

October 2019

## Cooperation: A Community College and a Rehabilitation Center

Theresa Johnson-Sligar

*Coordinator, Interpreter Training Program—center for special academic support*

Steven R. Sligar

*Georgia Sensory Rehabilitation Center Division of Rehabilitation Services*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.wcsu.edu/jadara>

---

### Recommended Citation

Johnson-Sligar, T., & Sligar, S. R. (2019). Cooperation: A Community College and a Rehabilitation Center. *JADARA*, 26(1). Retrieved from <https://repository.wcsu.edu/jadara/vol26/iss1/7>

## **COOPERATION: A COMMUNITY COLLEGE AND A REHABILITATION CENTER**

---

**THERESA JOHNSON-SLIGAR**

**Coordinator, Interpreter Training Program  
Center for Special Academic Support  
DeKalb College**

**STEVEN R. SLIGAR**

**Georgia Sensory Rehabilitation Center  
Division of Rehabilitation Services**

### **Abstract**

This article is a description of the development and two-year implementation of a Cooperative Agreement between DeKalb College and the Georgia Sensory Rehabilitation Center. The agreement was initiated by DeKalb College due to the increase in applicants with potential to prepare for developmental studies. These needs included assessment, academic upgrading, vocational information, and study skills improvement. During this time, the Georgia Division of Rehabilitation Services established the Georgia Sensory Rehabilitation Center with a mandate to network with existing services. The timing of increased demand at DeKalb College and development of the Georgia Sensory Rehabilitation Center was right for initiation of this program. Resources of both institutions will be described and how they "fit together."

This paper also address the details of the agreement and pros and cons of implementation. Issues addressed include bureaucracy (two different institutions), staff turf protection, meeting program requirements at two different sites, funding, stigma of college students at a

rehabilitation center, use of computer assisted instruction, and supervision.

---

### **Introduction**

Cooperative agreements have been around for quite some time. Governments have formed alliances to wage both war and peace. Churches and social organizations have relied upon community resources to meet the needs of their parishioners or consumers. Log cabin building and hog dressing are examples of community cooperation and Appalachian folklore that were recorded by a group of high school students (Wigginton, 1972). It just makes good sense to cooperate, share resources, and arrive at a common goal or fulfill a mutual need. There are numerous contemporary examples:

1. In *Toward Independence* (1986), the National Council on the Handicapped acknowledges "coordinated services" exist but goes further to recommend these be mandated as well.

2. Inter-agency cooperation is being written into legislation as can be seen in the Carl Perkins

## Cooperation: A Community College and A Rehabilitation Center

---

Vocational Educational Act [PL 98-524], the Rehabilitation Amendments of 1986 [PL 99-506], and the Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1988 [PL 100-407]. This latter Act requires that the grantee develop cooperative agreements with other states.

3. The private sector is involved too. The Apple Computer Company has donated computers for networking purposes within a community. IBM links with the National Easter Seal Society, United Cerebral Palsy Associations, and Courage Center to administer portions of their "Offering for Persons with Disabilities."

4. The University of Tennessee administers a Post-Secondary Education Consortium which makes available and accessible college training for deaf persons throughout the southeast.

The list could go on and on. There are a myriad of types of formal and informal memorandums of understanding, agreement, and coordination or cooperation. These agreements are evidence of the need for individuals and organizations to network. In *Deaf Students and the School-to-Work Transition* (Allen, Rawlings & Schildroth, 1989), it is stated that "plans must be developed and implemented that provide for regular and frequent face-to-face interaction of interagency teams at the service delivery level."

This paper details the cooperation between DeKalb College and the Georgia Sensory Rehabilitation Center.

### Structure of the Agreement

DeKalb College is a two-year institution, is part of the University System of Georgia, and is located in the eastern part of the city of Atlanta. There is a designated program for students who are deaf which is jointly funded by DeKalb College and the Postsecondary Education Consortium from the University of Tennessee. This program has

been in operation since 1983. Services (interpreting, notetaking, tutoring, career advisement, and developmental studies) have been made available to hearing impaired-students in this setting. At the time of the initial development of cooperation there were nine students involved in the program, and, it should be stressed, this agreement was intended to broaden the base of an already established program. Presently there are 44 students.

