**The experiences of deaf and hard of hearing students at a Queensland university:
1985-2005**

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Abstract

This article reports on the experiences of deaf and hard of hearing students at a Queensland university that offers an extensive deaf student support program. Seventy-two current students and graduates of the program since its inception twenty years ago completed a survey about their experiences, highlights, challenges, and use of communication tools and support services at university. Findings indicated that, while many of the students used the services provided by the university's Deaf Students' Support Program, other deaf and hard of hearing students did not use these services. There were some differences in outcomes between the two groups. The study results reflect, both quantitatively and qualitatively, students' levels of satisfaction with the services they received. Overall, the students had a high rate of graduation, comparing favourably with other university students, and the available range of generic and special support programs and facilities were influential for their study experiences and graduation outcomes.

Keywords: Academic and social experiences; Communication tools; Deaf and hard of hearing students; Support services.

In Australia, few universities have specialist support programs for deaf and hard of hearing students; more commonly, the universities' generic disability support offices provide services and hire interpreters and tutors as needed. Griffith University, which in 2006 had an enrolment of more than 32,000 students across five campuses in south-east Queensland, is one of the few with a specialist program. Griffith was the first Australian university to establish designated support services for students who are deaf or hard of hearing, and its Deaf and Hard of Hearing Student Support Program (DSSP) continues to provide arguably the most extensive support services to these students in Australia. The DSSP began at the Mt. Gravatt College of Advanced Education in 1985, and since the merger of the College with Griffith University in 1989 has maintained and extended its services to deaf and hard of hearing students across all campuses of the university. In addition, The DSSP provides specialist services to other universities in South-East Queensland.

In 2005, a project was conducted jointly by Griffith University's DSSP and Centre for Applied Studies in Deafness. The purpose of the project was two-fold. First, it aimed to examine the evolution of designated support services in university education in Australia for deaf and hard of hearing students and to explore the university experiences of these students and graduates. The second aim was to explore the workplace experiences of these students and graduates (reported in Punch, Hyde, & Power, in press). Here, we report the findings of the first part of the project, the university experiences of graduates and current students.

It is important to examine and evaluate the supports offered to deaf and hard of hearing postsecondary students, given the functional, environmental, and attitudinal barriers faced by these students and the high rate of non-completion of degree programs among this population (Lang, 2002; Spradbrow & Power, 2004; Stinson & Walter, 1997).

Classroom participation and a sense of academic and social integration are acknowledged as important for the academic success of all postsecondary students (Tinto, 1993), but are often lacking for deaf and hard of hearing students (Stinson & Walter, 1997). Pointing out that, once provided with services such as interpreting and note-taking, deaf and hard of hearing students are often expected to be on an equal footing with their hearing peers, Stinson and Walter further explained:

Consideration is rarely given to the fact that the student is being deprived of access to the full spectrum of life on the college campus. Such isolation, or lack of integration into the educational community, may be an important cause of attrition among deaf persons attending college. This point especially relates to the access students have to the social life of the institution. (p.22)

It has been recognized that, even with interpreting and note-taking support, deaf and hard of hearing university students receive less information from lectures and tutorials than their hearing peers. In a study of sign language interpreting for deaf Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) students, Marschark, Sapere, Convertino, and Seewagen (2005) found that the students did not acquire as much information from lectures as their hearing peers even with experienced interpreters who were familiar to the students. In Australia, Napier and Barker (2004) conducted a study involving four deaf university students in a panel discussion about their perceptions of interpreting in lectures. These students reported that they never accessed 100% of a university lecture, with estimates of how much they understood through sign language interpreting ranging from 50% to 90% of lecture material.

