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**Educating Deaf Adults:  
The LaGuardia Community College Model**

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## Educating Deaf Adults: The LaGuardia Community College Model

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*The New York Times* has referred to the Programs for Deaf Adults (PDA) at LaGuardia Community College as "the most comprehensive educational program for deaf persons in Metropolitan New York City." This paper describes the growth and development of the PDA at LaGuardia during the past 10 years and includes the development process, needs assessments, results, characteristics of the deaf student population, program offerings, personnel requirements, and funding sources. LaGuardia's model of service delivery is based on the awareness and acknowledgement of the important role and function of community colleges, especially continuing education programs, in the provision of postsecondary educational programs to deaf people.

### Access to Learning

Community colleges today have a major role to play in the provision of access to the special populations who have been unserved in the past, or who have been provided with relatively few accommodations to address their respective educational needs. One group for which this is especially true is the deaf population, a traditionally underserved segment within higher education. Until the mid-60s, a deaf high school graduate in the United States had two choices: to attend a college where no special support services were available or to attend Gallaudet College, the only liberal arts college in the world for deaf people. Today, a deaf

high school graduate has some real choices, for many two-year community colleges, some of which have been funded by the federal government, now typically provide specialized support services for deaf students.

The community college has emerged as a major point of access for deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals who wish to pursue education beyond the secondary level. The community college is typically accessible geographically, is generally more responsive to special needs of nontraditional learners, and is relatively low cost in relation to other higher education institutions (e.g., private colleges, state university systems, and proprietary schools).

Because of this influx, community colleges need to anticipate and to plan for an ongoing demand for services for the deaf population. Like their hearing counterparts, many hearing-impaired individuals will delay entry into college; some will leave college early and return later as more mature, serious students; and some graduates will return for additional training or retraining for new careers or career advancement. Moreover, the community college must prepare for those students who do not function successfully at the college level and who need Adult Basic Education courses and support services. Colleges must prepare to hire trained professionals, especially those who are deaf, to work specifically with deaf people.

Although the educational and career needs of deaf individuals are similar to those of the hearing population, the participation rate for deaf students

in continuing education programs on college campuses has been very low until now. Because of communication barriers that are not usually addressed within institutions of higher education, hearing-impaired students are understandably reluctant to enroll.

Access to educational programs for deaf students on community college campuses should include not only degree programs but the full range of nondegree programs, which may include career preparation, personal development, academic skills preparation, and if possible, job training programs. These programs must, in addition, provide a full range of specialized support services that includes interpreters (oral and sign language), tutors, counselors, and notetakers. With these services in place, the deaf community, the vocational rehabilitation system, and schools for the deaf will begin to utilize the available programs to enhance the educational experiences, personal development, and occupational competencies of deaf people.

Continuing education programs may serve as a bridge to degree programs or as terminal (self-contained) programs such as Adult Basic Education (ABE), General Equivalency Diploma (GED) preparation, college preparation, or vocational training. In general, continuing education programs have the capability of providing greater access for deaf people because of these programs' flexibility in the design of suitable classes and appropriate schedules, their ability to respond within a reasonably short time frame to meet identified needs, and their mission to serve nontraditional populations.

Innovative approaches to service delivery such as the model program developed by the Center for Continuing Education at Gallaudet College are needed. Gallaudet has demonstrated that continuing education services planned for nonhandicapped adults can be effectively made available for hearing-impaired adults in its urban area (Washington, DC) and at satellite centers across the nation. The functions of the program include periodic needs assessments, appropriate mobilization of key community resources, adequate promotion of the programs, and concurrent provision of the necessary support services (Mayes, 1975). Schein (1976), who also emphasizes the need for support services, has suggested that communication barriers could be overcome through the use of manual communication, interpreters, special materials, and other techniques. The provision of these support services is essential to the success of continuing education programs for deaf people.

True accessibility means as well that colleges provide a range of options for those deaf students who may begin with noncredit coursework and, as

their skills and self-confidence increase, gradually move along a continuum into credit-bearing degree programs, all having appropriate support services. LaGuardia's experience has demonstrated that this approach can and does work.

### The Population

Bowe (1976) describes a deaf person as one who has lost (or never had) the ability to hear and understand conventional speech through the ear alone, even with maximal amplification. Deaf people cannot understand speech with their eyes closed, and lipreading a conversation is an extremely difficult task for most deaf people. Based on this description, there are today over 2.76 million individuals in the U.S. who are deaf.

