Access, Belonging, and Affirmation

Deaf Postsecondary Access and Inclusion Scale 2022–2023

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Suggested Citation

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Contents

NDC uses the term "deaf" in an all-inclusive manner to include people who identify as deaf, deaf-blind, deafdisabled, hard of hearing, late-deafened, and hearing impaired. NDC recognizes that for many individuals, identity is fluid and can change over time or with setting. NDC has chosen to use one term, "deaf," with the goal of recognizing the shared experiences of people from our diverse communities while also honoring our differences.

Key Findings

During the 2022–2023 academic year, the National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes (NDC) surveyed deaf students in higher education institutions across the nation. This report provides a comprehensive overview of survey results and offers suggestions for improving access and inclusion for deaf students on campus.

The following are **key findings** from the survey:

- **Deaf college students are diverse:** 55% of survey respondents had an additional disability; 49% were Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC); and 11% identified as gender nonconforming.

- **A majority of deaf students used more than one accommodation.**

- **Deaf students provided an average rating of 65 out of 100 for the accessibility and inclusivity** of their postsecondary education and training environments.

  - Deaf students rated their accommodating learning environments at an average of 70 out of 100.

  - Deaf students rated their sense of campus connectedness at 63 out of 100.

  - Deaf students rated their campus's deaf-affirming climate at 62 out of 100.

- **Institutions are responding to the need to create more welcoming spaces for deaf students** by designing programs tailored for English language learners, implementing centralized funding systems for accommodations, and establishing cultural and academic centers for deaf students, as well as campus clubs for students who use sign language.

Who Took This Survey?

Deaf students enrolled in any postsecondary training or educational program in the United States who were at least 18 years old were eligible to take the survey. The sample in this report consisted of 180 students attending 65 colleges and universities. Among the deaf students who participated, 55% had an additional disability, 49% were BIPOC, and 11% were gender nonconforming, reflecting a wide range of deaf students. This sample is a good representation of deaf college students, based on national demographics. For more information, review our undergraduate enrollment report (**nationaldeafcenter.org/enrollmentdata**).

What Accommodations Did Deaf Students Use in College?

Deaf students used a range of accommodations to access classroom instruction and campus activities. More than half of the respondents (60%) reported using at least two accommodations. The most prevalent accommodations were sign language interpreting services, captioned videos, note taking services, extended test time, and assistive listening devices. Speech-to-text services are commonly used accommodations, but few students in our sample used these services. Most students surveyed used a combination of accommodations, such as interpreting, captioned videos, and extended test time.

Student Accommodation Use

60%
used more than one accommodation

40%
used only one accommodation

Most Frequent Accommodations

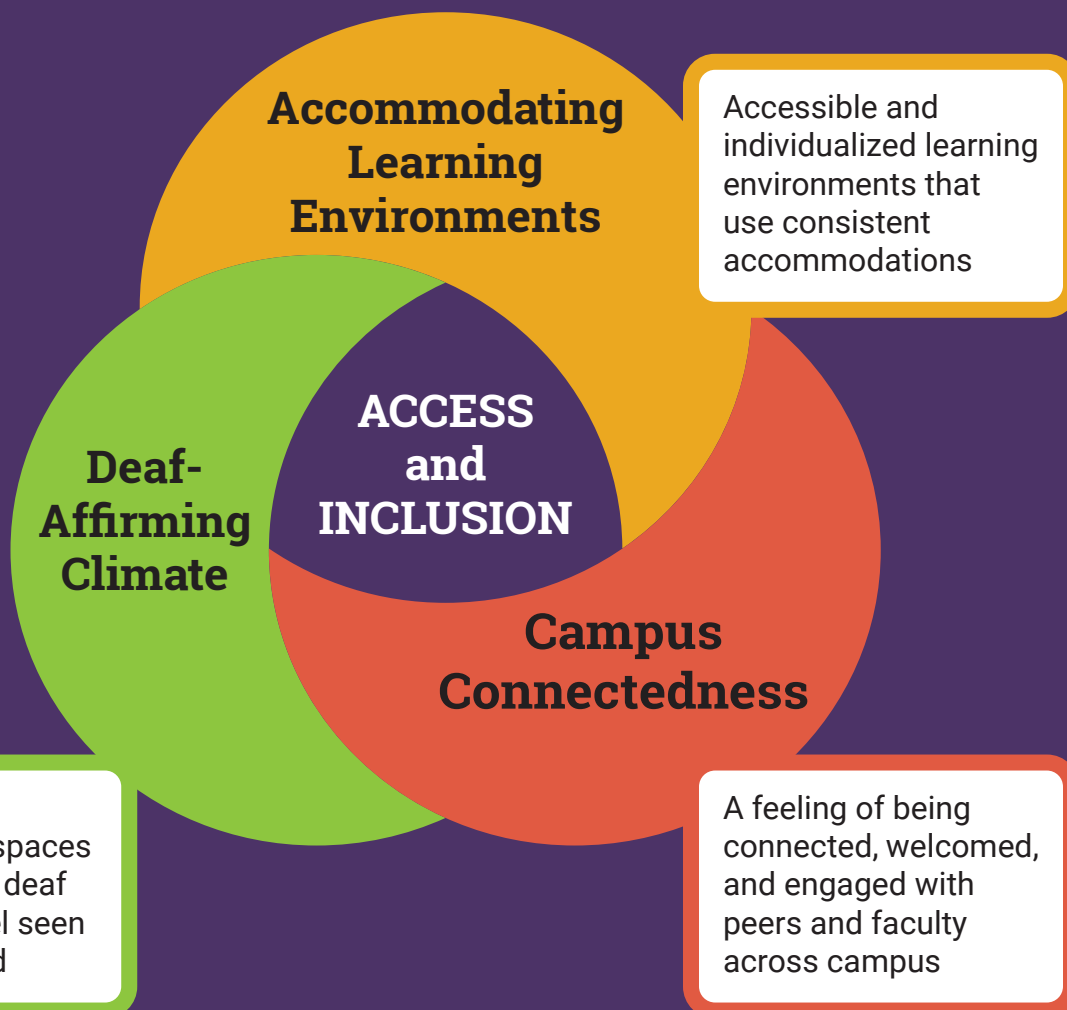| INTERPRETING SERVICES | 72% |
CAPTIONED VIDEO	65%
NOTE TAKING SERVICES	55%
EXTENDED TEST TIME	47%
ASSISTIVE LISTENING DEVICES	9%

