COMMUNICATION DIVERSITY: STRATEGIES FOR ENSURING SUCCESS IN NTID CLASSROOMS

NTID DIRECT INSTRUCTION MODEL

Communication is a joint responsibility of all members of the NTID community. “Strategic Decisions 2020,” the NTID strategic plan, notes that: “NTID is a unique educational community that has evolved over its 42-year history and will continue to change. Our students bring diverse languages and communication abilities and preferences to our educational community, and we wholeheartedly welcome them. The key qualities of NTID’s communication environment are diversity and inclusiveness: our goal is to respect this diversity and continue to strive towards inclusiveness (p. 17).

The Direct Instruction Model is used in all classes taught within NTID and for all course sections taught by NTID instructors in the other colleges of RIT where enrollment is limited to NTID-supported students only. This model makes the instructor responsible for facilitating communication* in the classroom. To fulfill this responsibility, each instructor will communicate directly with students using sign language and an appropriate mix of other communication strategies, which may include spoken language, fingerspelling, printed/visual aids and web-based instructional materials. FM systems are available for loan to students who request them. Also, all instructors have designated office hours when students can meet for class tutoring sessions.

* The statement “facilitating communication” means that the instructor helps ensure that all course-related communication is accessible to all.

FLEXIBLE DIRECT INSTRUCTION

The Flexible Direct Instruction (FDI) process, described below, may be invoked as a last resort when a student1 is clearly not benefiting educationally from an instructor’s application of the Direct Instruction Model.

The FDI process provides an opportunity to consider services that augment the Direct Instruction Model when communication otherwise in place is inadequate to benefit a student2 educationally.

TIMELINE

1 In certain circumstances, the classroom instructor may also invoke the FDI process – see below.
2 A student with a secondary disability is required to seek accommodations from the RIT Service Office. (http://www.rit.edu/studentaffairs/disabilityservices/service.php). Once approved, the student should meet with his or her instructors to communicate the need for accommodations.
1. Prior to the Summer Vestibule Program (SVP)

• The Language Communication Background Questionnaire (LCBQ)

The LCBQ is a 14-item questionnaire designed to let NTID know the communication profile of each student. Each accepted student is required to complete the questionnaire as accurately as possible and send it in before they arrive on campus for SVP. Attention to LCBQ data can assist chairs and counselors/academic advisors in scheduling students in sections, which best fit their communication profile.

• The New Signers Program

The New Signers Program (NSP) is an optional one credit, two-week pre-orientation program offered to newly accepted deaf and hard-of-hearing students who have little or no prior skill in American Sign Language. The program is designed to help students learn basic sign skills, so that they can begin to feel more comfortable interacting with RIT/NTID students and instructors who use sign language. The NSP coordinator will provide all chairs and counselors/academic advisors a list of NSP participants before the beginning of SVP.

2. During SVP

• Career Seminar

Communication issues are discussed as part of the career seminar curriculum. Where a Career Seminar instructor notices that a student seems to have significant communication difficulties, he or she should refer that student for a communication interview and inform the SVP coordinator, who will forward the information to the department chair once a student has been accepted into a program.

• Communication interviews

All SVP students attend a communication workshop. Some students participate in follow-up communication-related interviews to assess their spoken and sign skills as well as other communication factors. After these interviews, three lists of students are generated and shared with the Associate Dean for Academic Administration, the Associate Dean of Student and Academic Services, program chairpersons and counselors/academic advisors. The first list is composed of those non-signing or new-to-signing students who have expressed interest in taking a sign language course in the fall. (Sign language courses are scheduled where possible so as not to interfere with other coursework.) The second list comprises those students who appear to benefit the most from the use of audition in the
classroom. The third list comprises those students who are, as a result of the interviews, considered likely to encounter significant classroom learning barriers due to communication-related variables.

The purpose of these lists is to allow program chairs to consider a student’s communication profile in scheduling for Fall Semester courses and thereafter.

Where a program chair is unable to schedule a student in a way that will most likely match his or her communication profile, the program chair will a) meet with the instructor prior to the start of the semester to discuss strategies to facilitate the success of the student in the class, and b) alert the student’s counselor/academic advisor

3. Add-drop week

• Changing a student’s schedule

An instructor who notices that a student is struggling with communication in the class should discuss this during the first week with both the student and the chairperson of the department in which the course resides to see if strategies, for example, reassigning the student to a different section, may be helpful.

• Filing an FDI request (student)

When it becomes apparent to the chairperson that a student is struggling with communication in a class such that an FDI request may be in order, the chair completes Sections One and Two of the FDI request form and forwards the form to the student’s counselor/academic advisor. The counselor/academic advisor meets with the student and completes Section Three of the form. See: http://www.ntid.rit.edu/president/academic-affairs/college-policies. Even though it is desirable that a request be filed during add-drop week, one can be filed after add-drop week where necessary.

When an FDI request is made, it will be reviewed by a panel of five consisting of the Associate Dean for Academic Administration, the Assistant Vice President for Student and Academic Services, the Assistant Dean and Director for Access Services (DAS), the DAS Director of Operations, and the Director of the Communication Studies Department. The panel may wish to seek guidance from the relevant chairperson as to what options have already been considered and/or tried, as well as review relevant documentation, for example the requestor’s LCBQ. The panel is responsible for identifying a resolution that addresses the student’s communication difficulties. A response will be provided to the student, the counselor/academic advisor, and the department chair within three business days of the request having been filed. If an FDI request is approved, the response will
detail the purpose and the specific services to be provided. If denied, the response will specify the reason for the denial, as well as an alternative resolution.

• Filing an FDI request (instructor)

In the unusual case where it is the instructor who, having tried all available strategies, feels it necessary to file an FDI request, the instructor should consult with his or her chairperson. If the chairperson agrees with the instructor that communication in the classroom is clearly breaking down, the instructor files the request with the FDI review panel with a copy of supporting documentation from the chair. Once again, it is the panel is responsible for identifying a resolution that addresses the communication difficulties in the classroom. A response will be provided to the instructor and chairperson within three business days of the request having been filed. If an FDI request is approved, the response will detail the purpose and the specific services to be provided. If denied, the response will specify the reason for the denial, as well as an alternative resolution.

TRACKING FDI REQUESTS

• Students who file FDI requests, regardless of the result of review, will be followed closely by their counselor/academic advisor and a report will be provided by the counselor/academic advisor to the department chair by the middle of each semester. The department chair will share the report with the FDI review panel, who will consider whether FDI resolutions are working or if they need to be modified.

• The resolution of all FDI requests will be reported to the AAVP by the middle of each semester.

(7/16)