

Improving Outcomes for Deaf Students by Addressing Barriers and Strengthening Systems

National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes
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AHEAD 2025
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Access Check

- Visual Descriptions
- Interpreters
- Captions
- Other Access Needs

We ask you to join us in creating a culture that
reflects...

Access and Shared Engagement

and

Civility and Respect

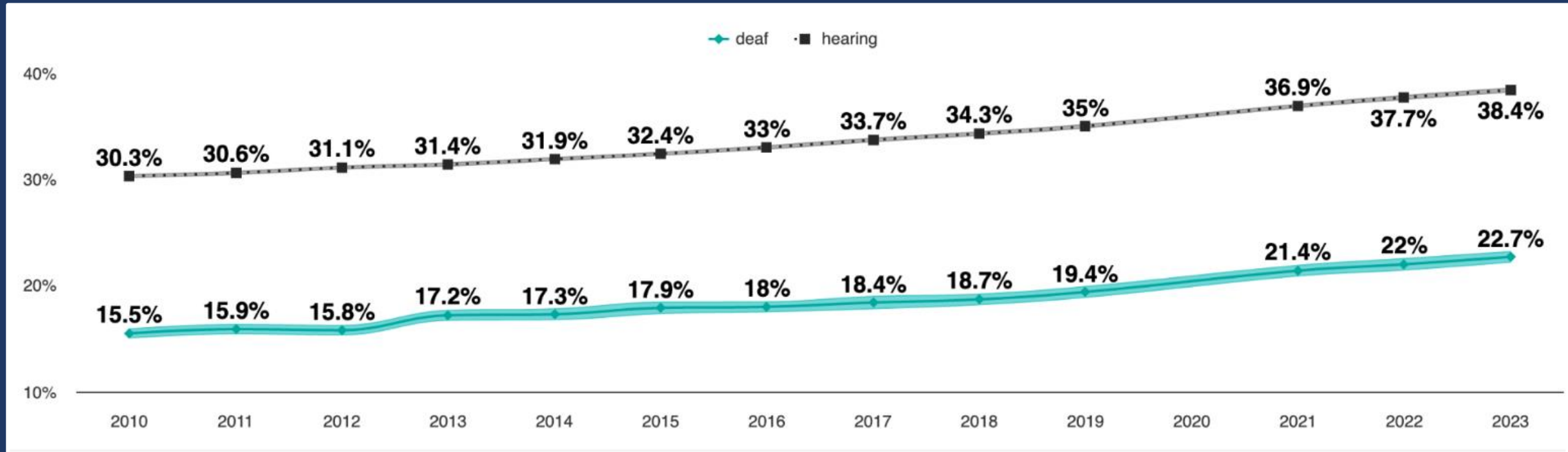
...this week and in all aspects of our organization.

Labor and Land Acknowledgement



Apache, Arapaho, Cheyenne, Diné (di-NAY), Lakota,
Puebloan, and Ute Nations

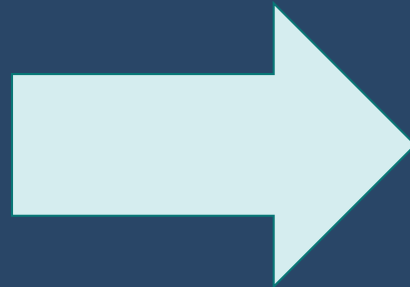
Bachelor's Degree Attainment or Higher (2010-2023)



(Bloom, Palmer, & Winninghoff, 2025)

Deaf Students are Not the Problem

Failure to
complete college
degrees shows
problems with
the **students**.