### The LaGuardia Model: A Comprehensive Approach to the Delivery of Educational Services

According to Schein and Delk (1974), 60 percent of deaf people who graduate from schools for the deaf would be optimally placed in two-year college programs. However, until LaGuardia Community College established and announced its Continuing Education Programs for Deaf Adults during the 1974-75 academic year, there were virtually no postsecondary educational institutions, including community colleges, in the New York City area that provided preparatory education or academic and career counseling to deaf people by utilizing staff fluent in American Sign Language and other communication modes.

Today, within the City University of New York system (9 senior colleges and 9 community colleges), only two colleges attempt to meet the postsecondary, continuing education needs of deaf people: New York Technical College and LaGuardia Community College. LaGuardia Community College has a full complement of staff (many of whom are deaf) who are fluent in a variety of communication modes. They are able to assist with large noncredit academic and vocational/career training programs and prepare students to move from nondegree into degree programs at LaGuardia or other colleges that provide similar support services for deaf students (i.e., the University of Tennessee's Postsecondary Education Consortium, the National Technical Institute of the Deaf, or Gallaudet College).<sup>1</sup>

LaGuardia Community College was convinced that hearing-impaired individuals would be responsive to and obtain considerable benefit from a well-planned and comprehensive program that considered the following factors within the program's service delivery model (Bowe, Watson, & Anderson, 1973):

- Ongoing identification through formal and informal needs assessments of physical, psychological, and educational barriers to participation in postsecondary educational programs.
- Implementation of an ongoing, flexible system of support service delivery to meet the needs of the deaf individual.
- Expansion of access to a diversity of courses and educational activities encompassing many of the deaf consumer's needs.
- Compilation, refinement, and development of effective teaching methods, techniques, and written materials geared to the needs of the deaf learner in both credit and noncredit programs.
- Provision for the continuing delivery of interpreting, counseling, and other necessary educational and support services on a permanent basis.
- Compilation of information and maintenance of an efficient system of information dissemination
- Economy of costs for maintenance of program and deaf consumer participation.

In establishing the Programs for Deaf Adults, LaGuardia received guidance and input from the Continuing Education Division at Gallaudet College in Washington, DC, and members of an advisory committee composed of deaf consumers and professionals in the field of deafness. After reviewing the needs of the deaf community, this committee recommended a set of responsive course offerings.

To introduce the program, the college held an "Evening of Entertainment and Education" for the deaf community. Prospective instructors, all of whom were deaf, described the content of their courses using slide presentations. Entertainment and refreshments followed the presentations. Over 200 deaf people attended this event and subsequently 90 individuals registered for leisure, noncredit courses. As the program grew, the staff and advisory committee recognized that several additional components would be needed to guarantee a realistic and effective program: counseling, remediation, and outreach.

#### **Continuing Needs Assessments**

In 1975, the Division of Continuing Education conducted an assessment of the counseling needs of deaf adults during which 100 deaf adults were interviewed. Participants expressed a strong desire for career assistance and specialized counseling services. In addition to the recommendation to establish a counseling program, a second recommendation emerged: develop outreach to the deaf community to inform deaf people of the existence

of the college's specialized services and to encourage the use of the available services.

Results of a second assessment conducted in 1975 indicated that the deaf community wished to have a coordinator who was deaf to implement the program's activities. The college responded by inviting members of the advisory committee to search for such an appropriately qualified candidate. As a result, in 1976, Dr. Glenn Anderson was hired as coordinator. He is now director of training at the University of Arkansas Deafness Research & Training Center. Ms. Carole Lazorisak, also deaf, was his replacement and served as coordinator from 1982 to 1986. Mr. Paul Menkis who has worked at Gallaudet and NTID is the present coordinator. Mr. Menkis, too, is deaf.

The Programs for Deaf Adults undertook a 1980 survey to determine the continuing education needs of hearing-impaired adults within the New York City area. The purpose of the survey was to identify some of the barriers preventing hearing-impaired adults from full participation in postsecondary education programs. Respondents to the survey were drawn from a diverse population of hearing-impaired individuals, many of whom had had prior experience in continuing education programs for deaf adults.

The survey yielded two significant findings:

1. Thirty-nine percent of the respondents stated that they would enroll in a continuing education program to improve themselves for job-related purposes, while another 39 percent would enroll for leisure purposes.

2. Twenty-three percent reported they would enroll to earn credits towards a college degree. These respondents said they preferred to participate in integrated classes for hearing and deaf students. These findings underscored the need for the availability of support services for deaf students who would actually be entering college and continuing education programs.