The Georgia Sensory Rehabilitation Center (GSRC) was funded during fiscal year 1988 with the physical plant opening and first staff in place by January 1988. GSRC is a comprehensive residential rehabilitation center providing rehabilitation services of evaluation, counseling, independent living and job seeking skills, and adult and computer literacy training for Georgians who are deaf and/or blind.

The development of this memorandum of understanding came about as the result of student needs exceeding resources at DeKalb College and GSRC's available resources to provide the needed services.

The five areas of student needs were academic placement, remediation/preparation, coping skills/strategies, residential, and counseling. Since many of the deaf students who enrolled at DeKalb College were not prepared for college level work, they enrolled in the developmental studies program. Even this program did not meet the needs of all students and a pre-developmental studies had to be established. The usual academic testing done at the college did not assist the instructors with pinpointing specific weaknesses and strengths of the students; therefore, a more diagnostic type of academic placement was required. There was also a need to establish instruction in basic academics to allow students to enter developmental studies. Part of the problems presented by the students was a need to acquire more appropriate study skills, understanding the

## **Cooperation: A Community College and A Rehabilitation Center**

---

relationship between their studies at college and an eventual career, acquiring skills to access the computer assisted instruction lab, and assistance with placement in the community. Since not all of the students served were from the Atlanta area, they were in need of residential services. Concurrent with this residential need was the need for training to develop the necessary independent living skills so that the student would be able to function successfully. This also included a need for mobility, either individually with personal transportation or use of the public transportation system in Atlanta. Finally, there was a need for personal social adjustment counseling as well as career/vocational guidance counseling.

At the same time the above needs were identified at DeKalb College, the Georgia Sensory Rehabilitation Center was operationalizing the mandated mission to provide services. This involved recruiting and filling positions of very highly skilled and specialized instructors as well as ordering and putting in place the technology and other needed items necessary to fill up a 22,000 square foot center and 12 apartments. By August of 1988, there was available a skilled vocational evaluator, a specialized adjustment instructor in remedial education, a laboratory with computer assisted instruction, an adjustment instructor in independent living, a rehabilitation counselor for the deaf, 12 apartment units, three buses, and two drivers.

A cooperative memorandum of understanding was developed between DeKalb College and GSRC which identified five areas of service: placement, preparation, coping skills, community services, and counseling. These needs of DeKalb College students were met through GSRC's evaluation unit, instructional area, use of apartments and buses, and counseling.

### **Agreement Detail**

The memorandum of understanding had six specific areas which had to be considered.

#### **Referral Process**

There has to be a clear delineation of how inter-facility referrals will be handled. This involves meeting both program requirements and sharing of information. Issues of client confidentiality are critical in this area. Trust is another important factor as a background review of referral information done by one facility needs to meet requirements and be thorough enough for the other program to accept.

#### **Information Sharing**

This is divided into two parts. The first is informal sharing of client progress, and problems among professionals involved with the client. The second area is more formal information including written reports and attendance at client staffings.

#### **Decision Making**

There are four factors which determine program direction. First is that client involvement and input must be assured at all levels of decision making. Second are those decisions which relate specifically to GSRC or DeKalb College. Third are joint decisions which will involve both institutions. For example, the college academic advisor deals with appropriate courses to be taken while the GSRC counselor deals with roommate problems. Both professionals cooperate while counseling the student about career advisement (rehabilitation) and selection of a major (college). And fourth, clients' field vocational rehabilitation counselor, must be included in the process.

## Cooperation: A Community College and A Rehabilitation Center

---

### Service Provision

A significant question in any joint agreement is: who will be the primary service provider and which institution will be complimentary or secondary? There is also a need for continuity of case management, especially as changes or shifts occur from one center to the other. With Atlanta area students it was very clear that DeKalb College was the primary service provider, with GSRC providing some secondary services (placement, evaluation, coping skills workshops, and some counseling). However, for those clients who were also in GSRC's residential program, all activities directed towards development of independent living skills were the primary responsibility of GSRC, with academic development the primary responsibility of DeKalb College.

### Exit and Follow-Up Procedures

Questions relating to these areas must be determined as to who will provide final documentation and follow-up services. In this case, usual GSRC policy (exit interview, case summary, and follow-up) was followed.