Deaf Postsecondary Access and Inclusion Scale

This report uses the Deaf Postsecondary Access and Inclusion Scale (DPAIS), a validated 17-item questionnaire for deaf college students. DPAIS consists of three main categories: **accommodating learning environments**, **campus connectedness**, and **deaf-affirming climate**. The survey is presented bilingually in American Sign Language (ASL) and English and contains optional demographic questions (see **nationaldeafcenter.org/surveys**).

DPAIS Categories

Accommodating Learning Environments

Accessible and individualized learning environments that use consistent accommodations

ACCESS and INCLUSION

Deaf-Affirming Climate

Culturally affirming spaces that make deaf people feel seen and valued

Campus Connectedness

A feeling of being connected, welcomed, and engaged with peers and faculty across campus

How Did Students Rate Accessibility and Inclusion on Campus?

This report is framed around the idea that access is more than accommodations. Even when deaf students receive appropriate accommodations, they can feel isolated on campus. Overall deaf students did not provide favorable ratings of their postsecondary education and training environments. On average, survey respondents rated their institutions at 65 out of 100, or somewhat likely to be accessible and inclusive for deaf students.

Overall Average Rating

65 out of 100

This survey provides a framework for understanding the experiences of deaf students on college campuses across the nation and helps guide institutional improvement activities. Participants responded to questions about accommodating learning environments, campus connectedness, and deaf-affirming climate, and average ratings varied across those three categories. Students were least likely to feel like their campus was deaf affirming; the only exception was for deaf students enrolled at campuses that serve more than 1,000 deaf students.

> "The office of admissions, advising office, and disability services need to work together to make sure deaf/disabled students are moved through the system quickly to ensure accommodations are being arranged in time. My first week, I had no accommodations."

Accommodating Learning Environments

70 out of 100

Surveyed deaf students indicated that they were somewhat likely (70%) to experience accommodating learning environments at college. Questions in this area asked students about their experiences with faculty/instructors and accessibility offices. These two groups play a significant role in facilitating accommodations in learning environments for deaf students.

Most students (71%) said that faculty were likely to use slides or handouts, but only 65% stated that these items were provided ahead of time. This finding suggests that though faculty are increasingly using supplemental materials to enhance instruction, students do not always get these materials in advance. Further questions demonstrated that only 65% of deaf students believed that faculty were likely to adjust their teaching strategies to accommodate their communication preferences. However, a majority of students (74%) believed that faculty were likely to support individual differences and diverse perspectives in the classroom.

When asked about support from the accessibility office on their campus, deaf students responded fairly positively. Most deaf students (73%) felt that the accessibility office responded to their requests in a timely manner and 73% said they were likely to get consistent access providers (e.g., captioners, interpreters).

