

# NETAC networks

Providing technical assistance to professionals working with students who are deaf or hard of hearing in postsecondary settings

February 1998

## Early results from the needs assessment: Who is providing services for deaf and hard-of-hearing students?

by Jerry Walter

With the funding of the four regional postsecondary education technical assistance centers\* for deaf and hard-of-hearing persons, the U.S. Department of Education directed that a national needs assessment be conducted to determine the types of assistance each of the centers should provide to participating institutions. NETAC coordinated the needs assessment for all centers by generating the mailing lists, inputting the data, and analyzing the returns. Each of the centers was responsible for distribution of the questionnaires and follow-up with institutions not responding to the initial mailing.

The needs assessment focused on the population of postsecondary institutions listed on the 1995-96 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) maintained by the National Center for Education Statistics. As a result, questionnaires were sent to 10,286 postsecondary institutions in the U.S. and its territories. Table 1 shows that the 10,286 institutions were generally distributed evenly across the four centers.

**Table 1**

Institutional Characteristics	Number Surveyed	Percent Surveyed	Number Returned	Percent of Returned	Return Rate
All Institutions	10,286	100%	4,478	100%	44%
Level					
4 year	2,818	27%	1,314	29%	47%
2 year	2,638	26%	1,271	29%	48%
< 2 year	4,830	47%	1,893	42%	39%
Control					
Public	2,212	21%	1,163	26%	53%
Non-profit	2,955	29%	1,320	29%	45%
Proprietary	5,119	50%	1,995	47%	39%
Region					
Midwest	2,520	24%	866	19%	34%
Northeast	2,334	23%	1,068	24%	46%
Southern	2,962	29%	1,258	28%	43%
Western	2,470	24%	1,286	29%	52%

The questionnaires were mailed to the schools during the summer of 1997, with telephone follow-up occurring during September and October. The total effort resulted in 4,478 returned questionnaires, of which 4,256 were useable. These returns resulted in an overall return rate of 44%, distributed as indicated in Table 1.

*\*Editor's note: The "four regional technical assistance centers" refers to PEPNet, the Postsecondary Education Programs Network, which is comprised of the Western Region Outreach Center and Consortia (WROCC) at California State University at Northridge; the Midwest Center for Postsecondary Outreach (MCPO) at St. Paul Technical College; the Postsecondary Education Consortium (PEC) at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville; and the Northeast Technical Assistance Center (NETAC) at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, a college of Rochester Institute of Technology.*

The goal of the four regional technical assistance centers is to increase postsecondary educational opportunities and accessibility for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Thus, one goal of the assessment was to determine the level of services being provided. Table 2 indicates that, overall, 68% of institutions provide no services for deaf or hard-of-hearing students and that most proprietary institutions offering less than a two-year degree provide no special services for their deaf and hard-of-hearing students. The results also indicate that public institutions are more likely to provide services for deaf and hard-of-hearing students than are private, not-for-profit institutions.

**Table 2**

Institutional Characteristics	Useable Returns	No Services	Program for Deaf	Office for Disabled
All Institutions	3,877	68%	27%	5%
Level				
4 year	1,159	48%	46%	7%
2 year	1,068	51%	41%	9%
< 2 year	1,650	94%	4%	2%
Control				
Public	1,004	22%	65%	13%
Non-profit	1,145	70%	27%	3%
Proprietary	1,728	94%	5%	2%

The results from the study also indicate that institutions returning the survey are serving 8,653 deaf and hard-of-hearing students with over 5,000 students being served by two-year schools. Fewer than 200 deaf and hard-of-hearing students were attending proprietary institutions, while 7,474 of the 8,653 students were attending public institutions. It is clear from these results that opportunities for postsecondary education are provided primarily by public institutions. The question this raises for the technical assistance centers is how much of a role should they take in advocating for more services and increased enrollments in the private and proprietary arenas?

More results from the needs assessment will be available soon in the form of reports from the national results as well as individual reports for each of the regions. Also, I plan to provide continued reporting of results in this newsletter. In the next issue look for a discussion about important areas of need for technical assistance when providing support to deaf and hard-of-hearing persons.

If you have any questions about the needs assessment project, please contact Karen Hopkins at NETAC, 716-475-6493 (voice/TTY); 716-475-7660 (fax); e-mail KAH9323@rit.edu.

