The hearing-impaired student presented his first solo speech two weeks before the group presentation. He told the instructor that he was very scared because he knew he was going to

have to sign the entire speech. While his interpreter would repeat everything he was signing, both vocally for the audience and through sign back to him, he had to split his focus between the two “audiences.” At one time during his speech, he actually had to correct the interpreter, whereupon he stopped delivering his speech to correct what he had said or meant to say and asked the interpreter to say it correctly to his listening audience. During this incident the other students in the class were observed smiling to themselves and squirming, even though it seemed obvious they all wanted to encourage him through his difficulty. When he was done, they all clapped through sign, which is done by waving your hands left to right. He looked to the instructor for approval, and she signed “good job.”

*Rewards.* During the semester the hearing-impaired student opened up more to the instructor. At the beginning of the semester he would only use his interpreter and sign language during his speeches. He told the instructor:

“The hardest part to speaking, I think is getting in front of the class room and getting ready to speak. I am not a talk active person. because of my shy ness.” [sic]

As the semester continued however, the hearing-impaired student seemed to grow in confidence as he told his instructor in an e-mail in week ten:

“When i first started this semester i only signed and texted people. Sometimes i would just write out when i want to say on my phone and then show the words to people as a way to communicate. But now i’m feeling more comfortable

with some of the friends i've made and i will talk with them with my voice because i feel safe around them. i know they won't judge me if i made a mistake speaking. i don't feel that way with everyone though, so then i just use sign language." [sic]

Another pivotal moment came during the group presentation. The hearing-impaired student made the decision to deliver his portion of the group speech not through sign language, but vocally. He spoke slowly, but with confidence. The instructor felt a moment of excitement, a moment of pride that the hearing-impaired student felt that he could speak verbally in such an open setting in front of his peers. As the instructor looked around the room it was obvious the other students were surprised. The look of respect and appreciation was apparent as the entire class displayed positive non-verbal expressions. Their body language projected support for the hearing-impaired student; leaning forward, smiling, and giving strong eye contact.

The instructor spoke with both the hearing-impaired student and the interpreter after the class to discuss this event. The student used both his voice and sign language to answer, stating;

"You've created a safe environment for me. I feel that I can speak easily in this classroom. This is the only class I feel I can use my voice without feeling scared." [sic]

### *Hearing Students*

Through focus groups and interviews, the major theme that emerged with the hearing culture was the difficulty that they had in communicating with the hearing-impaired student and

how time consuming it was. The student's responses have been divided into three categories, classroom communications, challenges, and rewards and are presented as written [sic].

*Classroom communications.* During the participant observation in the classroom many problems began to appear almost from the first day of class. During the introduction segment of the class, all students paired up in teams of two. Each student discussed things about themselves for three minutes then each would introduce one another in front of the rest of the class. The process seemed to work fine until one student introduced the hearing-impaired student. When the hearing-impaired student started to sign his introduction and his interpreter spoke to the class some of the students in the class looked uncomfortable. During his introduction, he acknowledged a female student in the class as a strong athlete whom he had seen play baseball before and told her she was good. The look on the female students face appeared uncomfortable, even a bit afraid or taken back, as if she was fearful of interacting with the hearing-impaired student. This remained the situation with this one student throughout the entire semester. While the hearing-impaired student did have an interpreter with him throughout the class, this other student would often stare at them both with the expression of fear and surprise.

The initial reaction from the instructor was that perhaps this hearing student had not been around someone with this sort of disability. To try and eliminate these fears and uncertainty the instructor decided to put these two into a group along with one more classmate for a team project. This same female stated in her interview, "It was difficult to communicate with him. I tried to remember to always look at him when I spoke but it wasn't always easy for me." [sic] Those thoughts were echoed in other interviews where another student wrote, "I felt very uneasy trying to understand what he was saying so I asked him to write everything down for me, it was just easier." [sic] Another student wrote:

“I felt sorry for him; I mean, I don’t know what it’s like to be deaf but I don’t know sign language, it was really difficult to communicate with him without his interpreter around.” [sic]

