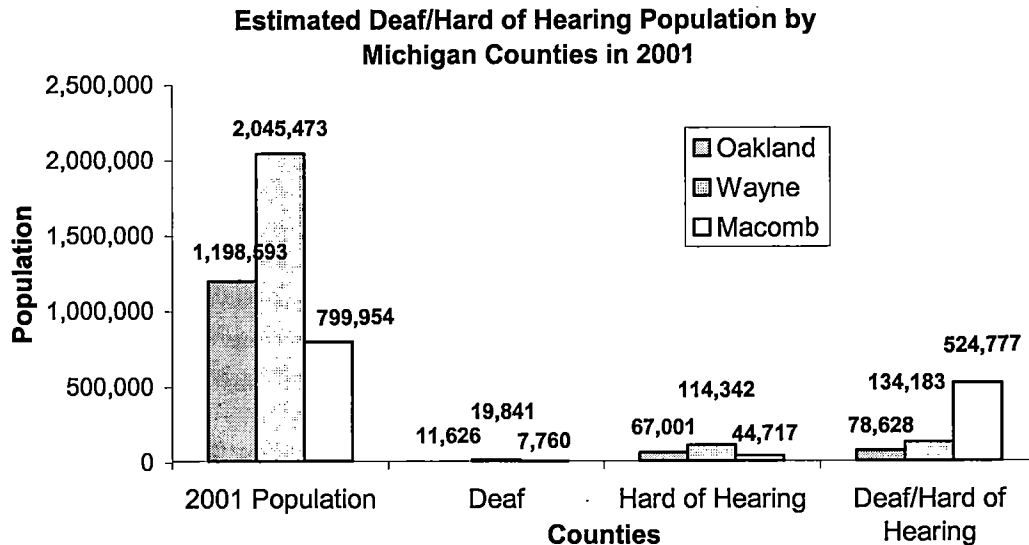


**Oakland Community College
American Sign Language (SLS) Labor Market Analysis
July 2003**

Executive Summary

Overview

In order to prepare students for successful careers in American Sign Language as an Interpreter/Translator, the marketing team at Oakland Community College would like to determine who employs these individuals, exactly what employers are looking for in a potential employee, preferred educational requirements, the demand for individuals specializing in the field, typical career path(s), salary range, the impact of education/certification on salary and the typical work environment. This report evaluates different organizations, agencies, institutions and companies that are known to utilize the services of translators/interpreters, are members of organizations that provide assistance or support for the deaf community, and/or are affiliated with organizations dedicated to aiding of the deaf community in Oakland, Wayne and Macomb counties.



Key Findings

- "Sign language for the deaf was first standardized in France during the 18th century by Abbot Charles-Michel l'Epée. French Sign Language (FSL) was brought to the United States in 1816 by Thomas Gallaudet, founder of the American School for the Deaf in Hartford, Conn.
- The National Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) started in 1965 and has only been certifying interpreters since 1972.
- A Sign Language Interpreter is specially trained to assist in communication between the deaf, hard of hearing and hearing communities.

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Key Findings Continued

- Although certification or a formal collegiate education in American Sign Language is not a requirement, most employers generally prefer it.
- They work in many different environments, part-time, full-time, freelance and salaried.

Methodology

Information in this report was derived via U.S. mail (brochures, booklets, and catalogs), institution or organization websites, and telephone or person-to-person conversations with colleges, schools and/or organizations contacts.

The History of American Sign Language

“Sign language for the deaf was first standardized in France during the 18th century by Abbot Charles-Michel l'Épée. French Sign Language (FSL) was brought to the United States in 1816 by Thomas Gallaudet, founder of the American School for the Deaf in Hartford, Conn. He developed American Sign Language (ASL), a language of gestures and hand symbols that express words and concepts. It is the fourth most used language in the United States today.

In most respects, sign language is just like any spoken language, with a rich vocabulary and a highly organized, rule-governed grammar. The only difference is that in sign language, information is processed through the eyes rather than the ears. Thus, facial expression and body movement play an important part in conveying information.

In spoken language, the relationship between most words and the objects and concepts they represent is arbitrary—there is nothing about the word “tree” that actually suggests a tree, either in the way it is spelled or pronounced. In the same way, in sign language most signs do not suggest, or imitate, the thing or idea they represent, and must be learned. Sign language may be acquired naturally as a child's first language, or it may be learned through study and practice. Like any living language, ASL grows and changes over time to accommodate user needs. ASL also has regional varieties, equivalent to spoken accents, with different signs being used in different parts of the country.”¹

The Sign Language/Interpretation Profession

According to the Family Independence Agency (FIA), Sign Language Interpreting is a relatively new profession. The National Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) started in 1965 and has only been certifying interpreters since 1972. When Public Act 204 (Deaf Person's Interpreter Act) was passed in Michigan, DOD (The Division of the Deaf) realized that there were few nationally certified interpreters. PA (Public Act) 204 was the first step in addressing interpreter quality when persons were not certified. PA 204 of 1982 states:

An act to provide for and regulate the use of interpreters in administrative and judicial proceedings and in certain other instances; to establish standards for interpreters; and to provide compensation for interpreters, and to provide for promulgation of rules.²

The State Quality Assurance (QA) Screening program was modeled after the national RID's program. The QA program has improved the access for deaf and

¹ <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0200808.html> American Sign Language: June 11, 2003

² http://www.michigan.gov/fia/0,1607,7-124-5460_7260_21376-1487800-html Family Independence Agency: May 03, 2003.