*Jerry Walter is a research associate in the NTID Educational and Career Research department and has been instrumental in planning and implementing the needs assessment project.*

## Communication access on campus for students who are hard of hearing

by Brenda Battat and Donna L. Sorokin

Four years at college is a stage of life, one that contributes to our development as a human being. Although the academic elements are the primary reason most people pursue higher education, college is more than just classes. College is also a microcosm of society, a home away from home, a place to learn both formally and informally, and therefore a place where each and every student must be able to participate and feel comfortable and safe.

For hard-of-hearing students, participating and feeling comfortable and safe means there must be communication access in place throughout the campus and in the dormitories. Only then can students with hearing loss interact on an equal level with peers and take advantage of all that college has to offer.

Public phones throughout the campus, outside and inside, especially emergency phones, should be hearing aid compatible and be equipped with volume control. TTYs should be placed conveniently across campus according to ADA requirements. All fire alarms, both in public areas of the campus, common areas of the dormitories, and in the dorm rooms of students with hearing loss, should be equipped with visual strobe lights. Auditoriums where lectures and performances are held should have assistive listening devices installed. These can be used not only by hard-of-hearing students but by anyone with hearing loss when an event is open to the general public. Likewise, the systems will be used during parents' weekend, commencement, and other activities when alumni, parents, and friends of the college make use of these facilities.

Speaking of commencement, this milestone event should be set up so that all hard-of-hearing and deaf graduating seniors and their family members can understand all of the speeches and proceedings. This is most effectively achieved by setting up computer assisted real time transcription, particularly when activities are held outdoors where acoustics are poor. Commencement is a very visible event where the educational institution has an opportunity to publicly demonstrate its commitment to providing access to all participants who need assistance with communication access. It will also be greatly appreciated by international families whose first language is not English.

Hard-of-hearing students will also need to be able to use the various services offered on campus such as academic and psychological counseling, learning and writing centers, in- and out-patient medical services, the office of financial aid, and legal services, to name a few. All staff members need to be trained in communicating with people who have difficulty hearing and to be sensitized to their needs. Such basic techniques as speaking slowly and clearly, facing the person, and not covering the mouth when speaking should become second nature. Recruitment staff should know how background noise and poor acoustics affect the ability to hear, and interview space should be organized to overcome such barriers as much as possible. There should also be available assistive listening devices to use with students who need them to communicate in face-to-face situations.



Brenda Battat



Donna Sorokin

Just as removing architectural barriers allows students with physical disabilities to move freely about the campus, providing communication access allows those students who cannot hear well to have access to all college programs and services. Hard-of-hearing students can move easily around campus, but they cannot participate once they get into buildings unless communication access is appropriately provided. Although hearing loss is much less visible and therefore much less likely to be thought about, a lack of

communication is a barrier in much the same way that steps or narrow doorways are a barrier to students with mobility impairments. Different problem, different solution, but neither less needed nor less crucial to those who are hard of hearing.

*Brenda Battat is Deputy Executive Director and Donna Sorokin is Executive Director of Self Help for Hard of Hearing People, Inc. (SHHH), a national educational organization of and for people who are hard of hearing. SHHH provides its educational offerings in a number of ways including written materials such as the bimonthly magazine, **Hearing Loss: The Journal of Self Help for Hard of Hearing People**, other publications and videos, an annual convention, and participation in research activities. The address is: SHHH, 7910 Woodmont Avenue, Suite 1200, Bethesda, MD 20814; 301-657-2248 voice; 301-657-2249 TTY; 301-913-9413 fax; Web <http://www.shhh.org>.*

*Don't miss the upcoming ADA satellite broadcast:*

### **Beyond the Surface: Implementing ADA in Postsecondary Institutions Serving Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students**

Featuring Jeanne M. Kincaid  
with panelists  
Marta Belsky, Dr. Frederick Schroeder,  
and Dr. Ed Franklin

**Thursday, March 19, 1998  
Noon - 2:00 p.m. EST**

For more information contact NETAC:

716-475-6433 voice/TTY

716-475-7660 fax

e-mail: [NETAC@RIT.EDU](mailto:NETAC@RIT.EDU)