#### **Access and Growth at LaGuardia**

More and more students of high school and college ages are learning about LaGuardia's Programs for Deaf Adults and are beginning to see LaGuardia as a place where continuing one's education is possible. The college has now established itself as meeting many of the educational, vocational and career, social, and referral needs of the deaf community. Staff members provide information via the Telecommunication Device for the Deaf (TDD) that ranges from entry requirements for college programs to which Broadway shows are being interpreted. There are identified staff members to whom deaf people can relate and a constant core of deaf students in the noncredit Guided Independent

Study Program and in the credit programs. LaGuardia Community College has become a positive alternative for many young students of college age who do not wish to travel to Gallaudet or to the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) and who prefer to remain in New York to attend college nearer to their homes. In addition, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, because of reduced funding levels, has provided funding for its clients to attend colleges near their homes to reduce travel, housing, and other costs.

Experience over the years has confirmed the need for a comprehensive approach to address the crucial issue of providing a viable support system including counseling, interpreting, tutorial, and notetaking services for deaf students who enroll. The college continues to need the financial resources necessary to provide the specialized support services, especially in light of the anticipated steady increase in the numbers of deaf students on campus, in credit and noncredit programs. Recent research conducted by the Office of Assessment and Demographic Studies at Gallaudet College reveals that the numbers of deaf students currently graduating from the residential high schools for the deaf average 66% higher than the numbers graduated in 1982. On a regional basis, the Northeast (including New York State) is reported to have the highest numbers, 1,810 graduates. Of that number, 558 would be eligible for academic postsecondary programs whereas the remainder (70%) would need educational and vocational counseling and other support services (White, Karchmer, Armstrong, & Bezozo, 1983). Within metropolitan New York City schools for the deaf, there are over 1,958 deaf students. Approximately 691 of that number attend the New York City public schools.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Cooperative Education & The Deaf Student**

LaGuardia Community College is a cooperative education college, where *all* full-time day students in degree programs alternate terms of classroom study with terms of related work experience. The college makes some 2,000 internship placements each year with an established inventory of over 350 employers.

Cooperative education programs can be especially effective for deaf and other handicapped students. Many deaf students leave high school with little or no exposure to concrete career alternatives. Both young students in particular, and deaf persons in general, have been characterized as lacking a broad-based information system on which to make career or vocational decisions. Quigley and Kretschmer (1982) report a study by Lerman and Guilfoyle in 1970 that attempted to investigate

vocational development of deaf youth ages 12.5-20.5 years. Deaf subjects were found "to choose jobs at a lower socioeconomic level than their hearing peers, and these chosen occupations tended to cluster at the semi-skilled and unskilled level" (p. 98). In addition, "deaf students particularly chose occupations that were typically classified as traditional jobs that deaf people pursue, such as printing" (p. 98). Joiner, Erickson, and Crittenden (cited in Quigley & Kretschmer, 1982) had similar findings that led them to conclude that "a communication network existed—flowing from deaf adults to older deaf students to younger deaf students—that was independent of school and family influences" (p. 98). They concluded that ". . . for the most part, deaf adolescents had a very limited fund of information regarding the work-a-day world as a result of restricted sources of information and a restricted ability to process information because of language difficulties" (p. 98). These results suggest that typical vocational programs for deaf youth might not provide them with sufficient vocational information for making good career choices.

Through its experience with deaf students during the past 10 years, staff within the Programs for Deaf Adults at LaGuardia Community College corroborate the findings cited above with respect to gaps in career and vocational awareness as well as gaps in English language acquisition and basic education. The staff has developed Career and Community Resource Workshops and incorporated these sessions within the academic component of the Guided Independent Study (GIS) program for Deaf Adults. In 1984, the office provided career education and training in word processing, food services, and clerical skills. Through Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) funds, 19 of 23 trainees were placed on internships and over 50% of these were placed in jobs. Students have all learned about many career opportunities previously not familiar to them.

During the Career and Community Resources Workshops, program staff typically invite deaf professionals and other workshop leaders who serve as role models for a shared experience and dialogue with significant positive impact on students. These role models assist in reshaping the images that deaf young persons have about their own capabilities and potential. Prior to this exposure, many of the LaGuardia students did not know any deaf professionals or members of racial and ethnic minorities who were professionals.

#### **The Programs for Deaf Adults: A Description**

LaGuardia's Programs for Deaf Adults consists of noncredit academic skills programs, career and

vocational training programs, personal enrichment courses such as driver education, and degree programs. These programs, administered and coordinated through the Division of Continuing Education's Community Services Programs, typically enroll 160-170 deaf students each academic quarter.

