

Deaf students overcome problems

By Tami Gower
Emerald Contributor

Before she enrolled in classes at the University, Rebecca DeLore — who is partially deaf in both ears — spent a year at Central Oregon Community College in Bend because of its "close-knit and personal" atmosphere.

DeLore said that by first attending the smaller college, she was better able to ease into the larger university scene.

She graduated from the University last spring with a degree in psychology. Still, she discovered barriers here that were tough to overcome, such as communicating with students who hear perfectly fine.

She also worked twice as hard to learn what was being taught. "I spent a lot of time outside of class researching, because I could not hear all the information presented in lectures," she said.

Although the University offers a note-taking service for students with hearing loss, DeLore said she didn't trust its reliability and instead relied heavily on her roommates to help her take notes.

Even given an ideal learning environment, she estimates she can only hear and understand about 40 percent of a lecture. She added that she feared her professors would think she wasn't trying if she didn't attend class.

Still, DeLore often thought that attending was a waste of time, she said.

Current University student Richard Bear, an English major who has nerve deafness, said he spends a lot of extra time reviewing his notes to make sure he heard everything in class.

"I transcribe all my notes onto a computer and do a lot of filling in," he said. "Attending

lectures is extremely physically exhausting because a hearing-impaired student spends so much energy concentrating on just hearing what is being said."

Both Bear and DeLore said professors who use visual aids, such as a lecture outline placed on an overhead projector, help the hearing-impaired student.

Although most of her professors were cooperative upon learning about her hearing loss, DeLore said she became frustrated because little of what they did seemed to increase her ability to hear.

"I could have been more assertive in my studies, but didn't perceive myself as belonging at the University," DeLore said.

However, higher education for the hearing-impaired in the United States is limited. Because these institutions accept only the most severely hearing-impaired students, DeLore had to enter mainstream higher education in order to earn a degree.

There are no support groups specifically for the hearing-impaired at the University. In order to fill a social void, yet prevent being placed in a disabled category, DeLore joined the Club Sports crew team.

The University provides several learning tools for the hearing-impaired. In addition to the note-taking service, sign language interpreters are available to attend class with the students.

Another alternative, the "FM system," directly links via microphone hookup the student and professor. Hearing-impaired students listen through the FM receiver, which is set to the same frequency as their hearing aids. The professor uses the FM transmitter. This personalized system decreases the amount of background noise that normally distracts hearing-impaired students.

DeLore said she appreciated the services provided by the University but thought they could be better publicized.

"Perhaps if it were known that there were accommodations at the University, it would attract more hearing-impaired students. Professional people should also come in to give workshops and be on staff to give information to professors and the general population about the hearing-impaired," she said.

Bear said he thought the Campus Information Exchange, a computer communication network on campus, could be expanded to offer another potential outlet for the hearing-

impaired simply because the information is exchanged visually.

Bear characterized the University as a microcosm of a larger, relatively uncaring microcosm with a corporate rather than family feeling.

To compensate, Bear works in the University Library as a manuscript processor in special collections — the ideal job, he said. "I don't have to answer phones or have much contact with the general public, and I work with a small number of people," he said.

Some departments at the University, Bear continued, are not structured advantageously for the hearing-impaired, such as language courses that are taught orally.

Professors may want to help reach the hearing-impaired, but don't know what to do because the department provides no such guidelines, he said.

This term, the speech pathology-audiology department is offering American Sign Language I, II and III. However, the College of Arts and Sciences does not recognize sign language as a foreign language. It is considered another form of English, even though those with severe hearing loss are unable to understand spoken English.

According to Hilary Gerdes, counselor for the pre-nursing program and the disabled, only three hearing-impaired students currently use the services of the University's Office of Academic Advising and Student Affairs, making the hearing-impaired the smallest group of disabled students on campus.

She said in the past a pamphlet about the hearing-impaired was printed by the University and distributed among the faculty. But professors may not have examined the information as closely as they could have, she added.

Personal contact with the hearing-impaired will educate the campus community about the problems hearing-impaired students have, according to Gay Carpenter, a professor in the Leisure Studies and Services department.

"As professors and students see more people with hearing disabilities, they will feel more comfortable dealing with this disability and will learn to adjust to it through exposure to it," Carpenter said.

Carpenter, who taught a hearing-impaired student last year, said other students in the class had more adjustments to make than she did as professor.

"But, I think the students learned a lot from the experience as well," she said.



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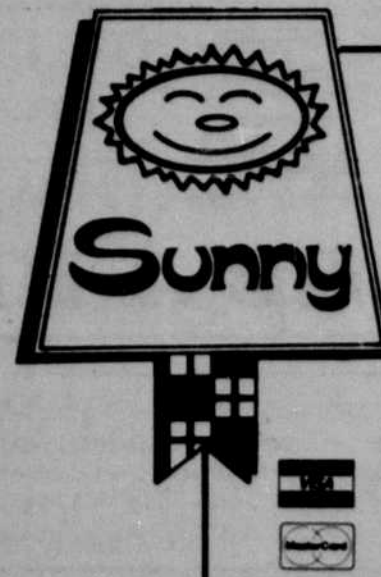
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