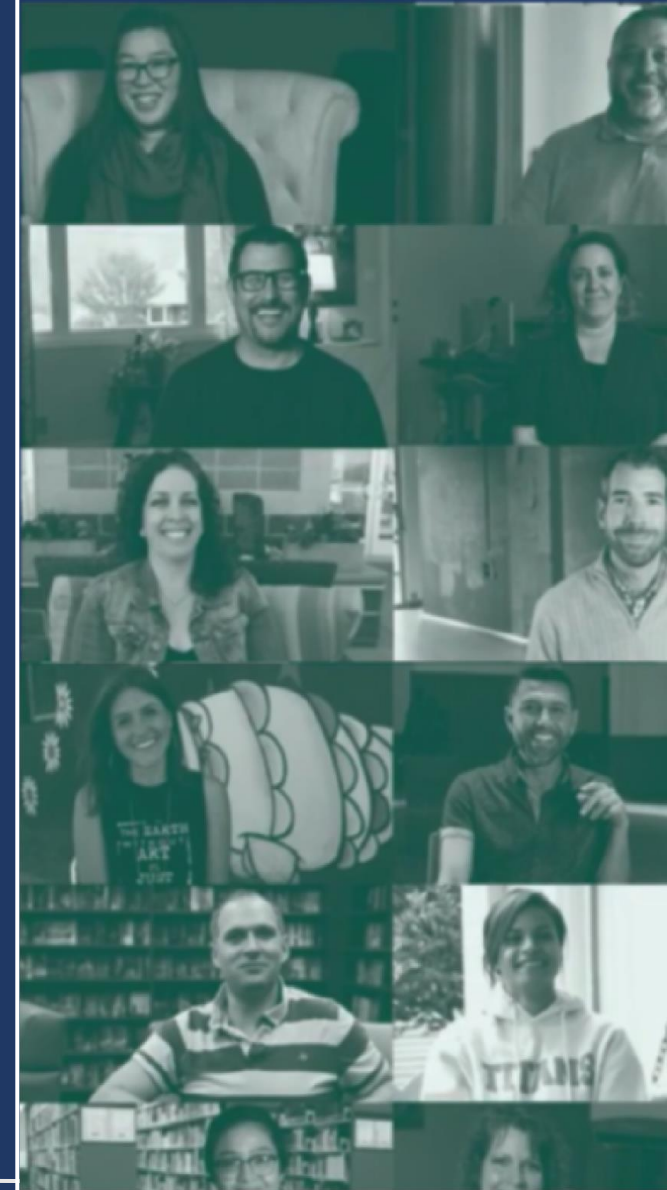


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