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hard of hearing persons and, as a result, the quality of interpreting services is better. QA interpreters follow the same code of ethics as nationally certified interpreters and must obtain continuing education units yearly to keep their qualification level current.³ The State of Michigan certification levels are described in detail below.

QA LEVEL III:

Intermediate Skill Level: demonstrated ability to interpret/transliterate communication between hearing and deaf or hard of hearing persons with a minimum of 88% accuracy. Recommended for situations where there may not be an opportunity for the interpreter to stop communication for clarification. Examples: education/tutorial situations, informal meetings and daily living skills, training, public meetings, interviews.⁴

QA LEVEL II:

Limited Skill Level: demonstrated ability to interpret/transliterate communication between hearing and deaf or hard of hearing persons with a minimum of 74% accuracy. Recommended for one-to-one or small group situations where the interpreter may or may not have the opportunity to stop communication for clarification. Examples: education/tutorial situations, informal meetings and daily living skills training.⁵

QA LEVEL I:

Restricted Skill Level: demonstrated ability to interpret/transliterate communication between hearing and deaf or hard of hearing persons with a minimum of 60% accuracy. Recommended mainly for one-to-one situations where the interpreter has the opportunity to stop communication for clarification. Examples: Social/recreational situations, non-technical and informal meetings.⁶

Nature of the Job

A Sign Language Interpreter is specially trained to assist in communication between the deaf, hard of hearing and hearing communities⁷. This individual must be focused, accurate and dedicated to their duties and responsibilities. They must keep in mind that their ability to effectively train and communicate, has a direct impact on the degree of understanding the individual or individuals interpreters are intended to serve. Many with educational

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backgrounds and/or certification in the Sign Language/Interpretation field typically find employment with state and local governmental agencies as well as the private and public sectors.⁸

Work Environment

Interpreters work in a variety of settings including medical, legal, religious, mental health, rehabilitation, performing arts, and business.⁹

Education and Training

Although certification or a formal collegiate education in American Sign Language is not a requirement, most employers generally prefer it. The Americans with Disabilities Act requires qualified interpreters/translators in a variety of settings. It states "To satisfy this requirement, the interpreter must have the proven ability to effectively communicate..." One important measure of an interpreter's proven ability is professional credentials.¹⁰ Those credentials may include a certificate, a college degree and/or passing an assessment exam measuring the necessary skills. The National Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) and the National Association for the Deaf (NAD) provides national certification testing accepted by employers. In addition to these agencies, state agencies may also provide testing on the state level, providing acceptable credentials for employers.

Salaries vary depending on many factors including geographical location, education, experience and credentials.¹¹ Freelance interpreters might earn anywhere from \$12-\$40 an hour. Interpreters employed by agencies earn anywhere from \$15,000-\$30,000 per year depending on the agency and level of credentials. Highly skilled, credentialed interpreters may earn anywhere from \$40,000-\$50,000 per year.¹²

⁸ http://www.lcc.edu/communication/sign_lang/careers/ Lansing Community College: May 02, 2003.

⁹ <http://www.rid.org/terpfag.html> Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Interpreting and ITP Frequently Asked Questions: May 05, 2003

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Job Outlook

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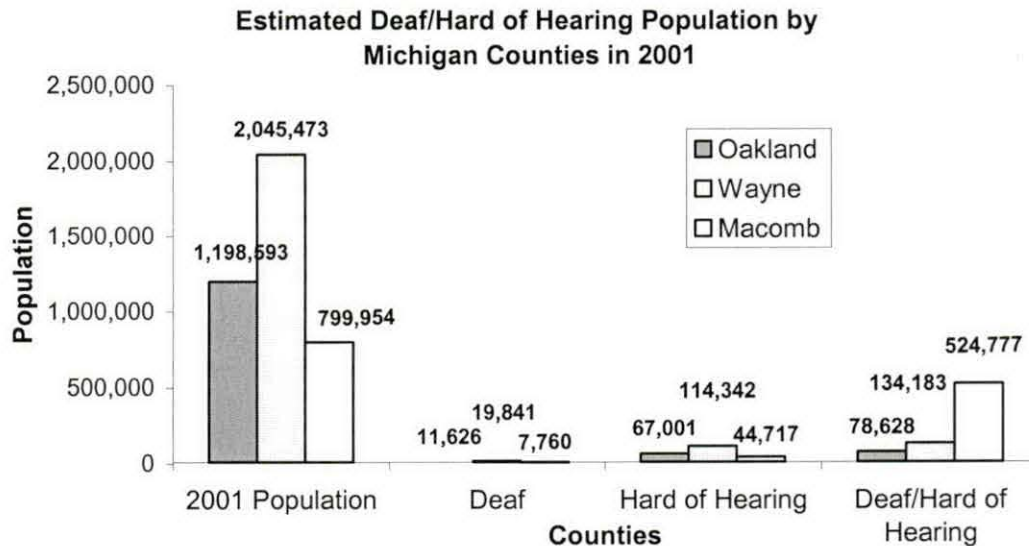
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INC. Draft

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