

ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: AN EXPLORATION OF DEAF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE DYNAMICS OF THE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROCESS TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THEIR REHABILITATION GOALS

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A single-case study design was utilized to explore, through personal interviews with Deaf consumers of the state/federal VR system who were attending Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., the variables associated with perception of the barriers in the state/federal VR process. Three research questions were utilized: (a) what perception do Deaf consumers have of the VR process?; (b) what are barriers to the achievement of goals in the VR process, as perceived by Deaf consumers?; and (c) what factors do Deaf consumers attribute to the achievement of goals in the VR process? An examination of the qualitative data indicated that the three main areas of VR services that caused barriers to achieving services among the participants were (a) the services and support that VR offers its consumers varies from state to state, rather than being standard among all states, (b) the opinion that there is insufficient communication between VR and consumers, and (c) the high turnover rate of VR Counselors. Examination of the qualitative data also indicated that, overall, participants were satisfied with their VR services, primarily because VR pays for school and participants feel that VR is meeting their needs at this time.

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DYNAMICS OF THE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROCESS TO THE
ACHIEVEMENT OF THEIR REHABILITATION GOALS

by

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Background

This study examined Deaf consumers' perceptions of the dynamics of the rehabilitation process in obtaining services from the state/federal vocational rehabilitation (VR) system.

The purpose of the state/federal VR program is to assist individuals with disabilities in preparing for, and engaging in, gainful employment. The VR program provides a wide range of services and job training to people with disabilities who want to work (RSA, 1999). To be eligible for VR services from a state VR agency, the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) stipulates that "a person must have a physical or mental impairment that is a substantial impediment to employment; be able to benefit from VR services in terms of employment; and require VR services to prepare for, enter, engage in, or retain employment" (RSA, 1999).

Since the passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and its subsequent amendments, the VR system has taken a special interest in ensuring that all persons with disabilities have equal access to effective services (Adams, 1991; Campbell, 1994; Moore, 2002). The primary goal of VR is to assist people with disabilities in obtaining, maintaining, and re-entering the job market by eliminating barriers to employment (Rubin & Roessler, 1995). Bolton et al. (1980) stated that "the ultimate objective of rehabilitation services is the long-term vocational and psychosocial adjustment of disabled persons" (p. 113).

There are many barriers to the achievement of the goals of VR, as identified in the literature. Some of these barriers, as perceived by consumers, are competition to close the

most cases with the least federal money spent (Quinn, 1981), conflict in goals—rehabilitation professionals want to help consumers achieve their goals but do not want to spend a lot of money or time (bureaucracy) (Quinn, 1981; West, 1995), no personal support from rehabilitation professionals (Quinn, 1981; Turner, 1994), lack of consumer choice—professionals telling consumers what is appropriate (Turner, 1994; West, 1995), the perception that rehabilitation professionals often have superiority complexes—“like Gods who choose what to give and what not to give”—by excluding consumer’s participation by talking to others (e.g., employers) about them and withholding information that pertains to the consumer (Quinn, 1981), lack of adequate health coverage (Turner, 1994; West, 1995), lack of coordination between services (Bryen et al., 1987), and lack of family involvement (Bryen et al., 1987).

The 1992 (PL 102-569) amendments to the 1973 Rehabilitation Act addressed some of these barriers by incorporating consumer choice and involvement. Title IV of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA; P.L. 105-220) included the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998, which revised and extended the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Koch et al. (1998) asserted:

...in examining the philosophical and legislative influences that shape the rehabilitation counseling profession, the most prominent theme is the ever-increasing emphasis placed on involving people with disabilities in all aspects of service delivery. As this trend continues, the expectations that people hold regarding the services that they receive are of paramount concern. (p. 212)

Involving consumers in all phases of the VR process will increase the likelihood of successful outcomes and consumer satisfaction with these outcomes. The barriers

discussed above apply to all populations of people with disabilities. However, little research has been done with the Deaf population. Creighton (2003), in an article published in the *NADmag*, a publication of the National Association of the Deaf, entitled, "The ADA, Employment, and Deaf People," asserted that finding the trends in employment of Deaf and Hard of Hearing people is pretty near impossible, as most major research programs and studies are focused on people with disabilities in general, not specifically Deaf or Hard of Hearing people. The state/federal VR program reported that, during fiscal year 1997, 1,303 Deaf consumers exited the VR system in Region III (Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia). Of these 1,303 Deaf consumers: 77 consumers were closed after assessment (Status 08); 739 consumers were closed as rehabilitated (Status 26); 340 Deaf consumers were closed as non-rehabilitated, even though services were provided (Status 28); and 147 consumers were closed as non-rehabilitated (Status 30) (RSA, 1999). In essence, 23.6% of Deaf consumers were successfully rehabilitated (Status 26) by VR services in FY 1997. Closure status, however, simply reflects that the individual has been working for 60 days, but information about long-term job retention, career advancement, and consumer satisfaction is lacking (Belknap, Korwin, & Long, 1995).

There are many barriers to the achievement of the goals of VR for Deaf consumers. These barriers, as identified in the literature, include: a shortage of qualified sign language interpreters, and the varying qualifications of those who provide the interpreting services (COED Report, 1988; Danek, 1993); unqualified personnel working with the Deaf population (COED Report, 1988; Danek, 1993; Hanson, 1973; Vernon, 1970); voluntary adoption of the guidelines in the Model State Plan for the Deaf (Danek,

1993; Moore, 2001); communication issues (Allen, Rawlings, & Schildroth, 1989; Hurwitz, 1991; Joyce & Mathay, 1986; and Vernon, 1970); and the pathological vs. cultural viewpoints of deafness (Dolnick, 1993; Glickman, 1983; Lane, 1997). These and other barriers impede the future success of Deaf consumers in the VR system and, quite possibly, make this population less likely to seek services in the first place.

Need for the Study

In 2000, the RSA expressed concern about the steady decline between 1989 and 1998 in the number of “successfully rehabilitated” consumers with hearing loss. The RSA encouraged state VR agencies to examine their state RSA-911 database to assess service delivery patterns for that population. This decline “could possibly be explained by the priority of services requirement for ‘severely disabled’ persons to be served first, thus eliminating many ‘easy’ hard of hearing closures.” (M. M. Danek, personal communication, 2005). Studies have been performed to examine why cases of Deaf consumers of VR have been closed successfully (Bolton, 1975; Bursell, 1997; Wootton & Mowry, 1983) and unsuccessfully (Bolton, 1975; Demann, 1963; Joyce & Mathay, 1986; Moore, 2001; Scheinkman et al., 1975; Worall and Vandergoot, 1980). Mowry (1988) stated:

The success of vocational rehabilitation services is often measured by the percent of successful closures and employment rates at closure. However, these measures may not present a broad enough picture of the impact of these services, particularly since the ultimate goal of VR is a lifelong adjustment for the individual. (p. 1)

In addition, studies have been performed to evaluate consumers' post-service adjustment regarding their quality of life (Bursell, 1997, unpublished; Mowry, 1988; Oullette, 1984; Stewart & Watson, 1987).

In this age of consumer choice and empowerment, it is imperative to gain input from consumers regarding their satisfaction with rehabilitation services. A growing belief is that consumers "should gain power over the services they receive and, in the process, gain or regain control over their lives" (Kosciulek et al., 1997, p. 5). In fact, the 1992 (PL 102-569) amendments to the 1973 Rehabilitation Act mandated, "...individuals with disabilities must be active partners in their own rehabilitation programs, including making meaningful and informed choices about the selection of their vocational goals and objectives and the vocational services they receive" (100(a)(3)(c)). This mandate was reinforced, and expanded upon, in the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998.

Since the inception of the VR system, improvements in services and service delivery for Deaf consumers have occurred because of legislation and the advocacy of strong consumer groups (Watson, 1990). As aptly stated by Patterson and Marks (1992), VR service providers can provide better services, and enhance the satisfaction of each consumer, when they listen to the views of the consumers.

A review of the literature reveals a lack of studies to assess barriers to achieving goals in the VR process, as seen by Deaf consumers themselves. A gap remains, therefore, in our understanding of the impact VR services have on Deaf consumers' quality of life, employability, lack of recidivism, and economic independence.

Statement of the Problem

Historically, VR approaches to assisting Deaf consumers to succeed in employment have been lacking (Belknap et al., 1995). Typically, the employment rate of Deaf people has lagged behind that of hearing people, as reported by Christianson (1982). A 1995 review of the Census Bureau statistics by Belknap et al. (1995) showed that this trend continues. Belknap et al. (1995) stated that the reported lag in employment rates for Deaf consumers occurs despite intervention and assistance from the state-federal VR system, and that this is likely due to inadequate attention to job retention and post-employment issues. Long & Davis (1986) asserted that a lack of attention to post-employment service need has resulted in unemployment and underemployment, and can create a “revolving door syndrome” for consumers within the VR system.

While services to Deaf adults have expanded and improved, it appears from the literature and from professional and rehabilitation practice that there are many barriers for Deaf consumers in the VR system that impact the achievement of vocational goals. Included in these barriers is the prevailing negative attitude among the Deaf community regarding the VR system. However, there is not enough information in the literature to identify these barriers or the source of these negative attitudes regarding VR from the perspective of the Deaf consumer.

Purpose of the Study

Vocational issues—including career choice, work adjustment, and occupational mobility and advancement—are a preeminent concern of most Deaf people (Danek, 1992). However, there are many barriers for Deaf consumers in the VR system. The purpose of this study was to discover and examine Deaf consumers’ perceptions of

barriers in the state/federal VR process. Gaining insight into the perceived barriers for Deaf consumers in the rehabilitation system can lead to the acquisition of important knowledge that, in turn, can contribute to the evaluation and improvement of services provided for this population.

Research Questions

Three research questions were addressed in this study:

1. What perception do Deaf consumers have of the VR process?
2. What are the barriers to the achievement of goals in the VR process, as perceived by Deaf consumers?
3. What positive factors do Deaf consumers attribute to the achievement of their goals in the VR process?

Definition of Terms

Before proceeding, it is important to clarify some definitions. For the purposes of this paper, a cultural identity rather than a pathological identity will define **Deaf consumers**. The consumers identify themselves as a part of a culture and community, and by the use of American Sign Language (ASL) as their primary language. These consumers are proud of the fact that they are Deaf and do not consider themselves disabled (Peterson, 2004; Shapiro, 1993). Also important to note is the author's use of "Deaf consumer." While it is imperative to use people-first language when talking about other populations (e.g., "individual who is blind") it is culturally acceptable, and preferred, to use the term "Deaf consumer." Using "Deaf" first with a capital "D" denotes a member of the culturally Deaf community. There are other subgroups of individuals who have a hearing loss (e.g., Hard of Hearing, late-deafened, and oral deaf), which have

their own unique characteristics and special needs to consider. However, these groups will not be discussed, or referred to, in this paper.

Clarification of other terms follows:

Deaf: a hearing impairment of such severity that the individual must depend primarily upon visual communication such as writing, lip reading, manual communication, and gestures (RSA, 1986).

Rehabilitation Counseling: a “comprehensive sequence of services, mutually planned by the consumer and rehabilitation counselor, to maximize employability, independence, integration, and participation of people with disabilities in the workplace and the community” (Parker, Syzmanski, & Patterson, 2005, p. 3).

Barriers: something that hinders or restricts (Webster’s II New College Dictionary, 1995) a consumer’s successful rehabilitation in the VR system.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many barriers to the achievement of the goals of VR for Deaf consumers. The purpose of this study is to discover and examine Deaf consumers' perceptions of the dynamics involved in the process of obtaining services from the state/federal VR system. A review of the relevant literature will be divided into five sections.

The first section describes the State/Federal Rehabilitation program and the services it provides to people with disabilities, specifically to those who are Deaf. Section two reviews the premise of the 1992 (PL 102-569) amendments to the 1973 Rehabilitation Act (the Act) and discusses the implications for Deaf consumers. Section three describes the general barriers to the achievement of the goals of VR, as identified in the literature. Section four describes the barriers to the achievement of the goals of VR for Deaf consumers, as identified in the literature. The fifth section provides a summary of the chapter.

The State/Federal Rehabilitation Program

Rehabilitation Counseling is defined as a “comprehensive sequence of services, mutually planned by the consumer and rehabilitation counselor, to maximize employability, independence, integration, and participation of people with disabilities in the workplace and the community” (Parker, Syzmanski, & Patterson, 2005, p. 3). The emphasis of the state/federal Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program is on the provision of services for people with disabilities that will lead to an improved quality of life (Rubin & Roessler, 1995).

To be eligible for VR services from a state VR agency, the Rehabilitation Services Agency (RSA) stipulates that “a person must have a physical or mental impairment that is a substantial impediment to employment; be able to benefit from VR services in terms of employment; and require VR services to prepare for, enter, engage in, or retain employment” (RSA, 1999).

The primary goal of VR is to assist individuals with disabilities in obtaining, maintaining, and re-entering the job market by eliminating barriers to employment (Rubin & Roessler, 1995). A variety of services is available to assist individuals in meeting the goals of VR and may include one or more of the following: diagnosis and evaluation, counseling and guidance, physical restoration, vocational or educational training, job placement, and post-employment services (Rubin & Roessler, 1995).

The National Institute for Advanced Studies (NIAS) (1982) asserted that deafness, probably more than any other condition, impacts heavily across the entire spectrum of an individual’s life. Thus, a VR agency is viewed as “a central resource for information and referral services; the agency is a critical linkage between the deaf individual and the hearing world” (NIAS, p. I-2). Danek (1992), in an article explaining effective approaches for working with Deaf and Hard of Hearing VR consumers, stated that in order for appropriate VR services to be arranged or provided for Deaf consumers, the provider must understand the unique issues that hearing loss presents. Professionals who work with Deaf consumers must possess knowledge about the personal, social, educational, and vocational ramifications associated with hearing loss (Danek, 1992), as well as knowledge of American Sign Language (ASL) and Deaf culture. With the increased emphasis of VR on consumer self-determination and choice, there is a need for

VR Counselors to understand and use counseling interventions that work best with Deaf consumers (Fry, 1995). This need is best served by employing counselors who are specifically trained to work with Deaf consumers: Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf (RCDs). RCDs generally work with individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing in the state/federal VR system. This specialty was established in recognition of the unique communication needs of Deaf consumers who use Sign Language (Danek, 1992).

Danek (1983), in an article discussing rehabilitation counseling approaches with Deaf consumers, cites four major steps for Deaf consumers in the rehabilitation process: assessment, goal setting, service delivery, and placement. Assessment for the Deaf consumer involves evaluating the individual's readiness to begin and complete services from a medical, educational, social, and vocational perspective. The first step in the rehabilitation assessment process is usually a general medical evaluation. The purpose of this medical evaluation is twofold: to substantiate the disability and to determine any other physical or mental work limitations. Otological and/or audiological evaluations may also be required to establish the existence of deafness.

According to Danek (1983), goal setting should take into account the consumer's assessed strengths as well as their level of self-awareness and knowledge of the career options available to them. One concern is that many Deaf consumers have little understanding of the requirements of the work force and either choose unrealistic or stereotyped occupational goals.

A major concern in providing services for Deaf consumers is the availability and accessibility of appropriate resources. As deafness is a low-incidence disability and the communication needs of Deaf consumers are unique, it is difficult to find training

facilities that use qualified staff and support services (Danek, 1983). Involving the consumer in the development of the IPE (Individualized Plan for Employment) and making sure they understand the choice of goals and available services is vital.

According to Danek (1983), counselor assistance with placement could include all or some of the following strategies: contacting the employer, filling out application forms, modifying or waiving the use of verbally based employment tests, providing interpreters for the job interview and for orientation after employment, informing employers of the training and communication needs of Deaf employees, and suggesting appropriate accommodations.

Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992 (PL 102-569)

In an article discussing the implications of the 1992 (PL 102-569) amendments to the 1973 Rehabilitation Act (the Act) for consumers with hearing loss, Danek (1993) stated, “the pre-eminent philosophical paradigm influencing rehabilitation legislation in recent years has been that of consumer involvement and empowerment. This recognizes the right of people with disabilities to full participation in all aspects of community life” (p. 8).

The Act instituted significant changes in the relationship between the VR system and consumers (West, 1995). The purpose of the Act was “to empower individuals with disabilities to maximize employment, economic self-sufficiency, independence, and inclusion and integration into society” (Kosciulek et al., 1997, p. 5). The provision of effective VR services is a means of accomplishing this goal (Kosciulek et al., 1997). With the Act, the VR program shifted from a role as guardian and dispenser of funds and services for consumers, to a customer service paradigm where the consumer’s goals,

preferences, and choices are paramount (Campbell, 1991). Thus improving the likelihood that consumers will secure satisfying and successful jobs and careers (West, 1995).

According to Danek (1993), the Act offered new opportunities for Deaf consumers to access programs and services authorized under the Act. The changes include: modifying state plans to incorporate the needs of Deaf and Hard of Hearing consumers; strengthening transition programs and services; addressing the unique needs of “lower achieving” Deaf and Hard of Hearing youth, particularly in supported employment and independent living programs; increased quality assurance in service provision for Deaf and Hard of Hearing consumers; removing restrictions on the number of authorized interpreter training programs; increased knowledge about assistive technology devices; and establishing permanent authority for the Office of Deafness and Communicative Disorders in the RSA, U.S. Department of Education.

There does not seem to be current literature available to discuss the implications of the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998 for the Deaf population.

General Barriers to the Vocational Rehabilitation System

As reported in recent rehabilitation literature, many consumers have expressed dissatisfaction with VR (Bryen et al., 1987; Koch et al., 1998; Patterson & Marks, 1992; Quinn, 1981; Turner, 1994; West, 1995). There are many barriers to the achievement of the goals of VR, as perceived by some consumers. Understanding these barriers provides a context for understanding specific barriers to Deaf consumers. Some of these barriers, as identified in the literature, are described below.

Bureaucracy

Quinn (1981), a former consumer of the VR system for 6 years, wrote about issues resulting from the perceived failure of the legislation to address certain consumer needs adequately, if at all. In a slightly bitter portrayal of the rehabilitation system, based on her personal experiences and experiences of former VR consumers she spoke to, Quinn asserts that much of America's effort to rehabilitate individuals with disabilities is a power struggle among the professionals involved. Quinn further states that, "behind 'helping the handicapped' lies a grasping after the federal dollar and a competition to close the most cases with the least money spent" (p. 19). Herein lies a clear conflict of goals, as rehabilitation professionals want to help consumers achieve their goals, however, they do not want to spend a lot of time or money doing so (Quinn, 1981; West, 1995).

West (1995), in an article describing the 1992 Rehabilitation Amendments relating to consumer choice and the barriers within the VR system that prevent consumers with severe disabilities from choosing integrated employment, asserted that "consumer choice will be better insured in systems in which people are funded and not the program slots they fill" (p. 288).

Lack of Support Systems

In addition to their struggle for adjustment and their place in life, in a world hostile with architectural and attitudinal barriers, many rehabilitation consumers face the disdain of rehabilitation service providers to give the personal support they need for job success and independence (Quinn, 1981). Possible reasons for this may include: (a) counselors did not receive professional counseling training and (b) counselors have a

commitment to system goals rather than personal consumer empowerment, etc. Quinn (1981) states that she disagrees with the rehabilitation systems' defense: "You can't give client's that kind of support. They won't find people out in the real world patting them on the back." She asserts that everyone needs some support and that, although many consumers receive that from family, friends, and colleagues, many people do not have outside support and a final source for that needed support is the VR system.

In October 1993, Virginia Commonwealth University's Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Supported Employment (RRTC) was funded for a third 5-year period by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, Grant #H133B30071. The RRTC provided research, training, and leadership on supported employment for citizens with the most severe disabilities. RRTC's research focus was on supported employment policy analysis, program implementation at the systems and consumer levels, and program evaluation issues. Turner (1994), editor of "The Customer is Right!, A Newsletter by Consumers from the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Supported Employment," a publication from the RRTC, conveyed the lesson he learned about the value of having the support of a person who never loses faith in you. In his case, it was his personal assistant. In his newsletter, he aptly stated:

...each year is marked with the historic legislation at the state and federal levels, but the same old "mindsets" still exist. People with disabilities are confronted with the narrow views of the professionals who are supposed to be assisting us.

We do not need this negativity on top of the pressures of unemployment! (p. 1)

This recognition of the need for personal support led to the formation of a new training track at the RRTC, the RRTC Leadership Institute, which trains mentors to support

consumers who want to exercise their rights to choose employment services. This track includes workshops on communication, negotiation, and other interpersonal skills.

Lack of Family Involvement

Traditionally, the focus of VR has been almost exclusively on the individual with a disability. Generally, a consumer's family has not been included as an integral part of either the assessment process or in the development and implementation of a consumer's individualized plan. However, a greater awareness and appreciation of the importance of family involvement in the VR process is emerging in the field today (Twenty-Sixth Institute on Rehabilitation Issues, 2000).

Bryen et al. (1987) studied the barriers to employment of individuals with disabilities in the United States and Israel. The rehabilitation systems of both countries were described and analyzed to provide an understanding of the vocational goals and practices. The purpose of this cross-cultural study was to: (a) identify the desired outcomes of the rehabilitation processes in the United States and Israel and to compare the relative importance of these outcomes within and between each country, (b) determine how well disabled consumers in each country achieved the above desired outcomes, (c) identify the factors and variables that related to the achievement of the above desired outcomes in each country, (d) identify and assess variables that were barriers to employment in the open market in each country, and (e) determine the impact of local labor market conditions on employability in each country. Two VR centers in the United States and three in Israel were studied to identify barriers to employment for consumers in the VR process. The consumer sample included 184 consumers with

various disabilities. The major finding of this study was that there was no consensus between the United States and Israel regarding the desired outcomes of VR.

An important barrier to the employment of individuals with disabilities that emerged from this cross-cultural study was lack of family involvement. Both in the United States and in Israel, families were rarely involved in service planning. While family members were generally supportive of their disabled family member working, they had real and enduring fears, concerns, and interests that were not taken into account when preparing consumers for employment. Service and staff patterns were focused too heavily on work adjustment training and too little on working with families. Bryen et al. (1987) noted:

...families should be an integral part of the VR process of consumers. If their concerns are not addressed and their support for future employment not reinforced, their potential facilitating influence is likely to be neutralized and weakened. The family may be the greatest facilitator or the greatest barrier to the employment of disabled persons. (p. 8)

The family is the natural and primary support system for the VR consumer (Twenty-Sixth Institute on Rehabilitation Issues, 2000). However, there has been little attention on the role of the family as a potential resource for the VR Counselor in assisting consumers in developing appropriate VR goals (Cottone, R. & Emener, W., 1990). In the past, family attention has been focused on the disability's effect on the family, rather than on the family's effect on rehabilitation. However, family members provide the most long-term and important support in a person's life and can make critical contributions to successful employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities

(Twenty-Sixth Institute on Rehabilitation Issues, 2000). Recent trends in service delivery approaches recognize that a consumer is part of a larger, interacting family and social system that has a significant influence on the rehabilitation process (Herbert, 1989; Twenty-Sixth Institute on Rehabilitation Issues, 2000).

The 1992 (PL 102-569) amendments to the 1973 Rehabilitation Act (the Act) reflected these changes and specifically cited the importance of family and other natural supports as one of the fundamental principles shaping VR policy (Section 100(a)(3)(D)). The Act gave greater emphasis to the role of families, authorized funding for family training on VR, and enhanced opportunities for family members to be involved in the rehabilitation process (Twenty-Sixth Institute on Rehabilitation Issues, 2000). As these policy changes have yet to be incorporated into real-life day-to-day practice, VR Counselors can be more effective if they realize that a consumer's family can be a critical partner in the achievement of VR goals and if they gain an understanding of how to work with the family to maximize the resources available to the person with a disability for achieving a successful outcome (Twenty-Sixth Institute on Rehabilitation Issues, 2000).

Many Rehabilitation Counselors agree that the family can significantly help or hinder the consumer's rehabilitation process and that some contact with the available family can make a difference in the consumer's attainment of rehabilitation goals (Power, Hershenson, & Fabian, 1991). Power et al. (1991) asserted that there are three critical times for contact when available families can be involved in the rehabilitation process: (a) during the initial phase of the VR process, when eligibility determination and/or a beginning assessment is conducted; (b) during rehabilitation planning and goal setting; and (c) during training and eventual placement when specific crises can occur.

Power et al. (1991) identified four major goals for VR Counselors when they involve families during the initial phase of the rehabilitation process:

- 1) to obtain information from available family members on the consumer's and their own expectations for VR and on the consumer's limitations and strengths in terms of independent living; 2) to identify the family's current needs in relation to the disability, their knowledge of the VR process, and any family obstacles that could inhibit progress towards rehabilitation goals, such as over protectiveness, secondary gains that appear more rewarding than rehabilitation achievements, and lack of interest in rehabilitation; 3) to identify the family's expectations both for the consumer's rehabilitation and for the role of the rehabilitation counselor; and 4) to communicate necessary information and support. (p. 14)

According to Power et al. (1991), the goal of family involvement during rehabilitation planning and goal setting is to build on the previously identified family knowledge, strengths, needs, and expectations in order to develop appropriate rehabilitation plans and goals. The VR Counselor's focus at this stage is to explore with family members how they can assist in the job training and/or job placement process.

During the training and eventual placement phase, a crisis can occur in many families. Examples of crises that could occur are: the consumer's increasing independence is perceived as disruptive both to an essential family role and to family functioning, a consumer has a sudden physical or mental setback, or an unexpected layoff occurs at work. Any of these events could cause a serious crisis for family members, and crisis management skills may have to be employed by the VR Counselor when family contact is possible (Power et al., 1991).

Often, parental expectations are a factor. Consumers who have grown up in homes where communication is problematic may find that their parents have unrealistic expectations of what they can or cannot accomplish. Too often, these parents relegate some of the work traditionally handled at home to the school. As time goes on and schools and professionals take over their children's lives, the parents become used to being "out of the loop." Therefore, the parents do not learn about the academic and vocational training options or job skills and careers that are available for consumers with hearing loss (Garay, 2002; Starnes, 2001).

Efforts must be made to involve families in the rehabilitation process and to encourage them to participate to whatever degree possible in identifying rehabilitation needs related to the Deaf culture (Garay, 2002).

Little Opportunity for Consumer Choice/Participation

The 1992 (PL 102-569) amendments to the 1973 Rehabilitation Act (the Act) contained major changes regarding the degree of choice and control that consumers of the VR system were empowered to exert over the services they received (West, 1995). Still, many professionals continue to tell consumers which jobs and services are appropriate (Turner, 1994). Quinn (1981) stated that rehabilitation professionals have superiority complexes and are "like Gods who choose what to give and what not to give" (p. 20). Quinn (1981) illustrated two main examples of lack of consumer choice. The first example is that Rehabilitation Counselors often exclude consumers' participation by talking to other professionals, such as employers, about them. Quinn stated that, for a consumer with a weak personality, this just officially confirms their inadequacy. The second example is that Rehabilitation Counselors often withhold information (e.g., what

the job market is like) from the consumer. According to Quinn, hiding the truth from the consumer enables the system to easily neglect them.

Turner (1994), in answer to his pivotal question “What can be done to put the customer and service provider on equal turf?” stated that it will help if the consumer knows their rights and how to use their self-advocacy skills. West (1995) asserted that “self-determination will be in evidence when individuals are free to exercise control and experience the outcomes of their choices free from coercion, obligation, or artificial constraints” (p. 284). Choice and self-determination lead to improved VR service outcomes, and to more satisfying and successful employment, with decreased social and economic dependence (West, 1995). However, in an article examining consumer empowerment issues in supported employment, West & Parent (1992) maintained that consumer choice remains significantly limited for many individuals with disabilities within the current VR service system.

Lack of Adequate Health Care Coverage

In his consumer newsletter, “The Customer is Right!, A Newsletter by Consumers from the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Supported Employment,” Turner (1994) identified the lack of adequate health coverage as a major barrier to employment for individuals with disabilities. For many individuals with disabilities, even part-time employment carries the risk of termination of financial and medical assistance and a net decrease in their standard of living. Therefore, many consumers seek employment in jobs below their full potential (West, 1995). Having a universal, comprehensive health care plan, thus reducing the fear of losing health benefits such as

Medicaid or Medicare, could be a major incentive for individuals with disabilities to seek employment (Turner, 1994).

Based on historical information, potential barriers to the achievement of the goals of VR, as perceived by consumers, include: bureaucracy, lack of support systems, lack of family involvement, little opportunity for consumer choice or participation, and lack of adequate health care coverage. Have consumer experiences and perceptions changed based on new legislation? There appears to be little current anecdotal information from consumers supporting or contradicting these viewpoints.