When asked about their biggest communication barrier or obstacle when working with a hearing-impaired student, one replied, “It was pretty difficult having to write everything down or type it on the phone to communicate with him, especially when a big portion of your grade is on the line.” [sic] This same student also stated, “I noticed he could lip read though, which was somewhat helpful, but overall it was very difficult.” [sic]

*Challenges.* The common theme stayed in every interview received through the hearing students in this class. One student stated, “Instead of trying to communicate I prefer to write my questions down and then have the hearing-impaired student answer them the same way.” [sic] The same student added, “It saved time; trying to communicate with him any other way was just too time-consuming.” [sic] Another student stated very honestly, “It’s just too hard to communicate with him, I have a heavy class work load and I don’t have the time to slow down to understand him, sorry!” [sic]

While these students did not, for the most part, bring these attitudes openly into the classroom, their interviews, which were conducted with the guarantee of confidentiality, reflected their true concerns and thoughts. From the instructor’s prospective, these were some of the most discouraging and disappointing answers she had received.

*Rewards.* Another interesting observation involved the female student from the Ukraine. Throughout the semester whenever the instructor would use sign language with the hearing-

impaired student, this student would express interest in the signing. Often times she would ask the instructor to show her how to ask a question using sign language. The impression left on the instructor was that it seemed with this one student, learning how to sign was just another opportunity to learn a new language. She did not appear to be afraid to approach the hearing-impaired student; in fact, she welcomed the chance to learn from him. Perhaps this openness for something new and unknown was due to her experience of having to learn a new language and the feeling of being left out. Her inability at one time to communicate in a new language seemed to have given her great empathy for the hearing-impaired student.

### *Instructor's Experiences*

Many times throughout the semester the instructor had to take on an active role of getting all the students to work together, specifically when it involved working with the hearing-impaired student. The themes remained the same, classroom communications, challenges and rewards. However additionally the instructor also identified a problem with the critique form used for all speech presentations which resulted in an additional section.

*Classroom communications.* At one point during a class session, the team that worked with the hearing-impaired student were brainstorming ideas for a presentation. The instructor recalled, "The two hearing students actually sat next to each other and spoke, trying not to move their lips as they discussed ideas, obviously excluding the hearing-impaired student." [sic] The instructor noticed the situation and asked the entire group to get into a circle to discuss topic options. This intervention immediately changed the climate of the situation from a negative to a positive working environment. The interpreter and instructor stayed within the circle to keep the conversation flowing. The efforts resulted in a strong presentation from the group the following

week. “It was frustrating,” stated the instructor, “because these few students built these invisible barriers towards the hearing-impaired student.” [sic]

In week ten of the semester the hearing-impaired student asked to meet with his instructor privately. He said:

“I want you to know that not all hearing-impaired students will welcome an instructor learning sign language. Some might only want to communicate through their interpreter and could possibly give you attitude if you try to learn their language.” [sic]

He further stated, “Sometimes it’s just their personality. They are angry or just don’t want to bother with you.” [sic] He continued:

“Please understand, every deaf or hearing-impaired student is different. Their degree of hearing loss is different and their willingness to accept an outsider (a hearing person), is up to that individual.” [sic]

He concluded by saying, “I think it was cool you wanted to learn my language. I’ve never had another teacher in college want to do that for me, so thank you.” [sic]

Throughout the semester a few students continued displaying a lot of discomfort around the hearing-impaired student. Their nonverbal communication was louder than any words spoken. Sometimes they would stare like the wide-eyed kid in a zoo. Instead of even trying to talk with the hearing-impaired student, some would simply point at things, then to him, then back

to themselves as if he were incapable of understanding or reading lips. His initial reaction to the pointing was a look of disbelief. He would shake his head, tighten up his lips and then hand over the object at which the other student was pointing. The instructor would try to counter such moments by bringing up a topic to discuss, leading to increased involvement. But it seemed clear that without the instructor's influence, some students simply would not try.

*Challenges.* While the instructor was surprised, at first, when she discovered that a hearing-impaired student had enrolled in a public speaking course, she immediately accepted it as an opportunity to confront such a challenge. To her, the change to actually help a disabled student proved intriguing. However, the question of how to teach someone to speak in public when he had limited vocal abilities presented some great challenges, especially when the hearing-impaired student would be working with hearing students.