WWW: [HTTP://WWW.RIT.EDU/~NETAC](http://WWW.RIT.EDU/~NETAC)

## State updates

### CONNECTICUT

- The NETAC Statewide Consortium is planned for February 13 at Manchester Community Technical College. For more information, contact site coordinator Elaine Taylor at 860-738-6380 voice/TTY; 860-379-3886 fax; e-mail at NW\_NETAC@commnet.edu. Snow date is February 19.
- On March 19, Connecticut will participate in the national live downlink teleconference on ADA issues at Quinnipiac College in Hamden.
- Two consortium meetings are tentatively scheduled for June 2 at Western Connecticut State University in Danbury (Western Region) and June 4 at Three Rivers Community Technical College in Norwich (Eastern Region).

### DELAWARE

- The state's second consortium meeting is tentatively scheduled for February. Contact Tracey Connolly, site coordinator at 302-761-8275 voice; 302-761-8336 TTY; 302-761-6611 fax; e-mail at tconnolly@dvr.state.de.us, for details.
- Three upcoming NETAC-sponsored training sessions for those who work in postsecondary institutions around the state will focus on forums for private job placement specialists; a one-day training session for company supervisors, managers, and coworkers; and a one-day training session for career placement and planning staff counselors.
- At the December monthly meeting of the Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf, Connolly shared a videotape produced by the National Technical Institute for the Deaf titled, "Working Together: Deaf and Hard of Hearing People."

### DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

- Site coordinator Sylvia Walker has adapted Howard University's "Bridges to Leadership 2000" program to include students from Gallaudet University's Model Secondary School for the Deaf and Kendall Demonstration School. The program offers career orientation and a chance for interaction between deaf and hearing students. This model will be shared with other postsecondary programs in the region.

### MAINE

- Site coordinator Barbara Keefe hosted a January 7 presentation on NETAC at the Career Development Center in Falmouth. The presentation also included information on ATM (asynchronous transfer mode), the state's new telecommunications system. Audience members were high school juniors and seniors who are deaf.
- Keefe is working with C-Print captionist Nicci Leaman and the University of Maine System Network to "Beta test" the C-Print system over the Network. Starvision, the software vendor whose equipment controls Maine's ATM network, is trying to set up trials of C-Print on its platform as well.
- Disability Service Coordinators in the University of Maine System have been invited to participate in a February meeting to discuss issues related to providing services for deaf and hard-of-hearing students in postsecondary programs.
- Keefe is working with the Department of Labor to arrange the presentation, "Working Together: Deaf and Hearing People" for Department of Labor personnel. This model will be observed by job placement counselors from postsecondary programs in Maine.

### MARYLAND

- The state's first consortium meeting for 1997-98 occurred November 13. NETAC director Alan Hurwitz attended; other representatives were from VR, the Governor's Office for Individuals with Disabilities, and coordinators of disability support services from colleges and universities statewide.
- On November 20 and 21, Florence Cooney, site coordinator, and Catonsville Community College (CCC) hosted the third regional conference for NETAC site coordinators.
- On December 4, C-Print was demonstrated to the Cardinals of the Deaf Club for students who are deaf at CCC.
- On December 17, the Disability Support Services Group, of which NETAC is a member, demonstrated to the CCC Board of Trustees various support services, including C-Print, available to students.

### MASSACHUSETTS

- The second statewide consortium meeting is planned for February at Northern Essex Community College. A discussion of the needs assessment results and goals for the upcoming year will take place. For more information, contact site coordinator Jane Nunes at 978-556-3341 voice/TTY; 978-556-3740 fax; e-mail at NETAC@necc.mass.edu.
- A statewide meeting of coordinators of interpreting services in postsecondary institutions took place in late January.
- NETAC Massachusetts will host the New England AHEAD meeting in February at Salem State College.

### NEW HAMPSHIRE

- The second consortium meeting took place January 30 at New Hampshire (NH) Community Technical College in Manchester. The agenda included a presentation on "The Role of Vocational Rehabilitation"; a discussion of needs assessment results; discussion of technical needs in New Hampshire; and announcement of technical assistance available through NETAC. For more information, contact site coordinator Cate Weir at 603-668-6706 x221 voice; 800-735-2964 (TTY relay); e-mail at C\_Weir@tec.nh.us.
- On March 19, NH Community Technical College will participate in the teleconference on ADA issues, followed by a workshop and discussion on "Determining Reasonable Accommodations" such as assistive listening devices, CART, interpreters, C-Print, and other assistive technology.
- A "Working Together: Deaf and Hearing People in the Workplace" program will be held April 17 at NH Technical College. The workshop is for college placement officers, disability support personnel, and career development staff.

