

NOT YET READY FOR PRIME TIME INTERPRETING PROGRAM

Department of Linguistics, University of Southern Maine and Alpha One, South Portland, Maine

Summary

The Department of Linguistics has elaborated its ASL/English Interpreting Program to provide a safe and well-regulated way for its students to gain added practical experience in interpreting as part of their training. The project is structured as a single one-credit 300-level course that will be run in collaboration with Alpha One, an off-campus center for independent living. The project is intended both as an aid to students in gaining high-level competency as interpreters and as a benefit to the Deaf community; it will provide limited interpreting resources for events that Deaf consumers can better enjoy and access with the aid of an interpreter, but where the nature of the event ordinarily would not justify the expense of a fully trained and licensed professional interpreter. The program combines carefully structured limits on participation for both students and Deaf consumer/mentors with equally careful preparation and training for this activity for all student and Deaf participants. An important bonus is that it will also develop over time a cohort of Deaf consumers who have training and experience as mentors for interpreters.

Program Description

Perhaps the single most important thing to say about the NOTYET Program is that it is NOT an alternative to hiring professional interpreters in circumstances where that is ordinarily required. It is most definitely not a general referral service whereby Deaf consumers access a pool of student interpreters when it is inconvenient or difficult to cover the cost of professional interpreters. The NOTYET program is first and foremost an educational initiative. It will identify a subset of low-risk situations where the student's need for practical experience can be matched to the Deaf consumer's desire to access events for which the expense of a fully trained and qualified interpreter is often hard to justify (e.g., family picnics that include Deaf and hearing individuals, visits to garage sales, etc.). It will provide a mechanism whereby student interpreters can accept work assignments in these situations. But the number and nature of potential interpreting assignments that will qualify will be strictly limited and the pool of student interpreters and Deaf consumers who will participate at any one time will also be strictly limited.

On the student's side, the NOTYET program is organized as a one-credit, one-semester course. Student interpreters will be referred to this program by their course instructors. They will need to apply for admission to the program and, if accepted, register for the associated course in the usual way. The ASL and interpreting staff of the Linguistics Department will screen applicants to determine their qualification for this program.

Only students who have completed LIN 331 *ASL/English Interpreting* may

participate in the NOTYET program. The NOTYET course will run in both the fall and spring terms with a new cohort of student interpreters and Deaf consumer/mentors each semester. Though students and Deaf consumer/mentors will be allowed to participate more than once, training is not transferable from one session to another; all participants will be required to take training specifically for the session in which they are enrolled.

Though we have no desire to prevent students and ex-students from doing appropriate volunteer interpreting outside of this program, we will make every effort to clearly distinguish students working on NOTYET assignments from others. Participants in each semester's program will be clearly and distinctively identifiable.

Like the student participants, Deaf consumer/mentors who participate in the program will be screened and trained as interpreting mentors by the program faculty and staff. Their participation will be for a single one-semester cycle, though they may participate as many times as they like, provided that space is available (it will only be possible to include a limited number of Deaf consumer/mentors in any given semester). There will be new training for consumer/mentors for each semester in which they participate. This training will cover what is and is not appropriate use of student interpreters, how to provide constructive feedback, how to fill out the program documentation, how to deal with foreseeable emergencies, and how to reach the designated emergency contact for an assignment.

Alpha One's contribution will be to allow a member of their staff, John Dunleavy, to serve as the instructor of record for this course as part of his regular responsibilities. In this context his primary role will be to match student participants in the NOTYET program with interpreting assignments initiated by Deaf consumer/mentors currently participating in the program. Since this is a normal part of Alpha One's independent living services for Deaf clients, participation in the NOTYET program is a natural extension of the agency's mission. Compensation will be at the normal rate for a one-credit course. In addition, John, along with Brenda Schertz, a full-time Lecturer in ASL in the USM Linguistics Dept. will participate as advisors and supervisors of the program.

Students will earn credit toward satisfying course requirements only for interpreting assignments that are made and properly documented through the established procedures of the NOTYET program. The minimum amount of interpreting time required over the semester is ten hours. The number of interpreting assignments students will do in the course of a semester will vary according to the duration and nature of individual assignments, but the expected baseline is three assignments.