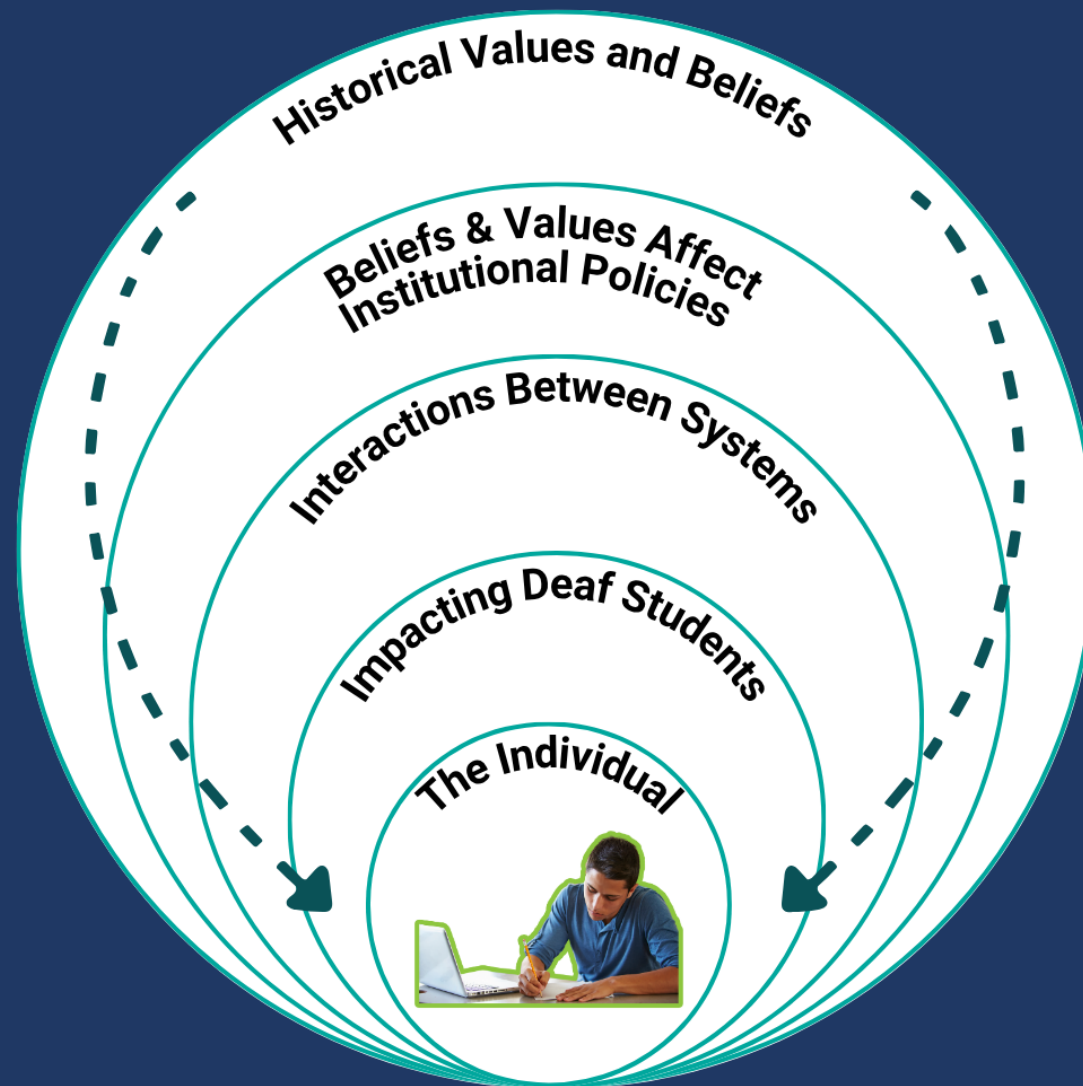
We hope to shift perspectives.

