

Faculty Session 3: Application of Communication Expectations
Gary Behm
Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs
Friday, April 4, 2025

>> Jessica: Everybody, can I get your attention? This is session #3. One more left after this next month. I'd like to move along because we have a full agenda today. My name is Jessica La Sala I never introduced myself, so I figured I'd do it today. Better late than never.

We're going to be focusing on Brian, Gary and PJ. If we have time, then Matt Lynn will come up. If not, Matt Lynn's part will be postponed to May 2nd. Everybody ready and raring to go? Let's give it to Gary. Oh, OK.

>> Gary Behm: All right. Hello. Everyone happy Friday. Happy Friday again. I like being here because we're all together and it's not very often that we all get together like this. I know everyone's busy, we have varying departments, so it's nice to have everyone here together.

I know that our reason is for communication, but I think at some other point in time we should get together. Just have a nice social time with all of us. I really do miss getting together. I'm tired of seeing everybody on Zoom. I'd rather get together in person. So, thank you all for coming. Thank you for making the time to be here. I really appreciate that.

So, here's our agenda for the next hour. I know we don't have much time together, so we have a packed schedule. OK, so. Really, what we wanted to talk about is that the NTID budget has been approved at level funding, which means we're receiving the same amount as we did last year.

Gerry did propose a budget to Congress. And we did ask for an increase, because of benefits, salary increases, all sorts of varying increases that happen with our budget. In past years we've been successful in receiving that increase, but this year and last year, we have received flat funding. So, we will — well we last year we did get a merit increase and we had to look for ways to navigate that to make sure that we could use funds available in our budget to cover those merit increases.

So again, for the year 2025, receiving level funding again, we again need to sort of tighten our belts and save where we can to make sure that we can support merit increases. So, for 2026, we're really not sure what's happening based on the way the government is looking right now.

Budgeting is challenging. So we are not really able to do exactly what we want. We need to budget wisely and we need to focus on our access services limitations. We know we need more interpreters. Gerry has approved some positions. Gerry is actually now saying that we can't afford to open many new positions.

So there is a hiring freeze currently. And so we know that money doesn't grow on trees anymore. Interpreters don't grow on trees as well. So we don't, you know, we're not able to grow our interpreters, right, Jason? We can't grow them like that.

So I guess you first need a bachelor's degree in order to get an interpreter now these days, but, the point is, we have limited resources. And we also need flexible communication. In the 70s, we didn't have access services here NTID and we survived. I graduated, I went off and found a

job. So we can survive. I think that we're probably going to be faced with these types of challenges for the rest of our time here, and we just need to be flexible with communication.

Back in my day, a lot of professors SimComed and you know, we didn't know any better. ASL had just become an officially recognized language and so we did the best we could with our faculty SimComing. And people were able to be successful. But we know that times have changed, and we know that we need to be flexible. Especially with the advent of the ADA and the need for reasonable accommodations.

So reasonable doesn't always mean that an interpreter is guaranteed, reasonable could be communicating one-on-one through technology or handwriting notes. But it just means that we can be creative and flexible in our communication. There's not just signing only. We are preparing our students for working with hearing folks.

And so whatever way we can communicate with our students is helpful to them. It helps them gain experience. Especially if a student is a science major, we do need to teach them how to communicate directly with their peers, their coworkers. They won't always have access to an interpreter for everything.

So they need to have the attitude of being willing to figure out different ways. In school, kids have been used to having IEPs for communication, but we're just trying to figure out how we can accommodate needs and communication here on campus. So Jess, you're in the 4th session right, for May?

The goal is to create a draft right and everyone will see it anyways. The point is, is that after all of these discussions on communication in the classroom will create a draft of all of the ideas that have been processed through these sessions.

So we'll end up creating some guidelines that we'll be able to look back on for appraisals, for promotions and we'll have something in place that everyone will be able to reference. And it may not be a solution for everything, but there will be guidelines. PJ, the floor is yours.

>> PJ Graham: Terrific. OK. Brian and I will walk you through a couple of things. Today we're going to be talking about deaf ed in general and what it's looking, what it will look like for NTID for the next year or so. Right now take a look at the screen. Almost 89% of deaf and hard of hearing students in the US are mainstream now, 89%.