The Guided Independent Study Program, the largest program area, focuses on academic instruction in specific areas depending on the instructional needs of students each quarter. Classes are conducted in (a) Adult Basic Education; (b) English as a Second Language, elementary, intermediate, and advanced levels; (c) high school equivalency preparation; (d) college preparation; and (e) college study skills. A workshop entitled "Orientation to Credit and Noncredit Programs at LaGuardia" is offered to all deaf students, along with ongoing academic and career counseling.

Within the college's degree programs, 45 to 50 deaf students are currently pursuing degrees in liberal arts, accounting, data processing, human services, and business administration. The majority of deaf students who enroll in degree programs are placed, on the basis of the college's placement tests, in a specially designed "English Language Development/Reading Section for Deaf Students." The reading course is offered through the college's Communication Skills Program where students are assigned to one of four levels based on test results. This is required before students enter regular college-level English composition courses, and they earn one college credit for each level completed successfully. PDA provides staff support services, which include two counselors; a full-time staff interpreter; tutors; and a Coordinator of Interpreter Services who handles all student and staff requests for interpreters and who screens, hires, and assigns to classes 20-25 part-time interpreters each quarter.

Since 1983, seven deaf students have graduated. Most of these graduates have transferred to four-year colleges, such as NTID and Gallaudet, feeling better prepared, both personally and academically, to pursue degrees at those institutions. Several have received special awards at the college's annual "Honors Night" for students approaching graduation.

Other related programs on campus include an American Sign Language Program, offered for credit within the Human Services Curriculum and noncredit within Continuing Education, and Saturday programs for deaf children. The development of an Interpreter Training Program is anticipated during 1987.

#### **Instruction for Deaf Students: Many Challenges**

In evaluating student outcomes, the staff realized that the provision of interpreters in credit classes,

while providing accessibility to classroom instruction, was *not* sufficient to assist deaf students to succeed in college. This in no way reflects on the skills of the interpreters but rather on the need to create an English language learning environment better suited to the particular needs of deaf students at this level of college entry.

Until 1983, deaf students experienced frustration in the college's required basic skills classes in reading and writing. The repeat rate for students was alarmingly high in spite of the presence of interpreters. An informal survey indicated that deaf students who dropped out of degree programs during that period all left during their basic skills course experiences; they were not passing the reading courses.

With this knowledge, and with the approval of the chairperson of the Communication Skills Division, the college piloted a special credit class in English Language Development for deaf students using many instructional techniques from English as a Second Language. The initial instructor hired to teach had a unique combination of training in deafness education, applied linguistics, reading, and interpreting. Of the 18 students who took the course during four quarters only 1 student was required to repeat a reading course. Seventeen students passed the course and advanced to the next level, which was basic composition, the college-level English course. In addition, two students passed the City University of New York Skills Assessment Test on the first attempt for the first time. Dr. Sue Livingston, a full-time instructor with a linguistics background and experience in teaching deaf people, now teaches reading to deaf students in the degree program.

The program staff has had to grapple with and attempt to resolve the myriad of instructional issues that arise in the teaching of deaf students. Not only do they deal with a variety of reading and vocabulary levels, but staff has had to be sensitive to the range of language abilities and communication modes among the deaf students. Academically, the current students read between grade levels 1 and 10. Their language modalities can be described as follows:

- Students whose primary language acquisition is American Sign Language (ASL) and English is a second language.
- Students whose first language is English and ASL is a second language.
- Students whose only language is English (no ASL skills).
- Foreign-born deaf students whose first language is neither English nor ASL.

One major implication of the above is that the

Coordinator of Interpreter Services must assess each student's communication mode (e.g., ASL, Signed English, Pidgin Sign English or Oral) to provide the appropriate interpreter services. In addition, the reading instructor must often develop individualized instructional approaches to meet the diverse communication modes used by students. PDA staff are now convinced that, with very few exceptions, most deaf students fare better and experience more success when placed in reading and writing courses designed to meet their linguistic needs at the basic skills level. In completing this sequence of courses, they are better prepared to be mainstreamed into college-level classes with appropriate interpreter services and access to tutors who have the ability to communicate with deaf people. In short, deaf students learn together and are not placed with hearing students at the basic skills level. This is similar to the situation of the English as a Second Language (ESL) hearing students in credit programs who take parallel ESL courses that they must pass prior to entering the nonbasic skills English and academic courses.