In a larger study, Foster, Long, and Snell (1999) examined deaf RIT students' access to academic information and their sense of belonging and academic engagement. They found that the deaf students indicated similar levels of classroom engagement and communication ease as their hearing peers, but did not feel as much a part of the "university family" as their hearing peers. The deaf students were more concerned about the pace of instruction than the hearing students, and in their responses to questions about communication tended to focus on the role of interpreters, stressing the importance of high levels of interpreter skills. In addition, interviews conducted with instructors revealed that while most instructors made at least a few accommodations for deaf students, others felt that they were under no obligation to modify their instruction, believing that the provision of support services such as interpreters, note-takers, and tutors met students' needs and provided them with full academic access. Most instructors were reluctant to invest time in training and professional development in how best to accommodate deaf students, citing the small percentage of these students in their classes.

Similarly, a pilot study involving in-depth interviews with two deaf students at Australian universities found that the students reported inadequate levels of access to interpreting services and a lack of awareness of deaf students' needs among academic staff (Komesaroff, 2005). In a study involving videotaped lectures in British universities, Harrington (2000) revealed some of the communication difficulties that can arise from the interactions and dynamics between lecturers, interpreters, and students. The study also surveyed interpreters and deaf students who had received interpreter services and found that many of the interpreters lacked the skills or training necessary to interpret at university level (Traynor & Harrington, 2003).

The needs of postsecondary students who may be described as hard of hearing, that is, who prefer an oral-aural method of communication and use their residual hearing, often supplemented by hearing aids or cochlear implants and speech-reading and who do not require sign language interpreting, have also been examined. Many students who communicate using speech, audition, and speech-reading often appear to interact with

relative ease in many favorable listening situations, but may be at risk of “slipping through the cracks” in regard to accessing content in lectures and other teaching situations (Spradbrow & Power, 2004). In a study of hard of hearing students receiving services from Griffith University’s DSSP, Spradbrow and Power found that over three-quarters of the eighteen students reported that they missed content in their lectures and tutorials, despite note-taking support and the DSSP’s contact with academic staff members who had these students in their classes.

Further, it is of concern that some hard of hearing students are receiving no support services because they do not identify themselves to student support programs or, if having identified themselves, choose not to use the services available. On leaving high school, young people can no longer rely on support services provided on the initiative of parents or educators, but must be responsible themselves for identifying their needs and appropriate accommodations and requesting services (English, 1997; Luckner, 2002). It may be that some deaf and hard of hearing school-leavers are not adequately prepared with the knowledge, skills, or confidence to do this. As well, it is possible that they deny or minimize the communicative and social disadvantages associated with their hearing loss in an attempt to avoid stigmatisation and negative reactions from others (Richardson, Long, & Woodley, 2004; Schroedel, Kelley, & Conway, 2003). Some students may not seek support services simply because they are unaware of the difficulties they could face in postsecondary education institutions, where teaching and learning conditions are very different from those in secondary schools. An Australian study investigating the transition to tertiary education of eleven deaf and hard of hearing students found that many believed that they had been unprepared for the hearing-related difficulties they encountered at colleges of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) or university (McLean, Osborne, McAuliffe, Housden, & Revens, 1999). Like the other two Australian studies cited above (Komesaroff, 2005; Napier & Barker, 2004), the study involved relatively few deaf and hard of hearing participants.

The current study provided the opportunity to examine the university experiences of a larger group of deaf and hard of hearing students and the services provided by an Australian university’s deaf student support program from the perspectives of students and graduates over twenty years.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 72 former and current students of Griffith University. The majority of respondents (70%) were recent graduates and current students, having attended university in the years from 2000 to 2005, probably reflecting the fact that these students tend to be easier to track and contact than students who left university a longer time ago. In addition, 25% of the respondents had attended between 1991 and 1999, and 13% had attended from 1985 to 1990. Of the 50 respondents attending from 2000 until the time of filling in the survey (for most, in late 2005), 21 indicated that they were current students. (A few respondents have been included in more than one time span as they had returned to Griffith for postgraduate study, making the total greater than 100%.)

