

Current Situation and Problems On Deaf / Hard of Hearing Student Services  
in Japan

: Based on the Results of A Nationwide Survey

by

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## 1. Introduction

Since the year 2000, several large-scale surveys on the situation of students with disabilities studying in universities and colleges have been conducted. For example, the Japan Association of National Universities conducted a survey in 2001, the National Institute of Multimedia Institution in 2001, and the Japanese Association on Higher Education and Disability in 2004. From such surveys, it has been found that students with disabilities are enrolled in about half of all the universities, colleges, and junior colleges throughout the country, and that to promote the advance of students with disabilities to higher education, on-campus support systems are being developed. The Nation-wide Support Center for Students with Disabilities, which has been conducting surveys on 4-year universities in Japan every year since 1994, reports that in the past, support to students with disabilities in universities were mostly centered on the provision of hardware. However, it reports that recently, the provision of human support is increasing. 93 universities now provide note-taker referral services. These surveys, however, are very general and are aimed at students with all different disabilities. Consequently, they do not give detailed information on the support to students with hearing disabilities, such as who and how competent these note-takers are, whether or not there is a training system for note-takers, how much they are paid, etc. This survey was conducted for the purpose of obtaining more detailed information on the support being provided to students with hearing disabilities.

## 2. Survey

Period: conducted during July-August, 2004

Respondents: 1258 4-year universities and junior colleges throughout Japan

Method: Questionnaire forwarded by mail (post)

Requested a response from the person in charge of registering/supporting  
students with disabilities

Response rate: 57.2% (universities 61.5%, junior colleges 50.8%)

### 3. Results

As a result of the survey, the following points were clarified:

- (1) Students with hearing disabilities are enrolled in about 30% of the universities and junior colleges throughout the country (237 schools: 287 if we include the data for the past 3 years), and note-taker support is provided in about half of these educational institutions (132 schools). Of the institutions providing note-taker support, about 60% (89 schools) pay the note-takers for their services. In nearly 50% of these institutions, an administrative staff coordinated the note-taker referral services (74 schools), and some form of training was provided to note-takers (71 schools). In some of these universities and colleges, a support center or committee for students with disabilities is being established, and an official note-taker referral service system is being developed within the school administration. On the other hand, some schools still have to rely on mothers of the students and other personal acquaintances to provide note-taking support.
- (2) An analysis of the number of students with hearing disabilities enrolled in each university or college revealed that of the schools in which students with hearing disabilities are currently enrolled, 80% (185 schools) have 3 or less than 3 such students. Only 6 schools had over 10 students with hearing disabilities. 50 universities and colleges replied that they had deaf and hard of hearing students during the past 3 years, but that they had graduated and currently have no such students on their campus. On the other hand, 34 universities and colleges replied that they registered a student with hearing disabilities for the first time this year. This situation is evidently making it hard for individual universities and colleges to build-up know-how and experience on provision of support services to students with hearing disabilities. The survey revealed a need for cooperation and exchange of know-how among schools on the development of a support system.
- (3) From the survey, it was found that at present, about 650 students with hearing disabilities are currently enrolled in universities and colleges in Japan, and that 90% of these are undergraduates and only 5% (about 30 students) are attending graduate schools. However, the major type of support provided on a nationwide scale is note-taking. This type of support is not suited to graduate schools, which are centered on research and

discussions. Consequently, support to students in graduate courses are probably provided case by case within each research room, making it difficult to grasp an accurate picture of their actual situation. As the support system itself develops to cater for wider needs, we can presume that it will become easier to grasp the situation in graduate courses as well.

- (4) We received reports on various endeavors to improve the quality of the support services for deaf and hard of hearing students, such as the establishment of a good communication/consultation system within the department and also between the coordinator and the students with hearing disabilities, holding meetings several times a year of all persons involved in the provision of support services, the provision of sign language communication to support students with hearing disabilities, holding seminars and training courses to improve the skill of the sign language interpreters, etc. Such reports lead us to look forward to further advance from just a referral system for information guarantee to a totally new phase of development.
- (5) Also there is a nationwide movement to establish an independent focal point for students with disabilities. 37 universities/colleges already have such a focal point, and in 16 of these schools, a specialized personnel is staffed for the purpose of serving students with disabilities. The survey also revealed that 3 schools have employed a full-time sign language interpreter, and 4 schools have employed a note-taker to support students with disabilities.

#### 4. Conclusion

Concerning the support to students with hearing disabilities in higher education institutions, about half of the universities/colleges in which students with hearing disabilities are enrolled have support services such as the provision of note-takers, and that these support systems are rapidly being improved. However, the majority of the support services being provided today are limited to note-taking, and the students are unable to select the type of support they want. The most widely employed system in higher education institutions throughout Japan is “ to recruit volunteer students, to teach them the basic skills of note-taking, and to coordinate their referral as note-takers to students with hearing disabilities in the classroom ” . In many cases, this system is not suited to postgraduate studies. As yet, a good system to support graduate students in specialized fields has not been developed. Also, it can be assumed that small junior colleges and colleges for practical studies requiring a lot of practical training would find it harder to recruit volunteer

students who can offer free-time in between classes to support students with disabilities. These are all cases which need to be solved. Lastly, from this survey we found 7 universities/colleges which have employed a full-time sign language interpreter and note-taker in order to offer more intensified support. We can anticipate that this number will continue to increase and that these schools will be a model for the development of a new support system for students with hearing disabilities.

Note: This survey was conducted as part of the activities of the Tsukuba College of Technology Research Center on Higher Education for the Hearing and Visually impaired, WG on Counseling/Support Room for Post-secondary Education of Students with Visual or Hearing Impairments, and the “ Postsecondary Education Network of Japan for Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing ” (PEPNet-Japan) which has its secretariat within the WG. PEPNet-Japan is a part of the activities of PEN-International and is funded by the Nippon Foundation.

Translation

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