Barriers to Achieving the Goals of the VR System – for Deaf Consumers

There are many barriers to the achievement of the goals of VR for Deaf consumers. Some of these barriers, as identified in the literature, are described below.

Lack of Widespread Implementation of State Plans for the Deaf

In 1974, the National Census of the Deaf concluded that the Deaf population of the United States was greatly underserved by state VR agencies. As a means of addressing this issue, VR agencies were urged to develop and implement specialized services and programs for Deaf and Hard of Hearing consumers (NIAS, 1982). In 1973, Schein developed a model state plan for rehabilitation services to Deaf consumers, which was subsequently revised in 1977 and 1980. The primary intent of the Model State Plan (MSP) was to provide “a structure, a set of acceptable options, and numerous conceptions with which to build a particular state’s program” (Schein, 1980, p. 1). The MSP addresses such issues as the unique problems encountered by a Deaf person in utilizing the VR process, manpower needs, guidelines for state advisory councils on deafness, interagency cooperation, special facilities for the hearing-impaired, Deaf community development,

and national-state-local communication (Ferrell & Wincenciak, 1977; NIAS, 1982).

Ferrell & Wincenciak (1977) stated that, prior to the development of this unified approach, rehabilitation services were inaccessible to nearly three million Deaf persons. In fact, rehabilitation services were available and accessible. However, a systematic written plan incorporating guidelines was not implemented in most states. Ferrell & Wincenciak (1977) asserted, “this document has become the single most influential factor in the development and delivery of services for deaf and hearing-impaired persons today” (p. 36).

A comprehensive study was conducted in 1982 by the NIAS to investigate the extent to which state VR agencies had implemented various components of the MSP, and to conduct an examination of the effectiveness of services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing consumers in nine states, using the MSP as a model for service delivery. Specifically, the study was concerned with the degree of MSP implementation, the relationship between status of MSP implementation and program characteristics, and the effect of MSP implementation on service delivery. A 55-jurisdiction (50 states, District of Columbia, and 4 U.S. Territories) survey of state VR agencies was conducted to closely examine the degree to which state agencies had implemented components of the MSP. The survey was mailed to the Directors of state VR agencies within each of the 55 jurisdictions, requesting their cooperation in the completion of the survey instrument. Fifty-one surveys were completed and returned to NIAS (the exceptions being one state and three territories). One of the major findings of this study was that a significant proportion of VR agencies have skilled personnel and specialized services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing consumers, despite the fact that the majority of agencies did not have a complete,

formal plan of services for this population. However, the analysis of the data indicated that the degree of MSP implementation is positively associated with the effectiveness of VR services to Deaf and Hard of Hearing consumers, although the strength of the relationship was moderate.

In 1990, the University of Arkansas Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Deafness and Hearing Impairment, under the leadership of the CSAR Standing Committee on Services to Individuals with Hearing Impairments, developed a revised Model State Plan for the Rehabilitation of Individuals who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing. This MSP was designed to update and supplement the prior editions of the Model State Plan due to the legislative mandates in the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1986 (PL 99-506) (Watson, 1990). The MSP was intended to serve as a resource document that offers standards in the development of rehabilitation services for individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing.

Hurwitz (1991) described an Advisory Committee on Deafness that was established by the New York State Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) in 1982 to identify and address the unique communication needs of Deaf and Hard of Hearing consumers. The advisory committee produced a document on a model plan concerning services to Deaf and Hard of Hearing persons in New York State. Among the major accomplishments of the committee were: (a) the adoption of the Sign Communication Proficiency Interview (SCPI) (Caccamise & Newell, 1987) to assess the sign communication skills of RCDs; (b) the establishment of minimum qualifications for sign language interpreters who have not been certified by the national certifying body for interpreters, Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf; (c) the establishment of a competitive

fee schedule for sign language interpreters; and (d) the provision of sign language and deafness-related training for non-counseling staff in OVR offices (Hurwitz, 1991; OVR, 1983).

Hurwitz (1991) asserted that it is imperative for each state to consider establishing an advisory committee to identify the rehabilitation needs of Deaf and Hard of Hearing consumers and, further, to develop and implement various strategies to meet these needs. Moore (2001), in a study investigating the relationship between VR services and work status at closure based on type of hearing loss, concluded that administrators for the 56 state and territorial VR agencies should consider implementing a model state plan for delivery of VR services for persons who are Deaf, late-deafened, and Hard of Hearing within each of their respective regions.

One reason the model state plan has not been broadly implemented is that it is voluntary, “resulting in a patchwork of policies and procedures for services to people with hearing loss across the nation” (Danek, 1993, p. 9).

Lack of Qualified Sign Language Interpreters

The Education of the Deaf Act of 1986 (P.L. 99-371) established the Commission on Education of the Deaf (COED) and charged it with studying the state of education of persons who have impaired hearing or deafness. In 1988, the Commission released its report, entitled “Toward Equality: Education of the Deaf,” to the President and Congress. The opening sentence of the Introduction to the report states “The present status of education for persons who are deaf in the United States, is unsatisfactory. Unacceptably so” (COED Report, 1988, p. viii). This report emphasized the severe shortage of qualified sign language interpreters for persons who are Deaf, and the varying qualifications of the

individuals who provide these sign language interpreting services. Further, the report recommended that the Department of Education develop standards for sign language interpreters in VR and human service settings (COED Report, 1988; Danek, 1993).

Hurwitz (1991), in an article discussing current issues and future directions of communication services for Deaf consumers, addressed the continuous “prevailing concern about the scarcity of qualified interpreters to work with deaf and hard of hearing clients in VR-related programs and services” (p. 4) by stating the need for developing policies, procedures, and strategies, and materials for the evaluation and employment of non-certified interpreters. The rationale identified was that this would aid in identifying the specific needs for interpreter skill development and would lead to eventual certification. This information was based on the success that New York State had with an Advisory Committee to the State OVR. According to Hurwitz (1991), the committee was successful in sensitizing the OVR to the unique needs of their Deaf consumers and in establishing communication standards for counselors and interpreters who work with Deaf consumers.

Shortage of Qualified Personnel

A crucial element in the success of any VR program is the qualifications of service providers (Danek, 1993). There have been several research studies discussing the shortage of qualified personnel (e.g., interpreters and counselors) to work with Deaf individuals in education and rehabilitation settings. A comprehensive survey of deafness rehabilitation needs and competencies was conducted in 1987 by Danek to investigate the current perceived shortages of deafness rehabilitation-related specialists, the professional competencies required to serve Deaf adults and the educational method most appropriate

for achieving each competency, the minimum starting salary and minimum educational requirement for each specialty within deafness rehabilitation, and the proportion of adult Deaf people who are in need of services and who are currently being served. The study included mailing lists from various organizations (e.g., state rehabilitation agencies, post-secondary facilities, mental health programs, independent living programs, and community service programs) to obtain a representative sample of professionals serving Deaf people. Results from this survey indicated there are perceived shortages of rehabilitation professionals for the Deaf, specifically, psychologists and mental health counselors. In addition, 31% of the 225 respondents indicated that a considerable number of Deaf individuals are not receiving the services they need due to lack of trained personnel.

Furthermore, results from Danek's (1987) survey indicated that measurable performance standards for rehabilitation professionals working with Deaf consumers are lacking. Bursell (1997), in an unpublished doctoral dissertation investigating the variables that influenced the rehabilitation outcome of Deaf former VR consumers, asserted that, without a method for evaluating the skills and competencies of rehabilitation professionals, quality service provision cannot be assured. The COED Report (1988) stresses that unqualified personnel being placed in these positions, and receiving on-the-job training, is "unacceptable" and "can only delay effective rehabilitation of deaf clients" (p. 107).

A qualitative study of the contemporary grassroots Deaf community in the United States was conducted by Petersen (1988) and investigated the implications for post-secondary education and VR. The goal of the study was to become acquainted with Deaf

people as individuals, not as statistics; therefore, no statistical or demographic information was collected. Questions were kept at a minimum and, after building rapport, participants were urged to “just talk” (quotations his) about their backgrounds, social and vocational experiences, philosophies, and opinions. This method had its problems (e.g., participants rambling) and was criticized by other professionals. However, Petersen argues that this may be because other professionals are not accustomed to social conversations with Deaf people and that, through this method, they were able to glean interesting things that would not have come to light in conventional question-and-answer interviews.

Petersen interviewed 160 Deaf people who were part of the “Social entity of the deaf” as distinguished from the “audiological deaf” (quotations his). Severity of hearing loss was not a factor in choosing interview participants; however, some effort was made to include Hard of Hearing individuals in the sample. During data collection, Petersen and his wife crisscrossed the country interviewing Deaf people whom they knew. These people put them in touch with other people they did not know. This methodology design was weak for two reasons. First, the geographic distribution of the sample was uneven. Time and financial constraints made it difficult to visit all areas of the United States or to stay long enough to fully experience the local Deaf community. Second, the socioeconomic distribution of the sample was uneven. There was a disproportionate number of people at the high end and too few at the low end, with the majority of the sample falling into the middle class range. Petersen asserted that focusing on the middle class was a prime goal of the project, and that many of the high achievers interviewed were proud of their grassroots beginnings and ties.

One of the major findings of Petersen's (1988) study was that Deaf persons are frustrated by the fact that they "can't communicate with their VR Counselors, that the counselors don't understand Deaf people, that they aren't familiar with all the training programs, that they underestimate the abilities of deaf people, that they have to use interpreters and the interpreters are no good" (p. 211). Melick & Herbert (1995), in an article discussing considerations for Rehabilitation Counselors with general caseloads who may serve Deaf consumers, asserted that this frustration may limit the number of eligible Deaf persons who seek VR services. Hanson (1973), in an article addressing conflicts faced by RCDs based on his professional experience as a RCD and as a supervisor of RCDs, remarked, "this obvious shortage of qualified personnel, when weighted against the magnitude of deafness in terms of complex needs for services, immediately suggests the dimensions of the challenge facing rehabilitation agencies" (p. 95). Other studies have arrived at the same conclusions (Gough, Sharp-Pucci, & Ouellette, 1988; Hurwitz, 1991; Myers & Danek, 1990; Petty, 1987; Pitts, 1980; Rice & Simmons, 1974).

Vernon (1970), in an article discussing the potential, achievement, and rehabilitation in the Deaf population, aptly stated:

...it is imperative that the number of counselors who are professionally competent in counseling and who understand and can communicate with deaf clients be increased. Services rendered deaf clients by a specialist and those given by a general counselor are as different as gold and Confederate money. The specialist can interact with his client and knows what kinds of programs are available for him. The general counselor cannot communicate, he tends to underestimate the

deaf clients' potential, and he rarely knows of even the local training facilities geared to the deaf client's needs. (p. 265)

Communication Issues

The special communication needs of the Deaf population present extraordinary challenges to rehabilitation services planners (Stewart & Watson, 1987). People who are Deaf are often isolated by a paucity of English language skills, low reading and writing skills, and a lack of experiential development that are a normal consequence of the communication process (Danek, 1983; Nash & Castle, 1980). Deaf students, by virtue of their communication difficulties, have uneven academic development when compared to their hearing peers (Allen, 1992). These barriers to communication may also limit access to support services, training, and vocational opportunities for people who are Deaf (Bursell, 1997).

In 1986, a research study conducted by Joyce and Mathay sought to examine the reasons why the cases of some Deaf consumers from the New York State OVR were closed unsuccessfully after having entered the VR process. The intent of the study was to identify predictors of unsuccessful rather than successful closure, to analyze case trends that lead to unsuccessful closure, and to make recommendations on case management strategies. Their study was initiated at the request of the Advisory Committee on Deafness for the New York State OVR as a means of developing recommendations on case services and staff training. The impetus for the study was that "although the 'success rate' for all Deaf clients is relatively high, concern has been raised about the individual plight of unsuccessful clients" (p. 5). This study sought to identify the reasons for closing these cases, the factors contributing to lack of success, and the differences between

successful consumers and unsuccessful consumers. One of the major revelations of this study was that difficulty communicating with Rehabilitation Counselors was the primary complaint cited by former Deaf consumers when questioned regarding their level of satisfaction with VR services.

In their book *Deaf Students and the School-to-Work Transition*, Allen, Rawlings, and Schildroth (1989) revealed that difficulty in communication was a leading complaint of former Deaf consumers. Bursell (1997) also reported that accessible communication becomes an integral part of program success for Deaf consumers. Together, these studies suggest that VR agencies should continue to emphasize the necessity of effective communication skills among Rehabilitation Counselors who work with Deaf consumers. If communication barriers exist between the consumer and the counselor, services cannot be provided or cannot be provided adequately (Allen et al., 1989; Joyce & Mathay, 1986).

Culturally Deaf individuals use ASL as their primary language. For many consumers, ASL was their first language and may be the only language they know. If the preferred language of the Deaf consumer is not used, limitations are placed on naturalness, spontaneity of thought, and comfort level within communication exchanges (Miller & Moores, 1990). If a Deaf consumer works with a counselor who knows ASL, direct communication can occur and valuable information will be retained.

Pathological vs. Cultural View of Deafness

In the researcher's professional experience, there appears to be a cognitive dissonance between VR's purpose to serve individuals with disabilities and Deaf consumers not viewing themselves as disabled. There are two main viewpoints of

deafness: (a) the pathological viewpoint, which categorizes deafness as a disability; and (b) the cultural viewpoint, which recognizes the Deaf as a member of a linguistic minority (Dolnick, 1993; Glickman, 1983; Lane, 1997; Peterson (as cited in Kennedy, 2004), to name a few).

The cultural viewpoint of deafness rejects the assumption that medical treatment means progress and is welcome. If asked if they would want their hearing restored, the Deaf would answer with a resounding “No!” (Dolnick, 1993). The pathological viewpoint of deafness establishes the hearing professional as the expert and the Deaf consumer as disabled and needing help; whereas, the cultural viewpoint calls for a partnership where the hearing professional is as likely to receive information and help as to give it (Glickman, 1983).

As Dolnick (1993) explained in an article entitled “Deafness as Culture,” “Deafness is not a disability. Instead, many Deaf people now proclaim they are a subculture like any other. They are simply a linguistic minority (speaking American Sign Language) and are no more in need of a cure for their condition than are Haitians or Hispanics” (p. 37). The culturally Deaf community embraces this viewpoint. For example, Harlan Lane (1997) explained in his article “Construction of Deafness”:

From my observation, Deaf people do not attach particular importance to medical care, not place any special value on rehabilitation or personal assistance services, not have any particular concern with autonomy and independent living. Instead, the preconditions for Deaf participation are more like those of other language minorities: culturally Deaf people campaign for acceptance of their language and its broader use in schools, the workplace, and public events. (p. 161)

Lane (1997) further stated that organizations, such as VR, espouse the pathological viewpoint as a basis for their specialized training and professional credentials and use it to maintain respect from consumers, to obtain state and federal funding, to insure one's standing in a fraternity of like professionals, and to legitimize their daily activities. In fact, the organizations' economic survival depends on the pathological viewpoint and seeks the total conformity of the consumers to this viewpoint. This is an inaccurate statement, as the state/federal system is not an organization; it is a publicly administered program. Furthermore, in the past, some rehabilitation professionals were not qualified for the highly complex, ever-changing job. However, new federal legislation requires Rehabilitation Counselors to have a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling. This is an important step toward professionalizing the field.

The differentiation between the pathological viewpoint and the cultural viewpoint is difficult for many Rehabilitation Counselors who perceive deafness as a disabling condition rather than seeing its cultural significance (Melick & Herbert, 1995). Being Deaf constitutes more than just a functional hearing loss to many Deaf consumers; it means belonging to a unique culture with its own language (ASL). Deaf consumers view themselves as a minority group with a unique culture rather than as persons who have a functional deficiency (Melick & Herbert, 1995). To change this viewpoint would mean Deaf people would no longer claim disability benefits or services under the present legislation for disabled people. Many opportunities are available to Deaf people (e.g., access to interpreters), on the condition that they accept the pathological viewpoint (Lane, 1997). Lane (1997) stated that many members of the Deaf community "endorsed the

Americans with Disabilities Act with its provisions for Deaf people, all the while believing they are not disabled but lending credence to the claim that they are” (p. 167).

The Sameness Issues in the Literature

The field of Deafness rehabilitation “is a scantily researched field, thus the dearth of references and the need to go back 30 years” (M. M. Danek, personal communication, 2005). It appears to the researcher that the literature for the past 30 years has not changed significantly. While services to Deaf consumers have expanded and improved, many of the recommendations in recent literature regarding the improvement of VR services for Deaf consumers do not appear to have changed from previous recommendations. Why the lack of new information? Why does it appear that many of the recommendations have not been implemented over the years? Danek (personal communication, 2005) stated that “not much has happened in deafness rehab in the past 10 years or so for a variety of reasons having to do with the de-professionalism of the field and other options in counseling with Deaf people outside of rehab.”

Summary

Studies have been performed to examine why cases of Deaf consumers have been closed successfully and unsuccessfully. Studies have also been performed to evaluate consumers’ post-service adjustment regarding their quality of life. Unfortunately, there is a lack of studies revealing potential barriers to achieving goals in the VR process, as perceived by Deaf consumers. Inviting Deaf consumers to discuss, in their preferred mode of communication, perceived barriers to the achievement of goals in the VR process could provide valuable information on ways to enhance the existing system.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

“Case study is not a methodological choice, but a choice of object to be studied. We choose to study the case” (Stake, 1994, p. 236). A case study is “both the process of learning about the case and the product of our learning” (Stake, 1994, p. 236). It is hoped that interviewing Deaf, Gallaudet students regarding their perceived barriers to the achievement of goals in the VR process (process of learning about the case) provided valuable information regarding how to enhance the existing state/federal VR system (product of our learning). “The case study written after all the observations have been made should bring knowledge, understanding, and insight that would not have been apparent before the materials were brought together” (Rothney, 1968, p. 5).

The data were based on open-ended, semi-structured, in-depth interviews and case study procedures were utilized to identify Deaf consumers’ perception of barriers in the process of obtaining services from the state/federal VR system.

Methodological Design

A single-case study design was utilized to address the research questions. The researcher studied particular phenomenon (the state/federal VR system) and its impact on eight people. The case study is holistic, as a single unit of analysis (interviews) was utilized.

This study followed Lincoln & Guba’s (1985) case study structure: the problem, the context, the issues, and the “lessons learned.” In this particular study, the *problem*, according to the literature and professional and rehabilitation practice, is that there are perceived barriers for Deaf consumers in the VR system that impact the achievement of their vocational goals. Included in these barriers is the prevailing negative attitude among

the Deaf community regarding the VR system. The *context* is the state/federal VR system itself, and the Deaf, Gallaudet students' experiences with that system. The *issues* emerged from the interviews with the Deaf, Gallaudet students—VR consumers—from their perspective. Finally, the lessons learned were determined at the conclusion of the study. It is the researcher's hope that the lessons learned, or insight gleaned, from this study led to the acquisition of important knowledge, which, in turn, could contribute to the evaluation and improvement of state/federal VR services provided for this population.

Following are several features that mark this project as a case study, according to Creswell (1998):

1. Identify a case. This study is a single-case study of a phenomenon (the state/federal VR system) and its impact on eight people. The case is Deaf, Gallaudet University students currently participating in the VR system and their responses to barriers in that system.

2. "bounded system". This study was bounded by time, as participants were interviewed while they were college students attending Gallaudet University and participating in the VR system. This study was also bounded by place, as participants were interviewed on Gallaudet University's campus.

3. Context or setting of the case. The context for the case in this study (the state/federal VR system) as well as a detailed description of the Deaf, VR consumers' perception of it, was described in Chapters I and II.

There is one feature of this study that is not congruent with the features of a case study; namely, utilizing multiple sources of information in data collection. The researcher used only an in-depth, open-ended interview with participants, as this is the most

effective method to elicit authentic information. Utilizing surveys is not feasible, nor appropriate, for the Deaf population due to language and cultural differences. In order to safeguard threats to reliability and validity due to this issue, the researcher employed the following: (a) a pilot case study to refine interview questions and (b) repeat questioning during the interview.

Also considered as possible approaches to answer the identified research questions of this study were phenomenology, ethnography, and grounded theory. Phenomenology was discounted as an approach for this study due to the fact that the researcher was not entering the field of perception of the participants, meaning that the researcher did not directly observe how they experienced, lived, and displayed the phenomenon being studied. Rather, this information was gleaned via interviews with the participants. One of the main premises of ethnography is to rely substantially on participant observation, with the participant also acting as a participant. As the researcher did not conduct this study in this manner, ethnography was discounted as an approach for this study. The grounded theory approach was discounted for this study due to the fact that the researcher did not construct a theory at the conclusion of this study.

Location in Which the Study Took Place

The study took place at Gallaudet University, specifically The Mental Health Center at Gallaudet University (MHC).

Gallaudet University is a private multipurpose educational institution and resource center that serves deaf and hard of hearing people through a full range of academic, research, and public service programs. As the only liberal arts university in the world designed exclusively for deaf and hard of hearing students,

Gallaudet is universally renowned. (Gallaudet University: A Tradition of Excellence)

A cooperative agreement was made between the researcher and MHC via the Gallaudet University School of Education and Human Services' Department of Counseling, which allowed the researcher to conduct the interviews at the MHC. MHC offers a comprehensive model of counseling, psychotherapy, assessment, and other mental health services to Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals and their families.

As all subjects were Gallaudet University students, the researcher was required to travel from Woodbridge, VA, to Washington, D.C., to conduct the interviews.

Participants

Participants in this study were current Deaf consumers of the state/federal VR system who were currently attending Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. To ensure population homogeneity of participants, only students who identified themselves as Deaf and utilized ASL were interviewed for this study.

An advertisement (see Appendix A) was circulated via Gallaudet University's student electronic mail distribution list as well as posted on bulletin boards around campus, explaining research criteria and requesting participants. This avenue was chosen, after previously identified attempts did not yield participants, because the advertisement was accessible to the entire student population of Gallaudet University, thereby reaching a larger audience. Interested participants contacted the researcher based on the contact information provided at the conclusion of the advertisement. Individuals who met the research criteria were contacted by the researcher by electronic mail and further details

were discussed. Eight individuals (two pilot cases and six cases) were selected to participate in the study.

Participants were awarded a cash incentive of \$10/hour for the interview period.

Procedures

An advertisement (see Appendix A) was circulated to all Gallaudet University students via the student electronic mail distribution list as well as posted on bulletin boards around campus introducing the study, explaining research criteria, and requesting participants. Interested participants contacted the researcher based on the contact information provided at the conclusion of the advertisement. The researcher contacted the individuals who met the research criteria via electronic mail to: (a) further explain the purpose of the study and answer any questions and (b) explain the logistics of the interviews. Eight individuals (two pilot cases and six cases) were selected to participate in the study.

At the time of the interview, the researcher further explained the purpose of the study, answered any questions, and began to establish a rapport with the participant. Also, the researcher asked the participants to sign the *Consumer Informed Consent Form* (Appendix B), indicating their willingness to participate in the study and the *Permission to Videotape Consent Form* (Appendix C), indicating their consent to have the interview videotaped. The participants were assured that the researcher and one other reviewer would be the only parties that would review the videotape, and that it would subsequently be destroyed.

The researcher, using the participants' preferred mode of communication, conducted semi-structured and informal interviews. Asking participants questions of an

open-ended nature involved asking for the facts of a matter as well as for the participants' opinions about events. Participants were often asked to propose their own insights into certain occurrences, and the researcher used such propositions as the basis for further inquiry (Yin, 1994).

During the 1/2- to 1-hour interview, participants were asked the following seven main open-ended questions that reflected the actual inquiry:

1. Tell me about what brought you to VR.
2. Describe your experiences with VR.
3. Could you identify needs that you had when you went to VR?
4. Is VR meeting your needs at this time?
5. Tell me about your experiences with VR. Has it been satisfying?
6. Tell me what about VR is not giving you satisfaction.
7. Describe your experiences with your VR Counselor.

The rationale for utilizing these seven open-ended questions is that they were generally exploratory in nature, in that they were designed to elicit significant information regarding Deaf consumers' perceptions of the dynamics of the rehabilitation process in obtaining services from the state/federal VR system. These types of questions are a justifiable rationale for conducting an exploratory case study, the goal being to develop pertinent hypotheses and propositions for further inquiry (Yin, 1994). In exploratory case studies, there are no propositions (no set theories or principles), but the design states a purpose, as well as the criteria by which an exploration will be judged successful (Yin, 1994). Some studies, such as this one, have a legitimate reason for not having any propositions. This is the condition in which a topic, in this case Deaf,

Gallaudet students' perceived barriers to the rehabilitation system, is the subject of "exploration" (Yin, 1994) (quotes his). It was the researcher's desire to uncover new information and, subsequently, discover propositions.

In a case study, the interview questions form the structure of the inquiry and are not intended as the literal questions to be asked of the participant (Yin, 1994). These questions are posed to the researcher, not to the participant, and are reminders regarding the information that needs to be collected, and why, and may serve as prompts in asking questions in a case study interview. The main purpose of these questions was to keep the researcher on track as data collection proceeded (Yin, 1994). Mertens (1998) asserted that "research questions cannot be definitively established before the study begins, rather, they will evolve and change as the study progresses" (p. 14). Using this method avoided the problem of leading questions, thus, interesting information was more likely to be revealed than would have come out in conventional question-and-answer interviews (Petersen, 1988).

The order in which these questions were asked depended upon the participants' reaction to the preceding questions. The flexibility in question order allowed the researcher to be more natural and responsive (Tesar, 2002). The open-ended questions used in the interviews were presented in a neutral manner (neither in a positive nor negative manner) as to avoid influencing the subjects' responses.

As this interview structure primarily entailed a visual, signed communication format, the responses of the participants were recorded on videotape, providing a permanent record of what occurred. By preserving the words of the participants, the researcher had their original data. If something was not clear in the transcript, the original

data source was checked for accuracy (Tesar, 2002). As a reliability check, in addition to the researcher reviewing the videotapes, biased interpretations made by the researcher were controlled by having a second reviewer review the videotapes, interpret the sign language into the English language, and transcribe the interview. The second reviewer is the Coordinator for the “Office for Students with Disabilities” (OSWD) at Gallaudet University. The OSWD provides individually tailored, comprehensive support services and programs for students with disabilities. Qualifications of the second reviewer include, but are not limited to, an earned PhD in Special Education Administration, membership in the American Deafness and Rehabilitation Association (ADARA), and fluency in American Sign Language.

At the conclusion of the interview, participants were awarded the \$10/hour incentive.

Instrument for Data Collection

“One of the most important sources of case study information is the interview” (Yin, 1994, p. 84). Interviews are an essential source of case study information because most case studies, including this one, are about human affairs (Yin, 1994). The instrument used for collection of the qualitative data consisted of the researcher as interviewer. Validity in qualitative methods was dependent upon the training, competencies, and empirical rigor of the researcher (Creswell, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Mertens, 1998; Tesar, 2002).

Researchers investigating cultures of which they are not members of are responsible for being knowledgeable about, and involved with, the culture and community that they are studying (Akamatsu, 1994; Foster 1994; Stinson, 1994). Stinson

(1994) held the opinion that “researchers have greater credibility when they can sign well, when they have deaf friends, and when they participate in the activities of the community” (p. 19), and asserted that “misguided work is less likely to occur when researchers who belong to the majority group are involved in the minority culture” (p. 17). The researcher is fluent in the use of signed communication, including ASL, possesses a strong knowledge of Deaf culture, and has attended and earned a master’s degree from Gallaudet University. The researcher has also worked in the field of deafness for over 10 years, primarily as a RCD.

According to Mowry and Anderson (1993), using semi-structured interviews offers several advantages, such as: (a) it enables the Deaf respondents to respond in their own words using their preferred mode of communication, and (b) it can provide the researcher with context (i.e., the “social reality”) (quotes theirs) in which to interpret the results. The use of interviews was imperative in this study for two reasons: (a) ASL is the primary language of the Deaf community, and (b) the average American Deaf adult reads at about the sixth grade reading level (Pollard, 1993). If a questionnaire were sent, it would require English proficiency beyond the participant’s ability, as English is not the primary language of the community. Materials that are wordy and verbose may overwhelm the consumer to the point that they either cannot comprehend the materials, or they just throw them out. Utilizing in-depth, face-to-face interviews allowed the Deaf participants to use the mode of communication that was most comfortable to tell their stories in their own words (Garay, 2003).