Respondents were asked to report their level of hearing loss across five categories: mild, moderate, moderate-severe, severe, and profound (reflecting categories used by Australian Hearing, a government organisation providing audiological services to children and adults). Twenty-two people (31%) reported their hearing loss as being in the mild/moderate range; 26 (36%) in the moderate/severe range; and 24 individuals (33%) indicated that they had a profound hearing loss. Four respondents (6%) reported using a

cochlear implant, and 38 respondents (53%) used hearing aids all or some of the time. The majority of respondents (57%) reported that their hearing loss had occurred at birth or by the age of three years.

The majority of respondents (68%) reported that spoken English was their primary means of communication in everyday life, and 32% reported that Auslan (Australian Sign Language) was their primary means of communication. Similarly, the majority (60%) identified primarily with the hearing community, while 14% identified with the Deaf¹ community and 26% reported a bicultural/bilingual (Deaf/hearing) identity.

Measures

A mailed survey contained both forced-choice and open-ended questions. Forced-choice questions collected information about respondents' primary means of communication (e.g., spoken English, Auslan, Signed English), primary cultural/linguistic affiliation (hearing, Deaf, bicultural), type of school setting in both primary and high school, degree of hearing loss, time in life when hearing loss occurred, and use of hearing aids or cochlear implants. They asked about courses studied at university, years of attendance at university, and reasons for choosing to study at Griffith University. Additional forced-choice questions asked about communication tools used and DSSP, generic, and external support services accessed while at university.

Open-ended questions asked participants to describe both major challenges and highlights from their time at university. Respondents were also asked to make recommendations to deaf or hard of hearing individuals contemplating tertiary study. Participants were invited to write about their experiences at whatever length they chose. In this way, the quantitative results were extended and elaborated upon by the qualitative results from the open-ended questions.

Procedure

Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from Griffith University. The university's Student Equity Services compiled a list of all past and current students who had identified on their enrolment form that they had a hearing loss and/or who had contacted or used the DSSP. The total number identified was 262. Of these, potential contact information was available for 180. After follow-up letters, emails, or telephone calls, the final number of completed surveys returned was 72. Non-response could often be attributed to lack of current address details, as this was the main way of attempting contact.

Results

Completion of study programs

University records indicated that, of the 262 students who had identified as being deaf or hard-of-hearing on enrolment at university, 41% had completed the degree in which they were enrolled. In addition, 24% were currently enrolled as continuing students and a further 13% were currently enrolled, but with approved deferral of their studies. Sixteen percent of students had withdrawn from their studies for personal reasons, and 2% had been excluded for "poor academic performance" (meaning they had failed at least one semester's work).

Less than half (44%) of the 262 students who identified themselves as being deaf or hard of hearing on enrolment at university over the 20 year period had accessed the DSSP

services. Of those who accessed the services of the DSSP, 45% had completed the degree in which they were enrolled. Of those who did not access the DSSP, 37% had completed their degree. Further, a higher proportion of those who had not accessed the DSSP had deferred or withdrawn from their studies.

Leaving aside those students who could not be expected to have graduated from Griffith at the time of the collection of the data, that is, those who had deferred their studies or were continuing students, the completion rate for the group was 70%. For students who had accessed DSSP services, the completion rate was 76%, and for students who had not used DSSP services, the completion rate was 65%.

Primary and secondary school settings attended

As shown in Table 1, only a small proportion of respondents had attended special educational settings such as special education units (SEUs) or special schools, where it is likely they would have been educated using signing (usually Signed English)—14% in primary school, and 19% in high school. The majority of respondents reported having had no support from services for deaf or hard of hearing students during their schooling (57% in primary and 58% in high school) or had received itinerant teacher support (29% in primary school, 21% in high school).

Insert Table 1 about here

Reasons for choosing Griffith University

Respondents were asked the reasons they had chosen to study at Griffith University. Respondents overwhelmingly indicated that the major reason for their choice was the availability of their desired course of study, with 76% citing this reason. In addition, 21% reported that their awareness of Griffith University's support services for deaf and hard of hearing people was a reason for their choice, and 6% cited knowing other deaf or hard of hearing people who had studied at Griffith. Fourteen percent indicated that other reasons, including being a Griffith staff member, proximity to home, liking the university's overall teaching structure, and the likelihood of small classes, influenced their choice of university.