And what mainstream looks like, we're not going to talk about. Does that mean with an interpreter? Without an interpreter, there are many deaf and hard of hearing students without IEPs in mainstream schools and without 504s, they're just in a public school, perhaps with an interpreter, maybe not, and just making their way through.

The National Deaf Center has said 49% of deaf students have additional disabilities. Meaning they might have ADHD, autism, depression and the like. Different things that are happening in their lives. They have that broken down, if you're curious about the breakdown go to the National Deaf Centers website and they have the stats there. I could extend.

I only have an hour so I can't go into all of it. So use your time wise. We need to use our time wisely. Here at NTID we publish an annual report for 2024 and this is what we documented up here on the screen. 29% students here have additional disabilities.

So it's lower than the national level but the National Deaf Center is collected national numbers but NTID has a lower percentage, but still we have students with additional disabilities. The fourth point could be a little bit confusing. We have 14,000 school districts all over the US, 14,000 districts. So they did some research and found that on average, 6 deaf students from three to — age 3 to 21 are in a school district. Some districts might have more, others might have none, but this is an average of all the districts. So imagine that, six deaf kids in each district.

So deaf kids have probably never even met each other if they're alone in their school district. They might have that feeling of I'm the only deaf person in my school district or — I was one of two deaf students in my entire school district during my years in high school.

And both of us were oral deaf students in that particular school district. Now, obviously I sign. But I'm still in touch with the other deaf student that I grew up with. She's a lawyer, she does not sign at all.

But we still keep in touch with each other anyway. So, that just shows you that typical of what deaf people, deaf children are dealing with out there, the diversity in their communication and the like. The last point is GRI is Gallaudet Research Institute, they're not running anymore but the last survey that they did was in 2013. I'm looking at research here like from PhD or other people that might are collecting more research data. Currently trying to find that.

>> Brian Trager: So, this is a breakdown of communication preferences from the year 2024 of students who are cross registered here. And then you can see our pie chart here of the breakdown. The majority of students uses spoken language. While the rest are split evenly between using both sign and spoken language or using just sign language. So I think this is a pretty good picture of how the changes have occurred over time here.

>> Jess: Just remember that there are some cross registered students that take math/English at NTID for a semester to get started. So that's important to understand that some of them start here and then become bachelor students in the other colleges.

>> Brian Trager: So now at the associate level, students who come for SVP, these are numbers from the most recent fall. So these are our current freshmen. So what we are seeing now is that 26 students prefer sign language. 10 prefer spoken language and 27 prefer both.

So, at the associate's level we are more geared towards students who sign rather than students who use spoken language. But the point is, is that there is a mixture of communication, regardless of if they are NTID associate level or cross registered.

>> PJ Graham: The last point consists like in the past couple of years, SVP tends, we tend to see a mixture of communication, a mixture. Some years we have more signers, other years we have more students using a mixture of SimCom spoken and signing. So I just want to make sure that you understand that.

I gathered information from teachers of the deaf and also Dr. Buckley sent me emails about specific students who have come here. I've decided to explain about four particular students to give you just a snapshot or a spotlight of who is coming here to NTID.

First is for a cross registered student. The first student was an oral student, hard of hearing, member of the They were the vice president of the Black Student Union, was a member of choir for four years. Also was involved with many different activities. The second student who will be a

cross registered student, is accepted to NTID, just decided that they're coming to RIT/NTID. They applied to 8 different colleges.

And finally decided on RIT and the reason being because of access services, because of support services and the things that we have and the things that NTID are known for. Works two different jobs. That's really impressive.

A little bit off point here in this group of students Dr. Buckley told me one student told him that he flew from his state Gerry flew from to that student's state, told him, I, I've flown here to see you, I want you at NTID. That student's response was, I'm trying to decide between NTID and Penn State.

So the point being, deaf students have options out there. We have to try to encourage them to come to NTID to be able to support them here and show them that and show them what we are. Two students again have been accepted for associates level degrees. They're coming to SVP this year. Our first student is from a mixed deaf family.