Moore (2001), in a quantitative study examining the disparity in VR closure success rates among racial and ethnic minorities of under-represented groups with

hearing loss, concluded that future research with the Deaf population may warrant the use of a data collection procedure which includes face-to-face personal interviews rather than an archival study. In working with a population who was Deaf, the flexibility and personal communication that the face-to-face interview offered allowed for fewer misunderstandings, more probing opportunities, and offered the researcher the opportunity to directly observe the participant. Given this method of communication, information gathered was more likely to be accurate. The facial expressiveness and body language of the individual added to the meaning of what was said in the interview (Bursell, 1997).

Interviews for this study were conducted in the preferred communication of the participants and sought to determine: (a) what perception do Deaf consumers have of the VR process?; (b) what are barriers to the achievement of goals in the VR process, as perceived by Deaf consumers?; and (c) what factors do Deaf consumers attribute to the achievement of goals in the VR process?

Pilot Study

Prior to the implementation of this study, a pilot study was conducted for validity and reliability purposes (Howell, 1989). Convenience, access, and geographic proximity (Yin, 1994) were the main criteria for the selection of the pilot case. Two Deaf, Gallaudet students, who were representative of the population being studied, were chosen for this pilot study. The purpose of this pilot study was to assist the researcher in refining data collection plans with respect to both the content of the data and the procedures to be followed, to assist the researcher in developing and/or refining questions to facilitate the interview, and to provide some conceptual clarification for the research design (Yin,

1994). A preliminary trial of interview questions and techniques provided necessary feedback, which was used to establish the validity and reliability of the data-collecting routine and appropriateness of the instrument (researcher as interviewer). Consequently, necessary revisions were made to the interview format that led to an improved research plan.

Lessons Learned

The time frame for each interview was not as long as the researcher anticipated. At the onset of the pilot interviews, the researcher anticipated that each interview would take approximately 90 minutes. The two pilot interviews took only approximately 60 minutes each, with expressive participants. It is the researcher's opinion that the participants came into the interview with set opinions regarding VR; therefore, they did not need to stop and consider their answers to the questions. The researcher found the participants quite willing to share their opinions about, and experiences with, the state/federal VR system.

As a result of the two pilot interviews, the researcher added the following questions to the remaining six interviews: (a) How did you find out about this research study?, (b) Why were you interested in participating in this study?, and (c) Do you think VR perceives Deaf people as disabled?

Data Analysis

The interviews with the Deaf, Gallaudet students who are VR consumers were videotaped, reviewed by the researcher, interpreted by a certified Sign Language Interpreter, transcribed, and reviewed by a second reviewer. Data analysis was a holistic analysis of the entire case and fell into three categories: description, analysis of themes,

and assertions. Throughout the data collection process, a detailed description of the case emerged, as did an analysis of themes or issues and an interpretation or assertions about the case by the researcher (Stake, 1995). The researcher employed a case-study approach to analyze the raw data from the interviews with the Deaf, Gallaudet students, utilizing the research questions as a structure to place the data into categories to provide a profile of recurring themes or topics about the state/federal VR system. The researcher was looking for patterns in VR experiences, such as the Deaf consumers' perception of the VR process, what gave Deaf consumers satisfaction and dissatisfaction regarding VR services, and Deaf consumers' experiences with their VR Counselors. Particular attention was paid to what positive factors Deaf consumers attributed to the achievement of their goals and what negative factors Deaf consumers attributed to being a barrier to the achievement of their goals.

The researcher did not address the data with a set of hypotheses to test or with a theory developed in another context to which he or she wished to match the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The researcher approached the interview transcripts with an open attitude, seeking what emerged as important and of interest from the text (Bogdan & Biklin, 1992; Guteng, 1998; Mertens, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The final phase of data analysis was the researcher's report of the lessons learned from the case, as mentioned by Lincoln and Guba (1995). The goal of exploratory studies is not to conclude a study, but to develop ideas for further study.

Summary

This single-case study design included three research questions to investigate Deaf, Gallaudet students' perceptions of barriers in the process of obtaining services from

the state/federal VR system. The research questions asked of participants were designed to elicit significant information regarding their perceptions of the VR process and their perceived barriers to the achievement of goals in the VR process. Qualitative information was analyzed by classification of themes and categories provided by the Deaf, Gallaudet student during the interview. The questions investigated and answered in this case study have led to information about ways to enhance the existing state/federal VR system.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this case research design was to discover and examine Deaf consumers' perceptions of barriers in the state/federal VR process. The qualitative aspect of this design explored, through personal interviews with Deaf consumers of the state/federal VR system, who were attending Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., the variables associated with perception of the barriers to the VR process.

For the purposes of this study, an advertisement was circulated to all Gallaudet University students via the student e-mail distribution list, introducing the study, explaining research criteria, and requesting participants. Eight students (two pilot cases and six cases) who met the research criteria were chosen to participate in personal interviews with the researcher. The interview method included seven open-ended questions: (a) what brought the subjects to VR, (b) the subjects' experiences with VR, (c) what needs the subjects had when they went to VR, (d) how is VR meeting the consumers' needs, (e) what is bringing them satisfaction from their experience with VR, (f) what is bringing them dissatisfaction from their experience with VR, and (g) their experiences with their VR Counselor. Other open-ended questions were often asked to build upon and explore the subject's responses to the questions asked by the researcher.

This chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section, the researcher's difficulties working with the state/federal VR system are briefly discussed. In the second section, subjects are profiled and a detailed description of the case emerges. The third section provides a summary of the interview material, based on the three research questions. The fourth section provides a summary of the chapter.

Difficulties Working With the VR System

The researcher encountered various difficulties during this study. The study was initially envisioned having a quantitative phase and a qualitative phase. The quantitative phase was to involve utilizing a questionnaire to explore barriers to the achievement of goals in VR for Deaf consumers, as perceived by RCDs. The qualitative phase was to consist of interviewing Deaf former consumers of the state/federal VR system regarding their perceptions of barriers to achieving goals in the VR system.

For the qualitative phase of this study, the researcher planned to request demographic data from RCDs on Deaf former consumers of the state/federal VR system from federal Region III (Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia). Information was to be collected on those Deaf former consumers who had been closed successfully (status 26) and unsuccessfully (status 28 and status 30) in the past 3 to 6 months. A total number of clients who met these criteria were to be identified by the RCDs in federal Region III. Letters from the interviewer would then be sent anonymously to those clients, inviting them to participate in the study.

For the quantitative phase of this study, all of the RCDs serving Deaf consumers in federal Region III would have been sent letters and questionnaires requesting their participation in this study. In addition to identifying and providing demographic and outcome data of Deaf consumers for the purposes of the qualitative interviews, the RCDs would have completed a questionnaire regarding their perceptions of potential barriers to the achievement of goals in the VR process for Deaf consumers.

The researcher immediately met opposition and was told to contact the State Coordinator for the Deaf (SCD) of each state to apply to do the study, and then to contact

each field office within each state to request permission to perform the study. The researcher was warned that processing these requests could take a minimum of 6 months, and that it was a burden on the individual offices to look up the client information and send out the letters. The researcher was not able to take this arduous route due to time constraints.

After the initial methodology was discarded, the researcher decided to focus on a qualitative study and interview Deaf VR consumers whose cases had been closed successfully (status 26) and unsuccessfully (status 28 and status 30) in the past 3 to 6 months, from any state, regarding their perceptions of barriers in the state/federal VR process. The researcher placed an advertisement in a well-known, national, Deaf newspaper for several months requesting participants. The same advertisement was placed in a well-known electronic newsletter with a wide distribution to the Deaf community for several months. Both advertisements yielded no response.

Finally, the researcher designed the current methodology and interviewed current Deaf consumers of the state/federal VR system who were attending Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. An advertisement was circulated via Gallaudet University's student electronic mail distribution list as well as posted on bulletin boards around campus, explaining research criteria and requesting participants.

It is the researcher's opinion that, following the initial methodology, combining both the quantitative and qualitative methods would have proved to be a stronger study; however, the researcher encountered "barriers" of her own in the state/federal VR system.

A Case Study of Deaf Consumers

The following information was derived from personal interviews with eight Deaf consumers of the state/federal VR system who, at the time of the interview, were attending Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. To protect the confidentiality of the subjects, pseudonyms were assigned. Information is divided into three areas. The first area provides a brief biographical sketch of the subjects. The second area describes the responses of the subjects to the interview questions. The third area reports and analyzes the relationships of patterns from each interview.

Biographical Sketch of Participants

Renee

A 21-year-old, single, Caucasian female, born and raised in Florida, Renee appeared outgoing, expressive, and very talkative. Renee was born hearing, gradually becoming Deaf after developing Otitis Media. Renee has one sister who was born Deaf and her remaining family is hearing. Renee reported that even though she was the only one who signed with her sister, she did “not really” grow up signing. Although there was only 2 years between them, her sister was gone frequently. Consequently, Renee did not see her sister very often.

At the time of the interview, Renee was an undergraduate student at Gallaudet University, majoring in Communication Arts. Renee was also working on Gallaudet’s campus, coordinating events for “Deaf Way 2.” At the time of the interview, Renee stated that she plans to graduate in 2 years. Her current goal is to obtain an internship with the United States Air Force (USAF) in their public affairs department. She stated that, when she was hearing, she wanted one day to join the USAF. Renee hopes to obtain a job with

the USAF as a civilian when she graduates. After working in that job for 2 years, she hopes to go to graduate school, either in the military or as a civilian.

Renee found out about this research study when she received the advertisement the researcher sent out to the Gallaudet community via electronic mail. She stated that she “saw VR and was instantly attracted because I know that not many deaf people are interested in researching VR and what works and what doesn’t work. So I thought I would come and share it.”

John

A 19-year-old, single, Caucasian male, John expressed his eagerness to “help” with this study. John was born Deaf in New York City. When he was 6 years old, his family moved to New Mexico, where he maintains his residence. Both of John’s parents are Deaf, although he thinks they were born hearing and became Deaf due to illnesses. John also has a younger brother who is Deaf. However, the parents believe the brother was also born hearing and became Deaf through illness. John is the only one in the family who was born Deaf. John’s family signed as he was growing up.

At the time of the interview, John was a sophomore undergraduate student at Gallaudet University, pursuing a double major in Psychology and Photography. When asked how he planned to use his majors, John replied:

I am not really sure yet. I don’t have any goals for my life yet. I have not yet decided for myself. Both of my majors fascinate me. Those are the two that I have liked the best so far in any school. So I decided to use those as they are my best skills. They help others so much.

John is not currently working; however, he is looking for a job on campus. When asked about his future career plans, John replied that he currently does not know. He further explained:

I don't see myself working everyday. I don't want that for my life. I want to be active. Go out, change the world. Living in Manhattan. Living big. That is what I want. So maybe Clinical Psychologist or a Photographer for a magazine. Not sure yet.

John informed the interviewer that he found out about this research study from his friend's girlfriend, who suggested that he participate. John also stated that he "enjoys helping people finish their studies. My major is Psychology; I know how hard it is to get people to help with research."

Tanisha

A 26-year-old, single, African-American female, Tanisha was born and raised in Maryland and appeared articulate, expressive, and very open to sharing her opinions about VR. Tanisha was born Deaf. Tanisha's parents are hearing and she has both a Deaf brother and a Deaf cousin she has never met. When asked if her family signs, Tanisha replied, "Yes, they all sign. I made sure of that."

At the time of the interview, Tanisha had recently graduated from Gallaudet University, with a degree in Psychology. Tanisha was also working on Gallaudet's campus, working with students under a new program called the Health Careers Opportunities Program (HCOP). Tanisha was also a Resident Assistant (RA) in the dorm. At the time of the interview, Tanisha stated that she plans to attend New York University (NYU) in the fall, pursuing a master's degree in Deaf Therapy. Tanisha hopes to obtain

an MA in a Deaf rehabilitation field, and possibly become a VR Counselor “where I can encourage more deaf people to go to school and get degrees. It’s not just about me. I want to go into a school-counseling program and get a job working with international students. I want to work with people.”

Tanisha found out about this research study when she saw an advertisement posted on the campus of Gallaudet University.

Carla

A 27-year-old, single, Puerto Rican-American female, Carla was born and raised in Bridgeport, Connecticut, and appeared outgoing, expressive, and a strong self-advocate. Carla was very articulate about her opinions regarding VR. Carla was born Deaf and her parents and two older sisters are also Deaf.

At the time of the interview, Carla was a sophomore undergraduate student at Gallaudet University, majoring in Social Work. Carla is not currently working. However, she stated that most of the time she volunteers. At the time of the interview, Carla stated that she plans to graduate in 2 ½ years. Her current goal is to focus on her undergraduate work, pursue graduate school, obtain her LSW certification, and set up her own practice. Carla stated that she does not mind working with a variety of people, such as children, adults, agencies, the government, and abused children. Carla explained in detail her social work-related work experiences in Boston over the last 5 years. Carla was very vocal about her issues with her supervisor and her apathy towards following policies and procedures. It was these experiences that led her to go back to school and focus on obtaining a degree.

Brian

A 34-year-old, married, Caucasian male, born and raised in North Carolina, Brian appeared friendly and eager to help out with this study. Brian was born Deaf and his parents and sister are also Deaf.

At the time of the interview, Brian was a junior undergraduate student at Gallaudet University, majoring in Communication Arts. Brian was also working on the weekends as a Staff Residential Assistant (RA) in the dorms of Gallaudet University. At the time of the interview, Brian was not really sure of his future career plans. He expressed interest in working in a residential school program as a dorm supervisor, or something related to working with kids in the residential school dorms. Brian stated that he needs to research this more.

Brian found out about this research study when he saw the advertisement posted in a building on campus.

Janet

A 25-year-old, single, Caucasian female, Janet was born Deaf and raised in California, and is the only Deaf member of her family.

At the time of the interview, Janet was an undergraduate student at Gallaudet University, majoring in Design. When asked what year she is in school, Janet stated, "I will be a senior for the third time. I have been in school for 6 years now. Janet was also working part-time for thewashingtonpost.com in the photography department. Janet's job responsibilities included "editing pictures and cleaning them up so they look good online." Regarding her future career plans, Janet expressed interest in pursuing graduate school, possibly majoring "in something related to art." Janet further explained that she

could also pursue studies in an unrelated field like philosophy or religion, but she was definitely interested in graduate school and traveling after graduation, and subsequently obtaining a “good job.” Janet added, “I am not sure yet. I am young, so I live by the minute, you know?”

Janet found out about this research study when she received the advertisement the researcher sent out to the Gallaudet community via electronic mail. She stated that she “read the e-mail and thought she could help.” Janet also shared that she wanted to participate in the study because she is an “honest person” and “the people who use VR really don’t know much about it” and she wanted to share her experiences.

Michael

A 23-year-old, single, Caucasian male, Michael appeared polite and eager to participate in this interview. He was born in San Francisco, California, and his family moved to Memphis, Tennessee, when he was 3 years old. Michael was born Deaf, however, all of his family members are hearing. Michael explained that his family does not sign and that he uses his voice while communicating with his family.

At the time of the interview, Michael was a sophomore, undergraduate student at Gallaudet University, pursuing a double major in Secondary Education and Theater. Regarding future career plans, Michael outlined his plans to teach high school students who have learning disabilities, stating, “They learn things through the theater instead of the regular learning environment. I think that will be very beneficial for them.” At the time of the interview, Michael was a full-time student and was not employed.

Michael found out about this research study when he received the advertisement the researcher sent out to the Gallaudet community via electronic mail. He stated that he

was interested in participating in the research study because he thought it “might help improve the relationship between VR workers and deaf clients.”

Paula

A 23-year-old, single, African-American female, Paula appeared outgoing, friendly, and very articulate. She was born and raised in Texas. Paula was born Deaf and has a younger sister and two distant cousins who are Deaf. Paula reported that some of her family, such as her parents, sign and some of her family members do not. Paula stated that their system of signing is really a home-based sign.

At the time of the interview, Paula was a senior, undergraduate student at Gallaudet University, majoring in Early Childhood Education. At the time of the interview, Paula stated that she planned to graduate the following year. Paula expressed her hope of becoming a teacher of young children, preferably kindergarten or first grade. When asked if she planned to teach in a Deaf school, Paula replied that it did not matter; she will work with any population. She further explained that the undergraduate program at Gallaudet University was training them to work with hearing children as well as Deaf children. Paula explained that if you want to specialize in deafness, multiple disabilities, or family-centered Early Childhood Education, then you would need to enter the master’s program. Paula informed the researcher that she was unsure of whether or not she wanted to enter the MA program.

Paula shared that she is unsure what she will do after graduation. She stated that she will probably look for a job; however, in the upcoming fall, as an undergraduate student, she will be taking a graduate course. According to Paula, this is her ‘test’ to see if she wants to go to graduate school. The following spring, Paula will take another

graduate class while working as a teacher's aide, which is part of her undergraduate requirements. Paula will then student teach. She will have a class and will be the primary teacher. Paula feels that this will be her 'test' to see if she feels confident enough to teach after she graduates. Paula indicated that she applied for a job but she decided to wait on that. Last year Paula was informed that VR will support her through graduate school. According to Paula, some of the VR Counselors she previously had did not know if they could support her through graduate school; however, her current VR Counselor told her that VR would support her through graduate school, providing she can explain her reasons for going to graduate school and her needs for an MA.

Paula found out about this research study when she saw a flyer advertising the study posted on the campus of Gallaudet University. She stated that she "saw it said 'VR clients.' I said 'oh, yes!'" Paula informed the researcher that, after she set up her appointment for her interview:

I went to Texas, and my friend told me about the interview. So I said, 'oh, yeah, I am supposed to do that.' So I contacted you again. She told me she felt good interviewing with you and telling you her concerns with VR. I encouraged her to tell other people to tell VR. Because some people, especially in Texas, don't like their VRs. I like my VR, but she didn't. I know the process; I understand the system. Maybe if they understood the system better, they wouldn't feel cheated out of the system.

When asked why she decided to participate in this interview, Paula replied:

I wanted to expose to you and to others about the VR system. The good and the bad. I am sure that you have heard the good and bad things about the other states.

I was hoping I could be the spokesperson for us. Research shows this. Nice. You can get numbers; know what is satisfying, what is not satisfying. You know?

Responses to Interview Material

Reason for Seeking VR Services/Needs the Subjects Had When They Went to VR

These two questions were asked separately, at different points during the interview. Both questions yielded similar answers from the participants interviewed. For all of the students interviewed, the basic need they had when they went to VR, and their reason for seeking VR services, was for financial assistance for college. But there were differences regarding how they first learned about VR.

Renee identified financial support for college as her primary need when she sought services from VR. Renee indicated that she sought VR services because her sister told her that VR would help her with school. Renee was a senior in high school at the time, and her sister informed her that, since she has a disability, she would have trouble getting benefits and insurance. Renee's sister suggested that she visit VR and Renee decided to see "what they could do for me." Renee stated that she "didn't know how they could help me." According to Renee, no information about VR was provided to her by personnel at the Deaf school she attended during her junior and senior years of high school. There was no Transition Specialist at the Deaf school she attended and she was not provided with information about VR by her Guidance Counselor. Renee indicated that, if she had not heard of VR services prior to going to Gallaudet University, she would have learned about it upon her arrival. She stated that everyone talks about VR at Gallaudet, comparing and contrasting the services provided by different states.

John also sought VR services for financial support for college. John explained that he sought VR services for money for college because his parents cannot support him at all. According to John, his parents went through a bad divorce about 3 years prior to this interview. He stated that they have bills to pay and “it is best that they not support me except for maybe \$2,000 a year. That’s all. So I can’t expect them to help me. Everything I’ve been doing so far is mostly on my own with VR and scholarships.” When asked how he found out about VR, John replied that he always knew VR was there when he was growing up. He explained that his parents are Deaf and they know about VR, and the Deaf community talks about VR and going to their counselors. John stated that you hear about VR often.

Tanisha also sought financial assistance for college when she applied for services from VR. Tanisha explained that she expected encouragement when she first sought services from VR. Tanisha indicated that her first exposure to VR was when her older brother applied to VR for help. Tanisha was 7 or 8 years old at the time and her brother was 15 or 16 years old. She remembers her brother receiving a Zenith television with captioning from VR. As a result of this experience, Tanisha knew that college students received services from VR. According to Tanisha, she first applied to VR when she was 10 or 12 years old and they explained what to do when she graduated from The Maryland School for the Deaf (MSD).

Carla initially sought services from VR during her senior year of high school. Carla worked closely with VR, exploring college programs and college entrance requirements. Carla eventually decided to drop the college idea, as she felt her life’s focus had been on school success: classes, honors program, student congress, etc. Carla

felt that she needed a “test for success” and decided to pursue the working world. Carla and VR worked out an agreement that they would share the responsibilities of looking for employment for Carla. Carla indicated that this was “good team work.” After working for 5 years, Carla sought VR services because she could not support herself through school. Carla further explained that she tried to find other financial assistance, such as scholarships, and was consistently turned down. Initially, Carla tried attending Gallaudet part-time and then working two or three jobs to support herself. Carla indicated that she became a workaholic and, as school was important to her, she wanted to focus on school and not miss any of the school experience. Carla indicated that she has known about VR since she was a student at the Deaf school. According to Carla, VR is always going to the Deaf schools and explaining what their purpose is and the services they provide.

Brian first became aware of VR during his high school years. While Brian was in high school, VR paid for a sign language interpreter for one of the classes he took. VR also paid for sign language interpreters for classes that Brian took at community college. According to Brian, this was 16-17 years prior to the time of this interview and was the first time VR supported him. A few years prior to this interview, Brian went to VR for the second time and sought financial assistance for college, as it is expensive and he could not afford to pay for school himself. VR financially supported him to attend Gallaudet University. Brian attended Gallaudet for one year and, “for a whole list of reasons,” he was thrown out. VR subsequently ceased supporting Brian, and he attended community college until the spring semester prior to this interview. At that time, Brian transferred back to Gallaudet University and VR started supporting him again.

When asked the main reason she sought VR services, Janet responded:

I figured I would take advantage of it...not take advantage in a bad way, but they will pay for school and room, so why not? You know. I am not trying to pity myself because, 'I am deaf, and I should take advantage of it.' No. They provide the service, so why not.

Janet identified financial support for college as the primary need when she sought services from VR. According to Janet, she first learned about VR when she was in high school. She was in a Deaf program that was already established with VR, so she had some knowledge of VR before she graduated. Janet stated that she started to learn more about VR, such as what services they can or cannot provide. Janet emphasized, "It is better to do some research on your own before you get VR because you don't realize how much they can do for you or how much they can't do for you, too. It goes both ways."

Michael indicated that he first learned of VR when he was a freshman in a mainstream high school. His first experience with VR was when they referred him to a work agency. Michael worked for 2 years and then approached VR about attending college. He stated:

My parents could not afford to send me to college with their money alone. So I knew I could get some kind of help, so I went to VR. I asked them if they would be willing to help me, and they said they would be willing to. Everything!

Paula first learned about VR services from a family member, who informed her that VR provides financial assistance for schools in-state or out-of-state. Paula called the VR office and explained that she wanted to attend Gallaudet University and inquired if

this was possible. VR informed her that it was possible and that, if Paula was eligible to get into the program, she was automatically in.

Experiences with VR/Aspects of VR That Cause Dissatisfaction

These two questions were asked separately, at different points during the interview. Both questions yielded similar answers from the participants interviewed. For several students, six main themes or opinions emerged from this question: (a) VR pushed students to pursue other career directions than attending college, due to the students' deafness; (b) there is discrimination in the VR system based on race, gender, or socio-economic status; (c) VR perceives Deaf people as disabled; (d) the services and support that VR offers to its consumers varies from state to state, rather than being standard; (e) VR should provide consumers with information about VR services from the onset of services; and (f) there is insufficient communication between VR and consumers.

VR Pushed Students to Pursue Other Career Directions

More specifically, two out of the eight students interviewed, both in the pilot study and the research study, indicated that they felt that VR was pushing them to pursue other career directions rather than encouraging them to attend college. The students felt this was because of their deafness. John explained, "VR did not really expect me to do a lot. They did not expect me to succeed at anything at all." John further explained that VR expected him, with their support, to work as a mechanic on cars, doing bodywork and engines. He stated that this was all VR expected of him, even though he had a 3.4 GPA from high school, high test scores from the SATs, was salutatorian from the Deaf school, was valedictorian when he transferred to the mainstream school, and received a letter from his State. He also mentioned that he sent all of this information to VR to plan for

college and tutoring and whatever other assistance he might require. A meeting was set up between John and his VR Counselor and, according to John, after reviewing all of his information, the VR Counselor remarked, “Wow, you are a very, very bright boy. I am curious, what kind of job are you planning to look for? VR can help with that.” John stated that this surprised him and he informed the VR Counselor that he was not really looking for a job at this time and wanted help and assistance in paying for college. John’s impression was that this took the VR Counselor aback and she replied, “You want to go to college? We will help you to find a job. That is really much better for you.” John stated that this went on back and forth for quite awhile and finally the VR Counselor agreed to have VR assist him with finances and tutoring for college. John’s opinion is, after all of that, his VR Counselor still thinks he is better off looking for a job than going to college.

When asked why he thinks VR had this particular perception of his future, John replied:

Really, I think it is because VR has bad experiences with that [students going to college]. Many times people go to college, and they come back, get in trouble, get suspended, or kicked out. So far, many things like that have happened and only a few actually succeed wonderfully. I know a few people from the Deaf school who succeeded wonderfully in college. In the past, I have known some who have gotten into trouble, or suspended, or kicked out and come back home. I think that VR feels like ‘why should we send kids out of state?’ So, I have been going back and forth with them—‘I am not doing this,’ I am not doing that.’ Everything is going wonderfully so far! But even after that, VR is still edgy; and they are not really willing to support me fully.

When asked how he feels about this situation, John replied, “I feel it is another step in dealing with everyday life. I just deal with it. Fine, I just take it and move on. Just have to succeed and work through it, that’s it.”

Janet discussed some of the struggles she had with VR regarding her desire to study design. She shared that she has had four different VR Counselors. According to Janet, her first VR Counselor did not want her to study design “because he felt it was not a good match for me because it is so involved in the hearing world.” Janet stated, “Really it fit my dream. That was my dream, you know? ‘Excuse me; don’t tell me I can’t do anything.’” Janet consequently decided not to go to school for a year “because I wanted to take time for myself and think about what I wanted to do...because he scared me into thinking maybe I couldn’t do design.” The next year Janet moved to a different city and had a different VR Counselor who, according to Janet, was “very supportive and nice.” However, time went on and “they still did not do much either.” Janet moved to another city in California and was assigned a VR Counselor that was specifically for people going to Gallaudet or RIT. According to Janet, this VR Counselor also initially turned down her request to study design. Janet stated that she decided to attend Gallaudet University anyway, and put down teaching as her choice of major so that she could become accepted. Janet attended Gallaudet University for a year and noticed during this time that the design program was improving. She went to her VR Counselor to discuss getting into the program; however, VR was still hesitant. Janet stated that, during the course of one semester, she found out more about her rights and realized that she could major in anything she wanted. According to Janet, her VR Counselor was concerned because, in the counselor’s opinion, the design program at Gallaudet University was not a good one.

VR visited Gallaudet over the course of a year, talking to people in the design department and interviewing students in the program. According to Janet, VR decided that the program was a good one and offered to support Janet in the design program. Janet stated:

But it was a long haul because I have wanted to study design since I was 18, and now I am 25. It just kept getting delayed. Still, I can't say that I'm sorry. No. I don't care because I got what I want. And I am happy with that. I don't know what I would have done at 22 years of age anyway, you know? So, it all came to good, yes.

The VR Systems Discriminates Based on Race, Gender, or Socioeconomic Status

Three of the eight participants interviewed had the perception that the VR system discriminates based on race, gender, or socioeconomic status.

Tanisha informed the researcher that VR will not financially support her pursuit of a master's degree. She agreed that it might be because she has graduated from college; however, she also feels that it is political. According to Tanisha, she cannot find work in the psychology or Deaf-helping fields with a bachelor's degree because they all require a master's degree. As she feels she needs an MA, Tanisha is fighting with VR to support her graduate work. At the time of this interview, VR was denying Tanisha's request. Tanisha's perception of why VR is denying her request is, "I think they don't like to support colored deaf people; they like to support white people, and its like colored deaf people are getting oppressed." When asked what makes her think that VR does not support people of color who are Deaf, Tanisha replied:

Because I am the first black deaf person from the Eastern Shore to get a BA. In Maryland, I am the first black deaf person to get a degree. I know of two other

people who got full support from Maryland to go to graduate school. I have been fighting with them and explaining to them, but they say, “No, no. We have supported you for 4 or 5 years and we think that is enough.” I explained to VR that my parents paid taxes for 20 years, my grandparents paid taxes for 20 years and, if I get my MA degree, we are talking about 20-30 years that I will work. I will be paying taxes. I will be paying back more than VR paid me anyway.

