

Patterns and Policies: The Changing Demographics of Foreign Language Instruction

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Editor

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Communication Policy for a Unique Bilingual Community: The National Technical Institute for the Deaf

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The National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) at Rochester Institute of Technology in Rochester, New York, is a bilingual academic community.¹ American Sign Language (ASL) and English are recognized as the two languages of this community. However, students and faculty in this officially bilingual environment, who have diverse professional and educational backgrounds as well as a variety of personal communication preferences and skills, use a range of contact languages and communication modes. This paper presents an overview of this diversity and the ways the faculty and the Institute work to support this unique bilingual community.

We present a description of the unique language-learning community at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf. This uniqueness applies both to the students who come from a variety of educational and language backgrounds, and to the faculty who are actively involved in the development and overseeing of NTID's Communication Policy. Like other post-secondary institutions, NTID has standard university guidelines for tenure and promotion. In addition, it has a Communication Policy that requires levels of proficiency in ASL of its faculty. Faculty come to NTID with various levels of proficiency in ASL. Some proficiency in ASL is a consideration for employment at NTID, a consideration that is unique among postsecondary educational institutions. The Communication

Policy is an attempt to address these varying levels of proficiency and is an integral part of the annual faculty performance review.

We begin with an overview of American Deaf culture and the complicated language choices in that culture. Then we introduce the college and the students who enroll there and present a closer look at the members of the faculty. We also explain NTID's role in providing faculty members with opportunities to learn ASL, to assess their levels of proficiency, and to foster research in the field. The discussion then continues with an in-depth explanation of this innovative Communication Policy.

The Deaf Community

We begin by explaining the difference between *deaf* people and *Deaf* people. This difference was originally proposed by Woodward (1972), using the lower case *deaf* when referring to the audiological condition of not hearing and the uppercase *Deaf* when referring to those people who share a language (i.e., ASL) and a culture. The members of this latter group use ASL as a "primary means of communication among themselves, and hold a set of beliefs about themselves and their connection to the larger society" (Woodward 1972, p. 1). The culture of Deaf people in the United States and Canada "like many other cultures in the traditional sense of the term, [was] historically created and [is] actively transmitted across generations" (Padden and Humphries 1988, p. 2). ASL, the language of Deaf people, is a visual/gestural language that Lucas and Valli (1992) describe as "a natural language with an autonomous grammar that is completely independent from the grammar of English and from the systems devised to represent English manually" (p. 16).

The language situation becomes quite complex and complicated, however, when Deaf people interact with deaf people and with hearing people in work, social, and educational environments. Often the choice between ASL and spoken English is neither a clear nor a natural one, but "is shaped by the characteristics of the users in a contact situation and by the varieties of language available to those users" (Lucas and Valli 1992, p. 6). One of these "varieties" is the category of contrived signing systems developed by educators to teach and visually model spoken English. Such systems may incorporate some features of ASL in English word order. Other possible varieties include: English signing with speech, often referred to as simultaneous communication (which may also include some features of ASL); ASL (the natural language); and spoken English (without

signs). This situation of language contact is unique to the interaction of a signed and a spoken language. Two individuals in a spoken-language contact situation exhibit linguistic outcomes that include code switching, foreigner talk, and lexical borrowing of different kinds. Two individuals in a signed-language contact situation would probably exhibit examples of code switching and code mixing (Lucas and Valli 1992). However, the contact between a spoken language and a signed language presents a unique situation in which “the terms that have been used to define spoken language contact phenomena, such as borrowing, cannot be indiscriminately applied” because of the difference in modalities:

If we consider the outcomes of contact between a sign language and a spoken language literally in terms of spoken language criteria, a description of code switching, for example, means that the person literally stops signing and starts speaking, at a sentence boundary. There exists abundant anecdotal evidence that [this situation occurs]. (Lucas and Valli p. 39)

At NTID, this language situation in a post-secondary environment demands a level of proficiency in ASL that takes into account this diversity of contact language. Classes at NTID often contain both deaf students who prefer a combination of spoken English and signed English and Deaf students who prefer ASL. To complicate the issue even further, many teachers are second-language learners of ASL who attempt to communicate effectively with this array of contact languages. These issues have enormous impact on the design and provision of appropriate training as well as on the expectations of proficiency levels for these second-language learners, these teachers of deaf students. When one is proficient in both ASL and English, one has more flexibility to effectively adjust or adapt to a wide range of communication skills and choices.