### NEW JERSEY

- Camden County College will sponsor three downlink sites—at Camden County College, Bergen Community College, and Ocean County College—for the March 19 ADA teleconference. Contact Josie Durkow, site coordinator at 609-227-7200 x4506 voice; 609-228-1897 TTY; 609-374-4879 fax; e-mail at durkow@email.njin.net, for details.
- Plans are underway for a March 26 transition workshop with the New Jersey Department of Education.
- Dianne Falvo, professor of Developmental English for Deaf Students at Camden County College, will present, "Working with

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### I never met a student I didnt like????!!!

by Jane Jarrow, Ph.D.

I am fond of reminding service providers and administrators that you cannot withdraw services from a deaf student because he/she has abused the privilege. Accommodations necessary for equal access are not a privilege, they are a right. The discussion usually occurs when a deaf student, for whom interpreter services have been arranged at the going rate, is a routine no show for classes, thus costing the institution for an interpreter's time even though the services were never used. The fact is, you can make it difficult for students who do not work with you responsibly in assuring access, but you cannot tell them they are no longer entitled to the services — the law says they are. Every institution should have in place a policy that details relative roles and responsibilities for use of services (especially interpreter services), and such policy should have sanctions built in; typically, the policy states that after  $x$  number of unexcused absences (those without notification in time to cancel the interpreter), the service will be suspended until such time as the student comes in to meet with the service provider and together they review the rules regarding use of the service. If your institution does not have such a policy in place, contact NETAC or the schools around you for suggestions of wording/contingencies and *get* one in place!

I was recently reminded, however, that while one cannot accuse a student of abusing the privilege, students can certainly be guilty of abusing the service — and the service provider! I have been assisting the folks at a private institution located in a big city who are dealing with their first-ever deaf student needing an interpreter. They have never had a deaf student before, so they did not have appropriate policies in place and are scrambling to plug that hole. But all the good policies in the world would not have insulated them from what this student is putting them through. Here is an institution that is trying its very best to do what it understands it should and (legally) must do — and whose good intentions are being trampled on at every turn by a student who is either spoiled, self-centered, or consciously looking to create an incident.

The student is a graduate student taking a prep course leading to professional certification in his field. He demanded that they hire the specific interpreter he had worked with during his undergraduate career. They complied because the interpreter was charging a reasonable rate, and it made sense to provide him with someone whose style he was familiar with and who had some knowledge of the subject matter. The same class is offered at two different times each week. He decided he wanted to attend the evening offering, then switched to the Saturday offering, and has now switched back to the evening offering. The service provider has dutifully rewritten the interpreting contracts and revamped the arrangements each time. (This is for an ongoing class!) The student has made it clear that if he decides not to attend the evening offering along the way, he expects to be able to attend the Saturday class covering the same information; after all, his hearing peers are able to use the Saturday ses-

sion as a make-up whenever they decide not to bother with an evening session after a long day at work. Oh, and of course, he expects them to have an interpreter present for those Saturday make-up sessions (although some might be with as little as 48 hours' notice). Give 24 hours' notice to cancel an interpreter for an evening session? That's not fair. His hearing peers can decide the afternoon of a class that they would rather attend on Saturday. He wants the same freedom.

As a colleague often says, "I want a red Corvette, but that doesn't mean it's reasonable!" The institution has an obligation to provide equal access to information, but they are not obligated to jump through hoops or turn themselves inside out for this student. He is right. Other students do have the *option* to decide on the afternoon of a class that they would rather go on Saturday. Unfortunately, that is an *option* (as opposed to a *right*) that is not available to this student because he is deaf and there are special arrangements that must be made in order that he be able to fully participate.