Tanisha commented that, in an indirect way, VR oppresses her.

Tanisha went back a bit further to explain her relationship with VR regarding college. According to Tanisha, when she was a sophomore or junior at MSD, representatives from different colleges would come for a work/college fair. The purpose of this was for the college to explain what the work force provides and what colleges tend to provide. VR attended these fairs as well to explain to the students what services VR could provide. Tanisha went and looked at different colleges and careers at the fair. Tanisha then visited the VR representatives and was asked if she was from the Eastern Shore. Tanisha replied that she was and VR explained that VR is done by county in Maryland. Tanisha filled out paperwork with her name, phone number, etc. Shortly after that, MSD contacted Tanisha and asked her what she wanted to do after high school. When she replied that she wanted to go to college, they recommended that she take a career test to see what her strengths and weaknesses were; which she agreed to do. According to Tanisha, she was informed that the test results indicated that she fit best with work that required vocational training. Tanisha further explained:

I felt like, “Whatever. But ok, fine.” I had other classmates that were from deaf families and VR encouraged them to go to Gallaudet University. So, I wondered,

“why not me?” So anyway, I just continued on. After graduation, I was working and I told VR that I wanted to go to community college. VR said, “fine,” and they supported that. But I still felt like community college was not giving me everything I wanted. I wanted more. So I asked if I could go to Gallaudet University. They asked me, “why?” So I explained that I wanted to get my BA degree so I could get a job. An AA degree will not help me in the long run, but a BA will. So we argued about that. On my own, I did some research and found the University’s phone number and other information. I gave the information to VR, and they wanted to hold on it. So I met someone who encouraged me to go to Gallaudet. I thought about it and I made the decision that I wanted to go to Gallaudet. So I asked VR and they finally said they would pay for me to go to Gallaudet.

Tanisha took the SATs and was accepted to Gallaudet University. VR informed her that she had to keep her GPA up or they would not continue to support her. Tanisha attended Gallaudet and admitted that she was “clueless about how everything works at school.” Tanisha explained that “everything got messed up with the VR money” and she had to figure out who was responsible for paying Gallaudet money for tuition and she could not return to school until the situation was straightened out. Tanisha reported that this was a new experience for her and her freshman year was really awkward. A mentor suggested that Tanisha talk to financial aid and VR. The situation was resolved when VR paid Gallaudet and Tanisha subsequently returned to Gallaudet. Tanisha reported that, throughout the next year:

Things went ok. I had ok grades, and VR said they would not support me. I felt it was not fair that my friends were continuing to get support even though their grades were the same as mine. So I argued with them about this, and I think it is because I am black. So fine, I went to a community college and took courses to show VR that I can get good grades. So fine, VR decided to support me again, and I went back to Gallaudet. They supported me through to graduation.

Tanisha's final comments about this issue were:

I hope that one day VR will help deaf, and other kinds of people...deaf, blind, wheelchair, handicaps. Because they are human beings and have the same value as other people. You know VR likes to make categories and tell people what they can and can't do. I would like that to be done with. I don't want to be the first black deaf woman in 30, 40, or 50 years. I want to use this to empower people in the community. I want to make a community so that it will be easier for our children and their children.

Though Michael stated that he received adequate services from VR, during the interview he discussed what was happening to other people by indicating that some people at Gallaudet do not think VR services are fair. Michael stated:

The services for me have been great, but for other people, I know they get terrible service. They get bad counselors who are not really willing to help them. I feel bad for them because it shows favoritism. It is not fair, so I think the office should try to be fair. I know one case, one friend, who lived in a lower economic class. He really wanted to come here, but he was rejected because of his background. Michael gave an example of how some people at Gallaudet think VR is unfair:

For example, the boys get more money. They get a full ride while the girls only get half the money. So, there is discrimination against gender. I think because they don't succeed as well as boys. Therefore, because the boys get a larger portion of the money, the girls are not able to succeed because of the limited options they have.

Michael continued this train of thought by stating that he thought it was odd, and not appropriate, that VR would discriminate based on gender.

Paula shared an experience she had with her first VR Counselor. According to Paula, her VR Counselor was impressed that Paula had attended a mainstream school where she used interpreters all day. Paula stated that she was at the top of her class, and the VR Counselor seemed impressed about that, but it was not appropriate because Paula perceived that it was because she is an African-American. When the researcher asked Paula to explain this more in depth, Paula explained that the counselor was not impressed with Paula's educational status:

...because I am African-American. I felt a little race tension. She felt it not appropriate for African Americans to go to college. Her eyes are interested, but behind them...ok... because my family is educated. My mother graduated from Texas University. It is a very large school but she graduated from there. My grandmother graduated from another school. My uncles are educated. My grandparents are educated; my uncle is a Social Worker. So, it runs in the family, they are all educated. My cousin is third generation, not first. People assume first, but it's really third. Assume, assume, assume. So that counselor had already assumed that. So I went ahead and filled out the form, said I was eligible. She met

my mother, and was embarrassed. She changed her attitude. She realized that my mother had high expectations. My mom wanted to know if they would support me or not. After that, the counselor said she would do many things like provide hearing aids. They could provide a whole list of things. Thank you. That's all I ask.

Paula stated that this VR Counselor left after one year.

VR Perceives Deaf People as Disabled

Thematic among two out of the eight participants interviewed was the opinion that VR perceives Deaf people as disabled. Carla stated that she had to teach her VR Counselor the concept of what an advocate is and that it means counselors support their consumers. Carla shared that some VR Counselors are responsible for job placement activities and have preconceived ideas about Deaf consumers and what they are capable of: "They don't understand them. They think they are trouble. I don't believe in judging." When asked if it was her opinion that her VR Counselor makes judgments, Carla replied:

Yes. A little bit. Yes. It turns me off. She doesn't judge with me. She knows I will speak up. I won't just accept it. I will let her know that I don't like it. I will question it and have a dialogue. I want to discuss it so I understand the other side. I am willing to listen. I am not shy. I won't just be polite and have a small dialogue. If you offend me, I won't be upset, my ego won't be hurt. I want to think about these things. Okay. Empowerment...VR doesn't want that. VR doesn't teach clients how to be powerful. That is like handing out power to people and saying you are empowered. Okay. Things are under VR's control. But it is

not my power. When you are not empowered, VR can take advantage of that.

That's not fair.

When asked if she thought VR perceives Deaf people as disabled, Renee responded with an immediate, "Yes." When asked how she felt about that, there was a long pause. When asked if she personally felt that Deaf people are disabled, Renee replied, "No. Well yes. I mean it depends. The word 'disabled' to me is not the same as 'disabled' to her. The word is defined by how the world perceives those people. It has to have special connotations. You know?" Renee went on to say:

VR views deaf people as disabled. I think that the general population views deaf as disabled. They pity us. I really don't need that pity. Many deaf people are not against taking advantage of that pity. Some of them have a good job and they are still on SSI (Social Security Income). I don't like the idea that people look at me as disabled and they will help me. But at the same time I use their services so that is a little bit of a conflict.

Renee gave an example to illustrate what she meant by this conflict:

It's like if someone met you on the street and just looked at you and pitied you and wanted to give you \$1,000, do you take the \$1,000 or not? No, because it's like 'so what.' You know? But, most people I know would take the \$1,000 and say thank you. I think it is the same thing. Because you are deaf, you get money and 'here's your services.' You are deaf, so you are disabled. And in a way they are right because it will be difficult for me to go to school. It will be harder for me to get a job. At a community college, VR will reinforce that I need interpreters and note takers. I need a whole list of services that VR will contact the state and

get for me. VR will advocate for the needs of their clients. It is the same with jobs too. VR will get you a job and work everything out. It makes the lives of deaf clients easier.

Renee further stated her opinion that VR “helps to set up everything smoothly. It substitutes for us as an approach. It’s a conflict. I don’t know how many Deaf people think about that.”

Services and Support VR Offers Consumers Vary from State to State

Another area of dissatisfaction that was thematic among five out of the eight participants interviewed was the variation, geographically, of VR services offered. Renee expressed the opinion that the concept of VR is good, but she thinks the problem is that each state is different from the others. She holds the opinion that, if there was one standard VR system, it might be run or managed better. She stated that each state government is different and that some counties are run differently as well. Renee gave the example of her county in Florida: her county has more Deaf people than any other county in Florida; consequently, the county receives more money than other counties. Renee feels that the quality of services changes based on financial resources and based on which county you live in. Renee also shared that all of the Deaf students at Gallaudet talk about their experiences with VR, comparing and discussing the differences between them. “My VR pays for that. Oh, yours doesn’t?” Renee also thought that it was interesting that some states’ VR come to Gallaudet to meet their students. “It is like a ‘VR Day,’ about 26 VR flock to Gallaudet and meet with all the students from their state. California does that, Texas does that.” Renee further explained that, at this time, the VR Counselors come and mingle with their students, so it is obvious who has a lot of contact with their

students. Renee stated that Florida does not do this and believes that one reason might be that Florida does not have enough students who go to Gallaudet.

According to John, other state VR systems of the Deaf people at Gallaudet are willing to pay for things like traveling, interpreting, and tutoring, and his VR in New Mexico is not. John discussed how this is not fair but he understands the reason why. John's opinion is that maybe other states have more money to give to everything and his state does not have a lot of money. John stated that this does not make him feel good and he wishes his state could give a little bit more. John shared his belief that he feels his state's VR is very different from other states' VRs:

So far I have had many people in the deaf community tell stories about VR as very needy. But, when I hear stories about VR in New Mexico, they are always focused stories. Like VR is always cutting, they have many problems, people have to fight with them, and people get sent all over the place. There are a lot of problems to face. I hear a lot of paranoia when I meet people at Gallaudet and I say VR is lousy. People tell me they love their VR Counselor. I look at them funny. A lot of people tell me stories about VR: 'VR is so nice. They give me everything. They meet all my needs. We eat together and all of that good stuff.' I look at them, 'really? Wow!' Growing up I always thought that everyone had the same experience with VR; that it is awful, have a lot of problems, have to fight, and not giving all kinds of support. Other states are a lot nicer. I was very surprised by that. Maybe New Mexico is different because there is not enough money. I don't know. My experience is different from other people's experiences. According to Tanisha:

Other students get computers and laptops, and all kinds of things. But my VR has not given that to me. Why? They say, 'no, it is under the county in Maryland, their budgets are all different, and they are not the same.' They get monies from the state and then, once they get it, they can budget it however they want. I still don't understand because under the county, they still have Maryland VR meetings every year. They discuss how to use the money, and I am not sure what the political point is.

Tanisha further explained that she thinks the VR support you receive is different depending on which county or state you live in. She commented that each county gets money from the state of Maryland, so the amount varies for each county, which she does not understand.

Brian's impression about VR was more positive. He stated, "They give me what I need. For me, I am satisfied with what VR gives me." Brian later added, "I am pretty satisfied with VR. There is not a lot they can do for me. Some states allow full support, but not many." When asked if he thought this was fair, Brian responded:

No. It should be the same. But, they are state agencies and not federal agencies, right? They are other states which each have their own rules and policies. It just happens that North Carolina does not support fully like other states. It would be nice to have it; I could focus on school full-time. One negative about partial support is that I have to work, pay for my own expenses, and worry about finances and bills.

Paula had a different perspective on this issue and shared her belief:

Some states don't provide services. VR is under what company? Which corporation do they work for, because the government gives VR their money. Ok. Then VR decides what to do with that money. But I am curious about how they feel about the government pressuring some of the state VRs by saying, 'you have more successful clients that are working. They are not dependent on SSI or SSDI.' I know some students who really wanted to go to graduate school, but they couldn't because VR said no. They will only support you for 5 years. That's what I think. They will support you for 5 years or X number. I understand that, it is a money issue. They pay a lot of money for a BA degree, then to add an MA. They feel that have to prove to themselves they did well for the BA. But they should be able to get an MA because it is a 1- or 2-year program. Go part-time or full-time. It is my opinion that VR should filter out who has potential and who is better off working. You know?

Paula finished this thought by adding, "I feel that sometimes VR Counselors select people at random or first-come, first-serve. I just feel they shouldn't do that. They should support everyone who is eligible to get into the program."

Paula continued discussing her dissatisfaction by stating:

Each state gets a different amount of money. Does that money come from the federal government or the local? That's my thing. It is very vague. They just say they get it from the government, but they won't give specific information. Who is responsible for funding? Is it private? Government? That is what I am curious

about. It seems like I can't understand until I get in the VR system, maybe, I don't know.

Paula went on to explain that she understands that some VRs are very mean and uninviting to their consumers, and others are friendly and inviting. Paula stated:

It's not fair. That's my feeling. 'I am sorry, but I do better than this person and you are telling me that you can't afford it??' Then they give me a song and dance about already having the money set up for this other person because they asked first. You came in after, so you get what is left. This small amount. I think there needs to be more of a fair system, where everyone can get the services that they need. If they fail, the first semester, or break the first agreement, then they should be cut off. They should bring in a new person to replace the old client because the file is already there. There should be a smooth transition for that.

VR Should Provide Consumers with Information about VR Services from the Onset of Services

Thematic among three out of the eight participants interviewed was the opinion that VR should provide consumers with more detailed information about the services that VR offers at the initial time of contact. Carla expressed concern over her hope that all of VR can provide brochures and information about services to consumers so new intake consumers can make decisions. Carla further explained that, as a new consumer, she had to do things for herself. She would have to ask, "Do you have a brochure on this topic?" Carla felt that she had to bug people to find out information that she was curious about. Carla stated that she did not expect them to sit there and explain everything to her in ASL; however, she thinks she should be given the materials to read over and ask for an

explanation if she has questions. Carla's opinion is that information regarding VR should not be hidden so consumers have to ask for it, especially if the consumer is new and does not know what kind of information they are seeking.

Janet stated that an aspect of VR that is not satisfying to her is that VR does not give consumers all of the information they need to know in the beginning, such as a consumer's rights. As an example, Janet shared that her former VR Counselor came to Gallaudet and gave a presentation about VR. The counselor wanted to share his experiences with VR because he felt that VR didn't treat Deaf people appropriately. He stated that the consumers have rights and should be able to pick any major they wanted to. Janet also learned that consumers have a right to have on-site supervisors, or have a mediator that will come to both sites. It was Janet's opinion that all of this information should be made available to consumers at the beginning of the VR process.

Paula also expressed the opinion that consumers need more education and information about VR and the services they can provide. Her advice to consumers of VR was that they educate themselves about what services they need. They need to do the research about VR and ask questions. Paula gave an example of a meeting her VR office recently had for new consumers who do not yet know the VR system. They showed a videotape that explained everything about the VR process and what services consumers are eligible for. Paula expressed the opinion that consumers make the wrong assumptions about VR, and that meetings and videotapes such as these can help clear up these assumptions. Paula also thought that VR should provide consumers with information, such as a manual, about what services are available to them after their cases are closed. Paula stated that if a consumer has career needs or services after they are employed, and

their cases are closed, they do not know where to turn or what resources are available to them.

Insufficient Communication between VR and Consumers

Thematic among seven out of the eight participants interviewed was the opinion that there is insufficient communication between the VR offices and their consumers. Specifically, consumers are having difficulties contacting their VR Counselors and obtaining information needed to prepare for the start of the new school semester. Brian addressed this when he shared that he had trouble getting the information he needs from VR and he has to constantly ask again. He explained that he was trying to prepare for the fall semester and had been trying to contact VR via e-mail since May to find out how much support they will give him and other information. At the time of this interview in July, Brian did not have any information about his new VR Counselor. He stated that he was told in May that he had a new VR Counselor and was still waiting to find out his or her name and have contact with them. Brian reported that his current method of contact with VR was via e-mail. He reported that he used to contact them by phone and they responded quickly; however, as it is expensive to call long distance, he switched to e-mail. Brian stated that he has found out that e-mail is not the best way to contact VR, as it takes them a long time to respond. At the time of this interview, Brian asserted that he planned to go home in 2 weeks and stop by VR to find out who his new VR Counselor is and what is going on with his school for the fall semester. Brian expressed the concern that there was one only month left until the semester started and he still did not have the information he needed.

Carla expressed a similar problem when she gave an example of problems she had with VR regarding paperwork for school. Carla had filled out all of her paperwork, submitted it, and was waiting for VR to send money. The money never arrived. When she called she was informed that she was missing forms. There was a lot of confusion and a lot of waiting in between Carla's contact with VR. Carla stated, "VR should attend training workshops every month. They don't know how to fill out all this paperwork. They stall by saying they are working on it, but they really don't know how to do it! That wastes my time." Carla stated that she thinks all of these issues should be taken care of before school starts and that "Gallaudet and VR need to coordinate things!" Carla's opinion is that both VR and Gallaudet take too long to resolve these issues and that they are "not sharing information with each other."

Michael expressed his opinion about communication with his VR office:

It is sometimes difficult to get in touch with them. They are either too busy or not in the office. I call and they are not there, so I go and show up in person. They are there. They will tell me they are not there or in the office, whatever.

Michael expressed that it was difficult to contact VR when he needed something or needed help. Michael also added that his VR office had recently obtained an e-mail system, so they were in the process of learning it. Michael shared:

...they recently added the e-mail system shows me that they are working on how to contact them. Before, the only way to contact them was on the phone. But it was not very effective because Deaf people don't like to use the phone, because the secretary in the office will say, 'they are not here!' or 'they are out somewhere...out of the office.

Michael asserted that he thinks that the secretaries are lying when they say the counselors are out of the office. He explained his reason for thinking this by saying, “They lie because it only takes a little bit of time to say he’s not there. But if I drove there and showed up, I would find he was there.” When asked why he thought the secretaries would say the counselor wasn’t there when he really was, Michael answered, “I think they hire secretaries who don’t like disabled people.”

Renee stated that she also has trouble contacting her VR; her primary relationship with them is limited to faxing them information that they need regarding school. Renee feels this is a significant problem that affects her VR services and she would prefer more contact with them. Renee’s opinion is that:

VR really has a lot of power, they can really help someone; someone who needs a push or maybe someone who needs to get their foot in the door, or maybe needs that kind of guidance. You know? VR is good because they can sit down with you and talk with you. They try and help you succeed with your goals. That is really good. So, I prefer someone who could keep me in check. I think that’s important, especially when I am 2,000 miles away.

John stated that his mother has the most contact with the VR Counselor and he has only met this counselor three times. The rest of their contact has been via TTY, e-mail, and fax. John indicated that he does not really have a relationship with his VR Counselor. He further explained that he will send e-mails and it will be 3 or 4 days before he gets a response. John’s opinion is that his questions are not being answered in a timely manner and when he does finally receive a response, it is usually an evasive one. He stated that he will ask his VR Counselor a direct question and “she just dances around it”

until he tells her to answer him directly. John further stated that, “VR does not really care about anything I do. All VR really cares about are the grades at the end of the semester. They ask me, ‘What are your grades?’ so I send them my grades. That’s all they are really waiting to know.”

Tanisha reported that she has not had a lot of contact with her VR Counselor over the last 1 or 2 years. This was due primarily to difficulties they had with their working relationship, which was discussed in the previous section regarding dissatisfaction with VR services. Tanisha stated

I lost respect for the VR system. I feel that I lost respect for them. My counselor would e-mail me every month to see how I was doing in school. I send them two replies a semester. All for what? We make contact through the phone if we have to. We keep contact, but not everyday.

When asked how frequently she had contact with her VR Counselors, Janet replied that it depended on the counselor, stating, “Some don’t care as long as you give them what they want.” Janet explained that she has had VR Counselors contact her every month to see how she was doing and some just required that she turn in her paperwork. A few months prior to this interview, Janet had been in contact with her fourth, and current, VR Counselor. Janet stated that she contacted her VR Counselor to discuss the purchase of hearing aids. According to Janet, the counselor stated she would contact her; however Janet has was not contacted, and stated:

I guess I will have to say something to get a move on. Because I don’t like to waste my time. I like to keep things moving. I have heard nothing for 2 ½ months.

Maybe they are busy, because I think in the summertime VR has a different schedule than during the year. I don't know. I am just guessing.

Summary

There were other responses to the interview questions regarding the students' experiences with VR and aspects of VR that caused dissatisfaction. These responses were individual, rather than thematic, and included: (a) VR staff not using sign language, therefore, necessitating the use of sign language interpreters; (b) VR insisting that Deaf consumers use hearing aids; (c) VR not offering the encouragement, counseling, and feedback about consumer progress that students perceive as necessary; and (d) The location of a VR office in a federal building, necessitating showing personal identification, which is perceived as violating the anonymity and confidentiality of being a VR consumer.

Is VR Meeting the Student's Needs/What From Their Experience with VR is Bringing Them Satisfaction?

These two questions were asked separately, at different points during the interview. Both questions yielded similar answers from the participants interviewed. Thematic among the participants is that VR is helping them meet their goals at this time, primarily because they pay for school and, for the most part, they provide the students with the services they ask for.

When discussing her satisfaction with VR, Renee stated, "...my overall experience with VR is that I am satisfied with it. They pay for school and I can't ask for more than that." When asked what aspects of her VR experience have been satisfying for her, Tanisha's reply was similar to that of Renee's, "I would say that they are paying for

school completely. They are paying for 4 years for me to get my BA degree. They give me hearing aids sometimes. And, they pay for new glasses for me.” Brian stated, “They give me what I need. For me, I am satisfied with what VR gives me.” Brian added that VR “pretty much” supports his goals. He stated they have given him everything he has asked for and haven’t turned him down yet. He added that everything he has asked for, they have given him, and “they give what they can give”.

When asked if she was satisfied with her VR experience, Janet replied, “Pretty much. I just wish I knew more about it (VR) when I got it. Because it’s like when you get something, you always gain more knowledge about it. Fine. I guess for now I am satisfied with it. Fine.” Janet indicated that VR is currently helping her to meet her goals. When asked about what aspects of his VR experience have been satisfying for him, Michael replied, “I am very satisfied with them. So, I would say I have a pretty high satisfaction rate.” Michael went on to explain, “They are very supportive. They are willing to do things that I need. Anything I ask for they provide.” Michael’s example of this statement was that there was a time when he didn’t have money to buy books and, when he contacted VR, they sent him the money to buy them. Michael also stated:

The office is open. If you need help, they will direct you to the right person. It doesn’t matter that that person is not my VR Counselor. You can sit down and discuss it. Then they write a note to my VR Counselor so they can take over. They do a pretty good job.

In Michael’s opinion, VR is meeting his needs at this time and they are helping him meet his goals.

When Paula was asked what aspect of her VR experience has been satisfying for her, she replied, “I am very satisfied with VR. They try to meet my needs. They try their best.”

One response to this question that was not thematic was John’s. While he indicated that VR did meet his financial needs for school, he did not view this to be satisfactory. When asked if John felt his experience with VR was satisfying, he replied:

Really, no. Not really. I mean that I have to find other things, find other sources to help me. Plus, I worry about life, how I will get through with what I have now. VR refuses to help me with anything else. It is really superficial. They don’t really help me with anything I need like financial problems or anything. I can’t go to VR because I know that I have to depend on others here. I don’t really think VR is helpful; they are more like a source of money for me. It is just like a scholarship that I get from them. That’s all.

Experiences with VR Counselor

Two main themes emerged from this question: (a) the opinion that there is a high employment turnover rate for VR Counselors, and (b) the lack of sign language skills among VR Counselors who are hearing.

High turnover rate of VR Counselors.

All of the participants interviewed indicated that they have had a high turnover rate of VR Counselors, which has led to difficulty in establishing a relationship and affects the continuity of services provided. Renee, whose VR Counselor at the time of this interview was new and would be her fifth VR Counselor in 4 years, expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that she has changed VR Counselors so often. Renee stated

that she is not sure why they change counselors so often; she wonders if it is because the system does not hire enough or if the counselors are promoted or find a job that they like better. Renee explained that her VR office in Florida does not have counselors who are Deaf. In her opinion, since they are all hearing and do not sign, thereby having to utilize sign language interpreters, they may feel frustrated with consumers and transfer to positions where they can communicate with consumers. Renee feels that her VR services are placed on hold because she keeps transferring to other counselors.

Janet, who at the time of this interview was working with her fourth VR Counselor, shared her opinion that changing VR Counselors so often affects services and slows down the VR process. She stated, “They are really slow now and they don’t speed up. Just like VR. You have to know VR, and what they tend to do, but it is a slow process. Ok. I mean as long as they are giving me free money. If they pay for it, I don’t care, I will go with it. Still...not the best.”

All other participants indicated that they have had multiple VR Counselors in a short period of time.

Lack of sign language skills among VR Counselors who are hearing.

Thematic among three out of the eight participants interviewed was the dissatisfaction expressed with the fact that the VR Counselors who were hearing either had limited sign language skills or a complete lack of skills. Renee indicated that she was on her fourth VR Counselor in 4 years and that none of her counselors knew how to sign. At the time of this interview, Renee felt that her fourth, and current, VR Counselor was “very good.” He did not know sign language, which Renee felt was a negative; however,

he was currently taking classes. Unfortunately, this VR Counselor had recently “moved up” and a new VR Counselor was going to be assigned, her fifth in 4 years.

John indicated that his VR Counselor is hearing and does not sign. When asked how he communicated with his VR Counselor, John replied that his mother, who is skilled at speech-reading, was present for their first meeting and acted as an interpreter. Michael indicated that he is on his second VR Counselor. Michael stated that his first VR Counselor was “not very good at all.” Michael explained that his first VR Counselor was hearing and they could not understand each other and had problems with communication. Michael stated that, in order to communicate, they had to write back and forth on a piece of paper. The first VR Counselor moved to a higher position and Michael received his second VR Counselor. The second counselor is Hard of Hearing and, according to Michael, “he communicates fine.” He also mentioned that none of the other people who work in the VR office sign and they wrote back and forth on a piece of paper to communicate.

The other participants indicated that they had no problems communicating in sign language with their VR Counselors, as their counselors were either Deaf themselves, or were fluent in sign language due to the fact that they had Deaf family members.

Summary

There was one other response to this interview question regarding the students’ experiences with their VR Counselors. This response was individual, rather than thematic, and was the opinion that the VR Counselor needs to learn what it means to advocate for consumers.

Two other themes emerged from this question: (a) The opinion that VR pushed students to pursue career directions other than attending college, due to the students' deafness, and (b) the opinion that there is insufficient communication between VR and consumers. These themes were discussed in the previous section regarding dissatisfaction with VR services.

Analysis of Qualitative Patterns

“Data analysis is a complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation” (Merriam, 1988, p. 147). Based on the questions asked by the researcher, the following patterns emerged from the interviews with participants:

Participants sought VR services for the purpose of obtaining financial support for college. For all of the students interviewed, their basic need they had when they went to VR, and their reason for seeking VR services was for financial assistance for college.

An area of VR services that caused dissatisfaction was the opinion that VR pushed students to pursue other career directions other than attending college. Two out of the eight students interviewed indicated that they felt that VR was pushing them to pursue other career directions rather than encouraging them to apply to college. In the students' opinion, this was due to their deafness.

An area of VR services that caused dissatisfaction was the opinion that there is discrimination in the VR system based on race, gender, or socioeconomic status.

Three out of the eight participants interviewed believed that the VR system discriminates based on race, gender, or socioeconomic status.

An area of VR services that caused dissatisfaction was the opinion that VR perceives Deaf people as disabled. Two out of the eight participants interviewed shared the opinion that VR perceives Deaf people as disabled.

An area of VR services that caused dissatisfaction was that the services and support that VR offers to its consumers varies from state to state, rather than being standard. Five out of the eight participants interviewed expressed dissatisfaction regarding the variation, geographically, of VR services offered.

An area of VR services that caused dissatisfaction was the opinion that VR should provide consumers with information about VR services from the onset of services. Three out of the eight participants interviewed expressed the opinion that VR should provide consumers with more detailed information about the services that VR offers at the initial time of contact.

Table 1 summarizes the general themes of barriers that emerged from the majority of the participants interviewed and illustrates their correlation to the barriers identified in the professional literature cited in Chapter II.

Table 1

General Barriers That Emerged From Participants

| Barriers that emerged from interviews | Literature associated with barriers |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| Services and support that VR offers to consumers varies from state to state | Bureaucracy (Quinn, 1981; West, 1995) |
| Insufficient communication between VR and consumers | Communication issues (Danek, 1994) |

Table 1

General Barriers That Emerged From Participants

| Barriers that emerged from interviews | Literature associated with barriers |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| High turnover rate of VR Counselors | Shortage of qualified personnel (Danek, 1987; Melick & Herbert, 1995; Petersen, 1988) |

Table 2 summarizes the specific themes of barriers that emerged from the minority of the participants interviewed and illustrates their correlation to the barriers identified in the professional literature cited in Chapter II.