Learn. Connect. Transform.

Our mission is to share information,
networks, and strategies to improve
continuing education and training for deaf
people.



Deaf Students Within an Ecological Systems Framework



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Monolingual English-Dominant Norms

This norm assumes that communication should only happen in written and spoken English even in multilingual settings.

The assumption that English-spoken language is essential for communication and participation in society. This belief is deeply embedded in social norms and practices and marginalizes those who rely on alternative modes of communication.

How Systems Create Barriers

And what to do about it!



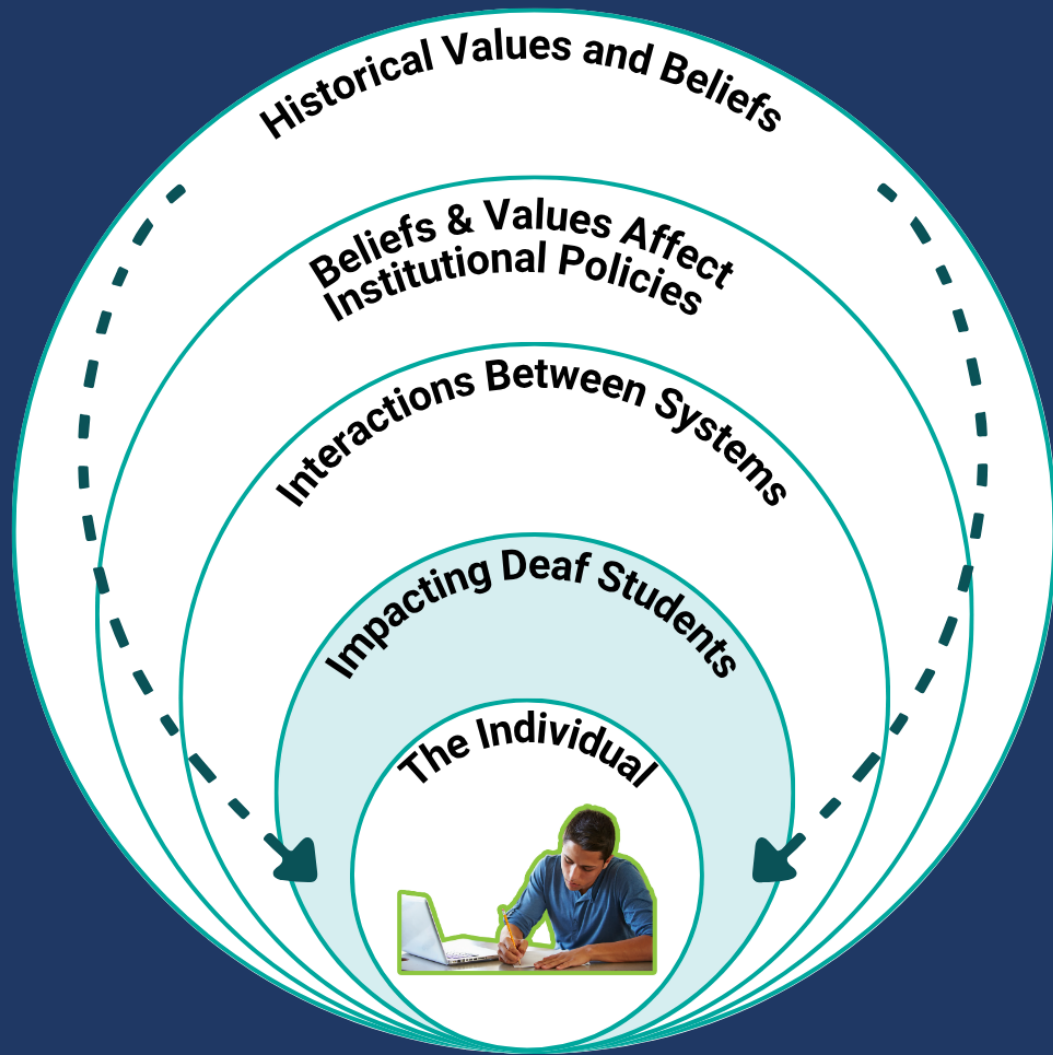
When Access Stops at the Classroom Door

Scenario: Deaf Student at Mid-Sized Public University

Student
approved for
interpreters
only for
registered
classes.

Interpreter
requests for
extracurricular
activities require
lengthy approval
process.

DS Office cited
“limited
funding” and
“academic-only”
accommodation
policies.



“Academic-Only” Policy Impact on Deaf Students

”Academic-Only” Policy Impact on Deaf Students

1. Access to academic only.
2. Exclusion from campus community.
3. Increased “Deaf Tax”

Outcomes on Student's Experience

"I had interpreters in class but none for tutoring or extracurriculars. That lack of access made me feel unsupported and led to me leaving after two years.
I lost my identity as a Deaf person."

- Student

(NDC Video Archives, 2022)

Rethinking Access: What Are You Doing (or Not Doing)?