Their father is hearing. Their mother is deaf. Has an older brother who goes to Gallaudet and an older sister who goes to a hearing college? Now, this student is not sure. Thinking about possibly going to a hearing college or NTID and finally decided on NTID, wants to major in business. Interesting in the bachelor's degree in business but thought I'll go ahead and get my associates in business first but wants to be in RIT's business school eventually but we'll start at NTID first.

At homecoming — was on the homecoming court. Our second student, really interesting. That particular student went to a School for the Deaf. Lives in the dorm on the deaf school's campus. But takes all academic courses at a mainstream public school. I didn't realize that you could actually do that.

They said that they're very nervous about coming to NTID because of their social skills. They feel that they don't seem to fit in at the deaf school because they're in a mainstream program all day. They don't necessarily fit in with the hearing peers because they can't hear. The interpreter use is not consistent. They don't often get an interpreter, so they often have to figure out how to deal with class, getting notes from the teachers.

So that student is really learning how to advocate for themselves and how to figure out how to get through the day. My last point is that students' parents are deaf and they often feel like they have to — they don't understand they have to deal with a VR counselor, so the student himself is already trying to navigate the system himself with parents who may not quite understand, they're first generation — he's a first-generation student, so parents aren't quite clear about the whole process, including VRM colleges in general.

>> Brian Trager: So the first point here is about how we can directly support student progress and communication without relying on a third party. So how can we directly communicate with our students? That's one of the questions that we're here to consider. We know that everyone has experienced different scenarios and we just want everyone to start thinking about this.

Also, thinking about the concept of the interpreter as a teacher. That's an issue. It's easy to pull in an interpreter and let them do the work. It happens sometimes, but are they there to make sure that they understand everything? Are they better at doing this than us? I think it's important that we consider direct instruction and compare it with instruction through an interpreter.

>> PJ Graham: Having interpreters is a great idea, it's terrific. At the same time, though, when we're trying to facilitate communication, to have so many adults in the classroom, trying the students, trying to figure out point A on the teacher, I explain about whatever the lesson is that I'm trying to teach, then it goes through the interpreter who translates it to the student. So, maybe we need to have a more communication mediation by saying that's not what I meant. Those weren't my word choices.

I need to know so that's you know, that's not how I would explain this. So you can have the best interpreter in the world with you, but even the best interpreter in the world can't see what's happening in a teacher's mind. So, they can provide — we can provide notes, we can provide support, but that direct teaching is the best way to one-on-one, help those students get the clear understanding of the material of what the teacher is trying to teach, so that's the point of the rest of this slide.

All teachers have a toolbox and strategies. You've got them, right at hand. And you bring that to your classroom. You know your students, you connect with them and build a relationship with them, as you work with them and support them. So, we can help bridge that communication gap. If a student is not understanding, you can then go read their facial expressions or see if they're actually following you or not.

And maybe encourage the student to paraphrase back what you just said so and ask them, did I explain that clearly? Am I helping you understand this? Do you need another example? Do I need to reteach this particular experience for you to understand it in a different way? And that will help people understand how to communicate, especially when it comes to content that interpreters may not even understand.

You all are subject matter experts in your field, and interpreters I mean they're fine, and they're interpreting, but they are often not subject matter experts. So, I can clearly teach a lesson, but when you bring in an interpreter, how can I then clearly teach this and also make sure that it's clear for the interpreter to be clear for the students?

So, with an interpreter and someone who has direct instruction, there are two different things happening here in the classroom. You have a group of students who are getting information directly from the professor, and then you have another group of students who are getting in our understanding from the interpreter's interpretation.

So, we have two sets of students who are getting different understandings in the same classroom. And that's what I want everybody here to think about. What do you want your students to take out of their class? What do you want them to bring out with you? Do the students have a full understanding of the information coming from the subject matter expert?

Or do the students have an understanding of information coming from the interpreter? Which not might not be 100% accurate. And of course it's not faulting interpreters I'm not faulting the subject matter experts, but it's just in terms of what communication is happening and how.