It seems that instruction in ASL will provide [second-language] students the most access to whatever they may encounter. If they are taught ASL, they will be able to understand contact signing, which will sometimes naturally occur. On the other hand, if they are taught contact signing, they will probably not be able to understand ASL. (Lucas and Valli p. 119)

The Institute and Its Students

Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), founded in 1829, is a leader in career-oriented education as well as in cooperative education. It offers one

of the oldest and largest co-op programs in the world. RIT is a coeducational, privately endowed institution, enrolling 12,637 full and part-time graduate and undergraduate students preparing for technical and professional careers. Its eight colleges include Applied Science and Technology, Business, Continuing Education, Engineering, Imaging Arts and Sciences, Liberal Arts, Science, and the primarily federally funded National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID). NTID is the first college for deaf students established on a campus designed principally for hearing students. It was created in 1965 by an act of Congress and is the world's largest technological college for deaf students. Nearly 1,100 college-age deaf students from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and several U.S. territories study and reside on the RIT campus. In addition, NTID enrolls approximately 75 international deaf students.

NTID's mission is to educate deaf students and prepare them for careers, conduct research into employment-related education, and share its knowledge and expertise through outreach and other information-dissemination programs. The college offers more than 30 technical programs, such as applied accounting, applied art and computer graphics, photo/media technologies, and engineering technologies. In addition to the diplomas, certificates, and associate degrees that may be earned through NTID, qualified deaf students may also earn a bachelor's or master's degree in more than 200 programs offered by RIT's seven other colleges.

Students who study at NTID are encouraged to use the communication method of their choice, including American Sign Language, signed English, and/or spoken communication. These students come from various linguistic backgrounds and vary widely in their levels of language proficiency. Most of the deaf students attending NTID have hearing parents, which is a reflection of the larger deaf community: approximately 91 percent of deaf adults have hearing parents (Schein and Delk 1974). This means that approximately 9 percent of deaf students have deaf (probably Deaf) parents. The hearing parent-deaf child interaction has a profound impact on the student's language choice and proficiency. "Deaf children of deaf parents seem to acquire language better than deaf children of hearing parents" (Schlesinger and Meadow 1972, p. 33). Add to this linguistic background the diverse educational experiences NTID students bring with them, and one can begin to see the complexity of the "communication method of choice." Students who attended residential schools for the deaf usually learned ASL from peers (Deaf children of Deaf parents) or from

the few teachers and/or staff who were Deaf. Students who were in mainstream programs or classes for the deaf in public schools may have learned any one of those “varieties” discussed above from hearing teachers and/or interpreters (who are themselves second-language learners).

Faculty of NTID make every effort to meet the diverse communication needs of deaf students in this contact situation by using communication strategies that may include sign language (ASL and the varieties of contact languages), speech, fingerspelling, writing, and other visual aids. This presents a challenge to the faculty, particularly when they encounter all of these different communication methods in one classroom and particularly when their level of proficiency in ASL (their second language) may not be high enough for them to move flexibly among communication modes while still retaining overall communicative coherence. The faculty at NTID has addressed this challenge in the following ways: (1) recognizing that teaching effectiveness in this unique educational setting requires knowledge, skill, and fluency with various communication methods; (2) articulating this expectation through the college’s Communication Policy; (3) supporting this expectation with assessment, training, and research; and (4) reflecting this expectation in the college’s tenure and promotion guidelines and criteria.

The Faculty

Faculty members join NTID with varying backgrounds; many of them bring substantial experience from the private sector that directly connects to the more than 30 technical programs offered at the college. As of January 1996, there were approximately 294 faculty members in the college, 234 of whom held tenure-track positions; 86 percent of them were tenured. Senior-level faculty members at the professor and associate professor ranks comprise 59 percent of all ranked tenure-track faculty, leaving about 41 percent (100 assistant professors and 11 instructors) at junior faculty rank. As one can see, these numbers show that the majority of faculty are already tenured and have most likely achieved their highest rank. This situation presents a challenge for NTID and the faculty to design and foster opportunities that lead and motivate senior tenured faculty members to higher levels of proficiency in this second language.