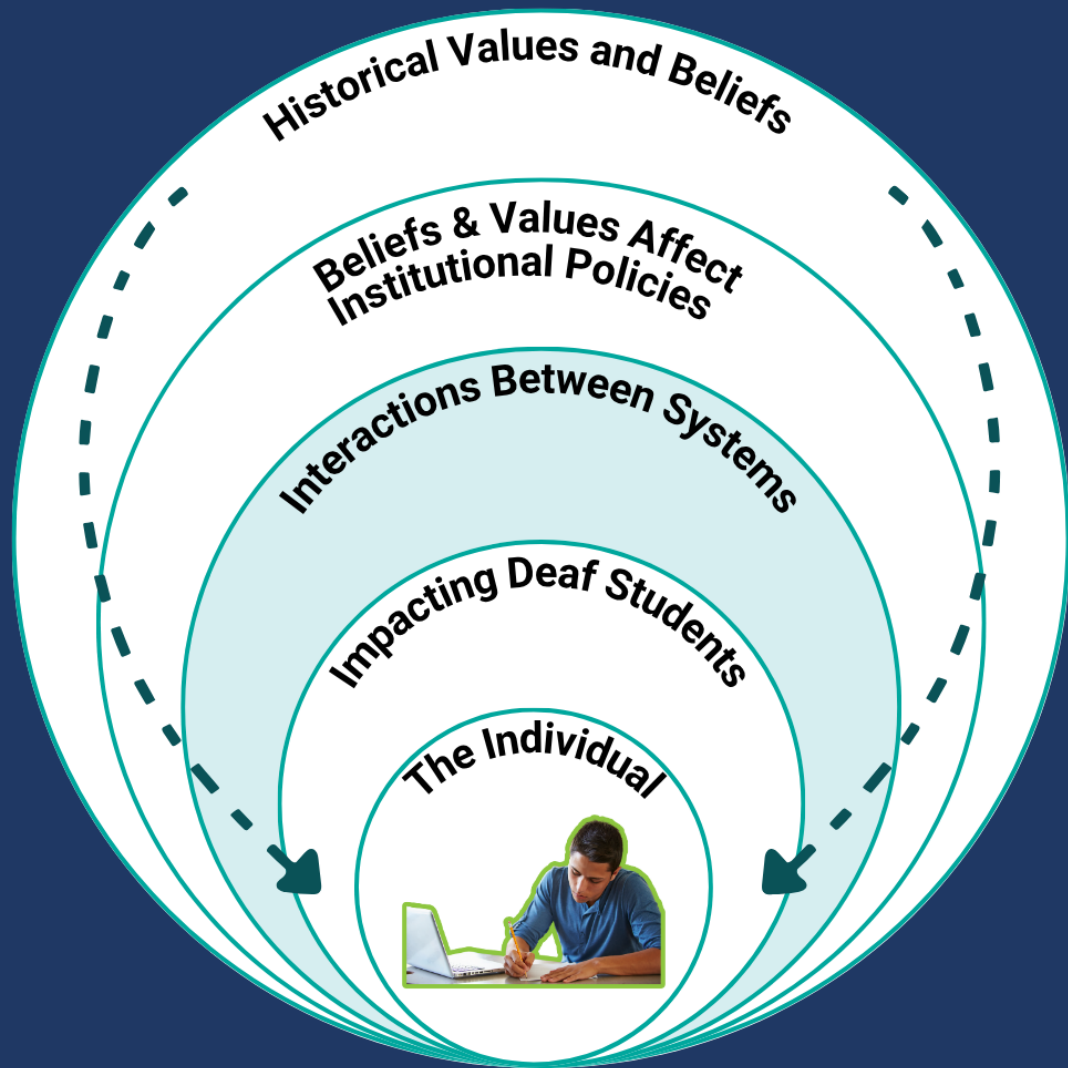
Are your access conversations with deaf students focused only on class, or do they include the full campus experience?



Shifting Practice

→ Build trust and rapport with deaf students through an iterative and interactive process





System Interactions: Power Dynamics and “Academic-Only” Policy



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System Interactions: Power Dynamics and “Academic-Only” Policy

1. Lack of expertise compounds harm.
2. Emphasis on ‘reasonable’, not ‘effective’ access.
3. System-led approach, not student-centered.

Outcomes on Relationships

“Disability resource office needs major education and training for Deaf students. Their empathy and understanding are severely lacking.”
-Deaf Student



Disability services professionals responded confidently about accessibility services compared to campus wide engagement efforts.

(Palmer et al, 2022)

Access in Focus: What's Working and What's Not?

