Fall 2012

Facilitating a Relationship Between Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students and Their Writing: How College Writing Centers Can Best Serve Every Student

Louisa Kornblatt
*Washington University in St Louis*

WUURD, the Washington University Undergraduate Research Digest, is published by the Office of Undergraduate Research once a semester each academic year. Applications for submission and Statement of Editorial Policy may be found online.

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**Recommended Citation**

Kornblatt, Louisa, "Facilitating a Relationship Between Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students and Their Writing: How College Writing Centers Can Best Serve Every Student" (2012). *Washington University Undergraduate Research Digest, Volume 8, Issue 1.*

[http://openscholarship.wustl.edu/vol8_iss1/77](http://openscholarship.wustl.edu/vol8_iss1/77)

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As universities strive to serve their students to the best of their ability, they must take into account a growing population in their student body: the deaf and hard of hearing (DHH). Since the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, institutions are barred from discriminating based on ability. The first generation of children to grow up entirely under the ADA is now at the age and in the position to pursue an education past high school. Additionally, the advent of cochlear implants aid the deaf in functioning independently in the general population. As a result, deafness interferes less and less with daily duties. However at the college level the DHH are still at a disadvantage with their writing. Many struggle to grasp grammatical structures, similar to hearing second language learners, and have difficulties organizing ideas in a linear progression.

I argue universities need to invest more in writing support for these students, beyond simply assuring DHH students can sit in a lecture class or communicate with a tutor, and must address the barriers that prevent these students from fully expressing themselves on paper. I attend to the interconnectedness of lower order concerns—problems on the sentence level—and higher order concerns—problems on the macro level—in the writing of the DHH. In order to treat each student as an individual, hearing and DHH alike, I propose writing centers mainstream DHH students into the regular program by employing techniques, such as visual maps and other organizational tools, which aid these students as well as the general body of students.