Of the 234 full-time tenure-track faculty members, 198 are hearing and 36 are deaf. With regard to their educational backgrounds, 77 hold terminal degrees in their fields, 150 hold master’s degrees, and seven have

bachelor's degrees. Currently, the average age of the tenure-track faculty member is 48 years and the average length of employment at NTID is 16.4 years. The number of newly hired faculty members has decreased over the years. In 1979, there were 11 new faculty hired to full-time tenure-track positions, whereas in 1984 there was a sharp drop to only four new hires. Ten years later in 1994, three full-time faculty were hired. Of the 11 new faculty hired in 1979, only one had one year of experience with deafness. In 1984, out of the four hired, one faculty member had one year of experience with deafness and another had 11 years. In 1994, all three who were hired had some experience with deafness (one year, 11 years, and 14 years) (NTID 1994 Annual Report, pp. 53–57). These numbers serve to emphasize that very few current faculty need to learn a “new” language, presenting a challenge for those who “teach” these faculty members. Those in the field of second-language learning may question why there continues to be a need for teaching ASL as a second language at NTID. Perhaps a bit of historical perspective will shed some light on this issue.

When NTID was established in 1965, the prevailing attitude in the United States toward deaf people, Deaf culture, and ASL was quite different from today. ASL had just been recognized as a language by academia (Stokoe 1960). The teaching and researching of ASL as a foreign/second language became an area of study that led to new literature and to pride in the language of the Deaf community, and laid the groundwork for academic programs in Deaf Studies. However, deaf individuals in the United States were viewed as “handicapped” and “in need of help.” Primary and secondary educational opportunities for deaf students were limited mostly to state schools for the deaf. Gallaudet University (then Gallaudet College), founded in 1864 in Washington, D.C., was the only major institution of higher learning for deaf people in the country. With the advent of civil rights legislation in the late 1970s for handicapped citizens, the increase in mainstream programs expanded educational opportunities for deaf students.

Sign language programs for faculty at NTID in the early years were state-of-the-art; the accepted approach to teaching ASL as a second language was to teach within the structure of English word order. This approach sometimes supported speaking while signing. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, NTID began developing a sign language curriculum based on the direct experience method, in which ASL grammar and cultural information were an integral part. Videotapes, books, and other

support materials were developed to provide information on different academic disciplines (e.g., technical signs for physics, chemistry, biology). These curriculum materials often formed the foundation of sign language classes across the country.

Over time, as academic research influenced actual pedagogical approaches to teaching ASL and as deaf people became more involved in the research of their own language, the accepted approach to teaching ASL as a second language more closely followed the teaching methods of spoken languages. Total immersion classes became quite common and new curriculum materials continued to be developed. The reality of adapting and adjusting to pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning ASL continues to be a challenge for everyone in the NTID community. The next section of this paper describes this challenge.

Communication Policy

Establishment

Along with this increased knowledge and awareness of Deaf culture, community, and ASL, there was a growing concern among deaf students, faculty, and the administration regarding access to their educational and work experiences at NTID/RIT. In response to this issue, and in an attempt to respond to the faculty's desire for clear and concise guidelines regarding communication skills, the dean of NTID appointed a faculty task force in the fall of 1987 to develop recommendations for expectations and guidelines for faculty communication skill development. In June of 1990, the task force submitted its final report to the dean, who in turn presented it to the faculty for ratification. This report included recommendations for ways in which the college could foster opportunities for full and equal participation by all members of the NTID community in college affairs. NTID faculty members are now required to develop sign language expressive and receptive skills and spoken communication strategies and techniques. The Communication Policy ratified by the faculty stated:

[NTID faculty] will strive for, achieve, and maintain the ability to communicate in sign language at a level of vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, comprehension, and fluency that allows faculty to participate effectively in communication situations applicable to work and social topics [and] will strive for, achieve, and maintain the ability to use spoken communication strategies and techniques. (NTID CTF, p. 17)