Programs studied

Twenty-seven of the study's 72 respondents reported having studied education or special education programs at diploma, bachelor's, or master's levels, and it appeared that most of these individuals were still working in the field of deaf education. In addition, twenty other programs of study were reported by the remaining respondents. These programs included law, science, arts, social sciences, visual arts, human services, health sciences, communication, multimedia, information technology, and hotel management. These data reflect the fact that, since the 1980s, access for deaf and hard of hearing individuals has extended to cover a wide range of programs and professions.

Use of generic university supports

Respondents were asked about their use of generic university services such as counselling and face-to-face and online learning assistance programs. The most commonly used generic service was learning assistance, reported by 31% of the respondents. Eighteen percent indicated that they had availed themselves of personal counselling, 14% had

received career advice, 7% welfare services, and 10% had accessed student associations. Fifty-three percent of survey respondents did not use any of these generic services.

Use of external supports

As might be expected for any student, with or without a hearing loss, family and friends appeared to be an important support external to the university to many of the deaf and hard of hearing students in this survey, with 47% citing family and 40% citing friends as a support. In addition, 18% cited other Deaf people, while only 6% cited support from the more formal source of Deaf community organisations. Twenty-three respondents indicated that they did not access any external supports during their studies at university.

Use of communication tools and DSSP support services

Of the supports offered by the DSSP, the most commonly used was note-taking. As shown in Table 2, 65% of the respondents reported that they had used peer manual note-taking² and a further 19% had been provided laptop computer note-taking. Interpreters were used by 36% of the students and 35% reported having used technological and communication aids, listed as hearing aids, FM aids, induction loops, telephone-typewriters (TTYs), telephone relay services, and SMS messaging. No respondents indicated that they had used video conferencing. The category *Other* was chosen by eleven respondents, who listed such supports as taping tutorials, email, captioned videos, a peer support group, and specialist tutorial assistance. In addition, another eleven respondents checked no items, suggesting that they did not avail themselves of any of these tools and services.

Insert Table 2 about here

The quantitative data picture of students' use of communication tools and services while at university was illuminated by qualitative data from the extended written responses to two questions, one asking about most useful communication tools, the other asking about major challenges experienced with studying at university. A large number of respondents nominated manual/peer note-taking as the communication tool or support they found most useful. Respondents also mentioned interpreting as a support service they especially appreciated. Typical responses included:

Interpreters a huge plus—allows for real time interaction in lectures and tutorials. Manual notes were good to refer to and to use for revision later.

Interpreters (Auslan) allowed me to take in all info that was presented. Note-taking allowed me to watch interpreter. This allowed maximum understanding.

However, several responses qualified this appreciation, pointing out the sometimes problematic nature of interpreting or note-taking. Unavailability of interpreters was sometimes a problem, and a few comments were made about the uneven quality of interpreting and note-taking. Typical responses were:

Trying to get my input (Q's & A's, comments, etc.) to the lecturer via interpreter is challenging in trying to be quick to avoid time delays. Sometimes, interpreters/note-takers were not available.

Peer note-takers—never found very useful—they are always another person's version of things rather than an objective account.

Unprofessional note-takers—I failed a crucial exam because note-taker failed to note/mention some essential information.

Several responses described the usefulness of technical aids such as hearing aids and FM systems; for instance:

Hearing aids were vital to my success in understanding lectures.

I am lost in lectures without the FM system. On the occasions it hasn't been working I really struggle to understand what is going on. It is invaluable.

