

## The PostSecondary Finish Line: Creating Access for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Individuals at Graduation Events

Graduation season is a busy time for Disability Service Offices, and Pepnet 2 is thrilled to assist many professionals who have questions about communication access at graduation ceremonies. The law is clear that institutions must provide access to public events and ensure an equitable experience for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. <http://www.ada.gov/effective-comm.htm>



We have prepared the following information to assist postsecondary institutions in planning for communication access.

### Why is access to events needed?

What does communication access mean in the context of a large venue ceremony? How can professionals communicate that need to administrators and graduation committees?



#### Ceremonies are noisy.

The combination of the large acoustic space and the chatter of attendees creates a real barrier--making it difficult for those who are hard of hearing to use residual hearing.



#### Speech reading from the audience is impossible.

Speech reading in a conversational setting is very different from attempting to speech read a speaker in a large venue. Even if a person can communicate well one-on-one he or she will not be able to lip read a speaker on stage.



#### Deaf and hard of hearing people have diverse communication needs.

Some individuals with a hearing loss are fluent in American Sign Language (ASL) but not English, while others don't sign at all. Providing real-time captioning *and* interpreters will ensure access for all deaf and hard of hearing attendees.

### What kinds of services create access for deaf or hard of hearing individuals at ceremonies?

#### Large Screen Captions:

Since the advent of CART and advances in technology that allow captions to be projected onto a large screen, it's finally possible for people who are deaf or hard of hearing to have full access to large venue events. Since many institutions now record their graduation ceremonies and stream them over the Internet, CART provides a way to make the online video accessible as well as the live event.

#### Coordinators can

- cooperate with people from various campus departments;
- touch base each year to ensure the technology is working;
- rely on vendors to shepherd their institution through the technical issues.

#### Everyone benefits from captions

- Family members with a hearing loss
- Individuals for whom English is a second language
- Attendees seated in a section with poor acoustics

#### Interpreters:

Open captions on the large screen are a way to provide access to many individuals, but aren't a replacement for qualified interpreters. Requests for sign language interpreters must be honored.

### Many institutions schedule interpreters well in advance because:

- It allows interpreters time to prepare an effective translation of song lyrics and speeches.
- It allows time to work out the placement of the interpreter, since protocols for seating, lining up, and conferring degrees are important to the flow of the ceremony.

**Remember:** *If an institution chooses not to proactively schedule communication access, information about the process for requesting accommodations must be clearly stated in all advertisements and announcements.*

#### Listening Systems:

Listening systems in large venues allow users to listen directly to the feed from the microphone, reducing the volume of competing noises in the environment. Although these systems are required in large venues, they will not be effective if staff don't know how to use and maintain them.

#### Coordinators can

- be in touch with technical staff at the venue;
- ensure that the system is ready and in operating correctly;
- consult with a vendor about what system is right for specific venue.

We hope this information is helpful -- if you have any further questions for us on this topic, feel free to contact us at [help@pepnet.org](mailto:help@pepnet.org)