

Laws Associated with Disabilities

It is imperative that educators, parents and students be aware of the rights of an individual with a disability in the academic setting. Federal laws protect and support such individuals. At Disability Support Services we work hard to adhere to these guidelines and laws. Your understanding of these laws will help ensure that The Catholic University of America offers both students and faculty equal opportunities.

Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act (IDEA)

IDEA covers individuals from birth to the age of 21 or until graduation from high school and requires institutions to provide a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. It does not apply to college students.

The Rehabilitation Act, Section 504

This law applies to any institution, school or agency that receives federal funding and requires that it provide, to the best of its ability, services and accommodations needed to incorporate the people with disabilities into the academic world around them.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

This law is considered an extension of Section 504. Like Section 504, ADA requires schools, universities, businesses, agencies, etc., to supply "reasonable accommodations" to individuals with disabilities. ADA, unlike Section 504, covers those entities that do not receive federal monies as well as those that do receive federal aid.

The following Web sites explain these laws in more depth:

<http://counsel.cua.edu/fedlaw/adas.cfm>

<http://counsel.cua.edu/fedlaw/rehabs.cfm>

The Catholic University of America admits students of any race, color, national or ethnic origin, sex, age or disability.

REASON. FAITH. SERVICE.

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

Professional Partnerships

Faculty and Sign Language Interpreters

A guide for CUA faculty working with Deaf and hard-of-hearing students and sign language interpreters in academic settings.



THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

Office of Disability Support Services
207 Edward J. Pryzbyla University Center
Washington, DC 20064

Phone: 202-319-5211

Fax: 202-319-5126

E-mail: cua-disabilityservices@cua.edu

Web: <http://disabilityservices.cua.edu>

Working With a Sign-Language Interpreter

Sign-language interpreters hired to work at CUA have a variety of working experiences and have varied educational backgrounds. Some have received associate's, bachelor's, and/or master's degrees in interpreting. Our interpreters have certifications from national organizations for sign language interpreters, such as the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf and the National Association for the Deaf. The more you learn about the role and responsibilities of interpreters, the better we can ensure our Deaf and hard-of-hearing students equal opportunity for the best possible education they can receive at The Catholic University of America.

The Role of the Interpreter

An interpreter bridges the gap between sign language (a manual language) and spoken English. When the professor or a classmate speaks, the interpreter translates the spoken words into the language preferred by the Deaf or hard-of-hearing student—sign language. The student likewise participates in the classroom by signing the information and the interpreter voices it (talks) for the class. The interpreter is not meant to be a participant in the classroom, but a communication facilitator, making sure that communication is easily accessible for the Deaf and hearing populations equally.

What is accessible to the hearing students should also be accessible to Deaf and hard-of-hearing students, even such classroom events as a student who continues to cough throughout class, causing a disturbance. The Interpreter even communicates comments made in class that may offend Deaf or hard-of-hearing students. Any comments or questions Deaf or hard-of-hearing students make likewise will be voiced for the class, so that the class also has equal access to that information.

To help fight mental fatigue and help keep themselves mentally fresh, sign language interpreters often work in teams of two. At the university level, class material and content are often very intellectually complex, and the interpreter has to process all of the information he or she hears. And, although only one Interpreter signs at a time, the other Interpreter is responsible for information that may be missed by the team member. Working as a team also helps prevent interpreters from the overwork that causes repetitive motion injuries.

How Professors Help the Interpreting Process

- If possible, please give the interpreter(s) a copy of textbooks, class syllabus, handouts, and lecture notes. Having these materials helps the interpreter become familiar with the topics to be discussed in class and with spelling key vocabulary words.
- Please inform the interpreter of any films to be shown in your class. If possible, choose films that have closed captioning. For the Deaf and hard-of-hearing students, captioning is easier to watch (read) than watching the Interpreter during a film.
- Be sensitive to the fact that when the lights are completely off in a classroom, Deaf or hard-of-hearing students cannot see the interpreter.
- When addressing Deaf or hard-of-hearing students, please look and speak directly to them. Don't talk to students through the interpreter.
- The interpreter is trying hard to accurately interpret the lecture. If the speed of the lecture or conversation becomes too rapid, the interpreter may ask for clarification.

Most important, if you have questions, please ask.

Common Misconceptions About Interpreters

The interpreter serves as a tutor/personal aide for the Deaf student. Interpreters at the postsecondary level rarely tutor students. It is not their role to provide tutoring services. Most universities offer tutoring; Deaf and hard-of-hearing students can use these services if necessary. Interpreters do not serve as personal aides. They are professionals who work to facilitate communication.

The interpreter might interject his or her opinions during class or tell others what happens in my class. The Registry for Interpreters for the Deaf, the national professional organization of sign language interpreters, has established a code of ethics that emphasizes confidentiality. Our interpreters abide by these codes. Personal opinions are not interjected into the interpreted messages.

The interpreter works with blind students and knows Braille. This may be true, but often is not the case. Those who are Deaf and those who are blind require extremely different services. Interpreters are only trained in sign language interpreting services.