#### **Creating Favorable Learning Environments**

The results of program activities have demonstrated that LaGuardia has succeeded in providing a truly accessible and supportive learning environment for deaf students, many of whom have not had positive experiences in prior educational systems. One outcome has been the increased enrollment cited earlier. Another positive outcome has been an increase in requests from outside agencies and institutions for program staff to visit and speak to deaf students, deaf employees, and agency staff about educational opportunities for deaf people at LaGuardia Community College and elsewhere.

The program has also had considerable impact on the college at large where many instructors are gaining experience in ASL and communicating with deaf students. Many faculty have expressed interest in finding ways to help deaf students succeed in their classes and a few have inquired about funding opportunities to use the computer to enhance students' learning.

Another outcome is the development, within the Division of Science/Human Services program of a Deaf/Hearing-Impaired Studies Option, which combines levels of American Sign Language and courses such as Psychology of Deafness and Deaf Folklore for students who wish to major in this area. The college president, Dr. Joseph Shenker, has also stimulated the interest of the president of Lehman College, a four-year liberal arts City University of New York (CUNY) institution, to serve deaf students. As a result, PDA staff worked closely with Lehman

College to develop an upper-division transfer program for deaf graduates who hold an Associate of Arts degree or prior college credits. Funds for the planning year were obtained through the chancellor's office of the CUNY. In addition, the LaGuardia Middle College High School, an alternative high school funded by the New York City Board of Education and based on campus, also enrolls hearing-impaired students in its academic programs.

The Programs for Deaf Adults has worked toward total integration of the program within the college's operation. There is now a movement to convene a collegewide advisory committee to focus on instructional issues in teaching deaf students, especially in reading and writing courses. The response of faculty has been very positive and exciting, and positive outcomes are anticipated from the opportunity to share.

#### **Funding Sources**

The rapid increase in the numbers of deaf students on campus within the last three years is largely attributable to LaGuardia Community College's ability to attract funding from the United States Department of Education, Regional Education Program in 1981; and the New York State Department of Education, Vocational Education Act (VEA) of 1976. The goal of the federally funded project was to make college programs accessible to deaf youth and adults through the provision of a range of specialized support services. The college also received funding from the J. M. Foundation and the *New York Times* Foundation.

The availability of funds enabled the college to expand its capacity to increase staff and to explore, develop, and enhance several program options. For example, the college was able to hire full-time counselors to provide academic, career, and personal counseling to deaf students enrolled in credit and noncredit programs; to hire part-time instructors and tutors for the noncredit GIS program; to provide interpreter services for deaf students in credit programs who were *not* eligible for services from the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation; to hire a part-time staff interpreter for the several part-time deaf staff members; and to purchase portable TDDs for staff. The college provides funding for the director of Community Service Programs who supervises the Programs for Deaf Adults, the coordinator for the Programs for Deaf Adults, the coordinator of Interpreter Services, and a portion of the salaries for the staff interpreter and all part-time interpreters.

LaGuardia Community College is firmly committed to enhancing educational opportunities for deaf students. The support provided to the

program from many levels of the college administration, including the president and the dean of continuing education, attests to this fact. The college's support has allowed the program to be flexible and innovative while focusing on providing maximum benefits to the students.

### Summary

LaGuardia Community College has developed and adapted flexible and effective response mechanisms so that the goal of an enriched educational, personal, and vocational experience for deaf students can be achieved. However, these mechanisms need to be constantly evaluated for their effectiveness so that colleges such as LaGuardia do not only admit deaf students, but assist them in every way possible to cope with survival issues on a mainstream campus. Such actions will ensure that deaf students do not pass through a revolving door, but are able to reach their educational, personal, and vocational goals. This approach is indeed compatible with the mission of community colleges today. It is very much among the priority goals that the staff of the Programs for Deaf Adults at LaGuardia Community College has defined for itself as it develops new programs, expands existing programs, reshapes or adapts curricula, hires new staff, and provides appropriate support services for the deaf students in noncredit or credit courses and programs. Underlying all program efforts are the enthusiasm, vitality, commitment, and teamwork present among the staff members of the PDA and a very responsive and supportive college environment.

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Lehman College, a four-year liberal arts college within the City University of New York has recently hired Ms. Deborah Copeland, formerly the counselor in LaGuardia's Programs for Deaf Adults (PDA), to develop an upper level transfer program for deaf students from LaGuardia and other institutions.

Lehman's program was inaugurated in September 1986.

<sup>2</sup> The American Annals of the Deaf, Annual Directory of Programs and Services 1984-85.

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