HIGHER EDUCATION ACCESSIBILITY & INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

DEAF SERVICES UNLIMITED

Higher Education
Sign Language Interpreting
& CART Captioning Services

www.deafservicesunlimited.com

Deaf Population In Higher Education

"Currently, more than 200,000 <u>deaf</u> students are enrolled in college (Bloom & Palmer, 2023), and over the past 10 years, more deaf people have obtained a bachelor's degree than ever before (Garberoglio et al., 2021)" according to the National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes. This report will outline growth of the Deaf population in higher education and provide insight on best inclusive practices.

Who

More Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals are pursuing higher education than ever before. The National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes shares, "1.4% of all college students are deaf. The majority of deaf college students are pursuing bachelor's degrees (42.1%) or associate degrees (45.8%)." This unprecedented growth must be met with equal or greater accessibility advancements across higher education.

Where

While schools for the Deaf and hard-of-hearing remain preferred options for many, more and more of these Deaf and hard-of-hearing students are opting for universities specializing in their field of interest. Heightened needs for specializations within the professional job market reinforce the need for prepared access policies for your institution.

How

"Almost half of deaf college students (45.8%) have an additional disability," states the NDC on Postsecondary Outcomes. This surge of deaf-disabled/deaf+ pursuit of higher education demands a new look at accessibility practices with an open mind, knowing each unique need requires unique solutions. Standard ASL interpreting may now need accompanied with supplementary supports such as captioning, as well as a wholistic audit of accommodations request and implementation processes.

Bloom, C.L, Palmer, J.L., & Winninghoff, J. (2025). Deaf Postsecondary Data from the American Community Survey [Data visualization tool]. National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes, University of Texas at Austin. www.nationaldeafcenter.org/dashboard

The Research

Deaf students pursue higher education at a wide range of institutions—public and private, 2-year and 4-year, nonprofit and for-profit—demonstrating that access to the college experience of their choice is a top priority. In fact, 21.3% of Deaf students attend out-of-state colleges, a higher rate than their hearing peers at 18.0%, according to the National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes. This trend underscores the importance of ensuring comprehensive support services like video remote interpreting (VRI), CART captioning, and accessible communication tools are available across all types of campuses—wherever students choose to attend.
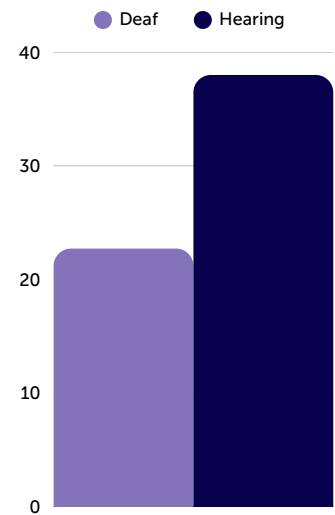
BACHELOR'S DEGREE

Studies show Deaf students enroll in all varieties of institutions including 2-year, 4-year, for-profit, non-profit, private, and public. According to the National Deaf Center on Post Secondary outcomes, "a higher percentage of deaf students (21.3%) attend an out-of-state college than hearing students (18.0%)." Access to the college experience of their choice proves to be a priority over proximity for many.

BACHELOR'S DEGREE ATTAINMENT OR HIGHER: UNITED STATES

"In the United States, among people aged 25-64, an estimated 22.7% of deaf people have completed a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 38.4% of hearing people.

In this chart, estimates are based on a sample size of 9,321 deaf people and 649,234 hearing people in the United States who participated in the 2023 American Community Survey. The margin of errors are 0.49% for deaf people and 0.18% for hearing people," according to the National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes.

Despite this wide participation in higher education, Deaf adults still face a degree gap: only 22.7% of Deaf individuals aged 25−64 have completed a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 38.4% of hearing individuals. These statistics, based on the 2023 American Community Survey, reflect the continuing need for accessible academic and non-academic support services. By offering interpreting and captioning solutions that go beyond the classroom—including student life events, advising appointments, and campus orientations— access services can help close this gap and ensure Deaf and hard-of-hearing students thrive throughout their entire college experience.

Bloom, C. L., & Palmer, J. (2023). Undergraduate Enrollment of Deaf Students in the United States (2019-2020). National Deaf Center.