I advised the service provider to make it clear to the student that there is  $x$  amount of money available to cover the cost of interpreters for him each week and no additional funds will be allocated; if he gives adequate notice to cancel the interpreter without penalty, the institution will do everything it can to have the interpreter available for a Saturday make-up instead. If the interpreter goes uncancelled and the funds are expended for a no show, that is the choice that the student has made. Of course, there are contingencies built in to assure that the student is not penalized for legitimate emergencies/illnesses, and so on.

The saddest part of this whole situation is that this student's demands and conduct are souring folks for every deaf student who will follow him. I also advised the service provider that the best thing she could do in this situation to further the 504/ADA cause at her institution was to hide from the administration, as much as possible, how thoroughly unreasonable the student has been. Make the changes, do what must be done, and simply present the results to the powers-that-be without background on the blood, sweat, and tears that brought you to this point. These are the kind of students who administrators love to use as the example of why 504/ADA are unreasonable. Make no mistake, though, the student is unreasonable — not the laws. Keep reminding yourself (and others) of that!

*Jane Jarrow, is president of Disability Access Information and Support (DAIS). An expert in disability services, she has been providing technical assistance and training to service providers on access and support services for persons with disabilities in higher education and has co-authored or authored numerous books and articles in the field of disabilities in higher education over the past 15 years.*

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## The Director's column

by T. Alan Hurwitz, Ed.D.



We are well into the second year of the grant, and I'm pleased to say we are on the right track! Our first annual progress report has been submitted to the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), the U.S. Department of Education funding agency for our grant. We've also contracted with Dr. Janette Henderson, who will conduct a formal evaluation of NETAC objectives and outcomes for Year One as delineated in our grant proposal.

We've been busy over the last few months: NETAC hosted the Postsecondary Education Programs Network (PEPNet) meeting October 23 - 24, 1997 at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID). As you may recall, PEPNet is the network of the four regional technical assistance centers funded by OSERS. Each center was represented by their center director and two to three staff members, and Ramon Rodriguez, OSERS Project Liaison Officer, facilitated the PEPNet business sessions. Some of the items on our extremely full agenda included progress reports on the needs assessment survey, the PEPNet national collaborative activities, and the National Task Force on Quality Services; discussions about the PEPNet National Conference to be held April 29 - May 2, 1998, in Orlando; and, of course, planning for Year Two PEPNet projects and activities.

The PEPNet directors also discussed the important issue of collaborating with agencies that address the transitional needs of individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. We received a letter from three directors of community-based comprehensive service centers for deaf and hard-of-hearing clients requesting PEPNet's assistance in serving as a resource to their efforts in seeking additional resources for the target population of deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals who are low functioning (LFD). The PEPNet directors are setting up a meeting with key representatives from the Department of

Education, Gallaudet University, and NTID to focus on the transition issues of students who are deaf or hard of hearing. We are committed to working with the LFD directors to ensure that students leaving high school programs and entering the community or postsecondary education, and eventually the work force, are prepared to benefit from a well-researched transition plan regardless of their ability level.

Another successful NETAC activity was our third regional consortium meeting on the campus of Catonsville Community College in Baltimore on November 20 - 21, 1997, graciously hosted by our site coordinator, Florence Cooney, and her director, Jill Hodge. Highlights of the consortium meeting included the preliminary report of the needs assessment survey for the Northeast region, updates of NETAC projects and activities regionally and state by state, a report on PEC's Peer Review Training session, and two workshop presentations. The first workshop, "Working Together," is a model seminar for employers, deaf employees, and their hearing co-workers and was presented by two NTID staff members, Linda Iacelli and John Macko. Copies of the instructional training manuals and videotapes were distributed to the site coordinators for their use in training job placement counselors at postsecondary institutions in their respective states. The second workshop was presented by a deaf English professor, Elaine Glennon, from Northern Essex Community College in Haverhill, Massachusetts. Professor Glennon discussed the English Language Cluster program and shared her best practices for teaching English through American Sign Language to students who are deaf or hard of hearing. This model provides strategies for the site coordinators to share with faculty and staff members in their respective states.

