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Supporting the success of online students who are deaf: Lessons presented at #SWDE2017



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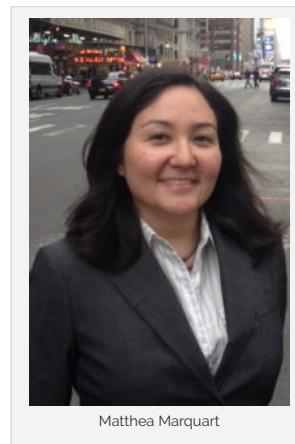
Supporting the success of online students who are deaf: Lessons presented at #SWDE2017

Posted By Laurel Hitchcock on Jun 23, 2017 |

Matthea Marquart, MSSW, is the director of administration of the Online Campus at Columbia University School of Social Work as well as an adjunct lecturer, and **Beth Counselman-Carpenter**, LCSW, PhD, is a full-time lecturer of direct and advanced clinical practice, gender and sexuality, with her current research focusing on technology in social work pedagogy. In this blog post, they share highlights from their recent presentation on supporting the success of online students who are deaf. If you have questions for them, they can be reached on Twitter at @MattheaMarquart or @ElisabethAnneCC.



Beth Counselman-Carpenter

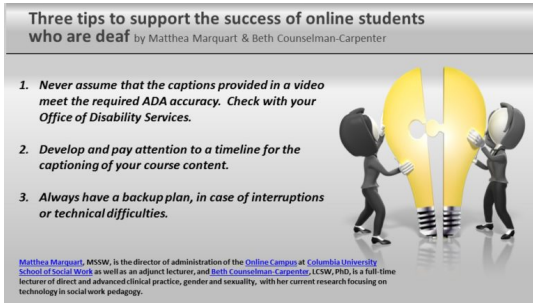


Matthea Marquart

On April 13, 2017, we presented a roundtable session on "Supporting the success of online students who are deaf" at the third annual Social Work Distance Education Conference sponsored by Our Lady of the Lake University's Worden School of Social Service.

We chose this session topic because social work values, as well as the law, require those of us involved in online education to ensure that we're providing equal access to all of our students. As the field of online education grows and new technologies develop, it's important to us to make sure that we're inclusive in administration, planning, and teaching. We also wanted to host a conversation on the topic, so that we could learn from the experiences of our peers at other institutions.

You can access a copy of our handout, which includes details about the tools & strategies we've used to support online students who are deaf, here: <https://doi.org/10.7916/D8V12B58>



From our perspective, there are three critical components to success: never assume, attention to a solid time line, and thorough preparation with a back-up plan for live course sessions.

Never assume: My experiences (Beth) with deaf and hearing-impaired students over the past year has made me a stronger and more thoughtful instructor. It forced me to actively challenge certain assumptions I had previously held about equal access and thus deepened

the creativity in and outside of the classroom to look at access through a more critical lens. When choosing media for your course, never assume that the captions provided are of the level and caliber in terms of accuracy. YouTube videos are NOT equal access compliant, as they are often inaccurate or their timing is off. All media selected by the instructor must be captioned by the institution's captioning services or be reviewed for accuracy by the Office of Disability Services prior to being assigned, shown or posted. This also includes transcribed videos shown from the library, when transcription has been completed by outside sources, and for podcasts.

Attention to the timeline: Captioning requires focus and solid planning as part of the core foundation of your course. Most offices require a three to four-week turnaround for all captioning, which requires having your media organized and well-placed in the semester's calendar prior to the start of the semester (if possible). It is NOT equal access to show a video in class and ask for it to be captioned later. Planning ahead and being confident in your choices is critical. Should something unexpected, such as a snow day or a server being down, (which happened this past year and lead to an unexpected asynchronistic class recorded lecture being posted), communicate actively with your student about their needs and be flexible about deadlines when asking for an 'emergency' captioning of media.

The all-important backup plan: The best-laid plans may never come to fruition. Even live captioning can fall apart – so working with an open, and prepared teaching team, is critical for success. Live captioners, who work in multiple shifts during a synchronistic class, can occasionally have technical difficulties and need to re-enter the classroom during live lectures. To manage this, our back-up plan was for the course teaching associate to step in and provide captioning (as best as possible) while the professor and student emailed both ODS and the captioning service emergency support while class continued. The teaching associate was aware of their responsibilities when this happened, and although the captioning was not perfect, it allowed for the students to continue to participate until the situation was remedied.