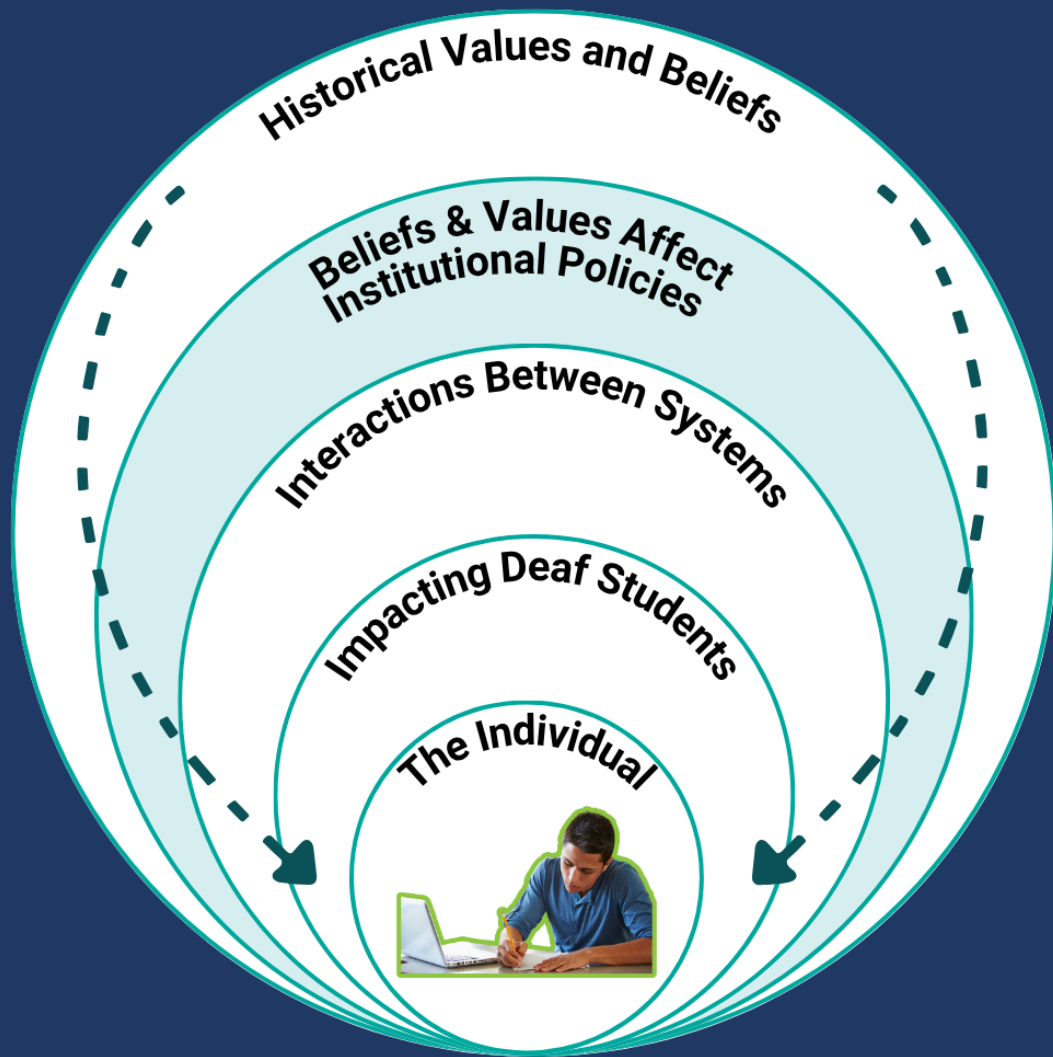
Do you see your role as supporting deaf students beyond the classroom?



Shifting Practice

→ Seek professional development and training to build cultural competencies





“Academic-Only” Access: How Policy Drives Systemic Values

“Academic-Only” Access: How Policy Drives Systemic Values

- 1. Budget reflects hearing-majority priorities.**
- 2. Accommodations are a commodity.**
- 3. Funding system favors departments without deaf students.**

Outcomes on Institutional Policy

“I wish that interpreters and accommodations were provided for campus activities that are not necessarily tied to an academic class. For example, office of disability services does not provide interpreters for student organizations or campus events and many times organizations are small with limited funding.”