Individual faculty members are responsible for developing annual documentation to show good-faith efforts in two areas: 1) participation in learning activities and efforts to develop communication skills and sensitivity to Deaf cultural issues, and 2) development of communication skills. This proposal was adopted by faculty vote and a three-year transition period was initiated. The dean appointed faculty members to serve on a Steering Committee on Communication (SCC) whose charge was to:

. . . provide the mechanism to ensure that a comprehensive, multi-faceted, well-coordinated institutional plan exists for the delivery of learning activities related to sign language development, cultural issues related to deafness, and spoken communication techniques and strategies. (DeCaro 1991, p. ii)

At the same time, the Office of Communication Assessment Services (OCAS) was established. Its function was as follows:

. . . [to] coordinate, manage and evaluate activities related to administering assessment of sign language and to be a clearinghouse of information on various available resources for faculty/staff to develop their skills in sign communication and to learn spoken communication strategies and techniques. (DeCaro 1991, p. ii)

It was envisioned that OCAS would also “function as a cooperative catalyst with research/evaluation teams as well as work cooperatively with the Steering Committee on Communication” (DeCaro 1991, p. ii). The primary tool for sign language assessment was determined to be the Sign Communication Proficiency Interview (SCPI).

Assessment

The SCPI, an adaptation of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language’s Language Proficiency Interview/Oral Proficiency Interview (ACTFL-LPI) (Caccamise et al. 1988), was adopted by the faculty as a college-wide assessment tool in 1991. Prior to this time, the SCPI was available as an option for individual faculty members to obtain feedback on their signing skills. Faculty receive some feedback on their American Sign Language skills through the process of taking sign language courses, but the SCPI offers a broader perspective on their language use.

The SCPI is an interview technique. A videotaped conversation with a skilled interviewer is later viewed by three trained raters. The topics of the interview vary according to the interests and communication needs

of the interviewee. This approach incorporates natural conversational strategies and attempts to put interviewees at ease to allow them to demonstrate the best sample of their communication skills, both expressive and receptive. (Caccamise and Newell 1994, p. 1)

NTID's SCPI team represents the diversity of the language community with members from the Deaf community, deaf, and hearing people. SCPI services are provided to all members of the NTID and RIT community. In keeping with its peer review design, the SCPI team is composed of both faculty and staff. The OCAS oversees this entire process including a follow-up meeting between the faculty member and an SCPI team member to review SCPI results and discuss options for continued sign language skill development. The implementation and administration of SCPI services continue to reflect the involvement and participation of faculty in this crucial aspect of their Communication Policy. Since 1982, 149 or 67 percent of the current tenure-track faculty members have taken the SCPI. More than half of this number have taken the SCPI since the establishment of OCAS in the spring of 1992. The faculty has achieved the following ratings on the SCPI. (See the Appendix for a description of the levels in the SCPI rating scale.)

Table 1.
Faculty Ratings on the SCPI

Level	Frequency
Superior Plus	2
Superior	20
Advanced Plus	13
Advanced	31
Intermediate Plus	36
Intermediate	32
Survival Plus	11
Survival	4
Novice Plus	0
Novice	0
Total	149

NTID Faculty/Staff Communication Database (1996)

Of those who have taken the SCPI (as of January 1996), 68 percent have achieved a rating of Intermediate Plus or above, the minimum rating required for tenure. As explained earlier in this paper, the average length of faculty employment is currently 16.4 years. The number of new hires at NTID has dropped significantly over the years, and those who have been hired recently bring with them some previous experience with deafness. This would account for the few faculty members in the Novice to Survival Plus range.

Training

In keeping with the recommendations from the Communication Task Force, NTID's training department offers courses for faculty to develop their sign language skills. The Department of American Sign Language and Interpreting Education (ASLIE) is charged with providing positive and creative approaches to increase sign language competency of the faculty. Regular review and refinement of curriculum and consideration of adult learning theory are incorporated into the instruction and delivery of sign language course offerings. Development of offerings for new and veteran faculty, including both traditional and non-traditional approaches, are a priority. We discuss these offerings later in this paper.

