Higher Education for Deaf Persons in Regular Institutions

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During the past five years there has been a great increase in facilities and resources for providing higher education opportunities for deaf persons. The program at Gallaudet College has been expanded, the National Technical Institute for the Deaf has been established, and the Rehabilitation Services Administration is supporting special programs in community and junior colleges in New Orleans, Seattle, and St. Paul. These programs will make available to qualified deaf students a range of opportunities in higher education more nearly equal to what is available to the general population than had been thought possible in past years. With the increase opportunities for higher education, and the growing emphasis on secondary level education in schools for the deaf, reasonably adequate facilities are becoming available to ensure the deaf child the opportunity for education comparable to the general population from pre-school through college, in accordance with his interests and abilities.

While the present and proposed facilities are greatly needed, and probably always will be so long as deafness remains unchecked, a system of specialized facilities for a small population can never duplicate the vast array of educational opportunities available to the general population.

Until deafness, or its effects, is eliminated then, it would seem advisable to invest some resources in determining how

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existing education and rehabilitation facilities throughout the country can be made more readily available to those who are deaf. The study summarized here (Quigley, Jenne, and Phillips, 1968) is one effort in that direction.

**Purpose**

The study was conducted to determine the extent to which deaf persons were successful in attending regular colleges and universities in the United States and the characteristics which were associated with attendance in such institutions. The original plan was to locate three groups of deaf persons: (1) those who had successfully graduated with at least a bachelor's degree from regular institutions of higher education; (2) those who had attended such institutions but who terminated prior to acquiring the bachelor's degree; and (3) those who were in attendance at regular colleges and universities at the time of the study. During the initial stages of locating the target population of persons who met the criteria of deafness and attendance at a regular institution of higher learning, it became evident there were two other groups of persons who might provide data of value for the purposes of the study: (1) persons who had begun study in a regular college or university and later transferred to Gallaudet College; and (2) graduates of Gallaudet College who attended graduate school in other institutions. Since these persons met the criteria of deafness and attendance in regular colleges and universities, the decision was made to include them in the study.

**Procedures**

By a variety of techniques, 902 persons were located who seemed to meet the study criteria. Questionnaires were sent to them and extensive follow-up efforts were made to ensure as high a rate of return as possible. More than 800 questionnaires were returned. These questionnaires were examined to determine if the respondents met the criteria of: (1) deafness, and (2) attendance at a regular institution of higher education. Only those questionnaires were accepted for analysis which indicated the respondents had attended, for at least
one semester, an institution of higher education listed in the *Education Directory* of the United States Office of Education. A total of 653 respondents returned usable questionnaires which met this criterion and the criterion of hearing impairment.

Hearing impairment was determined in two ways: (1) by the self-reports of hearing ability on Question 15 of the questionnaire; and (2) by audiometric data which were obtained from schools for the deaf for 168 respondents who also answered Question 15. A correlation coefficient of .53 was obtained between the audiometric data and responses to Question 15 for these 168 respondents. In view of the restricted range of the two variables, this degree of relationship was accepted as reasonable validation for the use of Question 15 data for those respondents for whom audiometric data could not be obtained.

Because of the differences among the five groups of respondents in terms of the length and type of experience in regular colleges and universities, it was decided to keep the groups separate in the presentation of the survey data rather than combine them into a single group. Within each group, the results were presented separately for those who were classified as deaf and those classified as hard of hearing for the purposes of the study.

Persons who had hearing losses greater than 65 decibels, as verified by audiometric data, or a certain level of response on Question 15 were classified as deaf. Those with verified audiometric losses less than 65 decibels, or a certain level of response on Question 15, were classified as hard of hearing.

**Results**

The results can best be summarized by presenting them for Group A and Group E together, Group B and Group D together, and Group C alone.

Group A and Group E. Group A consisted of 224 respondents, 184 classified as deaf and 40 as hard of hearing, who had been awarded at least bachelor's degrees from regular
colleges and universities. Group E consisted of 98 graduates of Gallaudet College, 85 deaf and 13 hard of hearing, who attended graduate school in other institutions of higher education. Approximately half of these persons had acquired at least one graduate degree.

Respondents in both groups can be considered as highly successful in terms of their academic and professional accomplishments. A variety of data, including reported grades during the last year of attendance in a regular institution of higher education, indicated they were able to compete successfully in undergraduate and graduate schools. The great majority of both groups were engaged in professional level occupations and were earning salaries at least comparable to those for professional workers in the general population. They appeared to be adjusting successfully in their marital and social lives.