Thinking Deeper: Systemic Values on Cross-Departmental Collaborations

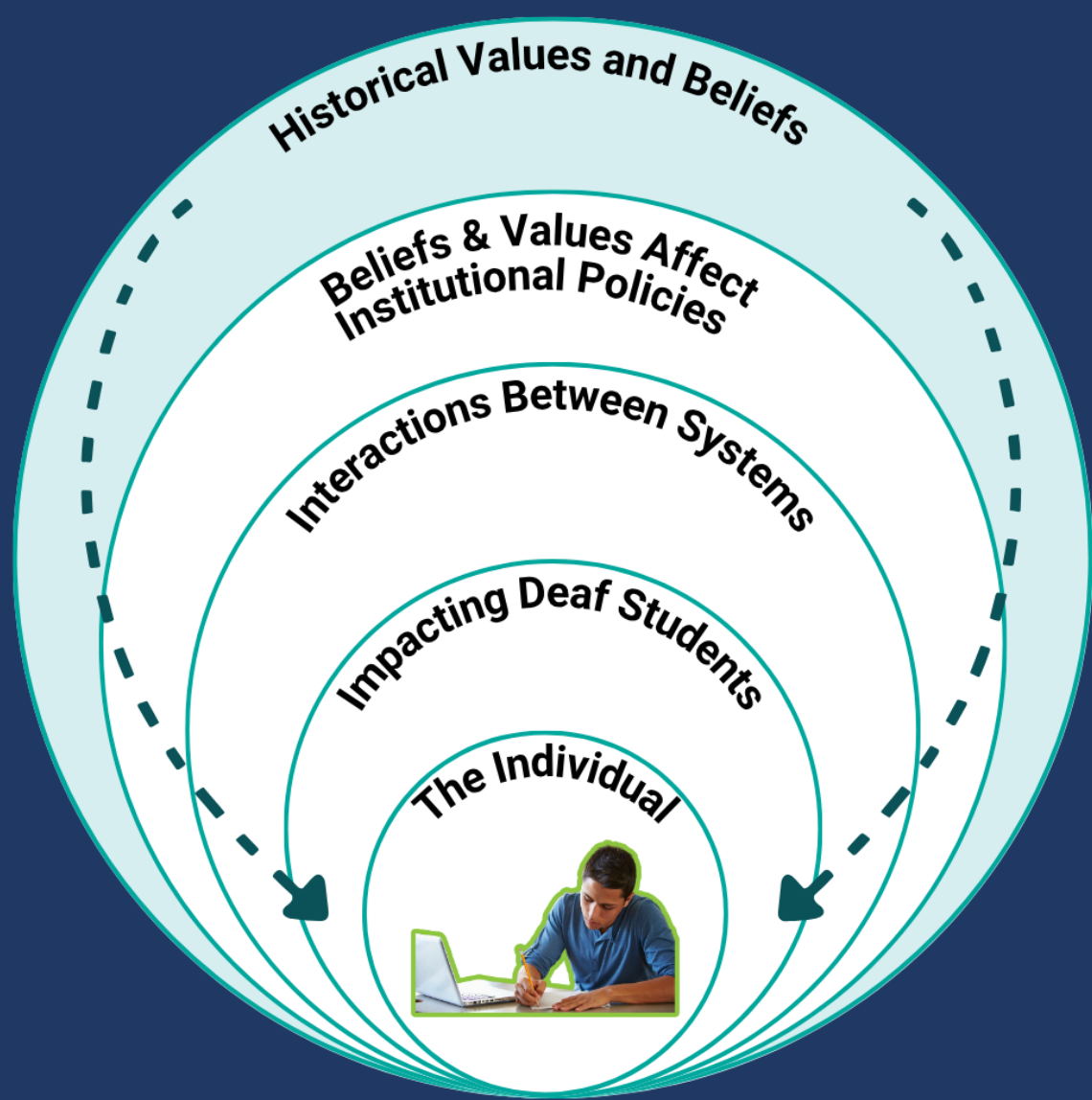
Do other departments on campus know how to facilitate interpreting services if requested?



Shifting Practice

→ Promote
campus-wide
practice of
shared
accountability
for access.