In relation to challenges, the majority of responses came from students who relied on their residual hearing rather than sign language interpreters in classes. These responses described their difficulties in lectures and, to a lesser extent, tutorials. Many problems involved the traits or behaviors of some lecturers. Mentioned repeatedly were lecturers with foreign accents, lecturers speaking indistinctly or not using a microphone, lecturers speaking while walking around the room or writing on the whiteboard, and lecturers not repeating audience responses or questions. A few respondents stated that lecturers lacked understanding of their hearing difficulties. In addition, problems associated with rooms were reported, such as poor acoustics and noise from air-conditioning. In tutorials, classroom noise, chatter, and the general group discussion posed problems for respondents. Responses about challenges included:

Hearing in a large lecture theatre. Some lecturers spoke indistinctly and in spite of sitting close to front and with aids it was difficult to hear. Sometimes when showing slides there would be no light on his/her face so it was difficult to lip-read.

I had a huge amount of difficulty hearing in computer classes as I would be required to listen, follow instructions and take notes all at the same time.

Hearing teachers [was the greatest challenge]. I practically taught myself the entire coursework through reading materials only and my previous experience.

However, examples of supportive lecturers were also given, as in this response:

Some of the lecturers were extremely understanding. One particular subject was “supportive environments” [and it] was exactly that—the lecturers were “great”, caring, understanding, and very knowledgeable.

In addition, the support provided by the DSSP was frequently mentioned and obviously appreciated. For example:

My year at Griffith was my favourite because of the support provided to me (FM, note-taking, interpreting and social-emotional support). I didn't spend so much time trying to catch up on what I missed and so had spare time to actually relax and not be so tired. I also made more friends and was not so lonely. For once, I actually felt like I was intelligent rather than not very bright and having to study so much harder to understand what others understood with ease.

A current student offered this advice to deaf and hard of hearing people contemplating postsecondary study:

Go to Griffith University and utilise all the resources and supports they offer—you probably won't survive at another university where their support doesn't understand the difficulties of being hearing impaired.

Social experiences at university

Several respondents commented that the social aspects of university life constituted an area of difficulty and challenge. Feelings of social isolation were intertwined with academic life and frequently resulted from difficulties in group work situations, as these responses illustrate:

In groups and studios...there is a lot of group work and group discussion and I have felt quite isolated at times.

Greatest challenge was mixing with peers—other students—trying not to remain isolated—this was always the challenge. You learn a lot from others and the sharing. Much less assignments in teams. These were hard.

Others mentioned the difficulties socialising in noisy environments such as the canteen, and it was pointed out that interpreters were not available for “social or impromptu meetings.” However, the data also contained numerous examples of the satisfaction participants gained from their social interactions with other deaf people. The university provided opportunities to meet other people who were deaf or hard of hearing and to learn to sign, opportunities that some participants had not experienced previously. In response to a question about highlights of their university experiences, comments included:

Meeting other Deaf people – not feeling so isolated about being Deaf.

My very first Deaf lecturer! That was the best and most exciting moment of my life. I would be floating on cloud nine for days after the lecture.

It was the first time in my schooling that I had support. Having other Deaf and hearing impaired students in the same course, “I wasn’t the only one”.

Friendship with many people in all areas in the uni, either deaf or hearing. Being able to broaden my network of deaf people after growing up in an entirely hearing world during my school years.

Discussion

It is interesting to note that more than half of the students who had reported their hearing loss at enrolment did not use the services of the DSSP. The reasons for not taking advantage of services specifically provided for students with hearing loss are not clear. It may be that some of these individuals did not consider that they needed help; for instance, students who had received no support at school (and over half the respondents reported receiving no support at school) or only the occasional visit from an itinerant teacher of the deaf during their final years of high school may have entered university with no expectations of, or perceived need for, support related to their hearing loss. It is possible that some students were not aware of the availability of the DSSP.

The students who did use the DSSP showed a slightly higher rate of completion and lower levels of withdrawal and deferral from their study programs, suggesting a benefit to those students who availed themselves of the support services.