Though there was some general optimism from students about accommodating learning environments at their colleges, there is room for improvement. Students explained that colleges should "integrate more universal design principles," "understand that auto captioning is not accessibility," and be more accountable for "professors who do not adhere to accommodations."

> "My graduate school is not doing a good job in terms of accessibility. They complicate the accommodations process for deaf students who have additional disabilities."

Promising Practices Spotlight

Portland Community College in Oregon offers a specialized program tailored to non-native English speakers, including deaf immigrants and refugees. The college employs deaf interpreters who have expertise working with this population. This promising practice allows emerging ASL signers to maximize their learning so that they can ultimately matriculate into a degree-seeking program.

The University of Wisconsin–Madison adopted a centralized funding system (nationaldeafcenter.org/funding-systems) to increase efficiency and reduce barriers related to requesting and providing accommodations. This shift made it easier for deaf people to request accommodations, increased the college's capacity to plan for access, and streamlined the process of coordinating accommodations.

Campus Connectedness

63 out of 100

Deaf students indicated that they were somewhat likely (63%) to feel a sense of campus connectedness. Questions in this area asked students about their experiences with classmates, friends, and student activities across campus. Campus connectedness and belonging can be key contributors to student retention and well-being.

Only 62% of deaf students said they were likely to call campus home and 60% said they were likely to participate in campus student activities. Though most deaf students reported that they did not feel "at home" on campus, they felt slightly more positive about their relationships with friends and classmates. Slightly more than half of deaf students (62%) said that their classmates would work with them on solving access challenges, 66% felt that they were likely to become friends with their classmates, and 68% felt welcome to have conversations with classmates. More than half (62%) of deaf students said they were likely to ask for help from their friends.

Responses in this category may seem somewhat neutral or slightly positive, but almost half of deaf students not feeling connected and engaged on campus is indicative of deeper problems. Student belonging is a critical aspect of the college experience, and these findings demonstrate an urgent need for improvement. Students explained that colleges should "encourage deaf students to participate in activities."

> "I feel isolated as a deaf person of color on campus."

Promising Practices Spotlight

Mt. San Antonio College in California established a cultural and academic center for deaf students (**mtsac.edu/dhhcenter**). This center is a physical space for deaf students to cultivate relationships and social networks. In addition to accessibility services, the center offers mentoring, tutoring, and even workshops for deaf students.

Bergen Community College in New Jersey has an American Sign Language Club run by deaf students. This club provides an opportunity for deaf students to lead and connect with members of the community who sign. The club hosts events and is involved in campuswide initiatives and functions.

Deaf-Affirming Climate

62 out of 100

Surveyed deaf students reported that they were somewhat likely (62%) to feel that their campus fostered a deaf-affirming climate. Questions in this area asked about deaf peers and faculty members, deaf-related events, and the availability of captioned materials across campus. All of these factors contribute to being what is often called "deaf friendly," or a sense of welcoming deaf people and deaf communities and validating their experiences.

More than half of deaf students (59%) said that videos displayed around campus were captioned and 70% reported that videos shared by classmates were likely to have captions. More than half of deaf students (59%) shared that their school was likely to host deaf-related events and 58% shared that they were likely to see a deaf faculty member on campus. A slight majority of deaf students (62%) felt that they were likely to have a supportive deaf peer with whom they could talk.

This category received the lowest ratings of the three DPAIS categories. Generally, slightly more than half of deaf students felt that their campus was likely to be deaf affirming through ensuring captions were available and having deaf-related events and deaf faculty members as role models, but a slightly higher percentage felt that they had access to support from deaf peers. This finding indicates that deaf students may be able to find support from each other, even if their campus is not deaf affirming. Students shared that colleges should "caption everything," have "more deaf-friendly staff," and ensure that hearing staff and instructors participate in "deaf culture lessons and workshops."

> "I wish there were more deaf faculty and opportunities to be an ASL tutor for students who are taking ASL."

Promising Practices Spotlight

Riverside City College in California hosts a monthly social event for deaf students to connect with each other. These meetings provide opportunities for deaf students to support each other as peers and engage with their community on campus. Additionally, they can connect with accessibility office staff and other departments. During one meeting, deaf students collectively registered for classes, offering them the chance to share information and enroll in courses together.

Cerritos College in California hires deaf students and deaf graduates in the accessibility office. This practice leverages deaf students' experiences with accessibility and creates a welcoming environment for deaf students. The accessibility office also offers an array of services, including advising and accommodations.