There were some differences between the two groups which are of interest to the purposes of the study. First, Group A respondents came predominantly from families whose socio-economic status was comparable to that of the families of the general college-going population. Group E respondents, on the other hand, came mostly from families of considerably lower socio-economic status. Since the average age of the two groups differed by only about five years, the difference likely was not due to different periods of prosperity in the United States. Both groups generally achieved higher socio-economic status than they reported for their families. Having started from a lower base, however, the upward mobility of Group E was the more striking.

Second, the two groups differed considerably in their types of pre-college schooling. The majority of Group E reported attendance in combined residential schools for the deaf, while Group A respondents attended mostly in oral residential schools, day programs or some combination of these. Since approximately equal percentages of Group A reported attendance in day programs as in oral residential schools, the residential factor did not seem to be a determinant of their pursuing higher education in regular institutions. It is more likely
that a determinant was the philosophy, which guides both oral residential schools and day programs, of preparing students for later education in regular high schools and colleges and of fostering as much interaction as possible with normal hearing persons during the school years.

The data indicated that hearing impaired students who obtain their pre-college education entirely within combined system residential schools will almost certainly seek higher education at Gallaudet College rather than at other institutions.

Third, the majority of respondents in Group E majored in Education in graduate school, while Group A respondents tended to major in a wide variety of subject areas with only a small percentage in Education. This was reflected in the occupational lives of the respondents. While the great majority of both groups were engaged in professional occupations, most of Group E respondents were in education positions concerned with services to other deaf persons. In Group A, most of the respondents were engaged in professional occupations other than teaching. Both groups appeared to be successful occupationally in terms of job status, income and job satisfaction.

Finally, there was a greater tendency for respondents in Group E to prefer marriage partners who also were deaf. Their preference was confirmed by their actual marriages which were almost always with older deaf people. While Group A had a considerably lower percentage of marriages to other deaf persons, such marriages still were contracted by the majority of respondents.

Group B and Group D. Group B consisted of 131 respondents, 84 classified as deaf and 47 as hard of hearing, who had attended regular colleges and universities but terminated short of achieving bachelor's degree status. Group D consisted of 39 respondents, 24 classified as deaf and 15 as hard of hearing, who began to study in regular institutions of higher education but transferred to Gallaudet College.

Both groups were similar in that they terminated study in regular institutions before acquiring at least a bachelor's degree.
degree. They also were similar in type of pre-college schooling and socio-economic background of their families. Group B respondents had an average age of approximately 31 years and most were employed. The average age of Group D was approximately 23 and all were in attendance at Gallaudet College at the time the survey was conducted.

As compared with Group A, whose respondents also began study in regular colleges and universities but successfully completed at least a four-year program, Group B and D earned lower grades during their last years in both high school and regular colleges. The grades for Group D in both instances were lower than for Group B which in turn were lower than for Group A. This factor of grade averages in both high school and college seems to be a major differentiating factor between those who successfully completed a regular college program and those who did not, either by terminating study or transferring to Gallaudet College.

Group C. Group C consisted of 161 respondents, 80 classified as deaf and 81 as hard of hearing, who were still in attendance in regular colleges and universities at the time of the study. Respondents in this group were similar to the other groups with beginning experience in regular colleges (Groups A, B, and D) in type of pre-college schooling and in the socio-economic backgrounds of their families. They differed in age, being the youngest group of respondents at an average age of 21 years.

This group seemed to show the effects of the emphasis in the past 20 years on amplification and home training from parents. They tended to make greater use of hearing aids, to have had more home training from parents, and to have received greater parental encouragement to attend college than was true for the other groups of respondents. The average grades for the group during the last year in high schools were lower than for Group A, higher than for Group D, and roughly comparable to those for Group B. The same was true for their grades during the last year in regular college. Since this group was still in college at the time the survey was conducted, an intensive follow-up study is planned to determine who
succeeded in college and who failed, and to determine other characteristics relevant to the purposes of the present study.

One matter of interest in conducting the study was the number of deaf individuals attending regular colleges and universities at any given time. Since the methods used to locate the target population probably did not succeed in locating all persons who met the criteria for the study, the numbers which can be given from this study of deaf persons in college are undoubtedly underestimates. They do furnish, however, some idea of the extent to which deaf persons are seeking higher education in regular institutions.

Two estimates can be given from the study data of how many deaf persons might be in regular institutions of higher education at any given time. One is the number of respondents in Group C which consisted of persons in regular colleges and universities at the time the survey was conducted. The total of 161 respondents in this group included 80 who were classified as deaf and 81 who were classified as hard of hearing by the methods described in the procedures of the study. Because of the methods used in locating the target population, which were directed toward locating deaf individuals, the 81 hard of hearing respondents were likely persons whose hearing impairment presented them with at least moderate difficulty in regular schools. It is obvious they would represent only a very small fraction of the total population of hard of hearing persons in regular colleges and universities. One estimate which could be given then is between 80 and 161 persons. It should be emphasized again that the procedures used in the study very likely resulted in these figures being under-estimates. However, there is no way of knowing how great the underestimation might be.

