

# Deaf students

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mode of communication.

While some deaf students, such as Andrea Roberts, a junior English major, are able to use a sign language interpreter, other deaf students do not use sign language, which can make communication difficult.

Roberts said the energy it requires her to follow her interpreter during every class leaves her tired at the end of the day and often gives her a headache.

Alexa Schriempf, a graduate student in philosophy, faces the problem dually as a student and as a teacher for her graduate work because she is deaf. Schriempf does not sign and says this does cause some difficulties.

"I have to actively receive information all the time," she said. "I am taking courses next term based on a professor's clarity of speech and whether they have a beard."

Note-takers help many students absorb information that they might otherwise have missed.

Natasha Nowakowski, a first-year MBA student, is able to hear 10 percent of what most people hear with the assistance of a hearing aid, and she relies on reading lips. In the classroom, Nowakowski estimates she can only make sense of about 30 percent of the information the professor gives.

"Every time the professor turns his back and talks to the blackboard, I miss it. Every time a student behind me asks a question, I miss it," she said.

Looking down to write would mean the risk of missing what the interpreter is signing, Roberts said. Having a note-taker relieves some of that stress, she said.

Outside of the classroom, the University arranges assistance for any activities related to the University. This could include arranging for a teletypewriter phone to be installed in a residence hall room or calling a film company to obtain a captioned version of a film for a class.

While the rigors of the classroom are intense, the University has come to many levels of assistance for students.

"The University has been quite helpful," said Sherwin, who uses a note-taker in some of his larger classes.

Nowakowski attended Georgetown University for her undergraduate studies, where she had very limited assistance. Comparatively speaking, she said, the University of Oregon has offered her far more assistance. She can receive free speech therapy through the University, and note-takers are offered far better incentives than at Georgetown, where she frequently had to go without.

Schriempf, however, has faced some accessibility difficulties at the University. In the discussion sections she leads, she has difficulty reading the lips of her students during conversations. Having a captionist who would type the students' comments into a computer for her to read would help her immensely, she said.

The disability services office could not find a captionist in the area, she said. Instead, Schriempf would like to use an electronic classroom to communicate with her students. Organizing this is eating up her time inordinately, she said.

"It is not the University's fault, though; it is a fact of life," Schriempf said.

The students said the University can only do so much. Some of the problems they face daily as students can't be alleviated.

Communicating with other students and colleagues is a common problem.

"If I am sitting at my desk in studio with my back turned, and someone is calling my name, everyone else in the room can hear them, but I can't, and they end up throwing a piece of paper at my back," Sherwin said.

Sherwin and the other students said once classmates and colleagues begin to adjust to fac-

ing them when they are speaking and making other minor adjustments, it becomes easier to communicate. Problems, however, cannot be completely obliterated.

"If I am walking down the stairs and talking to a colleague, turning to face them and walk could break my neck," Schriempf said.

Socially, communication can be difficult. Bars are nearly impossible because of the excess noise, Sherwin said. Having a

personal conversation over TTY loses some of the intimacy, Roberts said.

Talking on the telephone is near impossible without assistance. TTY phones that relay what people are typing to a voice interpreter to the other line can be cumbersome. Many deaf students rely heavily on e-mail.

"No matter what obstacles have come up, I have always been able to come up with a way

to bypass that," Nowakowski said.

Regardless of the University's involvement, students say personal effort, family support and governmental regulation have all assisted many students' experiences.

"The ADA makes it a requirement to make accommodations," Sherwin said. "That has really helped in creating opportunities."

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