Historic Patterns Reinforces “Academic- Only” Policies



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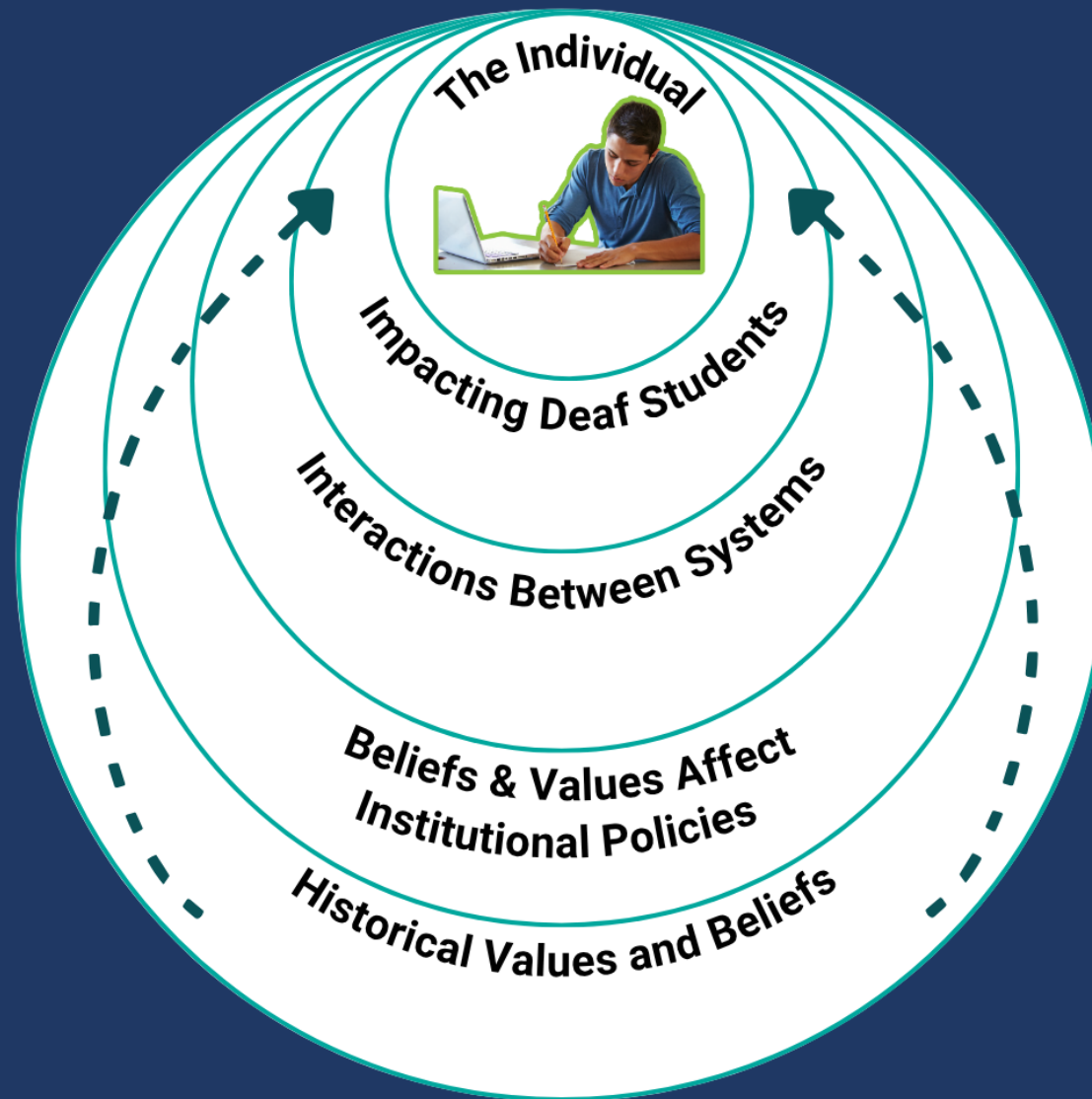
1. Deafness is a medical condition that can be addressed
with tools.
2. The Monolingual English-Dominant norms result in valuing
English over ASL.
3. Civil Rights laws forced retroactive access.

Shifting Practice

→ **Increase representation and visibility of deaf students and faculty on campus.**



Centering Deaf Students: Rethinking Access and Engagement



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Takeaway

**‘Academic-only’ policies aren’t just about processes—
they reflect systemic failures.**

The use of this framework reveals that inaccessible decisions are shaped by a combination from administrative policies, hierarchical power dynamics, and societal beliefs.

Effective access requires intentional commitment.

What Can You Do About It?

Adopting a Student-Centered Approach

Advocate to admin that accommodations are more than just logistics, but affirmation of identity

+

Shift from deficit-based practice to asset-based practices.

Reasonable → *Effective*

Move beyond 'academics' to holistic access and campus engagement.

Adopting a Student-Centered Approach



NDC Resources & Support



help@nationaldeafcenter.org

www.nationaldeafcenter.org/learn



Thank You!

Have a question or need guidance?

NDC is here to support you!

**Stop by our booth #316 to sign up for a 1:1
consulting session!**



Session Evaluation



tinyurl.com/AHEADFeedback

Your feedback helps shape future programming.

Thank you for attending!