Three NETAC site coordinators – Josie Durkow of New Jersey's Camden County College, Lori Hutchinson of Pennsylvania's Hiram G. Andrew Center, and Jane Nunes of Massachusetts' Northern Essex Community College – joined me in Atlanta to participate in the PEC's Peer Review Process training session November 3 - 4, 1997. The Peer Review Process was developed more than 10 years ago to enable postsecondary education institutions in the PEC region to enhance their direct service programs for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Josie Durkow remained in Atlanta for the rest of the week and participated in an actual peer review process at DeKalb College. She reported at the NETAC regional consortium that the process was a wonderful learning experience, as it helped her to realize that these strategies and techniques could be used to improve services to students who are deaf or hard of hearing at her home institution, Camden County College. We will continue to discuss the concept of the peer review process and how it will complement NETAC's formal evaluation plans to determine the effectiveness and impact of our technical assistance services to postsecondary education institutions.

By the time this newsletter reaches you, it will be 1998! May you, your friends, and family have a happy and prosperous New Year!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Alan".



Ramon Rodriguez (right), Program Liaison Officer, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education, chats with Herb Larson (left), Director, Western Region Outreach Center and Consortia at California State University at Northridge, and Donnell Ashmore, Associate Director, Postsecondary Education Consortium at the University of Tennessee, at the October 1997 PEPNet meeting at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, Rochester, New York.

Deaf Students in a College English Class” at the April 3 New Jersey AHEAD meeting at Brookdale Community College in Lincroft.

#### NEW YORK

- On December 12, a workshop held at LaGuardia Community College on “Sensitivity Training on Deaf Awareness, Deaf Culture, and Reasonable Accommodations” attracted nearly 40 people. Audience members were postsecondary counselors. A presentation on “Communication Access Issues” was part of the workshop.
- A workshop on “Creating a Supportive Educational Environment for Multicultural Deaf/Hard of Hearing Students in Postsecondary Education and Training Programs” is scheduled for February 6 at Hudson Valley Community College in Troy. Keynote speaker will be Dr. Sue Livingston, professor of basic academic skills at LaGuardia Community College and author of “Rethinking the Education of Deaf Students.” Another presentation during the workshop will be “Supplemental Instruction Services for At-Risk Students.”

#### PENNSYLVANIA

- The state’s next consortium meeting was held January 22 in Harrisburg. Needs assessment results for Pennsylvania were discussed as well as announcements and strategic planning for NETAC activities for the coming year. For more information, contact site coordinator Lori Hutchison at 814-255-8275 voice/TTY; 814-255-3406 fax; e-mail at Lorihutc+@pitt.edu.

#### RHODE ISLAND

- Rhode Island NETAC hosted a January 7 mini-workshop on “Assistive Listening Devices” at Bryant College in Smithfield.
- The state’s next consortium meeting will take place February 4 on the Warwick campus of the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI). During the meeting, site coordinator Maxine Little will distribute a “Survival Guide” designed for postsecondary faculty and staff members that describes everything from how to use a TTY to legal issues related to the Americans with Disabilities Act. Anyone interested in obtaining the guide can contact Little at 401-455-6064 voice; 800-745-5555 (TTY relay); 401-455-6181 fax; e-mail at Mlittle@ccri.cc.ri.us.
- Rhode Island NETAC will conduct a presentation on deaf awareness at a meeting of Bryant College residence advisors in February.

#### VERMONT

- A workshop took place January 21 at the University of Vermont. The workshop, which was open to all schools in the area, included a training session panel consisting of a VR counselor, a representative from the Office of Specialized Student Services, an interpreter, and deaf and hard-of-hearing students. Topics included how to interact with deaf and hard-of-hearing students, how to use interpreters, and how to use assistive technology. For more information, contact site coordinator Joyce Judy at 802-241-1180 voice; 800-253-0191 (TTY relay); 802-241-3526 fax; e-mail at judyj@am.ccv.vsc.edu.

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## An open letter to my colleagues\*

by Patti Lago-Avery

Dear Folks,

Some of you are aware that I have been on leave of absence this past fall quarter and know that I went to the Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) for both personal and professional reasons. Since returning from HKNC and traveling throughout the campus, I have encountered some folks who have been very surprised to see me with my buddy (the cane).