Table 2

Specific Barriers That Emerged From Participants

| Barriers that emerged from interviews | Literature associated with barriers |
|---|---|
| VR pushed students to pursue career directions other than college | Little opportunity for consumer choice/participation (Quinn, 1981; Turner, 1994; West, 1995; West & Parent, 1992) |
| VR discriminates based on race, gender, or SES status | No literature identified in this study |
| VR perceives Deaf people as disabled | Pathological vs. cultural view of deafness (Dolnick, 1993; Lane, 1997; Melick & Herbert, 1995) |

Table 2

Specific Barriers That Emerged From Participants

| Barriers that emerged from interviews | Literature associated with barriers |
|---|---|
| VR should provide consumers with information at onset of services | No literature identified in this study |
| Hearing VR Counselors have limited/complete lack of sign skills | Shortage of qualified personnel (Danek, 1987; Melick & Herbert, 1995; Petersen, 1988) |

An area of VR services that caused dissatisfaction was the opinion that there is insufficient communication between VR and consumers. Seven out of the eight participants interviewed expressed the opinion that there is insufficient communication between the VR offices and their consumers.

Overall, participants were satisfied with their VR services, primarily because VR pays for school and participants feel that VR is meeting their needs at this time. Thematic among the participants interviewed was the opinion that VR is helping them meet their goals at this time, primarily because they pay for school and, for the most part, provides the students with the services they ask for.

Participants indicated that there is a high turnover rate of VR Counselors. All of the participants interviewed indicated that they have had a high turnover rate of VR Counselors, which, in their opinion, has led to difficulty in establishing a relationship and has affected the continuity of services provided.

Participants indicated that the hearing VR Counselors either had limited sign language skills or a complete lack of skills. Three out of the eight participants interviewed expressed dissatisfaction regarding the fact that the hearing VR Counselors either had limited sign language skills or a complete lack of skills, which made communication difficult.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to discover and examine Deaf consumers' perceptions of the dynamics of the rehabilitation process to the achievement of goals in the state/federal VR system. The qualitative perceptions of Deaf, Gallaudet students, who were VR consumers, on variables associated with the perception of barriers in the process of obtaining services from the state/federal VR system, were examined.

An examination of the qualitative data indicated that the three main areas of VR services that caused barriers to achieving services among the participants were (a) the services and support that VR offers its consumers varies from state to state, rather than being standard among all states, (b) the opinion that there is insufficient communication between VR and consumers, and (c) the high turnover rate of VR Counselors.

Examination of the qualitative data also indicated that, overall, participants were satisfied with their VR services, primarily because VR pays for school and participants feel that VR is meeting their needs at this time. Qualitative findings of this study will be further described in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

This study examined Deaf, Gallaudet students' perceptions of barriers in the state/federal VR process. This chapter is divided into six sections. The first section discusses the research questions and qualitative themes arising from the individual interviews with Deaf, Gallaudet students. The second section discusses the relationship of the current study to the literature. Limitations of the research are explained in the third section. Implications for practice and recommendations are addressed in the fourth section. The fifth section provides recommendations for further research. The conclusion is presented in the sixth, and final, section.

Discussion of Research Questions and Qualitative Themes

Patterns of relationships were developed through analyzing the interview responses of the participants. Overall, the patterns discussed in Chapter IV were linked to the participants' perceptions of their (a) reasons for seeking VR services, (b) experiences with VR that caused dissatisfaction, (c) experiences with VR that bring satisfaction, and (d) experiences with VR Counselors.

Case study analysis indicated that the participants interviewed for this study were satisfied with the VR process, primarily because VR paid for their college education, and met their needs overall. Case study analysis also indicated areas of dissatisfaction the participants had with the VR process. The three research questions, which can be used as a guide for discussing the research conclusions, are discussed below.

1. What perception do Deaf consumers have of the VR process?

Case study analysis of the personal interviews suggests that the participants' perceptions of their VR experience were measured by the purpose they believed VR to

serve. For all of the consumers interviewed, their basic need and their reason for seeking VR services was for financial assistance for college. As this financial need was being met by VR, these participants seemed to feel in control of, and responsible for, the direction of their VR program. Overall, the participants interviewed had a positive perception of the VR process.

2. What are the barriers to the achievement of goals in the VR process, as perceived by Deaf consumers?

While the participants interviewed had an overall positive perception of the VR process, some barriers that were perceived were: (a) the services and support that VR offers to its consumers varies from state to state rather than being standard, (b) the lack of information provided to consumers about the services offered by VR, (c) insufficient communication between the VR offices and their consumers, and (d) the high turnover rate of VR Counselors.

3. What positive factors do Deaf consumers attribute to the achievement of their goals in the VR process?

The participants interviewed for this study attributed the achievement of their goals to the fact that VR is paying for their school and, for the most part, providing them with the services they request.

Relationship to the Literature

In Chapter II, the researcher focused on areas of available literature on the topic of VR for Deaf consumers. There is a paucity of research on Deaf consumers' perceptions of the dynamics of the rehabilitation process in obtaining services from the state/federal VR system.

Information gleaned from the interviews correlated with the literature in the following areas: bureaucracy, family involvement, little opportunity for consumer choice/participation, shortage of qualified personnel, communication issues, and pathological vs. cultural view of deafness.

Information gleaned from the interviews did not correlate with the literature in the following areas: lack of support systems, lack of adequate health care coverage, lack of widespread implementation of state plans for the Deaf, and lack of qualified sign language interpreters.

General Barriers to the Vocational Rehabilitation System

Bureaucracy

Thematic among five out of the eight participants interviewed for this study was dissatisfaction regarding the variation of VR services offered based on their geographic location. In Renee's opinion, VR services in each state are different. She holds the opinion that if there was one standard VR system, it might be run or managed better. She stated that each state government is different and that some counties are run differently as well. Renee gave the example of her county in Florida; her county has more Deaf people than any other county in Florida, consequently. Consequently, the county receives more money than other counties. Renee feels that the quality of services change based on financial resources and based on which county you live in.

According to John, other state VR systems of Deaf students at Gallaudet are willing to pay for things like traveling, interpreting, and tutoring, while his VR in New Mexico does not. John discussed how this is not fair but he understands the reason for the situation. John's opinion is that other states may have more money to give than his state.

John stated that this does not make him feel good and he wishes his state could give a little bit more. According to Tanisha:

...other students get computers and laptops, and all kinds of things. But my VR has not given that to me. Why? They say, "No, it is under the county in Maryland, their budgets are all different, and they are not the same." They get monies from the state and then, once they get it, they can budget it however they want. I still don't understand because under the county, they still have Maryland VR meetings every year. They discuss how to use the money, and I am not sure what the political point is.

Tanisha further explained that she thinks the VR support you receive is different depending on which county or state you live in. She commented that each county gets money from the state of Maryland, so the amount varies for each county, which she does not understand.

Brian stated that, "some states allow full support, but not many." When asked if he thought this was fair, Brian responded:

No. It should be the same. But, they are state agencies and not federal agencies, right? They are other states which each have their own rules and policies. It just happens that North Carolina does not support fully like other states.

Paula had a different perspective on this issue and shared her belief:

...some states don't provide services. VR is under what company? Which corporation do they work for, because the government gives VR their money. Ok. Then VR decides what to do with that money. But I am curious about how they feel about the government pressuring some of the state VRs by saying, "You have

more successful clients that are working. They are not dependent on SSI or SSDI.” I know some students who really wanted to go to graduate school, but they couldn’t because VR said “No.” They will only support you for 5 years. That’s what I think. They will support you for 5 years or X number. I understand that, it is a money issue.

Paula continued discussing her dissatisfaction by stating:

Each state gets a different amount of money. Does that money come from the federal government or the local? That’s my thing. It is very vague. They just say they get it from the government, but they won’t give specific information. Who is responsible for funding? Is it private? Government? That is what I am curious about. It seems like I can’t understand until I get in the VR system, maybe, I don’t know.

Karen Love Hanes, a Rehabilitation Technical Specialist with the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) for the State of Maryland for the past 21 years, stated that this is a “big issue” among consumers and that those consumers “compare all the time.” Love Hanes works with students at MSD and she hears this complaint from students and parents/guardians from all over the country. Love Hanes (personal communication, 2005) stated:

Everyone at Gally thinks they should be getting a free ride...consumers don’t always have an understanding of the scope of the program, where the funds come from, etc. We are not just paying for school; we are helping people who have a lot of different disabilities, in a lot of different ways.

Family Involvement

A greater awareness and appreciation of the importance of family involvement in the VR process is emerging in the field today. The family is the natural and primary support system for the VR consumer (Twenty-Sixth Institute on Rehabilitation Issues, 2000). In fact, family members provide the most long-term and important support in a person's life and can make critical contributions to successful employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities (Twenty-Sixth Institute on Rehabilitation Issues, 2000).

The relevance of family dynamics to the obtainment of VR services is clear in this study. Renee indicated that she first found out about VR from her Deaf sister, who told her stories about VR and "how they would help with college." Her sister encouraged Renee to seek services from VR due to the fact that she has "a disability so there are problems getting benefits and insurance" and that "they would help pay for school." Renee indicated that it was hard for her to look to VR for help; however, her mother encouraged her to seek services. Family involvement in the VR process can be instrumental for the consumer to achieve VR goals (McKenna & Power, 2000).

John's motivation for seeking services from VR was his parent's lack of financial resources due to their divorce, and their inability to support him in his endeavor to pursue college. John stated, "I can't expect them to help me. Everything I've been doing so far is mostly on my own with VR and scholarships." Due to the fact that John's parents are themselves Deaf, they have personal knowledge of VR. John's mother had frequent interaction with John's VR Counselor and was often the main point of contact between them. Some contact with available family can make a difference in the consumer's attainment of rehabilitation goals (Power et al., 1991).

Michael's motivation for seeking VR services was similar to that of John, as his parents also lacked the financial resources to pay for his college education.

Tanisha credited her parents for her involvement with VR services. Tanisha had a Deaf brother who was quite a bit older than her. She remembers him being involved with VR when she was younger. As an adult, Tanisha's parents, as well as her Deaf school, informed her about VR services.

Carla's parents and two older sisters are Deaf. When Carla was a senior in high school, VR came to her school and inquired whether the students wanted to go to college or work and distributed their business cards. Carla's mother encouraged her to seek out VR after she graduated. As Carla's "parents had high expectations" for her, Carla sought out VR and discussed the possibility of pursuing college. Similarly, Paula's mother had high expectations of her, as everyone in her family was well-educated. Paula's mother was a strong advocate for Paula and was instrumental in obtaining financial support from VR for Paula to attend college. Gallaudet University's Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center (The Clerc Center) shares the concerns of parents and professionals about the achievement of Deaf and Hard of Hearing students in different learning environments across the country. The aim of The Clerc Center is to improve the quality of education for Deaf and Hard of Hearing children and youth from birth through age 21.

The Clerc Center was mandated by Congress "to establish and publish priorities for research, development, and demonstration through a process that allows public input" (Education of the Deaf Act Amendments of 1992). Since 1994, The Clerc Center has devoted significant resources toward developing and implementing a structured process for gathering public input, starting with the establishment of the National Mission

Advisory Panel (N-MAP), whose membership represents the constituencies served by The Clerc Center. The constituencies include center/residential schools for the Deaf, day schools for the Deaf, mainstream programs for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students, regular elementary/secondary education programs, university programs, members of the Deaf community, alumni of Kendall Demonstration Elementary School (KDES) and Model Secondary School for the Deaf (MSSD), and parents of Deaf and Hard of Hearing students. The constituency representatives were selected to act in an advisory capacity to The Clerc Center. In 1994, the N-MAP narrowed the priority areas to three: literacy for all, family involvement, and transition from school to postsecondary education and employment.

The Clerc Center developed “Partners for Progress,” a mechanism through which it identifies areas of critical need in each of the three priority areas and identifies collaborating programs and individuals to make an impact on these needs. The Clerc Center has used a variety of strategies to obtain public input from the constituent groups. One such strategy, “National Dialogue,” is a meeting of experts and consumers to discuss the issues and critical unmet needs in one of the priority areas. In 2001, one such “National Dialogue” was held to discuss critical needs in transition from school to postsecondary education and employment. Among the issues discussed was the important role that families play in the lives of their children. One participant in the “National Dialogue” made a strong case for the power of parents to affect changes, not only in their children, but in systems that have an impact on their children (LeNard, 2001). When discussing the need for parent involvement, one respondent remarked, “If you want a smooth transition, empower the family” (p. 2).

Sitlington, Clark, & Kolstoe (2000) asserted that the impact of family influence, not work experiences or training, appears to be the strongest predictor for determining employment outcome. The family is the natural and primary support system for the consumer. Most of the major events in the consumer's life take place within the framework of the family; consequently, disability is a family affair (Tuck, 1983; Kerosky, 1984; Power & Dell Orto, 1986; Power et al., 1991; Twenty-Sixth Institute on Rehabilitation Issues, 2000).

Little Opportunity for Consumer Choice/Participation

Danek (1993) stated that “the pre-eminent philosophical paradigm influencing rehabilitation legislation in recent years has been that of consumer involvement and empowerment. This recognizes the right of people with disabilities to full participation in all aspects of community life” (p. 8). Emener (1991), in an editorial entitled “An empowerment philosophy for rehabilitation in the 20th century,” asserted:

...if rehabilitation professionals are dedicated to issues of individual independence and freedom on behalf of individuals with disabilities, then it indeed would appear fitting to assure that “empowerment” is a critical construct and guiding operational value with rehabilitation's systems, agencies, facilities, companies and professional service delivery personnel. (p. 1)

Two out of the eight students interviewed, both in the pilot study and the research study, indicated that they felt that VR was pushing them to pursue career directions rather than honoring their choice of attending college. The students felt that this was because of their deafness and that VR does not teach their clients how to be empowered. The process of empowering an individual means “to give official authority or legal power to” or “to

promote the self-actualization or influence of” (Merriam-Webster On-Line Dictionary, 2005). Therefore, the rehabilitation professional committed to an empowerment approach to rehabilitation service delivery should facilitate and maximize opportunities for individuals with disabilities to have control, influence, and authority over their own lives (Emener, 1991).

Other general barriers to the VR system discussed in the literature review—lack of support systems and lack of adequate health care coverage—were not identified by participants of this research study as barriers to achieving their VR goals.

Barriers to Achieving the Goals of the Vocational Rehabilitation System – for Deaf

Consumers

Shortage of Qualified Personnel

For the VR Counselor, hearing loss presents unique issues that must be understood if appropriate services are to be arranged or provided (Danek, 1992). The number of VR Counselors who have an understanding of deafness, and who are able to communicate in sign language, has increased due to the recognition of the need for hiring RCDs and SCDs (State Coordinators in Deafness) within the state systems and legislation designed to make rehabilitation services accessible to Deaf consumers (Danek, 1983).

Petersen (1988) found that Deaf persons are frustrated with the lack of qualified and trained vocational counselors for the Deaf. This frustration among the Deaf population may limit the number of eligible Deaf persons who seek services (Melick & Herbert, 1995).

Communication Issues

Communication competency is necessary but not sufficient for adequate service provision for consumers who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing (Danek, 1994). Three out of the eight participants interviewed for this study indicated that they had difficulty communicating with their VR Counselors. The VR Counselors that were hearing either had limited sign language skills or a complete lack of skills.

Pathological vs. Cultural View of Deafness

Just as a language is both the expression and result of a distinct culture, deafness is as much a culture as it is a disability (Glickman, 1983; Vernon, 1969). For many VR consumers, being Deaf constitutes more than a functional hearing loss, it means belonging to a unique culture with its own language, ASL. Within this context, Deaf individuals are viewed as a minority group with a unique culture rather than persons who only have a functional deficiency (Melick & Herbert, 1995). This differentiation is difficult for many VR Counselors, who perceive deafness as a disabling condition rather than seeing its cultural significance (Sacks, 1990; Woodward, 1982 (as cited in Melick & Herbert, 1995)).

Two out of the eight participants interviewed for this study had the opinion that VR perceives Deaf people as disabled. Carla shared her opinion that some VR Counselors have preconceived ideas about Deaf consumers and what they are capable of. “They don’t understand them. They think they are trouble. I don’t believe in judging.”

Renee stated:

VR views deaf people as disabled. I think that the general population views deaf as disabled. They pity us. I really don’t need that pity. Many deaf people are not

against taking advantage of that pity. Some of them have a good job and they are still on SSI (Social Security Income). I don't like the idea that people look at me as disabled and they will help me. But at the same time I use their services so that is a little bit of a conflict...It's a conflict. I don't know how many deaf people think about that.

Love Hanes (personal communication, 2005) stated that this "always comes up" among Deaf consumers in the VR process. Typical comments from Deaf consumers include, "I don't have a disability. I am fine. I can get money, that's why I am here." Love Hanes asserted, "There is still discrimination against the Deaf in the community; they do have disabilities, and they do have barriers that non-disabled people do not experience."

Two other potential barriers to the VR system, for Deaf consumers, that were discussed in the literature review—lack of widespread implementation of state plans for the Deaf and lack of qualified sign language interpreters—were not identified by participants of this research study as barriers to achieving their VR goals.

Limitations of the Study

Generalizations concerning results of this study must be tempered with caution, based on the following factors:

1. Given the unique approach taken by this study, a triangulation design that facilitated simultaneous review of data with the purpose of checking for consistency across sources of data, and further enhancing and clarifying results, should have been employed (Creswell, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Krathwohl, 1993; Mertens, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). This approach

would have served to corroborate and converge the results of this study, thereby decreasing the likelihood of bias that might be associated with the use of only one method of analysis (Creswell, 1994; Mertens, 1998). Utilizing multiple modes for gathering data would have been beneficial to the study, as each method of analysis would have served to complement the other method's weaknesses, as well as help to pinpoint the accuracy of the conclusions drawn (Tesar, 2002). Due to the difficulties the researcher encountered working with the VR system and accessing subjects, as discussed in Chapter IV, this method was not employed for this study.

2. Data for this study was collected from students who attend college, specifically Gallaudet University. Results may not be generalizable to consumers who are receiving job training, supported employment services, or attending another university.
3. Randomization of participants for inclusion in the personal interviews was attempted; however, the sample of volunteers was small. An advertisement was circulated via Gallaudet University's student electronic mail distribution list as well as posted on bulletin boards around campus, explaining research criteria and requesting participants. Eight students contacted the researcher and agreed to participate in the study; the first two participated in the pilot study, and the remaining six participated in the study. Because the sample was small, and because all of the participants were not randomly selected, generalizations to the larger Deaf community may not provide an accurate profile of consumers or experiences with the VR system.

4. The findings of this study are limited to the perceptions of the participants being interviewed and, therefore, are not generalizable to all consumers of VR. The students who volunteered for this study were articulate, expressive, very open to sharing their opinions about VR, and generally pleased with their experiences with VR. The majority of the volunteers for this study indicated that they wanted to participate in this study so they could share about their experiences with VR in the hopes of helping to improve the relationship between VR and Deaf clients.
5. Given the small sample size, the chances of one or two VR Counselors, who work with Deaf consumers, negatively affecting the Deaf participants' perceptions in the state/federal VR process are greater. Therefore, findings may not be generalizable to all counselors who work with Deaf consumers.
6. As seen from the perceptions of the participants interviewed, differences in VR services exist among states, so the results of this study may not be applicable to all state VR agencies due to regional differences and agency resources. Regional differences and agency resources may affect availability of services to consumers, counselor training, community resources, and availability of agency funding resources (Bursell, 1997). Also, due to the small sample size, states are not adequately represented.
7. Initially, the researcher had difficulty obtaining subjects to participate in this study, resulting in the final, small sample size. At the onset of advertising for participants for this study, the researcher was advised by a representative of Gallaudet University's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) to offer a cash incentive to potential participants to encourage

participation in this research study. The reason offered for this suggestion was that, due to the centrality of their location, Gallaudet students are frequently sought for participation in research focusing on the Deaf population, and are often “overused” for research studies.

An additional limitation is that researchers may be more prone to conduct research with Gallaudet students as they may not pose the usual limitations of subject resistance and inaccessibility. Nickless (1993) stressed that “availability does not justify repeated research on the same subject population” (p. 46).

8. There are potential problems regarding the credibility of research when researchers who are members of the majority culture are writing about individuals in a minority culture. One such problem is that there is a potentially dangerous tendency for oversimplification and stereotyping when researchers from the dominant culture try to describe and understand a minority culture (Stinson, 1994). As the researcher is hearing, researching, and writing about members of the Deaf community, this is a potential limitation of the study.
9. One of the lessons that the researcher learned from this study was that little has changed in the field of deafness in the past 30 years. All of the literature and research studies that the researcher read continually gave the same results, and the same recommendations. Significant progress or change does not seem to have been made. To this researcher, this apparent lack of progress is a source of frustration and discouragement. Perhaps the Deaf community shares this researcher’s beliefs concerning this lack of change.

Also, it was amazing to the researcher how many “barriers” were encountered just trying to implement a study investigating the obstacles that Deaf consumers of the state/federal VR system confront. If a researcher would initiate a similar study, it would have to be approached from inside the system to eliminate possible barriers to the collection of necessary information. Further, the researcher should attempt to have a Deaf partner in the collection of information. Such a person could possibly reduce the barriers for reaching and connecting with this population.

Implications for Practice and Recommendations

An analysis of information related to Deaf, Gallaudet students’ perceptions of barriers in the state/federal VR process is important for VR personnel to consider. The findings of this study, although limited in their generalizability by the restricted population (Deaf, Gallaudet students) and the relatively small sample size, suggest directions for the evaluation and improvement of service delivery efforts for Deaf consumers. The themes that emerged from the analysis led to the following implications for practice, and consequent recommendations, which are supported in the literature:

1. It would be beneficial for VR to devote more attention to providing Deaf consumers with detailed information about the services that VR offers and their rights as consumers (Bursell, 1997). This should take place at the initial time of contact. Having monthly meetings, a manual, or a videotape that has closed captioning, explaining the VR process and detailing the services Deaf consumers are eligible for would go a long way toward clearing up misconceptions about the services available to Deaf consumers. Information materials provided through VR offices must be modified and simplified to appropriately meet the needs of Deaf

consumers (Hurwitz, 1991). Additionally, information regarding services that are available after Deaf consumers are employed and their cases are closed would be beneficial.

Karen Love Hanes, a Rehabilitation Technical Specialist with the DORS for the State of Maryland stated that Maryland has a brochure that explains the process, from referral to successful employment, for all consumers. There is a closed-caption video available that explains the same process. DORS also has a brochure for individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing; however, as specific services are based on individual need and the brochures are somewhat general in scope, they need to be updated.

Love Hanes (personal communication, 2005) further shared that Maryland DORS explains all basic services and information to their consumers at the onset; however, in the end, it all comes down to the individual consumer's needs and what services they qualify for. Love Hanes stated that she was not sure if this practice was standard among all states.

2. The VR system needs to make a commitment to an empowerment approach to rehabilitation service delivery that facilitates and maximizes opportunities for individuals with disabilities to have control, influence, and authority over their own lives (Emener, 1991). Specifically, Deaf VR consumers should not be guided to pursue career directions other than college solely based on their deafness or the need for case closures. Love Hanes (personal communication, 2005) described an instance where a Deaf student she worked with through MSD was pushed into a

job by his VR Counselor, despite the fact that he was obviously college material.

Love Hanes stated:

I am not sure if it boils down to a money issue or a quick turnaround for a case closure. It is not right for individuals to not get a fair chance to pursue a career that they are capable of, and shoved into the wrong job, just to get case closures each year. There is a big push for numbers and a quick turnaround to get case closures.

3. The training of counselors who work with Deaf consumers needs to be challenged (Bursell, 1997). According to Peterson (as cited in Kennedy, 2004), “there is a lot of specialized training that goes along with working with this population. Counselors must learn a different language and culture as well as the medical and psychosocial aspects of the disability” (p. 22). As seen in the literature, it is imperative for counselors working with Deaf consumers to understand the unique issues that hearing loss presents (Danek, 1992; Fry 1995; Kennedy, 2004; NIAS, 1982; Peterson, as cited in Kennedy, 2004). The qualifications, skills, and expertise of VR Counselors varies throughout the VR regions, and Counselors may wish to re-examine how they provide services that better meet the vocational and personal needs of consumers who are Deaf. Deaf consumers need to have access to counselors who are proficient signers and proficient communicators. Employing counselors who are specifically trained to work with Deaf consumers (RCDs) should be a nationwide practice in the VR system (K. Love Hanes, personal communication, 2005).

Training VR Counselors to encourage consumers in their VR programs, and to explore support systems available to the consumers, could enhance consumers' opportunities for success.

4. All of the participants interviewed in this study indicated that they have had a high turnover rate of VR Counselors, which has led to difficulty in establishing a relationship and affects the continuity of services provided. It would be beneficial to examine the possible existence of, and reasons for, the high turnover rate of VR Counselors, and its subsequent impact on consumer achievement of VR goals. Danek (personal communication, 2005) stated that training new counselors is “an inefficient use of tax dollars, not to mention client losing continuity.” One possible cause of the high turnover rate that states could investigate and remedy are high caseloads and low salaries resulting in low morale on the job. Love Hanes (personal communication, 2005) stated that investigating the existence of, and reasons for, the high turnover rate for VR Counselors “would indeed be beneficial as long as some recommendations could be implemented to reduce the turnover rate.”
5. Consumers who are Deaf need to meet regularly with their VR Counselor to ensure they feel included in, and have a voice regarding, the direction and planning of their VR program. Working closely with the consumer, on a regular basis, would enable the Counselor to become better acquainted with the consumer and build a solid working relationship. This could prove valuable in determining what VR services would best enable the consumer to identify and achieve their vocational goals, without VR solely deciding what is best for the consumer. In

accordance with The Act, whereby consumers have more choices regarding the VR services they receive, choice and self-determination lead to improved VR service outcomes and to more satisfying and successful employment, with decreased social and economic dependence (West, 1995).

Love Hanes (personal communication, 2005) stated that the issue of insufficient communication between VR and consumers has not really improved. One reason for this is the large caseload that VR Counselors must carry. “If we had fewer consumers to work with, we could provide better quality services. Counselors are pulled in too many directions and it is difficult to respond to everyone.” Love Hanes further explained that DORS receives money from the State; of the significant amount of documentation required takes time away from meeting the needs of the consumers.

Love Hanes asserted that meeting regularly with their VR Counselor would provide additional opportunities for the consumer to have a better understanding of the VR process and how important a role they play in their own outcome.

6. VR Counselors need to recognize the role of the family as a “critical partner in the achievement of a successful employment outcome” (Twenty-Sixth Institute on Rehabilitation Issues, 2000) and make every effort to involve families in the rehabilitation process. Integral to the partnership between the family, consumer, and the VR Counselor is the realization that the family can be the most important source of information about the consumer (Twenty-Sixth Institute on Rehabilitation Issues, 2000). An awareness of how family members can be valuable resources for achievement of rehabilitation goals provides important

contributions to the VR Counselor's intervention strategies (Power et al., 1991). VR Counselors should explore the expectations of the consumer's family and whether they are a source of motivation to the achievement of rehabilitation goals. Counselors should encourage families to participate in identifying rehabilitation needs related to the Deaf culture (Garay, 2002). Love Hanes (personal communication, 2005) cautioned that we include the family "or the support system for the individual, as the family is not always the support source. Often there is a mentor or advocate that aids in the process. Especially in transitioning cases, this is very helpful to the process."

7. Continued emphasis within the state/federal VR agency should be placed on the importance and necessity of effective communication skills among staff who serve Deaf consumers. This emphasis should be reflected in recruitment and hiring procedures, in the availability of continuing education programs and in-service training, and in supervisory matters pertaining to case assignments and case management (Joyce & Mathay, 1986).