Recommendations

This section provides recommendations on three key aspects of the DPAIS. Ensuring **accommodating learning environments** requires faculty involvement and streamlined accommodation processes. Facilitating opportunities for **campus connectedness** relies on transparent communication and supportive relationships to enhance students' sense of belonging. Creating a **deaf-affirming climate** involves validation through events, consistent captioning, and culturally affirming spaces. These strategies foster an inclusive educational atmosphere for deaf students.

Ensure Accommodating Learning Environments

Creating accommodating learning environments requires a campuswide commitment—it cannot be the responsibility of only the accessibility office. Faculty also play a large role in ensuring accessible learning.

- **Consider a thorough evaluation of campus protocols and practices** to identify barriers or challenges to the process of getting appropriate accommodations. Identify ways to make requesting, coordinating, and providing accommodations easier and more streamlined across departments.

- **Evaluate the type of additional support and guidance faculty need** to make their teaching more accessible—for example, training, guidelines, examples, or checklists. Then integrate that support and guidance with existing faculty resources that support instructional best practices.

Suggested Resources

Accessibility Practices Certificate
nationaldeafcenter.org/certificate-program

Campus Evaluation Tool
nationaldeafcenter.org/resource-items/dseval

Disability Services Resource Portal
nationaldeafcenter.org/dss

Accessible Learning Environments
nationaldeafcenter.org/courses/supporting-accessible-learning-environments-and-instruction-for-deaf-students

Facilitate Opportunities for Campus Connectedness

Strengthening deaf students' sense of connectedness and belonging requires a holistic approach. This effort should involve the collaboration of multiple departments across campus—for example, accessibility offices, academic advising, student life, and student support services.

- **Increase transparency of information about how to access campus resources and activities**—deaf students may not realize what they are missing and may not be comfortable asking for help. This could include improving orientation and first-year experiences, ensuring that campus activities include information about accommodations, or ensuring that academic advisors can recommend programs and services tailored to deaf students.

- **Commit to building relationships with deaf students** and checking in with them to reduce feelings of isolation. Ask students for their feedback and input on how things are going and be prepared to make adjustments to campus protocols, practices, and policies in response to their suggestions.

Suggested Resources

Strategies for Collecting Student Feedback
nationaldeafcenter.org/resources/access-accommodations/coordinating-services/student-feedback

Accommodations for Events and Activities
nationaldeafcenter.org/resources/access-accommodations/events-activities

Orientation Guide for Deaf Students
nationaldeafcenter.org/resource-items/orientation

Transforming Systems to Achieve Equity
nationaldeafcenter.org/courses/transforming-systems-to-achieve-equity-for-deaf-people

Create a Deaf-Affirming Climate

Ensure that deaf students feel welcomed and that their experiences as deaf people are validated and affirmed across campus. This can be accomplished in many ways—for example, hosting deaf-related events, having campuswide captioned media policies, and creating opportunities to connect with other deaf people on campus. These activities can contribute to being a "deaf-friendly" campus.

- **Create culturally affirming spaces for deaf people** through strategies like hosting deaf-related events, coordinating meet and greets, or establishing clubs for deaf students or signing students. These strategies can help reduce deaf students' feelings of isolation and loneliness.

- **Evaluate the availability and consistency of captioning across campus**—for example, are the videos your college shares on social media always captioned? Does everyone on campus know about the importance of adding captions and accessibility to video content?

Suggested Resources

Deaf 101
nationaldeafcenter.org/courses/deaf-101

Captioned Media Guidelines
nationaldeafcenter.org/resources/access-accommodations/captioned-media

Deaf Awareness
nationaldeafcenter.org/resources/deaf-awareness

Attitudes and Biases as Barriers for Deaf People
nationaldeafcenter.org/courses/attitudes-and-biases-as-barriers-for-deaf-people

Take Action

NDC offers many resources that can help you create an accommodating, connected, and deaf-affirming campus.

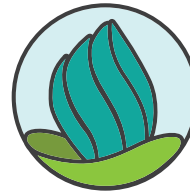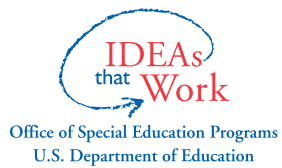Review and share our resources (**nationaldeafcenter.org/resources**).

Engage with your peers on our listserv (**nationaldeafcenter.org/sign-engage-ndc**) or in our community forum (**nationaldeafcenter.org/community**).

Take one of our implementation courses and complete one of our certificate programs (**nationaldeafcenter.org/certificate-program**).

Contact us for customized support: **help@nationaldeafcenter.org**.