I always have lived with the knowledge that slowly my vision would be changing. For many years I called myself hearing and visually impaired, because over the past 17 years I have been able to function pretty well with what hearing and vision I had. Two years ago I experienced more changes in both my hearing and vision to the point where I now call myself deaf/blind. Yes, I still have very good central vision that allows me to see you and to read and scan my environment, but I have very little peripheral vision and hence now need to use my cane to keep me safe while traveling independently. Also, because my hearing has changed, depending on sign language has become even more crucial. I use a copy interpreter in some of my meetings because I can no longer locate voices like before to help compensate for loss of my vision. Over the years I have learned many skills that have helped me cope and deal with living with Usher Syndrome, but the time arrived when I felt I needed additional skills that would allow me to feel confident and strong as a person and move on with my life. I decided last year to start the process of applying to HKNC and was accepted for this past fall. My goals were to learn intensive orientation and mobility, tactile sign language, some adaptive computer skills, and some adaptive independent living skills.

So, you may ask, why am I writing this letter? I think because over the years I have been in a position to educate and advocate for students who have Usher Syndrome. In this letter I am taking the step to educate and advocate for myself. Please understand that in spite of being deaf/blind, I truly feel I am not much different than most of you. I ask that when you are interacting with me to remember that I am a person first. My cane is my buddy. My time at HKNC was wonderful, and I feel so very positive about the experience. I fell in love with NYC and am excited about returning in the spring to be a tour guide to Joe and Keith (our 19-year-old son). It is exciting knowing that I will be leading them instead of the other way around!

In the interest of being proactive, I would like to offer some suggestions that might help you in your interactions with me or others with Usher Syndrome:

#### Things to do:

- Do allow the person who has Usher Syndrome to be independent.
- Do touch the person’s shoulder to get his/her attention. Touching is a big part of the deaf/blind world and is very acceptable.
- Do lead the person if s/he asks for help in the dark or other places.
- Do move at a pace that is comfortable for the person who has Usher Syndrome.
- When going out to eat, do go to restaurants that have good lighting and request a table with good lighting.

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# The Strategic Plan

by T. Alan Hurwitz, Ed.D.

The final report of the needs assessment was formally presented to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) in January 1998. In addition, Dr. Jerry Walter, research associate in the Educational and Career Research department at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID), and Karen Hopkins, NETAC Project Coordinator, will be reporting the final results of the study at the PEPNet National Conference April 29 - May 2, 1998 in Orlando, Florida. Six main themes have emerged that will assist with the analysis of the priorities of needs and techniques for technical assistance services: Administration and Planning; Resource Management; Legal Issues; Student Maintenance; Basic Skills; and Professional Development.

The challenge for the NETAC central office and the Site Coordinators is to convert the results of the needs assessment survey into a strategic plan for the next four years. In July 1997 at the second regional consortium meeting in Boston, the Nominal Group Technique (NGT) process was utilized to develop a blueprint of NETAC aims and objectives. This working document could not be finalized until the needs assessment survey was completed. In addition, the NETAC objectives and action plans spelled out in the grant application to OSERS had to be aligned with the survey results and the NETAC blueprint and brought together in a single Strategic Plan for NETAC.

NETAC's mission is to expand the array of available educational opportunities and to increase accessibility for students who are deaf or hard of hearing by providing technical assistance to a broad range of postsecondary education institutions in the Northeast region. Through the NGT process, three goals were established by the Site Coordinators, and the high priority needs for Year Two were identified from the needs assessment survey as shown below:

**Goal #1:** Enable postsecondary institutions to provide quality, accessible, efficient, and cost-effective access and support services to students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

High priority needs for Year Two: (a) funding for support services; (b) strategies to improve support; (c) technology to facilitate accessibility; (d) legal issues of students, faculty and administrators; (e) needs of multi-disabled deaf and hard-of-hearing students; (f) training staff to work with deaf and hard-of-hearing students; (g) strategies for retention; (h) managing interpreters, notetakers and computer-aided reporters; and (i) classroom and campus access.

**Goal #2:** Improve and enhance the quality of accessible support services through the application of emerging technologies for classroom learning in postsecondary institutions, to include, but not be limited to, C-Print technology, video teleconferencing, remote interpreting and captioning, distance learning, Internet/WWW, multimedia, and automatic speech/voice recognition.

High priority needs for Year Two: (a) technology to facilitate accessibility; (b) technology to facilitate learning; (c) training staff to work with deaf and hard-of-hearing students; and (d) strategies to improve support.