Love Hanes (personal communication, 2005) shared that, according to the students she serves from other States, many VR Counselors and VR staff write notes back and forth to Deaf consumers. While Love Hanes holds the opinion that this is acceptable if a consumer "happens to pop into the office," she "does not think it should become a standard practice" due to the fact that the consumer shares a lot information, and a lot of that information and meaning is lost by writing back and forth.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study raised several issues that suggest the need for further research. Further investigation is recommended in a number of areas, including the following:

1. The generalizability of the current study results given a more randomized sample of Deaf, Gallaudet students needs to be explored.
2. The generalizability of the current study to VR services, other than college, received by Deaf consumers (e.g., on-the-job-training and supported employment) needs to be explored.
3. Due to ongoing difficulties navigating the state/federal VR system and acquiring participants for this study, the researcher did not use multiple sources of evidence. For future studies, a triangulation design using multiple methods and data sources to ensure the collected information is consistent and factual, should be employed (Creswell, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Mertens, 1998; Wolcott, 1990). A major strength of case study data collection is the opportunity to use many different sources of evidence (Yin, 1994). Administering multiple methods and data sources independently would serve to uncover unique sources of variance that otherwise may be neglected by a single method of study (Jick, 1979; Mathison, 1988). Employing multiple methods and data sources would elaborate on findings from one method to another and initiate findings from one method to new interpretations, new areas for exploration, and possible new research questions (Rossman & Wilson, 1985). In addition to the personal interviews employed in this study, multiple modes of data could include archival records, direct and/or

participant observations, interviewing another population, interviewing additional VR Counselors, or written surveys completed by interviewed participants.

4. Researchers might want to replicate this study with a larger sample size consisting of a larger number of representatives from the different states. The duration of such a study, as well as the potential difficulty navigating the state/federal VR system of each state, should be carefully considered. Future research might address the following questions:
 - What changes should be made to the state/federal VR system in the delivery of services to Deaf consumers?
 - What positive factors do Deaf consumers of the state/federal VR system attribute to the achievement of their vocational goals?
 - What changes do Deaf consumers of the state/federal VR system recommend for the alleviation of barriers to the achievement of their vocational goals?
5. The researcher encountered difficulties working within the state/federal VR system while conducting research for this study. To conduct future research with the Deaf population, within the VR system, it may be beneficial for the researcher to be working within the agency and devote significant time to research activities. To minimize difficulties, further research should focus on collaboration, communication, accessibility of results, and immediate application (Nickless, 1994); possibly between the state/federal VR system and Gallaudet University. Collaboration provides an optimal vehicle for outcome research to be conducted without taxing agency resources. Not only can university settings form

collaborative research relationships, but two or more agencies can unite to conduct outcome research that is beneficial to all participating facilities.

(Nickless, 1994, p.1)

Considering the dearth of research, communication and accessibility of research findings are vital to the field of deafness. It is the researcher's hope that as these, and future, research findings are provided to professionals, others in the field will be prompted to instigate studies in their respective agencies.

6. A means to standardize the state/federal VR system needs to be investigated. Regional differences and agency resources may affect availability of services to consumers, counselor training, community resources, and availability of agency funding resources (Bursell, 1997). Title I (Vocational Rehabilitation Services) Part B (Basic Vocational Rehabilitation Services), Section 110 (State Allotments) of the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998 stated that the financial allotment is "the product of (a) the population of the State; and (b) the square of its allotment percentage, bears to the sum of the corresponding products for the States." Federal VR Regulations, 34 CFR (Code of Federal Regulation) Part 361, Subpart C (Financing of State Vocational Rehabilitation Programs), Section 361.60 (Matching Requirements): (a) Federal share; (1) General stated, "the federal share for expenditures made by the State under the State plan, including expenditures for the provision of vocational rehabilitation services and the administration of the State plan, is 78.7 percent."

Polly Huston of DORS (personal communication, 2005) stated:

...there is a formula for distribution of federal VR dollars to the states. It is based on population and per capita income. The per capita income has a negative effect, that is, a poorer state gets more money than a richer state with the same population.

Participants in this study expressed dissatisfaction that the financial resources that consumers receive for VR services vary among different regions and states.

Standardizing the VR system would ensure that the financial support consumers receive is based on their need, not based on the financial resources of their geographical location.

7. There needs to be an increase of Deaf individuals leading the research investigations of Deaf people. Researchers who are members of the minority group looking at their own group may be more sensitive to certain specificities and complexities. If a greater number of persons conducting research on the Deaf population were Deaf, the overall quality of research in the field might improve and its sensitivity to Deaf individuals might increase (Stinson, 1994). One can argue that much, if not most, writing about deafness has been that of hearing people sharing their own perspectives with other hearing people. "For a variety of reasons, deaf people's contributions to writings that further the understanding of deafness have been quite limited" (Stinson, 1994, p. 19).

Conclusion

This study represents an exploration of Deaf consumer perceptions of the dynamics of the state/federal VR process in achieving rehabilitation goals. The Deaf

participants used the mode of communication that was most comfortable for them (ASL) to express their perceptions of the positive factors and the barriers in the VR process. There was an overall positive quality to the interviews with the Deaf participants. Generalizability of research findings to populations other than Deaf college students or individuals who are not consumers of the state/federal VR system needs to be determined by those professionals, systems, universities, or programs wishing to apply study results. Detailed information regarding the participants of this study and the state/federal VR system was provided so that others wishing to replicate this study, or apply the results to their programs, have ample information from which to make informed decisions (Tesar, 2002).

This study represents merely one glimpse at the complex issue of barriers for Deaf consumers in the state/federal VR process, as seen by the Deaf consumers themselves. Although the issues raised in this study remain unresolved, the researcher hopes that perceptions of these Deaf participants may help focus and guide the evaluation and improvement of service delivery efforts for Deaf consumers as well as prompt additional research on this topic, specifically by researchers who are Deaf. It is only through coordinated service delivery and research efforts that professionals can best learn how to promote a meaningful VR experience for consumers who are Deaf (Moore, 2002).

APPENDIX A: REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION**VOLUNTEERS NEEDED...****FOR AN IMPORTANT RESEARCH STUDY**

IF YOU ARE:

- 1) Deaf
- 2) a Gallaudet University student
- 3) use ASL as your primary language

and

- 4) are currently a VR client

**THEN, YOU ARE INVITED TO SHARE AND PROVIDE FEEDBACK ABOUT
YOUR EXPERIENCES WITH VR**

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING IN A 1-1/2 – 2 HOUR
INTERVIEW, CONDUCTED IN AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE, REGARDING
THIS TOPIC,

PLEASE CONTACT REINA GRAHAM AT (703) 897-7644 (TTY) or

reinalynn@grahamsi.com

CONFIDENTIALITY MAINTAINED!

\$10/HOUR

YOUR FEEDBACK WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE!!

APPENDIX B: CONSUMER INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Project Title: An Exploration of Deaf Consumer Perceptions of the Barriers to Rehabilitation Success and Barriers to the Achievement of Rehabilitation Goals.

Principle Investigator: Reina Lynn Graham, M.A., C.R.C.

Phone: (703) 878-2630 (V); (703) 897-7644 (TTY)

Fax: (703) 878-0151

E-Mail: reinalynn@grahamsi.com

Faculty Sponsor: Marita M. Danek, Ph.D., C.R.C.

Department: School of Education and Human Services – Counseling

I am a Doctoral Candidate in the Counseling and Personnel Services department at University of Maryland at College Park. I am conducting research on VR services for Deaf consumers and I would like you to consider participating in this study. It is hoped that this study can be used to help us gain some insight into the perceived barriers for Deaf consumers in the VR system. This information could provide important knowledge that, in turn, can contribute to the evaluation and improvement of services provided for this population.

For this study you will be asked to:

- A. Participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher about your experiences with the state/federal VR system.
- B. It is anticipated that your participation will take approximately 1 ½ - 2 hours.
- C. You will be paid \$10/hour for your participation.
- D. Every effort will be made to accommodate your language and communication style.

- E. There is no more than minimal risk to individuals who participate in this research study, and complete confidentiality is assured.
- F. Your interview will be videotaped. Your name or other identifying information will not be used on the videotape. Only the principle investigator and one other reviewer will be viewing the videotape and then it will be destroyed.
- G. You may withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason, and without penalty. It is hoped, however, that you will offer your full participation.

Questions about any risk to you because of participation in this study may be addressed to the researcher, Reina Lynn Graham, at the phone number or e-mail account at the top of this consent form, or David R. Penna, Chairperson, Gallaudet University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) at (202) 651-5400 (V/TTY).

I have read the Informed Consent Form and agree to participate in the study “An Exploration of Deaf Consumer Perceptions of the Barriers to Rehabilitation Success and Barriers to the Achievement of Rehabilitation Goals” conducted by Reina Lynn Graham, M.A., C.R.C. I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time without penalty or prejudice. I understand that I will receive payment for my participation.

Your Name: _____

Your Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C: PERMISSION TO VIDEOTAPE

Project Title: An Exploration of Deaf Consumer Perceptions of the Barriers to Rehabilitation Success and Barriers to the Achievement of Rehabilitation Goals.

Principle Investigator: Reina Lynn Graham, M.A., C.R.C.

Phone: (703) 878-2630 (V); (703) 897-7644 (TTY)

Fax: (703) 878-0151

E-Mail: reinalynn@grahamsi.com

Faculty Sponsor: Marita M. Danek, Ph.D., C.R.C.

Department: School of Education and Human Services – Counseling

Please read the following carefully before signing:

I understand that I will be participating in a one-on-one interview with the researcher about my experiences with the state/federal VR system.

I understand that my interview will be videotaped. I understand that my name or other identifying information will not be used on the videotape. Only the principle investigator and one other reviewer will be viewing my videotape and then it will be destroyed.

I understand that complete confidentiality is assured.

I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason, and without penalty. However, I realize that it is hoped that I will offer my full participation.

YES, I give permission to videotape: _____
Participant's Signature/Date

NO, I do not give permission to videotape: _____
Participant's Signature/Date

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS**Pilot Interview #1 (Renee)**

R: Thank you for coming again. You know we are trying to get the videotape worked out. I will need you sign those papers again, because I made one small change to them. I will explain it to you. When you read it, you will see that it says that you agree to the interview and that another person, with me, will watch the video and then it will be destroyed. Okay?

C: Yes.

[reads and signs]

R: I want to explain what I am doing and then I will ask you some questions about VR. I want to know deaf students' opinions and perceptions about VR. Your experience with VR, okay?

C: Okay.

R: If you are having problems with VR, I can't help you with your individual problems, but I hope that people will become aware of the things that I have learned through this study. Okay?

C: Okay.

R: I want to know your perception of the barriers to your success with VR. If you have positive and negative experiences with them. First I want to ask you about yourself briefly. Ready?

C: Fine.

R: Your age?

C: 21.

R: 21. Okay. You're female...

C: Yes. You never know [laughing]

R: True. Your race?

C: White.

R: Okay. Where are you from?

C: Miami, Florida.

R: You were born there?

C: Born and raised.

R: You came to Gallaudet from Florida?

C: Right.

R: So far?

C: I have only lived there.

R: Okay. You are an undergrad at Gallaudet?

C: Yes.

R: Gallaudet is your first college?

C: Yes.

R: Okay. What is your major?

C: Communication Arts.

R: What do you plan to do with that major? What do you hope to do with that major?

C: I hope to be in public affairs. Work for the government or something like that.

R: Ok good. You are deaf yourself, right?

C: Yes.

R: Is your family deaf, hearing, or hard of hearing?

C: Mixed. I have one sister who is deaf. The rest are all hearing.

R: You two were born deaf?

C: No. I was not born deaf; my sister was born deaf. Growing up, she was the only one who was deaf. My hearing loss was gradual.

R:?

C: G-R-A-D-U-A-L. I had otitis media. When they found it, my parents moved to Iowa for 2 years. So I had VR there that gave me medicine, but it was wrong. So I continued to lose my hearing. My sister's suspicion is that it is not related to the medicine. That is a struggle.

R: Okay. Did you grow up signing?

C: Not really. Before, my sister was gone a lot. There are only 2 years between us, but I was the only person who signed with her. I did not see her often. I started really signing when I was 16.

R: 16?

C: 16.

R: Good. Okay. Do you have a job right now?

C: Yes.

R: What do you do?

C: I work for Deaf Way 2 events. I help coordinate conferences related to Deaf Way Events.

R: Do you think this is related to your future major or plans?

C: I don't know. I don't know. I enjoy working. I enjoy doing it. I enjoy working with people. That's what I like to do so it is not exactly related. But, I think for now, it pays.

R: You went to VR in Florida?

C: Yes.

R: And you have VR in Florida now?

C: Yes.

R: What brought you to VR?

C: My sister told me that VR will help me with school. That year I graduated, I was a senior in high school. She told me because I have a disability so there are problems getting benefits and insurance, things like that. So she suggested I go. So I went down to see what they could do for me. I didn't know how they could help me.

R: Did you think the first way they could help you was with money? Or did you think there were other ways they could help?

C: Yes, they can help with that. They can pay to go to vocational school, for their training, and job placement and supervision. Make sure you are doing well. Really VR helps with a lot of things like hearing aides for people who are hard of hearing. If I needed...if you had a problem like a disorder with your mind, they will help with that, too.

R: When you first started with VR, how did they help? What...?

C: My intention was for college, so I made an appointment with a VR Counselor. They said I had to take some test that would say if I have the potential to be successful in college or not. So fine, I took an IQ test. Then I took a psychological test, those kinds of things. So I took these tests and it proved that it is important to have money to send me to college. Someone who is not functioning in that capacity and they pay all this money, a

lot of money on college and tutors. Then the person comes back because they can't function. So that's why.

R: VR pays for college for you right now?

C: Yes.

R: Fully? Books and everything?

C: Fully. Everything. Florida, my VR, pays for my tuition, tutors, room and board, co- fees. The only thing they don't pay for is my transportation. I know some other states pay for that, but mine does not.

R: Does VR support or help you in other ways? Or just money?

C: Really, before VR gave me hearing aides. I met with my counselor. We went back and forth about that, because I feel like I don't really need it. But he felt I should get it. So I figured, fine, it doesn't hurt. So I did that. A long time ago when I went out to VR for the first time, I kind of disconnected from them because I was not doing well in school. I went back and I had decided to withdraw from school. So I had already signed with VR, to continue for 5 years of school. So, I told them I felt something was wrong. I couldn't pay attention; I was always distracted. So VR said, oh maybe that is the reason why I was not succeeding in school. They had my psychological test from before. The psychologist who tested me said that I had a little bit of an attention problem. So, VR sent me for disability testing, and they found that I do have ADD. But mine is mild, not severe. They gave me medicine that seems to help calm me down. VR thinks that is involved. And tests. I need glasses too, but I don't have them. It is not a bad vision problem, I am just not used to taking them on and off all the time. That's about all.

R: When you went back to school, was everything resolved?

C: Really, yes. VR did not feel that I was ready to go back to school. But I felt I was ready, so we both agreed that I would go to summer school. I don't know why summer school. I trust myself. If I went to school and I did well, then that would mean that I was ready to go back. They wanted me to go to community college, but I want to go to a university. So there was a little bit of a struggle about that. I went to classes, came back, and I proved to them that I could do it. Since then, they have supported me.

R: Ok. How long were you out of college?

C: 1 year.

R: One year? Do you feel that VR worked with you and the situation to figure out what the problem is?

C: They did... they did support me and help to figure out what the problem was. Once we figured out what the problem was, they wanted to keep me there. I don't know...I don't know how... So I worked for a year, no ties with VR. I was on my own. Then I wanted to re-connect with VR again, and I told them I was ready to go back to college. They said no. They said I should consider community college. I thought they were being stingy. They didn't want to pay all that money again and be wrong again. I understand that, but... So, they did help me to figure out the problem, yes.

R: Do you think that if VR did not support you that you would not be in college right now?

C: I don't know.

R: You don't know? Why?

C: Because I think that when I withdrew, I was on my own. That was good. But, if they are offering to help me, I will take advantage of that opportunity. When I first suspected

that something was wrong, I explained to VR why I thought I was not doing well. They listened then helped me to understand. Before that... I really believed in that counselor because... I have had counselors before that one... they were not really very by the books. But my new counselor is very good. He tries to help me as much as possible. He doesn't know how to sign, which is a negative. He is taking classes, but I still ask for an interpreter. He moved up and they hired a new counselor, but I have not yet met them. I have had this counselor for about one year now.

R: You had your first counselor for one year?

C: I had my first counselor for about 3 months. Then I got a new counselor for about 2 years. That was when I was a freshman at Gallaudet and the year after, when I went home.

R: You are on your third counselor now?

C: Yes.

R: Ok. The first one moved up right?

C: The first one was temporary until they could hire someone. Then I switched over to them. They moved up and I had another temporary one. Then mine, so I guess I am actually on my fourth counselor now.

R: Your fourth one now?

C: Yes. My fourth in 4 years!

R: Okay. Do you have a problem with changing counselors so often?

C: Yes.

R: Why do you think that happens?

C: I don't know. I believe that in Florida, VR they...I don't know. Maybe they don't hire enough. They move up. Maybe they find another job that they like better. I know my VR office has no hearing ... I mean no deaf counselors. All the counselors are hearing and they have to pull in interpreters so I think that maybe they feel frustrated with clients and transfer to positions where they can communicate with clients. That is my theory. If it is true or not, I don't know.

R: Do you feel like your services from VR get put on hold because you are transferring to different counselors?

C: Yes.

R: Yes.

C: Yes. Because my current counselor, the new one, sent me a letter last January. I had tried and tried to contact VR, but they were either in a meeting or couldn't set up a meeting for me. And I was in Washington, DC, so it was hard to work out a time to meet. I tried calling and I was told that VR, my VR in Florida... Because I tried to call to make an appointment and they told me they would e-mail me. So whatever, I decided that to make an appointment, I couldn't fit with their schedule. I am in Washington, DC. It is too difficult with school and those kinds of things. That is a problem.

R: Your most recent counselor does not sign, right?

C: All have not signed.

R: You use interpreters all the time?

C: Always.

R: Do you think there are problems or barriers with that?

C: Yes.

R: Why?

C: Because interpreters are not always right. Often when they voice interpret, they say it wrong. Not intentionally. Sometimes when I am watching an interpreter... I feel that eye contact is important when you are talking with someone. You should not be looking at someone else. I don't know if they are making up for their hearing. It would be like if you were talking to me and I were looking at someone else. And then it would be like if I were telling a story to someone else.

R: Maybe.

C: Where are you in the conversation? Where are you?

R: Third person maybe?

C: Yes. And it is like when... there are many factors related to that, really...suppose I try to be straight about something, then my face shows that. But if someone is just interpreting and not really paying attention to that, then they will not be expressing what I want to say. Or they may pick a different word than what I would have used myself. Or holding eye contact is important. For me, as well as deaf people in general, eye contact is very important. Without it, I feel disconnected from the conversation.

R: Your VR does not have anyone who signs or knows deaf culture?

C: The interpreters, yes. My VR has what are called on-site interpreters.

R: They are not hired and brought in?

C: No.

R: They work there?

C: Yes.

R: Ok.

C: They have many deaf clients, so they have to. It is nice that they do that, but the interpreters have a high turnover rate.

R: Recently you said that you struggled with hearing aids?

C: Yes.

R: Can you explain more about that?

C: Well...Really, I can function with hearing aids. But it is not...nothing to...uh, hearing people whose hearing dB level is below 40. I function around 60 dB. It is not bad, it is pretty good. But it is such an uncomfortable headache. I told VR. It costs \$2,500 just for one hearing aid. That's Siemens, new technology. It has a digital filter inside the hearing aid. The hearing aid will change to fit your environment. So if it is noisy, the background, the hearing aid will....stop it. The new technology in hearing aids. So, I have been struggling with the hearing aids, because really I don't want them. They said that they felt I should have one. After graduation, my counselor did not envision me going back to school. He thought I would go straight to work. Because of that, he got me hearing aids. That way I could stay at work and hear what is going on. But, it didn't work.

R: You already got the hearing aids?

C: I have them, yes. In a little box.

R: Ok. Did you feel forced to get the hearing aids?

C: Yes. I think that my VR is all hearing, so they are really supportive of utilizing as much hearing as you possibly can. Because that's what will make you successful. You know?

R: Oh.

C: I notice that....my other deaf that I know who use the same counselor or the same VR. They don't go to Gallaudet. They go to community college and VR won't even support it fully. I think it is odd. They pay fully for me, why not for them? But, I guess it is individual cases. So theirs would be different from mine. But I wonder because VR seems to really be the same. You need to hear, fine, we will give you some hearing aids, make you hearing, send you off to work, and you will be successful. That kind of thinking.

R: How does that make you feel?

C: Bah [swats her hand like it doesn't matter]. I don't depend on them anyway. That many people know. Many deaf believe that many people have that pity. Oh, you poor deaf person. So VR...different.

R: Would prefer if your VR Counselor signed or were deaf himself?

C: That is easy. Deaf would understand. Because if you wanted to go to college out of state, VR is pretty strict about that. That college that you pick out of state must have some kind of services. Ok. They must have some major that no college in-state provides. So, I said that I wanted Gallaudet. My counselor balked that it was out of state. There was a little of a struggle about that.

R: I mean would you prefer to have a counselor that is deaf himself, or hearing but understood deaf culture and signed themselves. I am just curious if you would prefer to not have an interpreter. Your situation has interpreters.

C: I don't want an interpreter. I have not heard a single deaf person say they like interpreters. Direct communication is best. As long as someone knows what I am saying, it doesn't matter.

R: Ok. Do you feel that VR meets your needs at this time?

C: Yes. The only problem that I have is like I said before, I have trouble contacting them. My relationship with my VR is that I fax them what I need for school. So far, it has worked.

R: You have no contact other than that?

C: Yes.

R: Would you prefer more contact?

C: I would prefer it, yes. Because VR really has a lot of power they can really help someone. Someone who needs a push or maybe someone who needs to get their foot in the door, or maybe needs that kind of guidance. You know? VR is good because they sit down with you and talk with you. They try to help you succeed with your goals. That is really good. So I prefer someone who would keep me in check. I think that's important, especially when I am 2000 miles away. You know? My mind is so distracted. Before my counselor who was wonderful, used to contact me often through e-mail. Now my new counselor never e-mails me. I was puzzled because I thought all counselors used e-mail. But anyway, he does not contact me through e-mail. My VR Counselor will contact me once a month to see if I am doing well in school. I prefer someone who knows where my plans are and making notes so that when we meet, VR knows who I am. I think that's important. Really because my counselor....

R: Right. Do you feel like if a problem popped up that you could contact your VR Counselor for help?

C: Depends on what the problem is. It depends. It depends if I...

R: Suppose you have a problem with school, or a problem with grades, you failed, or other problems with school itself, or with the deafness itself, do you think you could contact for help?

C: No.

R: Before you had a counselor for a short time. You noticed you had attention problems, suppose you had someone like that again, do you think you could contact VR for help?

C: I don't know. I don't know. Really, so much is based on your relationship with your counselor, too. Do you feel comfortable with your counselor? How comfortable do you feel telling your counselor things? You know? That is always important in a client-counselor relationship, so it depends.

R: What about your counselor now?

C: Mine, now, no! I have never met him. I have never met him. I got a letter and since he has contacted me. But what does he look like? I have not yet sat down with him and discussed things. So I have no idea who my counselor is. I only know his name and that he works at VR. That's all.

R: Ok. Do you feel that VR is satisfying for you?

C: In a way, yes. It's yes and no, you know? I don't expect too much from my VR, c'mon. I am pretty self-sufficient. I can function on my own. If VR no longer existed, I could still make ends meet. I am motivated. It is not what VR has done for me. Really, I am more than satisfied with that. We have our tiffs. We either agree or disagree; I think that's normal. Better to have two different perspectives. That's normal. But my overall experience with VR is that I am satisfied with it. They pay for school and I can't ask for more than that.

R: Ok. What is it about VR that does not satisfy you?

C: For me, I wish they would sign. I don't know. I think it is important. We have a person who supervises Gallaudet for many years, and they don't sign. How do you work for many years with deaf clients and still not sign? I don't know.

R: I understand.

C: That is a big negative. How do I know that? I feel there is a separation between the clients and the counselors. Now the state of Florida wants to put VR under the Department of Education instead of vocational rehabilitation. I wonder if that will make a difference, but I don't know.

R: Maybe, that is a good point. Okay. How much did you know about VR before you looked for help from them? Your sister?

C: My sister.

R: Did your sister or high school help you plan for VR?

C: No.

R: No?

C: Looking back, my sister spent 4 years in a deaf school. I moved to the same deaf school for 2 years. My high school years; junior and senior years of high school were in the deaf school. My sister.... Really before I went to the deaf school, I didn't know. Then someone told me and I went to VR. That's all.

R: Did you have an itinerant counselor in your deaf school?

C: No.

R: No.

C: No. Guidance counselor, that's all.

R: No one at the deaf school told you about VR?

C: No.

R: No. I am curious about that. If someone else planned to tell you about VR?

C: Really. In fact, when I arrived at VR I had no idea how they would help me. My sister had told me stories about VR and how they would help with college. They would help pay for school. I asked, "Really?" She replied, "Yes." So I went to see, and everything worked out.

R: If not for your sister, how would you have known about VR?

C: I came to Gallaudet, and there everyone talked about VR. They compare and discuss them. We discuss the differences between our VRs. 'My VR pays for that.' 'Oh, yours doesn't?' Interesting different states, some states' VR come to Gallaudet to meet with their students. It is like a 'VR Day.' About 26 VR flock to Gallaudet and meet with all the students from their state. California does that, Texas does that...

R: Really??

C: Yes. They all mingle with their students. So it is obvious who has a lot of contact with their students. My VR doesn't do that. I suspect maybe because we don't have enough students who go to Gallaudet.

R: Florida does not do that?

C: No.

R: Ok. I was just a little curious. I didn't know about that. You had recently mentioned that you are really self-sufficient. Before you looked for help from VR, was that the first time you looked for help from anyone because you were deaf?

C: Really, yes and no. I grew up in public schools. The school system had no interpreters. When I was 14 years old, and my mom noticed that I was missing things in school. So mom called the school and told them that I needed an interpreter. They decided to go ahead with it. That was the first time I ever had someone to help me; I always had to watch on my own. Until I had an interpreter. [mumbles] anyone not want to go to Gallaudet? That is 4 or 5 years of college. And to be stuck with interpreters. Is that good? I don't think so. So that's all. The first time. It was good. After that, it was deaf schools, so...

R: Was it hard for you to look for help from VR?

C: Yeah. In a way, yes. My mom told me I should go, so I went to see. At VR the woman told me they'd be happy to pay for me. So fine. They were only a little bit more involved. I am not saying they were completely disconnected, but... So I accepted. I don't really like, you know, handouts. Like 'oh you poor little deaf person. Here is some money. Oh my god.' I don't feel like that. But at the same time my deafness blocks me from going to university like Georgetown, a hearing university. You know? I prefer to go to Gallaudet where I don't have to get an interpreter. You know what I mean. Pros and cons.

R: Do you think that VR perceives deaf people as disabled?

C: Yes.

R: How do you feel about that?

C: [pauses]

R: First, do you feel deaf people are disabled?

C: No. Well yes. I mean it depends. The word 'disabled' to me is not the same as 'disabled' to her. The word is defined by how the world perceives those people. It has to

have special connotations. You know? Like next year I have to take the GRE, so I have to call and work out the situation. Let them know about interpreters for the spoken part of the test. I have traveled all over, and I have no clue about what will happen to me. I hear about all this new computer technology you know I can contact someone about something. I have relay services. There are many things that I already have here. I don't have to go out of my way to really do that. VR views deaf people as disabled. I think that the general population views deaf as disabled. They pity us. I really don't need that pity. Many deaf people are not against taking advantage of that pity. Some of them have a good job and they are still on SSI. I don't like the idea that people look at me as disabled and they will help me. But at the same time I use their services so that is a little bit of a conflict.

R: It is interesting about that conflict. I am curious about that conflict.

C: I think deaf people want to feel that they don't...like that. Fine. It's like if someone met you on the street and just looked at you and pitied you and wanted to give you \$1,000, do you take that \$1,000 or not? No, because it is like so what. You know? But, most people I know would take the \$1,000 and say thank you. I think it is the same thing. Because you are deaf, you get money and here's your services. You are deaf, so you are disabled. And in a way they are right because it will be difficult for me to go to school. It will be harder for me to get a job. At a community college, VR will reinforce that I need interpreters and note takers. I need a whole list of services that VR will contact the state and get for me. VR will advocate for the needs of their clients. It is the same with jobs too. VR will a job and work everything out. It makes their lives easier. If I look for a job in the classified ads, I have to call through relay. Employers already make decisions from

that. Many people hate relay anyway because it takes 5 minutes to talk, and it is slow. It is not like fluent voice. You know? So VR works out all of that and helps to set up everything smoothly. It substitutes for us as an approach. It's a conflict. I don't know how many deaf people think about that.

R: It's true. I agree with that. You said that you will finish with school next year...?

C: In 2 years.

R: In 2 years. Do you plan to look for a job or continue with school or what?