It is difficult to compare the Griffith deaf and hard of hearing students with national and other University groups as data for these are only available in the form required for reporting to federal education authorities. The overall rate of degree completion of 70% for

this group of deaf and hard of hearing students calculated over the last 20 years is difficult to compare with Griffith University as a whole, as University statistics are kept on an annual basis (for example the annual 'retention' rate for bachelor's degrees in 2005 was 78.8%). However, national university degree completion rates have recently been estimated at around 71% (Marks, 2007; Martin, Maclachlan, & Karmel, 2001). Further, specialist US institutions for deaf students such as the National Technical Institute for the Deaf and Gallaudet University report overall undergraduate graduation rates as being 55% for NTID (Rochester Institute of Technology, 2005) and 40% for Gallaudet (personal communication, David Armstrong).

The primary and secondary education of the majority of respondents appeared to have been conducted in mainstream settings with either no support services or with itinerant teacher support. Only 14% in primary school and 19% in high school had been educated in special education units or special schools. This is not entirely unexpected, given that it is estimated that 84% of deaf and hard of hearing children in Australia now are educated in regular classes, usually with support from itinerant teacher services. These students mostly are not provided with sign language interpreting services (Hyde & Power, 2003; Power & Hyde, 2002). In addition, some of the current study's respondents may have received no specialist support because their hearing loss was degenerative or occurred later than early childhood, or because they attended school at a time or place where specialist educational support was unavailable. In any event, it is apparent that few of the respondents would have been exposed to Auslan during their primary or secondary education. However, a substantial proportion of the current study's survey respondents indicated that they preferred to communicate primarily in Auslan (32%) and considered themselves part of the Deaf community or as having a bicultural identity (40%). Thus, it appears that their experiences at Griffith University, where they had the opportunity to mix with other deaf students, perhaps for the first time, and to learn Auslan and access sign language interpreters, may have acted as an acculturation influence for some students, leading them to develop a Deaf or bicultural identity. This is consistent with evidence found by others such as Bat-Chava (2000) who proposed that some deaf individuals growing up in hearing homes and schools with a culturally hearing identity shifted to a bicultural identity in adolescence or early adulthood after discovering sign language and encountering deaf role models. This is supported by the finding of Power and Power (in preparation) that 30% of the members of the Australian Association of the Deaf had been educated orally and mostly had only come to signing after leaving school. Certainly, the data from the open-ended questions on the survey confirmed that their exposure at university to Deaf social, cultural, and linguistic experiences was highly valued by some respondents.

It is heartening that this group of deaf and hard of hearing individuals studied a wide range of courses at university. Although teacher education, in particular the specialist strand of the education of the deaf, was the most commonly reported degree course, the wide range of other fields of study, from law to hotel management, suggested that these deaf and hard of hearing people were not allowing their hearing loss to circumscribe their career aspirations and choices. Similarly, while 21% reported that they chose Griffith University because it provided support services for people who are deaf or hard of hearing, a more commonly reported reason was because the university offered their preferred program of study.

Happily, some respondents reported that they had received support and understanding of the implications of their hearing loss from some of their lecturers. However, reflecting findings from previous studies (e.g., Foster, Long, & Snell, 1999; Komesaroff, 2005), some participants in the current study revealed dissatisfaction with

lecturers or tutors who made insufficient accommodations for the needs of the deaf or hard of hearing student in their class. It is important that academic staff understand that supports such as note-taking and interpreting do not necessarily provide full access to the content of lectures and other teaching situations. Lecturers and tutors need to be aware of activities within their control that tend to reduce this access, and activities they can undertake to improve it. As Spradbrow and Power (2004) pointed out, attempts to liaise with all academic staff who have a deaf or hard of hearing student in their class in such a large, multi-campus institution are made difficult because of the numbers involved and the inability to find times to suit all. Individual approaches have proved more productive, and the facilitation of direct communication between students and their lecturers is a major aim of the DSSP.