As previously stated, the faculty has the challenge of teaching students with diverse communication skills and preferences. In addition to learning ASL, the faculty is also expected to develop spoken communication strategies and techniques. The Communication Task Force (CTF) cites spoken communication strategies and techniques as critical to effective communication and defines spoken communication as

speech, with or without voice, used expressively and/or receptively, alone or to complement a message communicated with signs (NTID CTF, p. 27).

Research

The Communication Task Force also recommended that a research and evaluation plan be simultaneously established with the implementation of the Communication Policy. The Research and Evaluation Sub-Committee of the Steering Committee on Communication oversees the establishment of a database to address numerous communication issues, including faculty sign language communication skills, reliability and validity of the SCPI, evaluation of the SCPI process and services, further development

and continued evaluation of the ASL curriculum and services offered by ASLIE. This database and research and evaluation plan ensure ongoing faculty participation in the review of the Communication Policy and recommend refinements and adjustments.

Annual Plan of Work

All NTID faculty members are required to develop an annual plan of work that includes proposed activities for the academic year. The four major activity categories covered in this plan are: 1) area of primary responsibility and associated professional development, 2) communication skill development, 3) professional activities, and 4) campus and community activities. The communication skill development plan includes details of the faculty member's efforts to develop expressive and receptive sign language skills and spoken communication strategies and techniques. The plan is then used as part of the annual appraisal by the department chairperson that serves as the basis for annual merit salary increases, as well as tenure and promotion documentation.

Tenure and Promotion

Rochester Institute of Technology's granting of tenure to its faculty is in keeping with tenure requirements at other academic institutions: the major criterion for awarding tenure is excellence in one's primary area of professional responsibility. However, NTID includes a unique component as a direct result of its Communication Policy: "effective communication with people who are deaf and people who are hearing in all modalities and sensitivity to deaf cultural issues" (p. E. 1-8). The Institute expectation for NTID faculty is that they "will strive for, achieve, and maintain the ability to communicate in sign language at a level of vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, comprehension, and fluency that allows faculty to participate effectively in communication situations applicable to work and social topics." (NTID CTF, p. 17)

Competency is demonstrated by substantial evidence obtained through documentation of a variety of activities such as: 1) satisfactory completion of courses and seminars related to sign language, spoken communication, cultural knowledge or similar topics; 2) description of progress in courses and seminars (prepared by instructors and/or the individual); 3) evidence of ongoing participation in activities involving people

who are deaf and other activities as determined by the individual faculty member; 4) observations by individuals qualified to assess sign language and spoken communication strategies; 5) student evaluation feedback; and 6) certification from a nationally recognized organization such as the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf², or the American Sign Language Teachers Association.³ (NTID CTF, pp. 17–22)

Tenure documentation must include official results of the Sign Communication Proficiency Interview (SCPI) rating. By tenure review time, an individual is expected to achieve the Intermediate Plus level or higher in sign language skill. The promotion process at NTID also includes expectations for communication skill development. The achievement of a rating of Advanced or higher on the SCPI is a required part of the portfolio for individuals seeking promotion to the associate and full professor ranks.

Current Training at NTID

The *NTID Strategic Plan: An Agenda for Action* (1992) recognizes English and ASL as the languages of the NTID educational community. The Plan also states that faculty, staff, and administrators are committed to recognizing, studying, and using English and ASL as well as understanding and appreciating the diversity of the deaf community and Deaf culture.

The Department of American Sign Language and Interpreting Education (ASLIE)⁴ has a clearly defined role in building and maintaining a dynamic and diverse language community. For NTID to become a cohesive language community, it is imperative that each member possess the ability to communicate effectively across the range from English word order with or without speech to ASL. Also, for the language community to be dynamic, each member must be motivated to learn, possess the required knowledge and skills of languages used by the community, and gain an appreciation of cultural diversity.

The department supports the faculty by offering learning opportunities in four strands that complement each other and serve to enhance the functional language learning needs of the faculty. These language learning strands are: 1) language learning, 2) drill/review, 3) experiential, and 4) application.