C: I...really my...yes. My internship USAF, the US Air Force, I wanted to join the Air Force when I was hearing. But anyway, I want an internship there in the public affairs department. I hope when I graduate in 2 years to get a job as a civilian. And then 2 years from there go back to graduate school in military or civilian.

R: Do you plan to ask VR to help with that training or a job in the future?

C: No.

R: ...or resume writing?

C: Gallaudet here has a career center. They are convenient anyway because they are just right there.

R: Oh. True.

C: Instead of going to Florida. And I want to work in Washington, DC. So it is more comfortable for me to use Gallaudet's Career services because they have a relationship with the federal government. VR is at the state level, and they would work with the state government for me. So they are different. I prefer the federal government.

R: OK. I think I have asked all my questions. Do you have anything else you want to add about VR or your VR experience?

C: I think that VR...or the concept of VR...is good. But I think the problem is that each state is different from the others. So if there was one standard VR system, maybe it would be run or managed better. Because each state government is different. And in counties...because my county has more deaf people than any other county in Florida. If I went to a different county, I could get better services?! I mean, yes...

R: It's not equal?

C: No, it's not. Not really. And that county may not get enough money because they don't have enough deaf people there. VR has a lot of rules and changing of counselors all the time. I think that VR's tests need to be a little bit more stable. That's important. I mean, overall, my experience with VR has been not bad. But I think that overall it is important that we who use VR don't DEPEND on VR too much. Because as soon as something happens they go running to VR or that's messed up, I have to run to VR. Or I need something, and run to VR. VR is their safety until they function on their own.

R: That's a good point.

C: So, that's it.

R: I have one more question I forgot to ask you in the beginning.

C: Ok.

R: How did you find out about my interview here?

C: I got an e-mail at Gallaudet. I saw VR and was instantly attracted because I know that not many deaf people are interested in researching VR and what works and what doesn't work. So I thought I would come and share it.

R: Thank you so much. We will go out in the hall and turn off the video camera.

Pilot Interview #2 (John)

R: I want to thank you so much for agreeing to interview today. I really appreciate it.

C: Fine. No problem.

R: First I would like to explain a little bit about the study, then I would like to ask you a little bit about you.

C: [Nods]

R: And then if you will read and sign an agreement form. I want to get deaf students' perspectives on VR. Maybe you feel like VR has prevented you from becoming successful or maybe you feel satisfied with VR. I just want to get your perspective of VR. Do you understand my signing?

C: I understand you perfectly.

R: Okay. Good. [shows papers] This form talks about what I am doing. And this other form is an agreement to videotape the interview. When we are finished with the filming, then everything will be typed, transcribed...

C: ...transcribed. Record everything that was said.

R: Right. Then the videotape will be destroyed. Your name will not be on it. That is confidential.

C: Fine.

[hands forms to client. Client reads and signs]

R: That's it. Thank you. Okay, first I am going to ask you some background questions.

Okay?

C: [Nods]

R: How did you find out about my study and interviews about VR?

C: I found out because in my apt., my friend's girlfriend who is hearing took a course under you. She suggested I take this interview and I said fine. So I came here.

R: Okay. Why are you interested in that?

C: I enjoy helping other people finish their studies. My major is psychology; I know how hard it is to get people to help with research.

R: Your major is psychology?

C: [Nods]

R: Wonderful. Thank you. I really appreciate your help with this study. How old are you?

C: 19.

R: You're a male. What is your race?

C: I am white. I am not really sure what my race is called, but I am mostly white. I have some Hispanic relatives, one from Poland, one or two from Ireland, and one or two from Italy.

R: Okay. Where are you from?

C: I am from New Mexico. Really, I wasn't born there. I grew up there and spent most of my life there. I was born in New York City, really. Then we moved when I was about 6 years old. We moved there for legal reasons. My residence is there, and VR supported me there. So, we moved there.

R: Then you moved to Gallaudet from New Mexico, right?

C: Right.

R: Your major is psychology, right?

C: Psychology and I am also majoring in Photography, too. It is a double major.

R: Photography? Double major, wow! How do you plan to use your majors?

C: I am not really sure yet. I don't really have any goals for my life yet. I have not yet decided for myself. Both of my majors fascinate me. Those are the two that I have liked the best so far in any school. So I decided to use those as they are my best skills. They help others so much.

R: What year are you in school?

C: Sophomore.

R: Ok. You are deaf yourself?

C: [Nods]

R: You were born deaf?

C: [Nods]

R: Is your family deaf or hearing?

C: My family is deaf, too. But my parents were born hearing, but were sick and became deaf. Both my parents were deaf at about 2 or 3 years old. My mom became deaf at about 6 years old. I have a younger brother who is also deaf, but they think he was born hearing and was sick and became deaf. I am the only one who was born deaf.

R: Your family signs?

C: Yes, growing up.

R: Okay. Why were you looking for help from VR?

C: My family cannot even support me at all. It is impossible! My parents just got a divorce, a bad divorce, about 3 years ago. They have bills to pay like the house, so I can't expect them to support me at all. My dad earns about \$30,000 a year and half of that goes to my mom for child support and alimony. My mom does not work at all, she is a housewife. ...now she is concerned because she can't pay all the bills and she wants to

pay off the house and wants to pay off all her debts and student loans and the house. She can't afford to pay everything. So right now, it is best if my parents don't support me except for maybe \$2,000 a year. That's all. So I can't expect them to help me. Everything I've been doing so far is mostly on my own with VR and scholarships.

R: Ok. So you went to VR for money...for college?

C: Yes.

R: Ok. Is VR fully covering your college costs?

C: No, not really. VR does not give me full support. I have two...first they told me that I get a scholarship... more...

R: money? [did not understand the sign 'scholarship']

C: money...scholarship. I get the president's scholarship here. That is \$14,000. Two more. VR is willing to help me but they want me to continue applying for benefits from the federal aid and the Pell Grant and other places. Fine with me. VR had to reduce their benefits some so I could continue getting those benefits.

R: Okay. Do you have a job? Do you work?

C: I am looking for one right now.

R: Looking for one?

C: Yes.

R: On campus?

C: Yes.

R: Okay. Does VR help you in other ways or only money?

C: Only money. What do you mean "help in other ways"?

R: You went to VR for money right? Or did you go for new hearing aids or for help in evaluation...?

C: No. Never.

R: Do you know what VR can do to help you in other things?

C: Yes, I know. Most people use VR for two things: money for college and to help them find a job. For other things, most people tend not to rely on VR. We try to find other sources to help us with other things.

R: Oh ok. How did you find out about VR?

C: Growing up, I always knew VR was there. They were always there. My parents are deaf and they know about VR. The deaf community talks about VR. Deaf schools talk about VR. They talk about going to their counselors. You hear about VR often.

R: Ok. So two: your parents and your school, right?

C: Yes.

R: Ok. What are your future career plans? Do you know? Not yet?

C: Not yet. But I know that I want to...I don't see myself working everyday. I don't want that for my life. I want to be active. Go out, change the world. Living in Manhattan. Living big. That is what I want. So maybe a clinical psychologist or a photographer for a magazine. Not sure yet.

R: I know that you're a sophomore?

C: Sophomore.

R: So maybe you don't know this yet, but when you finish, graduate, do you plan to ask VR to help you look for a job, or...?

C: Maybe I will close the VR at home and ask the VR out here. I want to stay on the east coast.

R: Okay. Before you started with VR, was that the first time you asked anyone for help?

C: Really that was the first time that I asked for help, yes. But my parents have asked many other people for help before. My mom asked the church to help with food; my dad asked his parents and brothers and sisters for help because he was broke. So all except me. This is my first time, yes.

R: Tell me about your experience with VR. General.

C: Generally. VR did not really expect me to do a lot. They did not expect me to succeed at anything at all.

R: Really?

C: Yes. With VR support, they expected me to work as a mechanic on cars, doing bodywork and engines. That's all. I had a high GPA and high test scores on the SATs. I got a letter from the state and everything, it was wonderful. I graduated salutatorian from the deaf school and I was valedictorian when I transferred to the mainstream school. My GPA was about 3.4 cumulative. I sent this to VR to plan for college and tutoring and help me with everything. We set up a meeting. The VR Counselor looked at my information and said, "Wow, you are a very, very bright boy. I am curious, what kind of job are you planning to look for? VR can help with that." I was surprised. "I am not really looking for a job right now. I want help and assistance in paying for college." That took my counselor aback. "You want to go to college? We will help you to find a job. That is really much better for you." I just looked at him. Fine, so after a lot of discussing and going back and forth, my counselor said fine, we will assist you and tutor you to go to

college. After that, still, he thinks that I am better off looking for a job than going to college.

R: Why do you think VR thought that?

C: Really, I think it is because VR has bad experiences with that. Many times, people go to college, and they come back, get in trouble, suspended, or kicked out. So far, many things like that have happened and only a few actually succeeded wonderfully. I know a few people from the deaf school who succeeded wonderfully in college. In the past I have known some who have gotten into trouble, or suspended or kicked out and come back home. I think that VR feels like 'why should we send kids out of state?' So, I have been going back and forth with them, I am not doing this, I am not doing that. Everything is going wonderfully so far! But even after that, VR is still edgy; they are not really willing to support me fully.

R: How do you feel about that?

C: I feel it is another step in dealing with everyday life. I just deal with it. Fine, I just take it and move on. Just have to succeed and work through it, that's it.

R: Tell me about your experiences with your VR Counselor.

C: So far I have had one VR Counselor. Her name is Luann, and I have only met her three times in person really. My mom has the most contact with her because of the deaf school. VR is in my hometown. One hour and a half drive from there, so I couldn't see her except on the weekends. It made it almost impossible to meet with her. My mom has a lot of contact with her, but mine is mostly through e-mail and phone. I don't really know her personally.

R: So, you have continued with the same VR Counselor?

C: Still. Today. So far, yes.

R: Do you feel that your experience with your VR Counselor is positive?

C: I would say yes.

R: Is she hearing?

C: Yes.

R: Yes. Does she sign?

C: No.

R: How do you communicate?

C: The first time, my mom is good at speech reading, so she interpreted for us. And then after that we used the TTY and fax. Most of the time, I only contact VR through electrical wires like the phone. I don't really meet her in person.

R: Do you feel that her not signing has blocked you access in VR?

C: I don't think so. We don't really use VR that much except for work and college education. People in the deaf community don't really think that VR is really important. They go on in their own lives and forget about it, until 'Oh, I need help for my son to go to college.' or 'I lost my job!' Then they go to VR. But mostly VR is there, and deaf clients are not the majority of their clients. It is mostly poor Spanish and Native American people there. That is the largest group of clients in VR.

R: In NM, they don't have a large deaf community?

C: Not really. I would say there are about 2 million people who live there, but maybe only 1,000 deaf people.

R: Okay. Do you feel that VR meets your needs now?

C: Right now, VR meets my needs. But, I wish they would do a little more for me. Right now I live on campus. In a deaf house, at a deaf school, everything. I am still in the dorms. I am sick of the dorms, now I want to live off campus. But VR won't support me there. They only help when I am really in need. Right now they cover the costs of instruction and food; that is nice, I like that.

R: So sometimes, you wish that they would give you more money?

C: Sometimes, yes.

R: Do you feel that they meet your needs in other ways?

C: Really they have not needed to help me in other ways. Just money for tutoring, that's all.

R: VR gives you tutoring. From VR?

C: Yes, that's all.

R: Tutoring in what?

C: Here. They pay Gallaudet here.

R: So, if you have classes that are difficult for you, you can get a tutor?

C: That is free here. They provide that free here at Gallaudet. I don't have to worry.

R: Oh okay. So VR is not giving you that, Gallaudet is giving you that.

C: Yes.

R: Okay. I just wanted to be clear on that. Do you feel that your experience with VR is satisfying?

C: Really, no. Not really. I mean that I have to find other things, find other sources to help me. Plus I worry about life, how I will get through with what I have now. VR refuses to help me with anything else. It is really superficial. They don't really help me

with anything I need like financial problems or anything. I can't go to VR because I know that I have to depend on others here. I don't really think that VR is helpful; they are more like a source of money for me. It is just like a scholarship that I get from them.

That's all.

R: Recently, you've had money problems...

C: Yes.

R: ...other than that, what about VR does NOT satisfy you?

C: There are many things that don't satisfy me. Like, VR refuses to help me travel between home and here. Many other VRs for the deaf people here are happy to help with the cost of traveling. They are happy to help with tutoring, happy to help with interpreting. They do many, many things. My VR is not really willing to do that. I don't really have contact with them or a relationship with them. I send them e-mails and it is like 3 or 4 days before I get anything like a response. Then finally I get a list of Sometimes my VR is very evasive, too. I will ask a direct question, and they dance all around it until I just tell them to answer me directly. Later.

R: Okay. There are two things. First, it seems that VR gives your friends more, and your VR doesn't. So maybe it is not fair, do you think?

C: I mean I understand why. Maybe their state has a lot more money to give to everything. My state does not have a lot. That just makes me feel not good. Like I wish they could just give a little bit more.

R: And your VR Counselors are not responding to you in a timely manner?

C: Yes.

R: And they are not really answering your questions?

C: Yes. Also VR does not really care about anything I do. All VR really cares about are the grades at the end of the semester. They ask me, what are your grades, so I send them my grades. That's all they are really waiting to know.

R: You feel like they only care about your grades?

C: Yes.

R: And that is the only relationship you have with them?

C: Yes. That's all.

R: What more do you think you want from your relationship with VR? Your grades, you sent them. What more do you want?

C: I want them to know more about me. Things like encouraging me, counseling me about things that would help me out. Those kinds of things I would like them to encourage me, a few things are: thinking of which courses to take, I think it would help me out to take more credits, getting money earlier. Something like that. Maybe offer feedback about what I am doing so far. Something back home that I can depend on.

R: You are not getting that now?

C: No.

R: Do you feel that you could talk to your VR Counselor about that, or no?

C: I don't think so.

R: Those goals...

C: I don't think so. It is really a bit weird that after one year of telling them all those kinds of things, I missed [something]. They sent me something. I am not sure that I am the kind of person who wants to...I think that I am satisfied with what I have now.

R: Do you have contact with your VR office staff?

C: No, not really. Really it is between her and me, that's all. I go directly to her.

R: Okay. When you go home to visit, do you stop by or visit or have appointments with your VR Counselor?

C: I have appointments.

R: Yeah? Is that helpful, or...?

C: Yeah, it is helpful, but she is very, very busy. Always has different clients to meet with her. That is what she told me before, so I always have to make an appointment with her. Must.

R: Oh, okay. So you must do that.

C: Yes.

R: I think that is all the questions I have about VR. Is there anything you want to add?

C: I believe that my state's VR is very different from other state's VR. I mean that so far I have had many people in the deaf community tell stories about VR as very needy. But, when I hear stories about VR in NM, they are always focused stories. Like, VR is always cutting, they have many problems, people have to fight with them, and people get sent all over the place. There are a lot of problems to face. I hear a lot of paranoia, when I meet people at Gallaudet and I say VR is lousy. People tell me they love their VR Counselor. I look at them funny. A lot of people tell me stories about VR: 'VR is so nice. They give me everything. They meet all my needs. We eat together, and all of that good stuff.' I look at them: 'Really? Wow!' Growing up, I always thought that everyone had the same experience with VR; that it is awful, have a lot of problems, have to fight, and not giving all kinds of support. Other states are a lot nicer. I was very surprised by that. Maybe NM

is different because there is not enough money, or not enough...what other kinds of things, I don't know. My experience is different from other people's experiences.

R: When you are here at Gallaudet, do you hear more positive stories about VR or more negative?

C: Definitely more positive.

R: Good. Is there anything else you want to add?

C: Not that I can think of now.

R: We will go outside and turn off the video camera. Thank you so much!

Interview #1 (Tanisha)

R: Thank you so much for volunteering to interview with me. I really appreciate it.

C: Sure.

R: Remember our e-mail?

C: You will ask questions about VR, right?

R: Right. I asked if it was ok to videotape you?

C: Fine. It feels a little funny.

R: I will show you the forms. The first one explains what I am doing, and you sign if you agree to participate, and the second form is if you agree to be videotaped.

C: Fine.

[reads and signs forms]

R: Thank you. First I want to explain the purpose for this study. Second I will ask you background questions, and last I will ask you about VR services. Ok?

C: Fine.

R: The purpose of this study is to ask deaf students' perspectives about VR and VR services. Negative, positive, everything. I hope to learn about the perception of VR by deaf students. Ok?

C: Ok.

R: Some background questions about you. How old are you?

C: 26.

R: 26. OK. You're a woman.

C: Right.

R: Race?

C: I call myself black or African-American.

R: Where are you from?

C: Maryland.

R: Maryland. Do you get VR in Maryland?

C: Yes.

R: Were you born in Maryland?

C: Yes, born and raised!

R: Lived all your life, right?

C: Right.

R: Ok. You are an undergrad?

C: I recently graduated from Gallaudet University. This past May. I got my degree in psychology.

R: Psychology. What are you doing now at Gallaudet?

C: I am working with students under a new program called the Health Careers Opportunities Program, abbreviated HCOP. I am an RA in the dorm, and I am working a lot. In the fall, I will be attending NYU to get my master's degree in deaf therapy.

R: Where?

C: New York University, NYU.

R: So you are planning to get your master's degree?

C: Yes.

R: Do you think that VR will support you in that?

C: No.

R: No? Because you graduated?

C: Yes, but I also think that it is political. I am trying to fight VR to support me for my graduate work, but I can't find any work in psychology or deaf helping fields with a BA. Not a one. I need to have an MA, so I am fighting with VR to get support. They are saying, no. I think they don't like to support colored deaf people; they like to support white people, and it is like colored deaf are getting oppressed.

R: What makes you think they don't support colored deaf?

C: Because I am the first black deaf person from the Eastern shore to get a BA. In Maryland, I am the first black deaf person to get a degree. I know of two other people who got full support from Maryland to go to graduate school. I have been fighting with them and explaining to them, but they say no, no. We have supported you for 4 or 5 years, and we think that is enough. I explained to VR that my parents paid taxes for 20 years, my grandparents paid taxes for 20 years, and if I get my MA degree, we are talking about 20–30 years that I will work. I will be paying taxes. I will be paying back more than VR paid me anyway.

R: You feel that VR oppresses you?

C: In an indirect way.

R: You are deaf, right?

C: Yes.

R: Is your family deaf or hearing?

C: I have a deaf brother and a deaf cousin that I never met, but the rest of my family is hearing.

R: Your parents are hearing?

C: Yes, they are hearing.

R: Do they all sign?

C: Yes, they all sign. I made sure of that.

R: You made sure of that? Good for you! Good. You recently said that your major is psychology. What are your plans? I know you just said you wanted an MA degree, right? What do you want to do in the future?

C: I want to get an MA in a deaf habilitation field. So maybe become a VR Counselor where I can encourage more deaf people to go to school and get degrees. It's not just about me. I want to go into a school-counseling program and get a job working with international students. I want to work with people.

R: OK. One more question I forgot to ask, how did you find out about my study about VR?

C: I forget. I think it was Gallaudet; there was an advertisement or something?

R: Ok. When did you first hear about VR? Before you applied for help, how did you find out about VR?

C: (thinking) ...maybe...

R: I mean your parents, a school counselor...?

C: Really, it involved parents and school, both. Both.

R: When did you first apply for VR?

C: I was young. I was a pre-teen, maybe 10–12.

R: That is really young. Ok. When did you first apply for services? Were you 10, or was it high school?

C: No. Let me back up a bit. When I was younger, my older deaf brother, who was 15 or 16, he applied for help from VR. After a lot of talking, they got services, like I remember

my first TV with captions. It was a Zenith. I was 7 or 8, but I was so excited! So from then on, growing up, I knew that college students got more services from VR. They explained what to do after I graduated from Maryland School for the Deaf. I could get vocational training. I protested. I couldn't understand why they wouldn't encourage me to go to college. They encouraged others to go to college, so I protested.

R: OK. You have already answered my next question a little bit. Describe your experience with VR in depth.

C: Ok. When I was a sophomore or junior in high school, every year, they would have people from different colleges come for a work/college fair. They explained what work tends to provide and what colleges tend to provide. VR would attend as well and they would explain what they could do. Their services. So I went and looked around at the different colleges and careers. Then I went over to VR, and they asked if I was from the Eastern Shore. I said I was, and then they explained that VR is done by county in Maryland. So I said fine and filled out my name and phone number and all that. Then I gave the form to them. After that, I heard from Maryland School for the Deaf, and they asked me what I wanted to do after high school. I replied I wanted to go to college. They recommended I take a career test to see where my strengths and weaknesses are. So I said fine. I took the test. They said that my results indicated that I fit best with work that required vocational training. I felt like whatever. But ok, fine. I had other classmates that were from deaf families and VR encouraged them to go to Gallaudet University. So I wondered, why not me? So anyway, I just continued on. After graduation, I was working, and I told VR that I wanted to go to community college. VR said fine, and they supported that. But I still felt like community college was not giving me everything I wanted. I

wanted more. So I asked if I could go to Gallaudet University. They asked me why? So I explained that I wanted to get my BA degree so I could get a job. An AA degree will not help me in the long run, but a BA will. So we argued about that. On my own, I did some research and found the University's phone number and other information. I gave the information to VR, and they kept wanting to hold on it. So I met a woman who encouraged me to go to Gallaudet. I thought about it and I made the decision that I wanted to go to Gallaudet. So I asked VR and they finally said they would pay for me to go to Gallaudet. So I took a test SATs, and I got accepted. VR said, you have to keep your GPA up and other criteria, or we will not continue to support you. I said ok. So I went to Gallaudet, and I was clueless about how everything works at school. Everything got messed up with VR money. I had to figure out who was responsible to pay Gallaudet \$5,000 or \$6,000. It had to be paid off before I went back to school. That was a new experience for me, my freshman year was really awkward. I was upset so I talked to my mentor. Her name is Carol. She said I should talk with financial aid and VR. VR finally paid it off, thank God! I went back to school. Through the years, things went ok. I had ok grades, and VR said they would not support me. I felt it was not fair that my friends were continuing to get support even though their grades were the same as mine. So I argued with them about this, and I think it is because I am black. So fine, I went to community college and took courses to show VR that I can get good grades. So fine, VR decided to support me again, and I went back to Gallaudet. They supported me through to graduation.

R: You feel it has been a struggle so far?

C: Yes. But it seems like sophomore, junior, and senior years, VR got better. They had all the money ready for books, food, and dorm. I would go to school and everything was ready. In the fall, I went to financial aid to check, and everything was ready. So after that, they really supported me, you know?

R: When you first applied for VR services, what services were you looking for? What kind of support did you want?

C: I think I expected they would give me encouragement. They would throw all kinds of ideas and options for me to choose from. I expected they would be a source of information. I expected they would give me options like vocational training, college, community college. I thought I would have a place to go to with choices, but really I didn't.

R: Do you feel they meet your needs?

C: Yes. Some.

R: You also wanted money for school, right?

C: Right.

R: Are there other services that you wanted? You wanted education, encouragement, and money. Was there anything else you wanted from VR?

C: It would be nice if they gave me technical stuff, you know? Other students get computers and laptops, and all kinds of things. But, my VR has not given that to me.

Why? They say no, it is under the county in Maryland, their budgets are all different, and they are not the same. They get monies from the state, and then once they get it, they can budget it however they want. I still don't understand because under the county, they still

have Maryland VR meetings every year. They discuss how to use the money, and I am not sure what the political point is...

R: So if you live in a different county or state, the support is different?

C: I think so.

R: That's not fair?

C: No, it's not. Each county gets money from the state of Maryland, so the amount varies for each county. I really don't understand it.

R: Interesting.

C: I also get some services from VR too. They give me new hearing aids. Oh, what else?

Oh yeah, and they gave me new glasses. That's all. What's left is nothing. And my education, too.

R: So they cover the full cost for college, like tuition...?

C: Yes.

R: Room and board?

C: Yes.

R: Money for books?

C: Yes.

R: What else do you get money for? Transportation?

C: No, I live on campus. Before, at community college, I did not live on campus so I had to argue with VR to get money to pay for transportation. Now, I go to Gallaudet, so I go home for Christmas and summer. It would be nice to get money or a ticket from VR, but they don't do that. I have to pay for it myself. I feel like they are paying for my tuition,

room and board, and books for 4 or 5 years. Can I ask for more? No. You know. That's their attitude, fine.

R: Ok. Describe your experience with your VR Counselor.

C: My first counselor was a deaf man, and our relationship was not bad. Things were all screwed up. I told him I wanted to go to Gallaudet University and he asked me what field I wanted to go into. I said, I don't know. That's why I want to go to Gallaudet University. To find out what I want to do. He said no! You must have a clear goal. There is no way we will pay for 4 or 5 years if you do not have a goal. I kept saying I don't know. Gallaudet has different introductory courses like introduction to psychology, introduction to business, etc... I said I don't know, but I don't want to pick a major and then later decide I don't like it. He said no, you have to pick one. How about psychology, and I answered that it was fine. I didn't care. I asked if I picked psychology now and I decided later that I don't like it, can I change? He said yes. Just come in and talk to me. Ok. So he left, then a new counselor took over. A nice hearing woman. She learned sign language and we had a good relationship. I realized junior and senior year that psychology was not my thing. I called VR to let them know, and they were very upset. She complained that they paid for me to go to college for 2 years already, and we will pay for 4 or 5 years for you to get your psychology degree! I said that I realized that psychology is not my thing, and I explained that when I first came in I did not know what I wanted to do. It was a big fight. I would like to work with people. VR replied that they are paying for me to get my psychology degree and that it deals with people. But psychology is not my thing. We argued and argued and argued. I was told that if I changed my major, they would not support me any more. We signed a paper and agreed on that, but my former counselor

told me I had to pick a major to go to Gallaudet. We argued and argued too, so I finally just said fine, I would major in psychology.

R: Do you feel forced?

C: Yes.

R: So VR changed their story about your degree? Your first counselor said one thing, now you have a new counselor who is saying something different?

C: Yes.

R: Right.

C: Yeah, they want me to get a psychology degree. But, I don't know.

R: So only two VR Counselors?

C: Yes.

R: Now, you are still with the same counselor, the woman?

C: Yes.

R: She is learning sign?

C: Yes, she has really improved.

R: So you can communicate?

C: Yes.

R: OK. Do you have a lot of contact with your VR Counselor?

C: The last 1 or 2 years, I have not had a lot with them. I lost respect for the VR system. I feel that I lost respect for them. My counselor would e-mail me every month to see how I am doing in school. I send them two replies a semester. Not all for what? We contact through phone if we have to. We keep contact, but not everyday.

R: What about VR satisfies you?

C: I would say that they are paying for school completely. They are paying for 4 years for me to get my BA degree. They give me new hearing aids sometimes. And they pay for new glasses for me.

R: OK. What about VR does not satisfy you?

C: First, they had a list of names you could choose from. They don't do that now. Second, I would like more encouragement and support. And third, they should meet my needs. If there is another client who gets a computer or a laptop, they should do the same thing for me. Fourth, they should not have the political running around. For example, I finished my AAS degree in deaf habilitation, and I wanted to go for my BA, but they gave me a hard time. I am not satisfied with that.

R: Thank you for sharing that with me. OK. Before you went to VR for help, was that the first time you looked for help? In your life, that was the first time?

C: I am not sure what you mean?

R: When you went to VR and applied for help, was that the first time in your life that you asked someone for help?

C: Yes. When I applied for VR services, I asked for help. I had different reasons. The first was Gallaudet, then the type of future work, other things that I needed like glasses. That's why I asked for help.

R: You recently mentioned that you feel that VR does not encourage you in college?

C: Yes.

R: Because you are black and deaf, right?

C: Right.

R: Ok. Can you explain a little more about that?

C: I have met many good deaf people in my hometown. Many of them got vocational training. Some of these people were really smart and could go to college, but VR said no, vocational training. Get a good job, then slowly keep moving up. Good job and I get more pay. Some of them did not get any vocational training. And after all that is part of what can VR do. There is a whole list; I explained this. So I said, "Ask for help." They answered, "I don't know." "OK, why don't you know?" "I don't know." So fine, VR can help me find work. Up to six months. Then it is case closed. Really you can get a lot of help from VR. They will continue to support you until you feel satisfied. So then you can tell VR to close your case. I feel much better. I am independent. VR does not decide the time frame. They can't do that. Because some may not know the VR system. I had a friend who was paying and paying for this car. I told her to ask VR to help her finance this. I told her VR helped to buy my hearing aids. I think if you ask them to help you, they will. She was excited and gave them a call. They discussed this and VR said they could only pay for $\frac{1}{4}$. She had to pay the rest. I felt it was a conflict. She asked them to pay full, not $\frac{1}{4}$. Also, it is expensive to keep paying for hearing aids. You should make them pay at least $\frac{1}{2}$ or all. So they went back and forth. Finally, VR was willing to pay for $\frac{1}{2}$. I meet many people who still stay at home or go to school or go to work. Some of those people are not happy where they work, but they just put up with it. I tell them if they are not happy to go look for another job, and they say that VR won't let them. VR services are there to support you; VR does not control your life or make your decisions. I try to explain and explain this, but it is tough. What VR can do, I don't know.