>> Brian Trager: I've been married to an interpreter for 23 years. And it doesn't matter what I teach her about my field, she's still not a subject matter expert. She's an interpreter. I'm not going to ask her to interpret one of my presentations on my topics or my field, it takes a lot to — a lot of cognitive brainpower to work through that. So, we need to be sensitive to that as well. So, when we have an interpreter we have to be conscious of how we are working with them to make sure that we take accountability. And make sure that we take responsibility for making

sure that the information that comes through the interpreter is clear. I think Chris and Gary, when they were in the CAT lab, we used to have this universal tool of the whiteboard.

We would write everything on the whiteboard. There are some people who didn't know sign. It was OK because we would find a way. We would write everything down on a whiteboard. So I think that maybe we need to go back to our roots and take ownership of what we're teaching, take ownership of our communication and code switch and accommodate the students that are in our classes.

>> PJ Graham: Research has already shown that many deaf people struggle with language. Language and social skills. Those two areas. So, for example, here we have a great DLS group of people that they're teaching English, so it's important to help deaf and hard of hearing students understand our children, I should say.

So college students understand English because it's a bridge for them to go into RIT courses. It's a bridge for them to go into different areas of what they need. But we also are great because we have ASLIE. And other departments that you are strong ASL users. We are one of — we are a very unique university that that celebrates both languages.

We have our ASL and we have our English and many colleges don't have those. When a college has ASL, you're probably learning ASL as a second language. Here we have ASL both as a first and a second language. We have English both as a first and second language. And that's what makes us so unique. So when it comes to bridging communication between those two languages, direct instruction is always the strongest.

I know that is well-documented proving that they have to have an understanding of both languages. English is funny. It's a very strange language. It has so many rules that I even care to ever understand. You have to add an S here, but you can't add an S there. You have to add and here or was or if or were. I mean, all of that English is complicated. I love ASL because it's so clear. Crystal clear to me.

English you have to add more words to make a point. And then you have to add filler words like wonderful, terrific, fantastic, amazing. But when you're teaching language in general through an interpreter, it can be really hard. Let's say if I'm teaching English and I sign hey, the boy is wonderful, I'm thinking wonderful, the word wonderful when the interpreter might think terrific.

But me, as the professor might have the vocabulary word is wonderful, but the interpreter speaks terrific and that's during it. Then during a spelling test, the deaf and hard of hearing students puts down terrific when the teacher has to say no, that isn't the word. The word is wonderful. Who's in the wrong here? The sign's right. The concepts right. But the interpreter and the professor have two different concepts of what's happening at the same time.

Now you can prepare interpreters, you can give interpreters your notes. You can tell the interpreter, hey, OK, this time, I mean, you said terrific, but I really mean wonderful or whatever. But that adds more prep, more time, more explanation to make sure everything is clear when direct instruction is coming from your own head. And teachers, I know all of you do, we all including him, including Brian, including Jess. We all learn to think, quickly, on our feet.

If a student doesn't understand, you don't go, hey, hold on, I'm going to explain to the interpreter. Now that student isn't understanding. I have to explain this to you and really expound on this and that, no, and then go back to the classroom. You have to think really quick

on your feet. And that sometimes causes the interpreter to go, oh, whoops, I'm in the wrong place. They changed topics.

And they have to re-center themselves. I encourage for heavy content courses, small class size. I know we have budgetary concerns, but when it comes to language instruction, class size really is essential, something we really need to consider.

Talking about class size. Incidental learning experiences, you know, when you feel this or, you know, when you did this or it's from experience you use those experiences to help the students understand. Going back to Brian and my point, many of those deaf and hard of hearing students have probably been isolated in their school districts. So that means they might not have access to those kind of learning experiences that you need to give them now.

So what I want to do is some do some breakout into small groups. You can just group up. You know, I'm not going to take notes or anything, but I want you to think about two questions. Ask each other these two questions. In your classroom, who is the teacher? And who is the communicator? Are they the same person? Are they different people?

What do you do if there's a breakdown in communication? How do you repair it? While you're still teaching? While you're still trying to explain the content? And how do you know if there's a breakdown in the communication? Are the interpreters helping you saying I'm sorry there's a breakdown here or are the interpreters just rolling along?

Maybe even the interpreter's not even aware that there was a breakdown happening and the interpreter thinks they're interpreting everything correctly, but within the teacher's mind, they have a different word that the interpreter's using. That's the first question.

