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 student 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 student1 educationally.

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1 A student with a secondary disability is required to seek approval for accommodations from the RIT Disability Services Office. Once approved, the student should meet with his or her instructors to communicate the need for accommodations.
Before the Summer Vestibule Program (SVP)

• The Language Communication Background Questionnaire (LCBQ)

The LCBQ is a 15-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.

During SVP

• Career Seminar

Students are grouped by communication profile as indicated by their responses to the LCBQ for placement in their SVP Career Seminar. Where possible, career seminar instructors are chosen to match the communication profile of the students in their section. 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. (Where a student is directly admitted to an NTID program, the department chairperson will be alerted earlier.)

• 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 counselors/academic advisor

**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 in which the course resides to see if reassigning the student to a different section may be helpful.

- Filing an FDI request

When it is apparent to the chairperson and/or to the instructor that a student is struggling with communication in a class to a degree that suggests an FDI request may be in order, the instructor will encourage the student to work with the counselor/academic advisor. If the counselor/academic advisor believes that an FDI request is in order, then he or she will work with the student to complete the [FDI Request Checklist](#). Even though it is desirable that such a request be filed during add-drop week, one can be filed after add-drop week if necessary.

When an FDI request is made, it will be reviewed by a panel of five faculty/staff consisting of the Associate Dean for Academic Administration, the Associate Dean for Student and Academic Services, the chair of the Communication and Studies Department, and both the Assistant Dean and the Director of Operations of the Access Services Department. The panel may wish to seek guidance from the relevant chairperson as to what options have already been considered and/or tried. The panel’s goal is to identify 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.

**TRACKING FDI REQUESTS**
• Students who file FDI requests, regardless of the result of review, will be followed closely by their counselors/academic advisors 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 determine if FDI resolutions are working or if they need to be modified (or continued).

• All FDI requests will be reported to the AAVP by the middle of each semester. A status review of each approved FDI request will be included and adjustments made where appropriate.

(12/5/15)