The language learning strand consists of a sequence of ASL courses ranging from the beginning to advanced levels. Courses within this strand are devoted either to skill development or to knowledge development. The

content is focused on the development of functional skills or knowledge. In addition, the appreciation of the culture of Deaf people and cultural protocol is studied and practiced throughout the strand. The drill/review strand provides intensive practice on specific skills taught in the basic foundation courses. Courses in this strand are appropriate for those who need review or drill on specific language skills, such as sign vocabulary recall or production, and can also serve as a check of specified language features that should be mastered prior to enrolling in the sequence. The experiential/learning strand offers a wide range of activities outside the traditional classroom where language skills are developed in a variety of situations. The application strand facilitates the use of language and knowledge skills needed by the faculty and staff in specialized environments to accomplish specific purposes. This strand includes structured, planned activities such as Classroom Observation for Improved Communication, Strategies for Effective Communication and workshops on such topics as the Adult Second-Language Learner and Adverbial and Adjectival Inflection in ASL. In an attempt to address the particular needs of faculty learners, ASLIE offers a variety of formats for learning ASL, such as traditional courses that follow an established sequence for language learning, workshops that focus on specific features of the language in a one-time lesson, and tutoring where a faculty member receives individualized instruction. The faculty also has the opportunity to use the Self Instruction Lab, which houses materials such as videotapes and interactive video discs that supplement the ASL curriculum.

The curriculum review process allows for collegial feedback on the workshops offered to the general faculty. After peer review within ASLIE, curriculum review for courses is overseen by the Steering Committee on Communication, which brings an Institute-wide perspective to the curriculum. The 1994–95 academic year continues to reflect faculty support and participation of the training component of the Communication Policy. ASLIE offered 24 traditional classes, 24 workshops, and 49 tutoring opportunities. The total enrollment figure of faculty for the year was 232. Bearing in mind that there are 234 full time faculty, this level of participation shows commitment to the Communication Policy.

Conclusion

Accomplishing the goals that NTID has set for itself as a bilingual/bicultural working and learning environment presents an ongoing challenge for

its students and faculty. This paper has set forth the complex issues that make this language and educational community unique. NTID's view of itself has changed since it was established in 1965, as should any dynamic institution's view of itself. These changing views are reflected in the Communication Policy designed and supported by faculty members in response to their own need for clear guidelines with regard to communication skills and to the deaf students' and faculty's concerns with access to the educational and work experience.

Some of the challenges in providing this accessibility for students include addressing the varieties of contact languages. The Department of American Sign Language and Interpreting Education continues to offer and develop training opportunities that meet the needs of their "students" (adult second-language learners who are also teachers of deaf students). As previously mentioned, the average length of stay for tenure-track faculty is approximately 16 years and the average age is 48. In their study of adult learners of ASL at a post-secondary program for deaf students, Lang et al. (1996) have recently shown that "higher achievement in ASL [is] associated with a positive cultural attitude toward deaf people" (p. 137). These factors have a clear impact on the development and delivery of the ASL curriculum. This faculty member is, in many ways, atypical in that he/she brings a variety of previously learned skills to the current language-learning situation. The instructors in ASLIE are responsible for providing a sound, theoretically based curriculum for adult second language learners; these "students" are savvy enough to influence their curriculum, as it complements assessment and research activities. ASLIE is currently surveying the faculty it serves; the basic question is whether ASLIE's courses assist the faculty in appropriately meeting their sign language skill development goals (Reeves et al., in progress).

The sign language assessment process at the college is faculty-driven and supports ongoing refinement and review of the training curriculum and also supports research activities which, in turn, contribute to the continued expansion of the assessment process. Periodic updates on the reliability and validity needs and issues important to communication skills regarding the SCPI are in progress (Caccamise and Newell 1996).

To date, almost half of the faculty has participated in the SCPI process and the college is in the third year of implementation of the Communication Policy. It remains to be seen what impact this participation will have on the quality of the learning and work environment as it

relates to communication accessibility and on the language and communication skills of the faculty. Currently, there is an investigation of the relationship between NTID students' responses to a communication ease survey administered during the end-of-course evaluation and the SCPI ratings of their instructors (Long et al., in progress). These results will provide an additional perspective on the proficiency level of the faculty. During the coming academic year, NTID will begin to investigate communication requirements for the staff who work along with faculty and students.