**Goal #3:** Prepare individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing for successful enrollment, matriculation and persistence toward graduation, completion of program objectives, or completion of student goals in postsecondary institutions of their choice.

High priority needs for Year Two: (a) financial aid considerations; (b) work experience and placement; (c) partnership with Vocational Rehabilitation counselors.

The enabling objectives for each of these three goals were outlined in the last issue of *NETAC Networks*. These objectives have been cross-referenced and reprioritized based on the results of the needs assessment survey and NETAC's five-year management activity plan. The Strategic Plan will be added to NETAC's Web site.

It should be pointed out that although the high priority needs resulting from the needs assessment survey have been listed under the three goals for Year Two, this does not necessarily mean that other priority needs will be ignored. Wherever existing proven models, component models, and other exemplary practices are available for sharing with postsecondary institutions that have a pressing need for such technical assistance, NETAC will make every effort to disseminate this information. For instance, at the last regional consortium meeting, a proven model was demonstrated for teaching English through American Sign Language to students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

It bears repeating that NETAC's responsibility is to provide outreach and technical assistance to postsecondary institutions in the creation or enhancement of their programs and services to students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Care must be taken to always make this distinction and to not provide direct services to students.

Marcia Kolvitz, one of our PEPNet colleagues with the Postsecondary Education Consortium (PEC) at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, articulated the meanings of outreach and technical assistance. She and the PEC Central Office and affiliate program coordinators agreed on the following definitions: "Outreach: To create awareness and provide information," and "Technical Assistance: To provide specific information based on identified needs." She further elaborated that the PEC affiliate programs serve as a sort of laboratory setting for developing best practices and models of service provision, and that, considering the needs of students from a variety of backgrounds, the affiliate programs have the opportunity to test practical approaches and share them with others across the region. This, Ms. Kolvitz explained, may include training, workshops, conferences, publications, models, individual and on-site consultation, observation, feedback, peer review, needs assessment, collaboration and liaison, networks, and advocacy.

The Northeast region, including NTID, has a wealth of proven models, components of models, and other exemplary practices in various postsecondary institutions in the region, as well as the other three regional centers at California State University at Northridge, St. Paul Technical College, and the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. This is an exciting opportunity to pool resources and provide quality technical assistance services locally, statewide, regionally, and nationwide.



## An open letter ... *continued from page 6*

- Do sign in a smaller frame of space below your chin. This is not what you learn in ASL classes, but people with Usher Syndrome have different communication needs.
- Do stand back a distance when communicating with a person who has severe Usher Syndrome. This person needs some space between the two of you to make his/her visual field larger.

### Things not to do:

- Do not tease a person who has Usher Syndrome about his/her vision, e.g., like tapping him/her and then running away.
- Do not do everything for the person who has Usher Syndrome. Allow him/her to be independent.
- Do not take or entertain your friends who have Usher Syndrome in dark places.
- When guiding a person who has Usher Syndrome, do not push him/her ahead of you, but lead the person. Have the person walk a step behind you while holding onto your arm.
- Do not ask questions about Usher Syndrome if s/he appears uncomfortable talking about his/her vision.

In closing I would like to say that I would be happy to share my experiences at the Helen Keller National Center in NYC and would welcome the opportunity. I also would like to thank all of my colleagues who have through the years provided me with support both professionally and personally. Most importantly, I feel blessed to have the devotion and support of my husband, Joe, and my family.

*\* Editor's note: Patti Lago-Avery is a faculty member at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, a college of Rochester Institute of Technology. Since secondary disabilities were identified as one of the important priorities to address as a result of the needs assessment, we feel it's important to provide this information to our readers. Professor Lago-Avery graciously accepted our request to include her letter in this issue.*

NETAC Networks is produced at least three times a year. Articles should be submitted to Sherlea Dony, editor, NETAC, 52 Lomb Memorial Drive, Rochester, NY 14623-5604, through e-mail to SADDHD@rit.edu, or by fax to 716-475-7660. All articles are subject to editing. Comments and suggestions are always welcome!

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**Rochester Institute of Technology**  
National Technical Institute for the Deaf  
Northeast Technical Assistance Center  
52 Lomb Memorial Drive  
Rochester, NY 14623-5604

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