While this student seemed ready and willing for any assignment given, the first challenge arose when the instructor noticed the nonverbal communication demonstrated by the hearing students as they dealt with working with someone with a hearing impairment. In actual classroom participant observations between the hearing and non-hearing students, an incredible amount of apprehension became apparent between the two cultures almost from day one. The goal in this classroom setting was to try to eliminate the mystery and anxiety in dealing with the hearing-impaired student and help them all realize they were all really the same, just trying to fit in, to learn and to earn a good grade.

Some strong nonverbal communication came to light when the students were in the oral communication lab to work on their topics within their small groups. The instructor intervened again when the hearing students, while sitting at the computers, would start discussing topics

with their back toward the hearing-impaired student. The hearing students stated they had just ‘forgotten’ that the hearing-impaired student required them to look at him when they spoke instead of speaking over their shoulder. The instructor reminded all the students of the importance to communicate clearly and to speak face-to-face when discussing issues with their hearing-impaired classmate. The instructor recalled:

I watched the reaction of the hearing-impaired student as his teammates spoke over their shoulders. His look was anger mixed with frustration because he didn’t know what to do. I went over to the interpreter and asked her if he was alright. She just replied, ‘He gets hurt when they do this type of thing!’ I then asked the students to get into a circle and discuss topic ideas together, face-to-face. Personally, I should not have had to do that, they are young adults who should know better. I felt like I had to babysit some of these students just so they would remember to be considerate. I do not think that was asking too much from them. [sic]

For the group speech, each student was told to get the contact information from their group members, such as e-mail addresses and phone numbers. The hearing-impaired student actually took the initiative and approached his team to trade addresses. However, the next week when they were all working within their groups, an “invisible barrier” began to appear. The two hearing students would begin talking to each other, excluding their hearing-impaired partner. Instead of talking or communicating with the hearing-impaired student, one of the group members would only point to things instead of talking to him. The interpreter would sign what

they said, but the hearing-impaired student's nonverbal communication or reactions made it clear that he was feeling left out. His lips tightened and he dropped his head, shaking it as if to say, "No, no, no!"

The instructor, watching this dynamic evolve, asked him if sign language if he had any ideas for a topic. He signed, "No." His instructor asked the group for their input, but they were non-responsive. The instructor then had them all brainstorm ideas until they found one that they all liked. The students moved to the computers to research their topics. At the instructor's suggestion, the group then moved into a circle along with the interpreter and began discussing their topic ideas, including how their speech would flow and which part they each would present. When they left the class, the interpreter stated to the instructor that the hearing-impaired student told her "he was scared to really talk with his classmates for fear of being rejected." [sic] She stated she told him, "Just be natural and make the first move, and then the fear will disappear." [sic]

The instructor followed up this experience with e-mails to each student involved. The first was to clear the air with the hearing-impaired student, asking him for patience with regard to his group. He was very forgiving and surprisingly understanding of their reaction. The next e-mail was to his two team members, asking them to remember to face the hearing-impaired student when talking to him so that he could read their lips. They were embarrassed because they had not known the correct protocol, but both seemed willing to learn and participate. However, in a later e-mail from the female student to the instructor, she voiced her discomfort about having to work with this hearing-impaired student. She felt that working with him in a group setting was most difficult as she kept "forgetting" that he was deaf while continuing to communicate to him with her back towards him. She felt it was just too hard, uneasy and

frustrating working and communicating with him. While the honesty was appreciated, the comments were greatly disappointing.

*Rewards.* Throughout the entire semester, these same few students would not involve themselves with the hearing-impaired student unless required to do so. However, it appeared that the negative reaction from these few students actually changed the hearing-impaired student for the positive. While he used his interpreter for classroom conversation, he eventually delivered his last two speeches not with sign language, but with his voice. His actions results in strong support from the rest of the students in the class and actually drew looks of surprise and what appeared to be respect from the student that had been resistant and created barriers.