Second question is on the board. What are the benefits or challenges using direct instruction? So I want you to discuss in your groups. Do you have a question back there?

>> Audience Member: Just a clarifying question, could you clarify what you mean by direct instruction?

>> PJ Graham: Define direct instruction means me. I'm the teaching without the use of a third party in the room, without using an interpreter, me teaching whatever content, using whatever tools I have, writing, signing, spoken English, mine, visual aids, everything where I'm going from point A myself to point B the students. Where I have A to B.

But I also have, let's say, an interpreter for C, which is not always direct instruction because I, as a deaf person really don't know often if I am or if our word choices are the same. OK, so I'm going to give — you group up in about 5 or 6 people. And we'll have 10 minutes to have a discussion on these questions. Really, I'm going to give you 5 minutes or so. Okay go.

[breakout discussions]

>> Jess La Sala: Could you remind your neighbor that we're about to start up again?

>> PJ Graham: So it's PJ. All right, I walked around the room. I saw a lot of really great conversations. I have a few points to make. NTID and RITs needs are different. Right now we are the 4th college in terms of who receives the most interpreting or access services, so from the 9 colleges of RIT, we are at #4 So we are using a lot of access services here as a college who specializes in direct communication, direct instruction.

So while we understand that there isn't as much, there's not so much direct instruction at RIT and that but there is a high percentage of deaf students in those colleges, though, some of them are using captioning. And then there are also some colleges that don't have as many students in their programs. There are students who rely on their hearing.

There are other incidentals. So what we're trying to do is be an example of how we can provide direct instruction for our deaf and hard of hearing students. In my experience deaf families typically send their children to deaf schools. Am I right?

So why are they sending deaf children to deaf schools? It's because they know they're going to get direct instruction. There are some cases with some deaf schools. It's possible that the family, in their experience at a deaf school, would rather send their deaf child to a mainstream program. But at the same time, if we're thinking about access and what access looks like.

That's basically my point that I'm trying to make. So just from my observation of your discussion, you had really good discussion. You talked about direct instruction as well as some other information.

>> Brian Trager: There is some discussion what I saw about paying attention are the expectations when students come here. I think that that's because some of the students are told they will have full access, and I think that's another issue that we need to figure out what is the message that we're sending to the outside, to potential students.

I think that that's something that we have to consider. I think we have to change a lot. We have changed a lot over the years and we didn't realize, you know, how many different factors have impacted us, the students. Our parents out there encouraging their students to come here. What is the message that we're sending?

I think that's really critical that we think about that because that message sets the expectation when a student gets here, if we say we have this, this and this. Then that is what students think about. So we have to think about the message and how we can set expectations and what we're promising to the students.

>> PJ Graham: So we're not going to have a full discussion, the discussion that you see up there, but. If you are using interpreters in the classroom, you have to think about the interpreter's role as well. What is the interpreter's role? Because we do see the same problem in the K through 12 system.

Often, we see the interpreter's role as being a repairperson, a teacher, a subject matter expert, and a teacher's aide. I've heard stories of an interpreter who is managing behavior or is giving punishments to the deaf and hard of hearing students. And I'm not saying that that's happening here at NTID.

Although there are several times when I did have an interpreter say to me, do you want me to tell them? But I'm talking in class and they're interrupting me to say, should I tell them this? So if you do decide to work with an interpreter, be conscious of what they're there for.

And like Gary said earlier. Access Services are limited because of funding. So how can we maximize communication? And then on top of that, we have diversity of students. We have deaf and other disabilities. We have to make sure that our instruction is clear for everyone. You are

all experts in your fields. You all know how to work with deaf and hard of hearing students. So the power is yours to figure out what we can do to get the content to our students.

The last point up here is if you are working with students, that will increase communication, you can provide content examples if you're instructing directly. There will be less communication repair necessary if you're doing it directly yourself. All right, So we'll turn it over to Matt or not?

>> Jess La Sala: Yes? Somebody has a question back there or a comment? Katie. I don't want to take over but Matt said stay up here. That's fine. Stay up here.