Throughout the process of development, implementation, and administration of the NTID Communication Policy, input and participation by the faculty have been paramount. If this input and participation by the faculty continue, as is expected, NTID's future will most definitely reflect its Strategic Plan: Agenda for Action that commits the faculty and administration to recognize, study, and use English and American Sign Language and to understand and appreciate the diversity of the deaf community and Deaf culture.

Notes

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2. The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf is a national organization which has more than 5,000 members involved in the practice of sign language interpreting. RID administers a national evaluation and certification system, maintains state and national registries of certified interpreters, and advocates on behalf of interpreters and interpreting.
3. The American Sign Language Teachers Association is a national organization of professionals involved with teaching American Sign Language. ASLTA was originally formed as the Sign Instructors Guidance Network (SIGN) in 1975 as a section of the National Association of the Deaf. The ASLTA, through its predecessor organization, has been certifying teachers of ASL since 1976.

4. ASLIE houses the NTID faculty/staff sign language program and the interpreter education program (IEP), which offers an AAS in Educational Interpreting to hearing students. This program graduates approximately 20 students every year.

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APPENDIX

Sign Communication Proficiency Interview (SCPI) Rating Scale^a

Ratings	Functional Descriptors^b
Superior Plus	<i>Able to have a fully shared and natural conversation, with in-depth elaboration for both social and work topics. All aspects of signing are native-like.</i>
Superior	<i>Able to have a fully shared conversation, with in-depth elaboration for both social and work topics. Very broad sign language vocabulary, near native-like production and fluency, excellent use of sign language grammatical features, and excellent comprehension for normal signing rate.</i>
Advanced Plus	<i>Exhibits some superior level skills, but not all and not consistently.</i>
Advanced	<i>Able to have a shared conversation with good, spontaneous elaboration for both social and work topics. Broad sign language vocabulary knowledge and clear, accurate production of signs and finger-spelling at a normal/near-normal rate; occasional misproductions do not detract from conversational flow. Good use of many sign language grammatical features and comprehension good for normal signing rate.</i>
Intermediate Plus	<i>Exhibits some advanced level skills, but not all and not consistently.</i>
Intermediate	<i>Able to discuss with some confidence routine social and work topics within a conversational format with some (adequate) elaboration. Good knowledge and control of everyday/basic sign language vocabulary</i>

^a Adapted from U.S. Foreign Service Institute and ACTFL OPI Rating Scales by William Newell and Frank Caccamise.

^b For all SCPI rating descriptors, the first statement (in italic type) is always a statement of communicative functioning, with all remaining statements (roman type) descriptors of form (vocabulary, production, fluency, grammar, and comprehension).

(may have several sign misproductions), with fluency generally characterized by moderate signing pace and some inappropriate pauses/hesitations. Demonstrates use of some sign language grammatical features in connected discourse, but not controlled. Fairly good comprehension for a moderate-to-normal signing rate; a few repetitions and rephrasing of questions may be needed.

Survival Plus

Exhibits some Intermediate level skills, but not all and not consistently.

Survival

Able to discuss basic social and work topics with responses generally 1 to 3 sentences in length. Some knowledge of basic sign language vocabulary with many sign vocabulary errors. Slow to moderate signing rate with (some) inappropriate pausing. Basic use of a few sign language grammatical features. Fair comprehension for signing produced at a slow to moderate rate with some repetition and rephrasing.

Novice Plus

Exhibits some survival level skills, but not all and not consistently.

Novice

Able to provide single sign and some short phrases/sentence responses to basic questions signed at a slow to moderate rate with frequent repetition and rephrasing. Vocabulary primarily related to everyday work and/or social areas such as basic work-related signs, family members, basic objects, colors, numbers, names of weekdays, and time. Production and fluency characterized by many sign production errors and by a slow rate with frequent inappropriate pauses/hesitations.

No Functional Skills

(May be) Able to provide short single sign and "primarily" fingerspelled responses to some basic questions signed at a slow rate with extensive repetition and rephrasing.

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