The instructor summed up her experiences by dividing them into two categories: successes and failures. The biggest success centered on the classroom environment, one which allowed the hearing-impaired student to feel welcome and respected. Another success came as the instructor learned sign language. Even though the instructor's skills were limited, the hearing-impaired student really appreciated her efforts, especially because he was out of his comfort zone in a public speaking class. Most important, the instructor had to treat all the students equally, not favoring the hearing-impaired student over the others. The class responded to the idea that the instructor was willing to go above and beyond for one student, with the expectation that they would get the same treatment. The instructor also expressed a hope that when they left the class in May they would remember the effort and if opportunity allowed, they would do the same for someone else.

The instructor's failure evolved around the inability to eliminate the fear from the hearing students about accepting someone different, a non-hearing peer. For some, it was simply too

hard for them to see past the disability and just see the person. Maybe too much was expected of them. Many students put up invisible barriers. Some students were only focused on their grades, getting that 'A' over everything else. One student said, "If you put him in my group, will my grade suffer? I want an 'A' and I think he'll hurt my chances." [sic] For the instructor, this was again, very disappointing.

*Critique forms.* The critique forms used for the public speaking class were not functional for the hearing-impaired student. There was nothing currently used to grade and critique the hearing-impaired student effectively in their specific speaking style. The current form focused on only the vocal elements of public speaking. The form contained delivery structure and content. (See Appendix A) The current critique form emphasized the "use of voice to include rate, pitch, quality, enunciation, pronunciation, fluency, and conversational" [sic] (Huddy, 2006). This limited the ability to properly critique a speaker who needed to deliver a speech through sign language.

Two areas were identified as needing modification to meet the hearing-impaired student's needs. First, the "Delivery" section was modified to meet the requirements of the hearing-impaired student and emphasized the speaking skills they need in their future careers. "Delivery" was also adjusted to focus on how effectively they presented using nonverbal communication to include efficient sign language and speaking with their hands. (See Appendix B) The emphasis of gestures was moved from the use of body language section to the delivery section because the hearing-impaired use their gestures as part of their communication process. Their hands tell the story rather than their voice and the section pertaining to that aspect was missing.

For another area of change on the critique form, there was a need to identify the interpreter's place and responsibility in the hearing-impaired student's speech. This addition was added to the "Content" section and focused on the requirement of the hearing-impaired student to prepared and inform the interpreter with all outline material presentations to include PowerPoint. This addition was important, as hearing-impaired students must be responsible for communicating with their interpreters before all speeches, regardless of their method of communicating (verbally or through sign language) (Vigne).

These modifications were presented to William Huddy, author of the "Public Speaking, A Collaborative Approach" (Huddy, 2006), which is used in the Communication 210, Public Speaking class. Huddy reviewed the recommended modifications and approval all changes. This allowed the instructor to use the new critique form beginning in the spring of 2008 semester.

### *Limitations*

The limitations that occurred during this study were that there was only one hearing-impaired student and eleven hearing students in a single classroom. If conducted on a larger scale, this study could assist professor across the disciplines in exploring instructional strategies for a variety of hearing-impaired students.

### *Recommendations*

Further studies need to increase the scope of the research by increasing the number of participants to gain a broader range of ages and using a variety of subjects (i.e. math, science, engineering, nursing, and English). Training and understanding the complexities of working with a hearing-impaired student should be required of all instructors. Understanding the most

effective methods to teach in a classroom environment with both the interpreter and hearing-impaired student placed in such a manner as to be able to watch the instructor during classroom discussion and instruction is essential for the success of the student. Instruction in sign language for instructors would also decrease communication barriers in the classroom.

## **Conclusion**

This was an eye-opening experience for the instructor. First, it was to realize that although it is 2008, many students respond with fear when relating to someone with a perceived or real disability. Hearing-impaired individuals, however, do not consider themselves disabled. Knowing the correct way to address hearing-impaired students emerged as an important lesson learned through this study. Addressing these very issues with 18 to 22 year old adults proved to be a very sensitive subject, one that should be discussed carefully and respectfully. The role of the instructor is not to preach what students should or should not feel, or how they should respond or act around another student. Instead, it is to instruct students on how to put together a proper speech, with the proper outline and delivery. However, the instructor's attitudes and efforts can positively impact the opinions and behavior of the students. Even if complete change cannot be effected, making the students aware of their own behavior, when it comes to dealing with those with disabilities, can only result in increased awareness and understanding.