### Documentation Issues

It must be decided up front which facility will provide evaluation, interim, and exit report(s). With this agreement, it was decided the responsible professional, i.e. evaluator, academic advisor, etc. would provide usual reports.

### Implementation Issues

The memorandum of understanding was developed by the directors of both programs and there was top down support of this agreement. Following is a list of the major implementation and maintenance issues related to a successful cooperative agreement.

### Bureaucracy

As with any new course in a college, the administrative channels for approval of the course had to be followed. Since GSRC is autonomous in program development there was no problem in this area.

### Turf Issues

These present ongoing challenges to implementation of any agreement. The "whose program is it?" issue can be easily identified. The program is marketed as the "Collegiate Skills Improvement Program for the Hearing Impaired" at GSRC and within the rehabilitation community. However, it is generally referred to as "COM 95" at DeKalb College which is reflective of the course name and number. Initially, the program was hosted primarily at GSRC but, as student needs were identified, resources were also provided at DeKalb College. Concurrently, as more clients were admitted to GSRC the program shifted to the college campus with GSRC support being provided on site.

### Program Requirements

DeKalb College has minimum requirements on the Scholastic Aptitude Test of 250 verbal and quantitative. A College Placement Examination is required of students who score 400 or below in either area. These requirements cannot be waived for any student. GSRC does prefer their students be clients of the Division of Rehabilitation Services but this is not mandatory. It was requested that those individuals who are not GSRC clients be informed of rehabilitation services and how to access these services should they so desire.

### Funding

It is required that all students pay tuition to matriculate in the college. Initially there was no cost to DeKalb College since program costs were

## **Cooperation: A Community College and A Rehabilitation Center**

---

borne by GSRC. As need for this program was demonstrated, the college was able to assume financial responsibility. The GSRC staff and equipment were funded through Section 110 monies and there was no cost to the students.

### **Stigma**

The issues of college students at a rehabilitation center and rehabilitation clients at a college had to be addressed. It has been our experience that it is most important that staff maintain a perspective of the individuals as students or they will not participate in the program. This "self-esteem" issue proved to be very critical. With emphasis on academic preparation, students were able to continue in the program with minimal attrition.

### **Staff Supervision**

It is very important to maintain a separate program prospective and stick to direct lines of authority protocol. For example, if the issue is need for an instructor to comply with the established plan of services then the immediate supervisor is the appropriate person to deal with this issue not personnel from the other program.

### **Program Monitoring/Changes**

As stated earlier the original intent was to provide the bulk of the program at the Georgia Sensory Rehabilitation Center. Now the program

has been shifted to the DeKalb College campus with GSRC support. There is also a more diverse group of students who need night and/or weekend training which has necessitated providing support at varying times. Additionally, there has been an increased utilization of GSRC by other clients, which further necessitated a shift to the college campus.

### **Conclusion**

The benefits of this memorandum of understanding are three-fold and rather obvious. All of the students received the services they needed to participate in a postsecondary education program while developing their academic skills. The program demonstrated to college administration the need for these types of services. Subsequently, this was built into the college's budget. Likewise, GSRC was able to demonstrate that the services were necessary and valuable.

The primary challenge of the future is to maintain the program and to prevent it from growing stagnant. This will be done through annual formal reviews of the memorandums, informal discussions, as well as student needs assessment. The issues as discussed above will have to be considered, however, continued management support will serve to ensure maintenance.

## Cooperation: A Community College and A Rehabilitation Center

---

### References

---

- Allen, T.E., Rawlings, B.W. & Schildroth, A.N. (1989). *Deaf students and the school-to-work transition*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brooks.
- National Council on the Handicapped (1986). *Toward independence: An assessment of federal laws and programs affecting persons with disabilities – with legislative recommendations*. Washington, DC. ISBN 0-936825-00-6, The Library of Congress.
- Wehman, Paul, Ph.D., Moon, M. Sherril, Ed.D., Everson, Jane M., M.S., Wood, Wendy, M.S., and Barcus, J. Michael, M.S. (1988). *Transition from school to work: New challenges for youth with severe disabilities*. Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company, Baltimore-London-Toronto-Sydney. ISBN 0-933716-92-3, The Library of Congress.
- Wigginton, Brooks Eliot (1972). *The Foxfire Book* (Anchor Books edition). Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York.