"The Deaf Tax isn't just about the extra effort required to navigate daily life—
it's about the cumulative impact of constantly having to prove oneself in a world that assumes hearing is the default."

Pollock, G. (2025, March 25). The Deaf Tax: The Hidden Cost of Being Deaf in a Hearing World. LinkedIn

The Experience

"The process of requesting and managing accommodations is often stressful and exhausting, which some refer to as the "deaf tax" (Aldalur et al., 2022; Burke, 2017). As such, it is crucial that disability services have robust accommodation protocols and use an interactive process to support a successful transition and share the burden of managing accommodations," according to the NDC on Postsecondary Outcomes.

Your Deaf and hard-of-hearing students are not only entitled to the same access to education, but to the same campus experience. Consider these questions to audit your current accommodations user experience.

- Are communication access services readily available for events, student org meetings, and campus-wide activities?
- Do campus departments know how to request and provide accommodations like ASL interpreters or CART captioning for campus events such as orientations, guest speakers, or performances?
- Are RAs and housing staff trained on how to communicate effectively and respectfully with Deaf and hard-of-hearing students? Are visual alert systems (e.g., fire alarms, doorbells) installed and working properly in dorms?
- Are communication accommodations available at places like dining halls, health centers, financial aid offices, and career services? Are staff trained to interact with students who are Deaf or hard-of-hearing?
- Are accessible technologies—such as video phones, captioned media, or hearing assistive devices—available and well-maintained across campus spaces?
- Is campus signage visually accessible and inclusive of Deaf culture (e.g., ASL welcome signs, directions to interpreting services)?
- Do Deaf and hard-of-hearing students have a way to regularly share feedback on their overall campus experience?
- Are Deaf and hard-of-hearing students represented in student leadership, campus marketing, and diversity initiatives? Does the campus celebrate Deaf culture in meaningful ways?
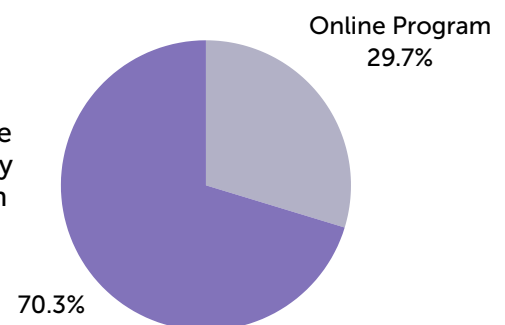
Remote Learning

In the current digital era, heightened by the global recovery of mass pandemics, remote learning is more popular than ever. The NDC on Postsecondary Outcome reports that 29.7% of Deaf students are enrolled in a fully online program. Are your online courses developed with accessibility in mind?

Video remote ASL interpreting and remote CART captioning allow for access at your fingertips.

Online Program
29.7%

70.3%

Bloom, C. L., & Palmer, J. (2023). Undergraduate Enrollment of Deaf Students in the United States (2019-2020). National Deaf Center.

Best Practices

Expert Advisory Team

Not an expert on sign language, Deaf culture, or accommodating Deaf students? We highly suggest broadening your scope by developing your own Expert Advisory Team. When faced with a new or challenging situation, you can seek their expertise and incorporate their advice into your campuses' solutions.

Who should be on your team?

1. Deaf/HOH Consumers – faculty, staff, or students (current or previous)
2. Service providers for each need and potential need – vendors
3. Key administrators within your department or outside your department (admissions, financial aid, advising, IT, housing, human resources, etc.)
4. Peers within your field – coordinators at other colleges/universities
5. Peers on your campus – coordinators within your college/university system, coworkers, etc.
6. Professional colleagues outside of higher education – diversity and inclusion professionals in government or businesses
7. Mentors – business coach, life coach, previous employer, senior staff

The DSU Facts

In 2024 alone we fulfilled...

