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Transcription Peter McDevitt, NBCC Saint John

Introduction: A video in which Peter McDevitt, an instructor with NBCC Saint John, talks about his experiences in accommodating students with hearing loss.

How did you accommodate a student with a disability in your class?

Two times that I've worked with the hearing impaired, one completely deaf and the other time partially deaf. I've had a couple of partially deaf students. In the case of the completely deaf, we had interpreters work within the class, so as I was lecturing, or if I was going over any lab work, in the case of the lectures, the interpreters would be with me, beside me, signing for the student. In the case of doing any exams or any tests, the interpreters would be working with the student. If the student had a question, they would interpret for me. For the partially deaf students, the case there was to make sure the students were set in an area where they could hear clearly and they could see because in some cases they could read lips and in other cases it was a combination of reading lips and listening to my voice as well. And as you can see by the way I am gesturing, I'm kind of a demonstrative person, so in my lectures, I tend to walk around a bit, and what I had to be aware of is, in the case of the interpreters being able to stay where they could follow with me. In the case of the partially deaf students, it was to make sure I didn't walk to the back of the room, out of their hearing, because there's a directional issue at play there. So I had to change my delivery styles a little bit. As far as the delivery materials that I'd use, in addition to using the regular chalk board, I found it very helpful for the students and they found it very helpful to have written instructions and in the case of the student who was partially deaf, any videos that I could find for the content, where they could watch the video, stop, rewind, watch it again and they could kind of go through the lectures at their own pace. So by using tools like Blackboard where I could actually do some of my own recordings, I could put those recordings up on Blackboard on some of the material that we covered in lectures. What that allowed the students to do was, I guess, self-educate at a different pace than the rest of the class was going. The feedback that I got from them was that that was very helpful in those cases.

How was the experience from your perspective?

I had an absolute ball. The interpreters who worked with me were an absolute pleasure to work with. I can only imagine that some of the material that I'm teaching, for example, if we were doing binary math, or were doing some physics courses, some of that material is fairly dry for the layman and yet they stood by and anything that I was talking about, they would sign. If there was any terms, etc., that they weren't unfamiliar with, they would meet before class or after class so that we could go over some things but the whole experience of having the signers in the class was, if ever you get a chance to do it, don't turn it down because it was a lot of fun. It was like having a sidekick if you will up on stage. For the partially deaf students, it was a little bit of work doing my own videos *per se* or trying to make sure that I can get some content that is over and above what we would normally do but again, the reward from that was far greater than any effort that I put forth. Really, it was a win-win situation for me. The other

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thing is that it kind of forced me out of my shell, out of my comfort zone of “This is the way I’ve been doing the course for the last couple of years,” well I have to rethink some of those aspects of it. Any time that you do that as an instructor, I think it brings some freshness in. It’s like getting new material that you’ve got to cover, that OK, I’ve got to rethink what I’m doing and as a result of that, you tend to go back and start freshening some of the material that might have gotten staid over the generations that you were delivering it to.

What would you say to a colleague who will have a student with a disability in his or her class?

If you know you’re going to have a student that’s hearing impaired, what I would suggest that you do before you get too far into the course is to sit down with the student and, first and foremost, find out how severe is the hearing impairment. Is it 20%, do you have to just make sure that you speak louder, or is it to the point that they’re going to need some supplemental material whether it is supplemental audio material that they can listen to outside of class, or video material that they can kind of put the audio and video together, or some written material that they can use to augment what you’re doing in your lectures. But the first and most critical thing is to sit down with the student because in some cases, the students are somewhat shy about their disability, especially if they’re a first year student, they’re into a new environment, they don’t know people and there’s sometimes that reticence to come forward. So, again, try and make it a positive learning environment, sit with the student, find out the severity, and then ask the student what they’re comfortable with and what they would like or what they’ve used in the past through middle school, high school, etc., or if they’re coming back into the school system after being out in the work force, what did they use to help them in their past life and if that can marry with some of the things you’ve got at hand, or some of the things that you can do, it makes that transition a lot easier. If you’re working with people who are going to be signing with you, same thing: sit down with them, talk. Some instructors had issues or concerns with the testing environment—are the signers going to be adding anything or giving any hints, etc. From my experience, they hold themselves to a very high standard and the student will ask a question and they will repeat exactly what the student asked. Bear in mind that when you answer, they will repeat exactly what you answer and, again, talk with the signers, the interpreters, get to know them a little bit and if there’s anything technical or which would be not common, explain those concepts and those terms. Other than that, just relax and enjoy the experience. It’s a lot of fun.