The answer to the question of how to teach hearing-impaired students is to have a system in place flexible enough to give a fair judgment of the students' capabilities. Give them assignments, answer their questions and then give them the freedom to decide how they want to present, through sign language and an interpreter or with their own voice, if possible. Just helping them believe in themselves enough to get up in front of their peers is the first step.

Preparing, practicing, knowing their topic, that is what will help them grow. Confidence comes with time, experience and maturity. It is important to help them take that first step.

**APPENDIX A**  
**CRITIQUE FORM (Original in red)**  
**ALL SPPECHES**

**Delivery**

**How effectively did presenter use voice (rate, volume, pitch, quality, enunciation, pronunciation, fluency, conversational)?**

*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Not alt all effective	A little Effective	Somewhat Effective	Neither Effective	Effective	Very Effective	Highly Effective

How effective was presenter's use of body language (eye contact, poise, swaying, fidgeting, motivating movement)?

*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Not alt all effective	A little Effective	Somewhat Effective	Neither Effective	Effective	Very Effective	Highly Effective

**Structure**

*Macrostructure:* How effectively did the presenter incorporate an attention-catcher? Was there a thesis statement? Did the speaking summarize his/her main points? Was there a clincher?

*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Not alt all effective	A little Effective	Somewhat Effective	Neither Effective	Effective	Very Effective	Highly Effective

*Microstructure:* How effectively did the presenter utilize language? Was there unnecessary slang within presentation? Profanity? Did the presentation flow?

*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Not alt all effective	A little Effective	Somewhat Effective	Neither Effective	Effective	Very Effective	Highly Effective

**Content**

*Analysis and support material:* Did the presenter address all main points? Meet time constraints? Was support material included? Was it relevant and clear? Did presenter meet requirements for visual aids? (1 required)?

*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Not alt all effective	A little Effective	Somewhat Effective	Neither Effective	Effective	Very Effective	Highly Effective

**APPENDIX B**  
**HEARING-IMPAIRED CRITIQUE FORM (Changes in red)**  
**ALL SPPECHES**

**Delivery**

**How effectively did presenter use nonverbal (effective sign language and gestures, i.e. “speaking with hands”) to communicate during speech?**

*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Not alt all effective	A little Effective	Somewhat Effective	Neither Effective	Effective	Very Effective	Highly Effective

How effective was presenter’s use of body language (eye contact, poise, swaying, fidgeting, motivating movement)?

*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Not alt all effective	A little Effective	Somewhat Effective	Neither Effective	Effective	Very Effective	Highly Effective

**Structure**

*Macrostructure:* How effectively did the presenter incorporate an attention-catcher? Was there a thesis statement? Did the speaking summarize his/her main points? Was there a clincher?

*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Not alt all effective	A little Effective	Somewhat Effective	Neither Effective	Effective	Very Effective	Highly Effective

*Microstructure:* How effectively did the presenter utilize language? Was there unnecessary slang within presentation? Profanity? Did the presentation flow?

*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Not alt all effective	A little Effective	Somewhat Effective	Neither Effective	Effective	Very Effective	Highly Effective

**Content**

**How well did student prepare and inform interpreter with outline material and power-point presentation?**

*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Not alt all effective	A little Effective	Somewhat Effective	Neither Effective	Effective	Very Effective	Highly Effective

*Analysis and support material:* Did the presenter address all main points? Meet time constraints? Was support material included? Was it relevant and clear? Did presenter meet requirements for visual aids? (1 required)?

*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Not alt all effective	A little Effective	Somewhat Effective	Neither Effective	Effective	Very Effective	Highly Effective

## Notes

1. Vigne, J & Ryan, J (2008). Personal interview conducted on February 8, 2008 at the Colorado Springs School for the Deaf and Blind, Colorado Springs, Colorado
2. Freeman, T. (2008). Personal interview conducted on March 10, 2008
3. Hagos, Y. (2008). Personal interview conducted on February 14, 28, 2008, March 10, 2008.
4. Hureau, M. (2008). Personal interview inducted on March 21, 2008

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