Several responses indicated participants' frustration with the inadequacies of the note-taking system, including the issues of a lack of professionalism of note-takers and the subjective nature of another person's notes. Although peer note-takers are trained and the quality of their notes monitored, in some subjects there is not always a trained note-taker in the class, given the wide range of courses studied by deaf and hard of hearing students at the university. Consistent with findings from other studies in Australia and elsewhere (e.g., Foster, Long, & Snell, 1999; Komesaroff, 2005; Marschark et al., 2005; Traynor & Harrington, 2003), some respondents reported the occasional unavailability of interpreters and the uneven quality of interpreting. However, there were many positive comments indicating participants' appreciation of the interpreting services they received. Indeed, many participants reported satisfaction with and appreciation of all the supports, including note-taking, interpreting, and social-emotional support, provided by the university's Deaf Student Support Program.

A shortage of qualified sign language interpreters who can cover the required range of academic material and classroom situations is a problem experienced in the United States (Marschark et al., 2005) and Britain (Traynor & Harrington, 2003). In Australia, the shortage of suitably qualified Auslan/English interpreters continues to pose a challenge to the provision of adequate interpreting services at university level. As at June 2005, the number of National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) accredited Auslan interpreters was estimated to be 722, with only 92 of these having achieved the full Interpreter level which is considered necessary for specialised areas of interpreting, including in postsecondary education (Napier, McKee, & Goswell, 2006). This is a situation that does not seem amenable to solution in the short term.

Reflecting concerns expressed in the literature (Schroedel et al., 2003; Spradbrow & Power, 2004), many of the difficulties described in the data involved those students who may be described as hard of hearing, that is, who preferred an oral-aural method of communication rather than signing and used their residual hearing and speech-reading rather than interpreters in lectures. These students repeatedly expressed their frustration with environmental conditions that impeded their hearing and speech-reading in lecture and laboratory situations. Poor room acoustics, poor lighting, and background noise arising from air-conditioning are factors that need to be addressed where possible.

In the area of social factors, which are considered crucial to the success of deaf and hard of hearing students in higher education (Lang, 2002; Stinson & Walter, 1997), two major findings emerged from the current study. First, many students appeared to have enjoyed satisfying friendships and a new sense of belonging through their contacts with other Deaf and hard of hearing people and, perhaps, a sense of learning about Deaf culture and moving toward a Deaf or bicultural identity. Second, in contrast with this positive aspect of their university experience, and reflecting the concerns of Stinson and Walter,

some respondents struggled with social and academic interactions with their largely hearing peer groups and expressed feelings of social isolation.

We found the use of both quantitative and qualitative question formats to be useful in this study, as the qualitative responses both exemplified and elaborated upon the quantitative findings.

This study investigated the experiences of students who are deaf or hard of hearing at one Australian university that has a designated Deaf Student Support Program. In Australia, many such students attend other universities, TAFE colleges, and private vocational training colleges that do not have support programs specifically for deaf and hard of hearing students. Little is known about the experiences, retention and completion rates, and vocational outcomes of these students. It seems likely that students in settings without specialist services and with fewer or no other deaf or hard of hearing students would experience greater difficulties than those in settings with designated deaf student support programs. Further research is needed with this population. Meanwhile, the findings should inform practices designed to support deaf and hard of hearing students in a range of postsecondary education settings.

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Table 1. Primary and secondary school setting (N = 72)

	Frequency	%
<i>Primary school</i>		
Regular school, no support from visiting teacher	41	57
Regular school with support from visiting teacher	21	29
Regular school with SEU	7	10
Special school	3	4
<i>High school</i>		
Regular school, no support from visiting teacher	42	58
Regular school with support from visiting teacher	15	21
Regular school with SEU	11	15
Special school	3	4
Other	1	1

Table 2. Communication tools and DSSP supports used at university (N = 72)

	Frequency	%
Interpreters	26	36
Manual/peer note-taking	47	65
Laptop computer note-taking	14	19
Technological aids	25	35
Other	11	15
None	11	15

Word count: 6,390

¹ We adopt the convention of using “Capital D: Deaf” for persons who consider themselves members of a linguistic-cultural minority community and “lower-case d: deaf” for describing the audiological term of loss of hearing. “Bicultural” individuals felt they fell into both categories.

² Griffith University has a program which trains student volunteers as note-takers for fellow students who have a disability