>> Katie Schmitz: No, no I'm not taking over. But what's missing is the role of a student. I mean the student participation. It's not about us. Doing more. Oh, the role of the student, we need to clarify that I think, because that hasn't been addressed. So maybe the next meeting we'll talk about the students I just want to put that on the floor, that's all. Sorry.

>> PJ Graham: This is PJ. I agree. Right now we were talking about direct instruction. We would like to include students via student panel or some way of sharing their experiences here. So it might be a good thing for Jess to organize something like that and do a communication workshop with students. Maybe you have thoughts about that, Jess?

>> Jess La Sala: May 2nd's meeting, we're going to be talking about your, remember, Gary mentioned that before we're going to start working on some guidelines for the summer. I can try to rearrange it to include maybe a student panel to share their experiences as well. I'm also curious about the student's thoughts about their own communication in the classroom.

What supports do they need within the classroom? I think it would be good to see what their thoughts are. Also, as professors we might not know for sure how to include them in supporting the classroom communication, but always know it's still our responsibility to provide that opportunity for that. Gary, do you want to say anything?

>> Gary Behm: This is Gary. Brittany Taylor is here. That's good. She's our director at DAS and she has been very proactive in learning about our students. Once students are accepted for fall Brittany and some of our folks as well have been meeting with the students to determine their communication needs, their communication styles, and that's a really important aspect of this because that information helps Brittany to decide whether this is a person who maybe using captioning or interpreting.

And so I think that it's really helpful for us to know communication preferences because Brittany gets all of this information and then we can be prepared for fall. So we can see what the needs may be. It's possible that, you know, K through 12 they've had an IEP and so decisions have been made on their behalf and maybe they haven't worked with an interpreter before.

So what I'm saying is that that's part of our responsibility is doing our homework before the students get here. Brittany, did you want to share anything? I think you should come up here. Yeah. So ironically Brittany you probably know more about the students than our faculty.

>> Brittany Taylor: Oh, this is a surprise.

>> Gary Behm: OK, sorry I put you on the spot.

>> Brittany Taylor: For RIT, we do interview the students. We meet with them before they arrive for their first year. We Zoom with them. We haven't had the opportunity to connect with the NTID

students. That would be a benefit for us as well, to find a way to connect with NTID students before they come here because once they arrive on the first day, we are clueless about their needs and how we can best fit their communication needs in the classroom. It would really be helpful for us to know the NTID students.

>> Gary Behm: So if Brittany doesn't know the information faculty also don't know. So none of us have any idea what the anti D student communication needs are. Even though we have tried to implement something like this, it's still not in place.

>> PJ Graham: Also just want to make an extra point here, this is PJ. We know that interpreters and faculty may not know what communication the students are coming in with, but also keep in mind that the students themselves may not know what communication they're coming in with. I mean, I've seen students who say oh I'm an oral student. My mom says I speak beautifully. And then they come here and everyone is kind of shocked because the professors at RIT can't understand them, communication doesn't happen.

So that self-confidence and every self-pride just goes out the window and they have to realize that they have to learn an entire new language. You know it takes five to seven years to learn a foreign language especially academically speaking. So we have to think about the students who think their English skills are terrific and then they realize they have to learn ASL. So we have to keep that in mind as well.

>> Jess La Sala: Agreed. This is Jess, I just have a few words to add. In our syllabus, we usually have a communication section when I teach a course. I don't usually have a syllabus to share with class the first day. I usually would like for the students to help design their class and determine what they want to learn, what they're looking for in that class.

And I usually have a syllabus template to follow because there are certain things that must be included in every class, but I also want to see what the students are looking for. So after the first class and I determine what it is.

Typically it's in a line with my syllabus, but they usually have a lot of really good ideas that I can add to the syllabus that we'll use for the rest of the semester. So that is something that we consider, we could consider for the communication section. Maybe take a chance to talk about communication on that first day.

Figure out what it is that your class needs. Come to some sort of communication agreement for the rest of the semester because every class is different. So this was just something I was thinking of when I was sitting here observing, and maybe something for us to think about as a whole.

All right it's 11:57. We have finished on time. The last couple we did not finish on time. Anybody else have any final words? All right, looks like you're all ready to take off, so see you May 2nd.