Overall, attention to detail is paramount. Be mindful of the amount of student-generated audio and video that is posted asynchronously and the turn-around time frame for all of those assignments to be captioned (usually it is 48-72 hours). If the captioning can't be done well, or in a timely manner, change the assignment for the entire class. Do not create an alternative assignment for the student, as again, this is not equal access. Should you need to engage a backup plan, reach out and engage the student by inviting them to give feedback in terms of their learning experience, what could have been done differently, and how they are experiencing access to the course.

From the administrator perspective, perhaps the most important thing that we do in administration is communicate. There are many departments and people involved in supporting students who need accommodations, including the University's Office of Disability Services, the School's disabilities liaison, the Advising Office, the Field Office, the Student Services team, and the instructors, teaching associates, and technical support specialists. The students who need accommodations need to be looped in as well.

Working various members of this team, depending on the circumstance, includes figuring out the level of accommodation needed, when it's needed, and how it will be provided. For example, online students complete field work in person, so in-person American Sign Language interpreters may need to be scheduled for field work; the same is true for Advising sessions and student life events on campus. Live online classes will need live captioners, which must be scheduled in advance; the live captioning service will need to be kept informed about academic holidays and any class cancellations, and the administration and instructor should agree on an emergency back-up plan in case the captioner doesn't show up. Live online student events require the same level of planning as live online classes. Media shown in class or assigned for students to watch as homework must be captioned, which can take two-four weeks. Media created by students for peer viewing and commenting, such as video introductions, recorded presentations, or video role plays, will need expedited turnaround to ensure equal access to participation. In order to make sure media captions are completed on time, the administration and instructors need to be in close communication about all media in the course.

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During the roundtable, our peers shared that their institutions are currently do the following:

- Caption all media that will be used during the first week, in every course, and then selectively caption the rest of the semester as needed on a course-by-course basis. This ensures that students who are deaf can enroll in any course and participate starting the first week, and saves the cost of fully captioning all courses.
- Live-caption sporting events as a matter of course, so that anyone in the community can follow the announcers.
- Use a variety of captioning approaches, including using third party vendors Cielo and 3Play Media, requiring students to caption media they create for assignments (in VoiceThread), requiring instructors to caption media they use in class, and using auto-captioning via Kaltura to start and then manually correcting the mistakes to bring the captioning up to standards.

What we learned from this discussion is that other social work programs are also engaged in ongoing conversations in order to keep up with new technologies and continually improve our services.

While it's important to create inclusive and equal access learning plans within the classroom, and our own institutions, we cannot neglect greater structural need for higher education as a whole to improve delivery of information with equal access. Developing accommodations to support all types of online learners needs to be a wider and deeper conversation. Future research will hopefully include not only students who are deaf, but online equal access for students with visual impairments and other learning needs.

Here is our abstract with the learning objectives:

One social justice victory of online education is the ability to expand access to higher education and serve a diverse student body. This roundtable discussion will give instructors and administrators the chance to share strategies and tools for supporting the success of students who are deaf.

Online courses with synchronous components generally include audio elements in the form of live virtual classes; homework assignments that include videos, podcasts, or other media; and student-generated media assignments such as introductory videos or video role plays. To enable students who are deaf to fully participate in these courses, school administrators and instructors need to be ready with tools and strategies, such as live captioners or American Sign Language translators, media captioners, and plans for inclusive lessons.

This roundtable discussion will provide a forum for those with experience supporting the success of students who are deaf to share their experiences, and for those without experience to learn and ask questions. The goals for this session include:

1. Sharing concrete tools and resources that can support online students who are deaf
2. Sharing strategies for inclusive lesson planning and instructional design
3. Identifying areas where schools of social work can better prepare to support students who are deaf

References:

Marquart, M. & Counselman-Carpenter, B. (2017). Supporting the success of online students who are deaf, *Columbia University Academic Commons*. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.7916/D8V12B58>.

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Dr. Hitchcock served as the editor for this blog post. The author is the Guest Educator.

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