Creating Access:
Graduation Events

TS Tip Sheet

Overview

Graduation season is a busy time for Disability Service Offices, and many professionals have questions about providing communication access at graduation ceremonies. The law is clear that institutions must provide access to public events and ensure an equitable experience for deaf individuals (see **www.ada.gov/effective-comm.htm**). The purpose of the following information is 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 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 people have diverse communication needs**.
  Some deaf individuals 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 attendees.

What kinds of services create access for deaf individuals at ceremonies?

Large Screen Captions
Since the advent of Communication Access Real-time Translation (CART) and advances in technology that allow captions to be projected onto a large screen, it's finally possible for deaf people to have full access to large venue events. Because 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; and
  - rely on vendors to shepherd their institution through the technical issues.

- **Everyone benefits from captions**
  - Deaf family members
  - Individuals for whom English is a second language
  - Attendees seated in a section with poor acoustics

NDC
National Deaf Center
on Postsecondary Outcomes

Interpreters

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

Many institutions schedule interpreters well in advance for the following reasons:

- 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, which is important because protocols for seating, lining up, and conferring degrees are essential 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 proactively

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

Related Resources

Additional resources on this subject may be available at **www.nationaldeafcenter.org/resources**.