Another estimate can be obtained from the data in Table 35 which listed the percentages of respondents reporting earliest attendance at a school of higher education, grouped by four-year periods. In Groups A, B, C, and D (respondents whose first attendance was in a regular institution of higher education), 126 who were classified as deaf listed their earliest attendance as being during the period 1960-1965. In the
same groups, 115 respondents classified as hard of hearing reported their earliest attendance as being during this period. While the figures obtained by this estimate and the previous one are likely underestimates of the true situation, they do indicate that considerable numbers of deaf students are seeking higher education in regular institutions.

There were two major characteristics which seemed to distinguish respondents who sought higher education in regular institutions, whether successfully or unsuccessfully. First they came from families with socio-economic backgrounds similar to those of the families of the general college-going population in the United States. Second, their pre-college schooling usually was obtained in oral residential schools, day programs, or a combination of these. The philosophy of these programs in preparing hearing impaired students for later education in regular high schools and colleges, and of fostering interaction of deaf students with normal hearing persons, might be the strongest factor in influencing the student’s eventual decision on the type of college to attend. The high school level might be particularly crucial in this respect. Data in the study indicate that when a student obtains his education through the high school level in combined system residential schools, he is not likely to attend a regular college or university. Since it is reasonable to assume, conservatively, that many students in such schools are as capable as those in day programs and oral residential programs, and as well prepared for college, the difference might lie in the goals and philosophies engendered in the students by the respective educational programs.

The factor which seemed to differentiate most between those respondents who successfully completed at least a four-year program in a regular institution of higher education and those who did not was simply academic accomplishment. This is shown by the higher average grades reported by Group A for the last year in college as compared to those for Group B (terminating students) in Group D (transfer students). The college grades, and thus college success, were predictable from the reported high school grades which paralleled the college grades for the three groups. Judging by the high school grades
reported by the transfer students (Group D), it would seem to have been inadvisable for many of them to have attempted higher education in a regular institution. It could also be reasoned, of course, that with appropriate special help they might have been more successful in regular colleges.

Implications

The study has shown that considerable numbers of deaf persons seek higher education in regular colleges and universities. It has also shown that many of these persons successfully graduate from such institutions and attain professional status in the occupational world commensurate with their educational attainments. The success of these individuals in institutions of higher education apparently is achieved with little or no special assistance. It would seem reasonable to assume that the provision of some special services, such as are available in many instances to students with other types of disabilities, would make it possible for greater numbers of deaf persons to achieve similar success in higher education. A number of recommendations for accomplishing this objective can be made from the study.

1. Special counseling should be provided early in the high school years for students who seem to have the academic ability and achievement for higher education. The student should be familiar with the wide range of universities, colleges, junior colleges, and specialized institutes which are available. He could be given the background necessary for making the most appropriate choice in terms of his interests and abilities. Assistance could be provided to aid him in gaining admission to an appropriate institution.

2. Special counseling and special services should be made available to the student when he enters an institution of higher education. It would be desirable to have a single person, perhaps a rehabilitation counselor, responsible for securing the services for a student within a given institution. While this might not be practical on an institutional basis, it could be feasible on a state or regional basis. Such a plan presently is under development by Dr. George J. Goldin at North-
eastern University in Boston, Massachusetts, with support from the United States Vocational Rehabilitation Administration. Respondents in the present study indicated a need for assistance in both academic and social life in such matters as admission procedures, orientation to the institution, special and career counseling and guidance.

3. Greater attention should be given to the educational needs of students with moderate hearing impairment of about 40-65 decibels. Data in the present day, and general knowledge, indicate that the needs of such students are not being met either in the elementary schools or in the higher educational levels. A hearing loss of this degree should not in itself become a sufficient handicap to prevent a student from securing his education largely through the regular school system. The evidence indicates that such is the case, however, in many instances.

Provision of special services to increase the chances of success for more deaf students in regular institutions of higher education would undoubtedly be expensive, since they would require a very low ratio of clients per counselor. However, such services would be much less expensive than the provision of specialized facilities. In addition to the lower expense of such a program, it is obvious that the vast array of higher education programs and facilities available to the general population can never be duplicated by special facilities for a small population. Such special facilities are needed, but the deaf person will continue to be confronted with a restricted range of educational choices and opportunities until ways are found to make available to him the facilities and programs available to the general population.