2,400+
EDUCATION ACCESS REQUESTS

Supported
20+
HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Provided VRI for
600+
CLASSES
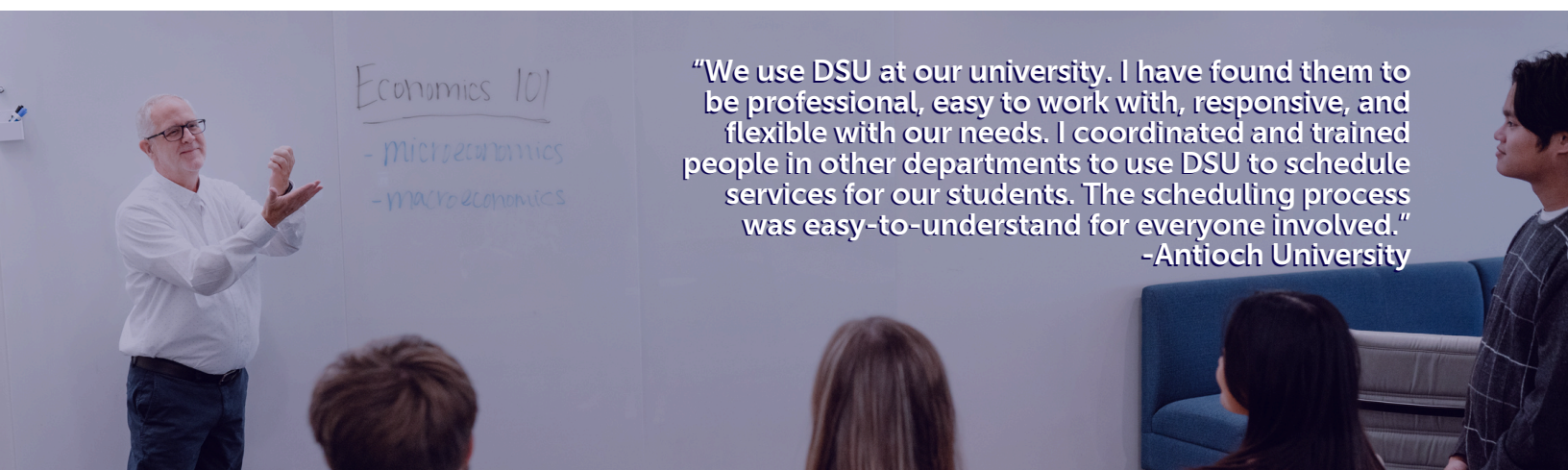
Deaf-friendly Campus Checklist

- Do you have an established relationship with a communication access provider(s)?
- Do all departments and department staff know how to request services?
- Do all sponsored and non-sponsored organizations know how to requests services?
- Is there an online request form for students?
- Can Deaf students communicate preferences to an interpreter?
- Do you provide Deaf cultural awareness training?
- Do you have a budget for communication access services?
- Are you aware of all grant funds available to offset communication access costs?
- Are closed captions on all publicly viewed televisions enabled?
- Are captioning services provided for closed-circuit broadcasts?
- Are all public events interpreted or captioned?
- Are visually appropriate seats reserved for all interpreted events?
- Is the emergency notification system on your campus accessible visually for the Deaf/HOH community?

"We use DSU at our university. I have found them to be professional, easy to work with, responsive, and flexible with our needs. I coordinated and trained people in other departments to use DSU to schedule services for our students. The scheduling process was easy-to-understand for everyone involved."
-Antioch University

Our Services

In-Person Interpreting

We boast a nationwide network of interpreters available in all 50 states. And when you need us, you'll talk to a person that will hand-pick the best interpreter for your needs — not just the first interpreter available. Our interpreting coordination team is fast, responsive, and ready to make sure your scheduling needs are met.

Video Remote Interpreting

Imagine being able to access a qualified interpreter from anywhere! With VRI, the interpreter facilitates communication remotely using web-based video technology. VRI can be used in a variety of settings, whether the hearing and Deaf participants are together in one location or also meeting remotely.

CART Captioning

Communication Access Real-time Translation (CART) is a form of captioning that DSU can provide, remotely or on-site, that displays the voice-to-text translation of spoken English into written English directly onto your device.

Post-Production Services

Our team of certified captioners and interpreters can make existing content accessible to those with communication access needs. This overlaid access is great for mass information announcements, safety communications, and more.

Deaf Culture Training

This comprehensive video series is designed to enrich understanding of Deaf culture, language, and history while promoting a more inclusive environment. This training includes five modules with eleven interactive lessons. Lessons are comprised of videos, images, questions, and short activities.

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