R: Wow.

C: I feel like my BA. If I get my BA, then VR thinks I might want my MA, and that makes them worry. I sent a complaint letter, and I hope to hear soon from VR. If not, they should at least support me for ½ because my parents themselves are educated without VR's support. You know?

R: Do your parents help you with money for college?

C: No.

R: No? I think I have finished my questions. Do you want to add anything about VR?

C: I hope that one day VR will help deaf, and other kinds...deaf, blind, wheelchair, handicaps. Because they are human beings and have the same value as other people. You know VR likes to make categories and tell people what they can and can't do. I would like that to be done with. I don't want to be the first black deaf woman in 30, 40, or 50 years. I want to use this to empower people in the community. I want to make a community so that it will be easier for our children and their children.

R: I hope so. Thank you for sharing your experience with me.

C: Sure.

R: Ok, let's go outside and turn off the video camera.

Interview # 2 (Carla)

R: I want to thank you for volunteering for this study. I really appreciate it. First, I will explain a little bit about what we are going to do. Then, like I recently explained on e-mail about the videotape.

C: Right.

R: That is fine with you?

C: Fine.

R: OK, I have a form for you to sign. I want to study about VR services from deaf students' perspectives. What satisfies you, what does not satisfy you? Do you feel any barriers to your success for the future? Do you understand me?

C: Fine.

R: Ok. First, I have forms for you to sign. If you agree.

C: Ok.

[Hands forms and signs]

R: Ok. Can you move your chair a little for the videotape? I want to ask you background questions, then questions about VR services. Your experiences and that, ok?

C: Ok.

R: Ok. How old are you?

C: 27.

R: 27?

C: 27.

R: Ok. You are female.

C: Yes.

R: Ok. Race?

C: I am Puerto Rican–American.

R: Ok. Where are you from?

C: I am from Bridgeport, Conn.

R: From Connecticut?

C: No, from Bridgeport in Connecticut.

R: Ok. And are you getting VR services from that state?

C: From the state, yes.

R: Under them?

C: Under them, yes.

R: You were born there?

C: Yes. I was born there.

R: You came to Gallaudet from there?

C: Yes.

R: And you are deaf, right?

C: Right.

R: Is your family deaf?

C: Yes, my family is deaf. I have two...

R: All?

C: Yes, all. My parents are deaf; I have two older sisters that are deaf. Yes, they are all deaf.

R: OK. What is your major?

C: Social work.

R: You are an undergraduate?

C: Yes.

R: What year?

C: I am a sophomore. Next fall, I will become a junior.

R: Ok.

C: I have 2 ½ years left.

R: Ok. Are you working now?

C: No. This past year, I volunteered at Gallaudet at a deaf staff training week in Texas. That's finished now. Most of the time I volunteer. That's when I am asked. I've served as chair. I've taken various jobs. Once I was asked if I was willing to help with some client cases. I grabbed the opportunity. My parents live in Connecticut, so when I am in New England I try to take advantage of the opportunity and see them. During school, I am too busy to worry about seeing them. I need to have my space.

R: OK. What are your future plans with social work?

C: I want to set up my own practice, but I prefer to focus on undergraduate first, and then move on to graduate school, too. Then I want to get my LSW certification. A licensed social worker can work from their own home. I prefer to work at home and also with the towns and go back and forth between them. I don't mind working with a variety of people: children, adults, agencies, the government, like with children who have been abused and taken advantage of by their parents. I don't mind signing on with that department that works with children. For example, there is a grandmother who is taking care of a child that is deaf and has mental retardation. Different government agencies refuse the child. They worry this is a dangerous person for the town. But she needs help

taking care of the child. She gets tired and worn out. The agency feels that they do not have the ability to take care of this kind of a child for 50 years. So, I prefer to take those kinds of cases as the case manager meeting one to one with clients. I'd make an agreement with the agency. So, I'd go once a month for a meeting. See how things are going. Develop relationships with the grandmother and the child. I think they come for 6 months, and they help work out a system for cooperation. I worked there in Boston for 5 years. Doing a variety of deaf human services, such as working for the government, paying for the agency to see different kinds of clients. I'd give those classes at home while working for a nonprofit agency, traveling around to see various clients. I'd practice with individuals and develop my skills. I feel that I just absorbed so many ideas from working there. I envisioned becoming a social worker and helping people. That was one of the benefits of working. At school, I have to think about it, but I prefer to practice. Meeting with individuals, keeping confidentiality, what you do everyday. At the same time, I think of it like a horse. It is an animal that works very hard. Now I am focusing on undergraduate, then graduate school. When they are finished, I am going to move on with my life. I don't want to graduate, and then go to work at a deaf school. I am tired of that. I worked for 5 years doing that. I got my experience and paid my time. I got my degree. I struggled with the supervisor. I struggled with...I would make suggestions, and things changed very slowly. For me, I tried to fit in. But, I was supposed to follow all the policies and do everything by the proper procedure. I tried to do things my own way and see if it works. If it seems ok, then I will continue on. I ignore the policies and procedures already in place. But, then things are going and a new program is getting developed. I can't just throw that out because of the policies and procedures. Throw out my work

because it does not fit this model! Then I realized why. So, what did I do? I went back to school. I'll focus on finishing school and then I'll move on with my life.

R: Sounds like interesting work.

C: Yes.

R: Social work. OK. How did you first hear about VR?

C: Really, I have known since the deaf school. VR is always going to the deaf schools and explaining what they're for. Help with money, work, need to practice, and evaluation. Whatever they provide. I have known all that since the deaf school. I know the various services and what VR is for. Money, school, practice. That is what they provide. Different services they are responsible for providing. Also they give counseling.

R: Why did you decide to go to VR for help?

C: I couldn't support myself through school. I tried to find help, like scholarships, but everyone just turned me down. It was impossible for me to work half time and go to school half time. School is important to me, you know? I wanted to focus on school and enjoy my college years. I did not want to miss anything. I went in to Gallaudet for part-time, then I would leave to go and work. I worked between two and three jobs; I was a workaholic. As the time to go to school neared, I focused on that and enjoyed myself. I do not want to miss my college years. I want to enjoy...a good new start for me to just go along at an even pace.

R: What services do you get from VR?

C: They pay for school.

R: Full?

C: Yes, full. They don't pay for my health. I pay for that. Food, I pay for that. VR pays for board. There are so many foods that I don't like, so I use my SSI money and put that aside for food. I can cover that because it is small. I cook myself.

R: Really they just pay for tuition fully.

C: School, right.

R: Not room and board?

C: Room, yes. Board, no. Some books, no. Books that are related to classes I am taking, they will pay for. But if I am writing a paper, and I need files, they I am on my own.

R: Do they pay for transportation?

C: I pay for my own transportation. I have my own car.

R: Do you get other services from VR?

C: Hearing aids. They provide alarms. If you tell them you need an alarm, they will provide it. That's it.

R: When you first arrived at VR, did you know that you wanted to study social work?

C: Yes. I have known for a long time that I wanted to get into social work.

R: You did not need counseling or career counseling?

C: No. I did get a job consultant. The policy said that all the new clients have to come in and answer questions. I did do that. I answered many questions already. I told them that I worked before, I have experience. I already know which major I want.

R: Describe your experience with VR.

C: Describe my VR. My experience with VR has been pretty good. The communication seems to be clear between us. They know my goals. I explained what I want. I had no problems. If there are problems, we work them out. It is not a strong, in-depth

relationship, however. Because, for example... I took at Gallaudet... Gallaudet requires you take Algebra 1, 2, and 3. I had to go way back and prove to them that I already took it. So the first two, I barely passed. The third one, I struggled with, and as the time to withdraw came near, I tried, but if I did withdraw, I would lose my money. If I withdrew four weeks later, Gallaudet said I would not get my money. So anyway, as the time drew nearer, I was communicating with VR. I always communicate with them what is going on. I told them I did not feel I could pass Algebra 3. I told them I was struggling, and I know my limits. I told them I would prefer to do it in summer school. They told me that I could not go to summer school. The first and second semesters we will help, but summer school, we don't provide for that. Me? Where are my rights? Where are my rights? I have been telling them all along that I am struggling with this class, I am frustrating. I study for tests, and on tests, I don't do well. I get Cs, Ds, and Fs. I tried to explain to them that I want to keep my GPA up. But they just said sorry. So I was thinking about this, and I discussed it with a friend of mine. I decided to withdraw. I told VR, and they were pissed off. I lost my money because I withdrew. Is it possible for me to support myself? I told them to look at my grades. So far, I have been a good student. Not perfect, but everything has been a B or an A. But, one F? Of course, I am struggling. Math is my weakness. I know it is my weakness. I feel confused and that VR is not supportive. I don't feel supported, and I feel sick. We have been talking so far, and you know that math has been my weakness. Is it possible to get support for that? Maybe a 'special needs' class for math. English and the other courses are fine, but for math... numbers just make me crazy. I keep thinking about it and it disgusts me. I am limited there. This situation could affect my money for the future. You know? So, I decided not to withdraw from the class. I

stayed. I failed everything till the last test. I turned it in and sweated it out. When I finally peaked, I passed! I got a D! I was so relieved! So I went to meet and discuss it with VR, and I told them I passed. They said great! I said hey, why can't you advocate for me and support me. You couldn't approach your supervisor to discuss this? You've known all along that I have trouble with math. Each class, I get a D. If I would continue, I would either get an F or a D. Where is the support for summer school? I would be able to focus on it. Eight hours everyday for three weeks. I could study and improve. Where is the support for me? If I am having problems, you should be supporting me, THE CLIENT, my needs. They reply they can't because of money. All they talk about is politics and money. I don't care!! You should support me! I am just one person, not many. Supporting one person is nothing. I feel that VR does not know how to support people. Wow! Look at my situation and help me. I worked in Boston. I worked under VR; I know the system inside and out! So, now I am the client. I don't work for the government, I am a client. I want you to do things for me. You know?

R: Really, you feel supported with money, but not as a client? You don't feel the support that you need as a VR client?

C: They don't support my needs. They don't support paying for summer school. That is really two negatives, but they fall under one: not supporting my needs. This is a logical math issue. I've already informed VR of this. In high school and growing up, I struggled with math. Did I admit it? No. Admit it? No. I would pass and I felt very relieved. Thank God! If I get an F, that means I have to take the class all over again in the fall. Is that fair for me? I fail so I take it again in the fall and work hard to learn again? If I get an F, then

the responsibility should be to begin communicating way back at the beginning. Get the dialogue going, get tutoring...you know I had a tutor everyday?

R: Everyday?

C: Yes. Really. Not everyday, but three times a week. We progressed very well, but when I would get in class, it's like my mind hit a blank. I know my mind. I told them, if I failed, I would have to take it over again, and I would be wasting your money. I'll keep this class and get an F and then I'll have to take it over again. VR said 'oh, oh, which one?' Oh come on now. I take all these classes and I learn the material for them, and I do so much studying, homework, and reading. I spend a lot of time to make sure everything is just perfect. I would rather save my time and energy for summer school. I could just get it all over with and pass. You know?

R: I know.

C: I have explained this over and over again with VR, but they tell me there is nothing they can do about it. My perspective...not my judgment, but my opinion...I feel they are not willing to support me. I have to confront them and tell them that I am the client and that I have needs. VR refuses to take care of anything. I am disappointed. I am willing to advocate for myself. I am willing to confront them to let them know I have serious needs. I am willing to haggle with them. They should provide more options. You give me money for school. I am going to fail this class, now what do I do? I struggle with them. But, they don't want to. If you still refuse to help me. I will let them know that I will look around and find other outside groups for support. I'll investigate and look for another open door. I will find a way. Expand my options. I can! I'll show them. They will be shocked and afraid. So, I've taken responsibility for their job. Should I beg them? Help

me please. Please support me. They do nothing. Will they continue to give me money for school if I fail? What should I do? Should I haggle and haggle with them? I don't want to.

R: You don't feel like the VR Counselor is doing their job?

C: No.

R: Right?

C: Right.

R: I want to back up a little bit. Did your VR Counselor support your decision to go to college?

C: Yes. They supported that. Yes.

R: They did not try to change you or anything?

C: What do you mean?

R: Your VR Counselor supported you going to college? They did not try to force you to do something else, like work?

C: They did suggest work, but I did some research into all my options. VR told me they would support me fully for school. GREAT! If I decided to go to work, I would lose some VR money. That means I would have to take loans or work until I graduated. So I figured that out. I went to VR and I was direct with them. I told them I did not want to work. I wanted to focus on school because after school there are projects and many things to accomplish. As a freshman, I focused on school and learned how things functioned at Gallaudet. Now I am ready to join organizations on campus, like the Spanish group and SBG. Getting involved with the community was my priority. I didn't know who anyone was. If I didn't work, I would have more time to do that. Working would take away some

of that time. I didn't want to go to school all day and work all night. I would have to schedule my time very carefully and give up weekends and relaxation for that. I would be stressed. I don't want to work. If the job was related to my major, then I would be willing to work. I prefer to work for Gallaudet in one of their offices. I will need to earn some money. I know I am poor, but college life controls my time and money.

R: I am just curious if, when you said you wanted to go to college, your counselor told you no, just work. Not do both work and college at the same time, but work only?

C: No. That doesn't apply. Clients complain. I would. All agencies have that, if you are not satisfied, then you fill out a client complaint. You then would set up a hearing and explain why college was so important. They then listen to the other side. They are trying to see if you have the skills and opportunities. You need to have proof, not opinions. You have to prove that you as a client can go to college and not work.

R: OK. Your VR Counselor, are they hearing or deaf?

C: Deaf. She graduated from Gallaudet. She was a member of the Delta sorority. She taught before. She recently started working for VR about 2 years ago, and started to slowly learn the VR system. Good person, cool, but sometimes...like I recently explained to you, when I want something, they just say no, and I want to strangle them. They don't understand what advocate is. I had to teach her that concept. I worked to teach her that it means she supports me. No. No. (Shakes head) That's just how I feel. I don't know.

R: What satisfies you about VR?

C: My perspective is that the communication is good. It is not everyday, it is more like every 3 months or 6 months. That part is really great! Asking me what's up, making sure my classes are ok, things like that. For me, suppose a person comes up to me and is ready

to express something. They should listen to me. That is key. They should take notes and listen to the client's needs and feelings. I understand that sometimes I will get a negative response, VR cannot do that. They need to explain why. Some VR Counselors don't know. They can't provide an explanation that makes sense. Or they think of things that don't apply. So VR should investigate to make sure they are doing the right work, you know? Most people will just sit there and accept the answers and leave, but I want to know why. I want to make sure everything is clear and that they are providing me with appropriate services. Sometimes my VR will give me services or advice, and I don't know why. So, I question her on that. To me personally, providing services means advocacy. Come on now..., get going. If you don't, I'll have to do it myself. I did prepare myself if I should fail a class. I had a back-up plan to take care of this. I can't do that. I have to fill out a client procedure form. I have a whole list of needs. But, thankfully I passed. I don't have to worry about that anymore. I want them to listen to clients' needs. If a client has a concern to take care of it, they should do that. Not just pretend to listen then when they leave, make the notes and forget about it. I have seen other clients who communicate fine. But outside, in the waiting room, they are reading a book or a magazine. So other deaf clients who feel they are being put down. They have their high school diploma and they just work. Deaf people are often treated like that. My parents are capable. They have minds. They have common sense. These people should be able to decide if they will continue on in education or not.

R: True.

C: Some VR are responsible for placement and have preconceived ideas about deaf clients. They don't understand them. They think they are trouble. I don't believe in judging.

R: Your counselor judges?

C: Yes. A little bit. Yes. It turns me off. She doesn't judge with me. She knows I will speak up. I won't just accept it. I will let her know I don't like it. I will question it and have a dialogue. I want to discuss it so I understand the other side. I am willing to listen. I am not shy. I won't just be polite and have a small dialogue. If you offend me, I won't be upset, my ego won't be hurt. I want to think about these things. Okay. Empowerment... VR doesn't want that. VR doesn't teach clients how to be powerful. That is like handing out power to people and saying you are empowered. Okay. Things are under VR's control. But it is not my power. When you are not empowered, VR can take advantage of that. That's not fair. I wonder what would happen if I went to another kind of service. You ask for help and they give you someone who is like a coordinator. Like an agency coordinator. They both assist people. One is from VR and the other is from another agency. They sit down and discuss each of their points of view with the client there, too. If VR won't admit wrongdoing, other additional agencies may get involved to confront VR. They fight VR for client rights. Understand?

R: Understand. Ok. One thing you said that satisfies you about VR is communication.

C: Yes.

R: Is there anything else satisfying about VR?

C: No. Communication is key. There is nothing else. Communication applies to so many different topics.

R: What are some other things that don't satisfy you about VR?

C: I remember when I came to Gallaudet. I needed help from the financial aid office. I needed to make sure all the papers and forms were ready so that VR would pay. I had a list of things to do, and I did them. VR never sent the money. I was frantic! I felt that VR was lying to me and I wanted my money. I did not know what I was going to do! I contacted VR and they were slow and I wanted them to hurry up. I waited. Then one day I was really antsy because I had not heard anything, so I called them. They said I did not send the federal FAFSA form. They asked me why I didn't do that. They said not to worry; they would photocopy the papers and give them to me. I was very upset because VR should be working with me instead of taking their time. Why isn't VR working with Gallaudet? I won't accept responsibility for this. That's not fair! They should take care of this now. Not wait. Now!

In the back of my mind, I thought, I need to double check on this. I always double check. VR said they would send the paper now. I called my sister to make sure everything was going right. I asked her to stop by the VR office and explain my list of frustrations. I wanted to be sure that everything was clearly understood by VR. I hate to be picky but I have to accept that this is my life! Why are they picking on me? That's not fair! Finally I had all this control. So, I collected and saved all of the paperwork but I was out there dangling. I didn't know where to go or what to do. It's important to keep following up. So, my sister kept checking and helping me to discuss this and work things out. So, we called back and forth. It seemed to take a long time and so silly too. I didn't understand what was going on with these papers. Things just kept going on and on. If VR reads the papers and sees a question they don't understand, they tend to put it aside until a

supervisor can assist. My sister discussed everything and made sure it all worked out. I didn't understand what the paper was about. I couldn't figure it out, and they told me to wait. I was sooo mad! That meant that the lists that VR gives you, if you can't figure something out, you have to wait until they can meet with you to explain it in a detailed manner.

VR should attend training workshops every month. They don't know how to fill out all this paperwork. They stall by saying they are working on it, but they really don't know how to do it! That wastes my time. I felt like I could get that information through my sister. VR said, if I want to finish something, you have to go down to the office and sit down with the counselor. Then they are like, well I have to wait for my supervisor to read it and make sure it is clear and sign it. You should have done this a long time ago. I don't have the time to run around all over like a bunny. Go to the accounting office; go to the financial aid office...running back and forth. I don't like that. PLEASE...I want to go in, get everything finished and stop worrying about it anymore.

Other universities do things quickly. You don't have to wait three weeks then wait another three weeks to get help. They work things out quickly. They work everything out the same day. Wow! Great! You are happy, they tell you to have a nice day and you are on your way. Given my experience of working with deaf clients who are preparing for college, things tend to take so long. Waiting for those above to make decisions and sign things.

It's shocking, awkward, WHAT? I don't understand it. Why do things take so long to be taken care of? I don't want to do things over and over again. I want to discuss in-depth the first time. I don't want to do this again. The same thing. Always taking a long time. I

prefer to take care of things quickly. I want to see the papers and forms right now. Don't tell me not to worry. You see me and you see the forms right here, okay? Fine! Let's fill in the blanks on the form using the financial information on the other forms. Transfer it to this form and put it all together. Check it out. Make sure that form is right. My friends told me that their forms are taken care of but, I have to do that myself. It's easy just to fill things out. Make sure it's right, copy it, and send it. Then you are finished. Make sure everything is filled out. Compare the forms. Make sure they are right and sign them. Then, why does VR put it somewhere out of sight and file it? For nothing! Make several copies of it so you don't have to commit the answers to memory. Then you won't have to fill it out over and over again. These issues should be taken care of before school starts. Not one semester, then the second semester meeting to discuss all these issues. Finish it. Copy it and send it. Gallaudet and VR need to coordinate things. Come on! Work together. What is the problem? Ask each other if you have all of the paperwork. You do? You don't? Send it and be finished with it. Both VR and Gallaudet are taking too long and not sharing information with each other. Regarding Gallaudet, I can understand this. There are so many students coming into Gallaudet from everywhere. But with VR, over and over. I am just one client. Just one. With VR, who are the other clients, the other students that are going to college? Just me. The only one. In other towns there are students going to Gallaudet and other colleges. VR told me, in Bridgeport, my town, I am the only one. Gosh... I was surprised to hear that.

R: Really?

C: Yes.

R: Why are you the only deaf person there?

C: There are others. I ask them, do you want to go to college. No. I don't want to go to college. So, I understand that I am the only one. Okay! The reason is because of the paperwork. It's easy for me. I just fill it out and send it in. I am the only one. Then, why do things take so long? That's why I won't discuss it. I am not willing. Paperwork? NO! Imagine, I've been working with VR on this issue for...this is the third year now. Wow! Things have slowly improved. At first it was awkward. At first, things just didn't fit. I wanted to strangle them. I felt scared. I didn't know what to do. We struggled because we didn't know each other. I was frustrated before. They (VR) controlled my life. Left me dangling with all of these issues. That's enough. It went on and on. It wasn't worth it. I had to teach them about my feelings. I talked and expressed my feelings. They finally understood. We had to teach each other about how to work with people. Seems she (VR Counselor) was a weak teacher for many years while teaching a class, discussing with them, helping them to learn. We learned how to have a back-and-forth conversation.

R: You felt that VR helped meet your goals?

C: Yes.

R: How?

C: What do you mean? Can you repeat?

R: You've already set up your goals for the future. Work, school...

C: Yes. (shakes head).

R: Do you feel VR supported that? Helped with that? Blocked you?

C: No. VR knows my professional experience. They know my work record in Boston.

She (VR Counselor) talked with different referrals about me, my boss. She wrote things down and knows my background. She checked again and again and asked many

questions. She checked all of my work experiences and felt, woooo...no college degree. On my last job, I was the coordinator. I was overwhelmed with that job and the reason was it's not worth it. That job...If you stay in that job, the pay increases were steady but very small. No recognition. I noticed that people who have their degrees got recognition. They had a degree on the wall and got recognition. I worked hard and focused and I saw and grew up and learned from my Mom and Dad who used family services, deaf family services. I grew up and saw those services. I experienced great services.

I picked up the skills of that job and how to do the paperwork and I did a great job. But I needed a degree. It's politics and VR understood that. Understood what I went through and the frustrations. So, they supported me and believed that I could succeed. I felt that my whole family believed in me. That's great! I feel a fire burning; a fire and it won't go off. It just keeps going. I have high energy. Because I am going for my goal and I won't give up.

My first semester at Gallaudet, I felt stagnant. They (the students) were all kids, young, all of them. Now I am 27 but then I was 25 years old. I had been in the work world. I knew how to get along with people. I had been involved in organizations, meetings. I had many different experiences and have seen many things and I felt like I had to slowly disconnect from those young, innocent, free students. I had to let them go. I went back to school. I was serious, worked hard and I saw...Wow we looked at each other. I met a few students there that were 27 and their perceptions were different than mine. They didn't have any experience in the work world. I had experience in the work world. They were supported by VR with the understanding that they (VR) know what life is about. Life is about taking risks. VR understood that and supported them.

R: Before, when you went to VR for the first time, you were looking for help?

C: No. Before, when I finished high school and got my certificate... Well, during high school, before I got my certificate, when I was a senior, VR came to my school and they asked us if we wanted to go to college or work. They gave me their business card. So, I contacted VR and got prepared for college and my mom encouraged me. Yes. I wanted to go to college but I felt that I had been in a deaf school, school school, and school, all of my life. In the honor's program. On the student congress. Strong deaf cultural influences. I needed a test for success. My parents had high expectations for me. So, I sat with VR. We looked at college programs and entrance requirements and worked everything out and then I felt... I decided to drop the college idea. I left school. I went on my own and never asked for help anyway. I was on my own. So, I started looking for jobs in the newspaper. I went looking for a job and it was very competitive. A lot of people were applying for the same jobs. I had all of my paperwork ready. I was looking and looking for work. It was consuming all of my time. So, I thought that VR could help me so I didn't have to waste my time. I discussed it with VR and we agreed. They would do 50% of looking and I would do 50% of looking for a job. Then I could focus on other things. It saved my time. We worked things out. It was good teamwork.

R: Do you feel that VR met your needs?

C: Yes.

R: In the future, will VR pay for graduate school?

C: No. Out of my own pocket. It's worth it. My background is good. It was nice that VR helped me a little bit but, for graduate school, I'll have to take care of that myself. Maybe I'll go back to Bridgeport. There are several universities. Maybe I'll go to the University

of New Orleans. You don't have to pay for tuition or food there. They will pay. That's for people who want to major in social work, helping professions, psychology, and psychiatry. Oh...Perfect. I am majoring in social work.

Landmark University has a deaf education program and offers free tuition. I am not a teacher. I am more of a counselor. There is financial aid available. You have to look and investigate. You have to do a lot of research.

R: I think all of my questions are finished. Is there anything more you want to add?

C: Just recently, not a long time ago, but when I went to VR, I looked for written information. Like, you have the right to appeal as a client or information about VR services. As a new client, I would have to do things for myself. I'd have to ask the secretary, "Do you have a brochure about this topic?" Oh yes...and then the secretary gets it and gives it to me. If I were new, I'd have to investigate and tell them what I want. I'd have to bug them to make sure I collected the information that I was curious about. I'd have to check and double check and gather everything. I am not saying they have to sit there and explain everything to me in ASL, but why don't they give me materials so I can read them and they can explain them to me if I have questions. Then the process will move along more appropriately.

Don't hide information so clients have to ask for it. I hope all of VR can provide brochures and information about services for clients so new intake clients can make decisions. Set up good communication with the client. Okay. I think that's all.

R: Okay. Thanks so much for helping me with this. We can go out this door. I have to turn the videotape off.

Interview - #3 (Brian)

R: Thank you so much for volunteering to help me with this study. I just want to explain a little bit about what I am doing. And I will ask you about your background and VR.

First, I will explain in depth a little more. This study is about perspectives of VR...deaf students... oh, I made a mistake! I want to study deaf students' perspectives of VR.

Okay?

C: [Nods]

R: If you perceive barriers to VR or if you are satisfied with VR. Positives, negatives, anything. Okay?

C: [Nods]

R: First, is it okay for me to videotape? You can just say yes, if you agree.

C: Yes.

R: Okay. These forms explain about the study and about the videotape. Please read it, and if you agree, then sign it. Thank you. [hands client papers, waits while reading and signing] First, the background questions. How old are you?

C: 34.

R: 24?

C: 34.

R: 34. Okay. You're a male.

C: [Nods]

R: Race?

C: White.

R: And you are married, right? I remember you told me that.

C: Married, yes.

R: Okay. And where are you from?

C: North Carolina.

R: Born in NC?

C: Born and raised there.

R: You receive VR services from NC, right?

C: Yes.

R: And you are an undergrad?

C: Undergrad, yes.

R: Which year?

C: Junior year.

R: Okay. Deaf right?

C: Deaf, yes.

R: Is your family deaf?

C: Deaf. My parents, sister, all deaf.

R: All deaf?

C: Yes.

R: Wow, okay. And are you working now, or school only, what?

C: Both. I work and go to school at Gallaudet. SRS. Student...no...Staff RA in the dorms on weekends.

R: Okay. Do you like it?

C: It is very good.

R: Does it help you pay for school...

C: [Nods]

R: ...or VR?

C: VR pays some. Not full support, some. They pay about half.

R: What are your future career plans?

C: To work in a residential school program as a dorm supervisor or, uh, something related to working with kids. Not teach, but something in the dorm. I am not really sure; I need to research it more.

R: Okay. What is your major in school?

C: Communication arts.

R: [Nods]

C: General enough.

R: When did you first hear about VR? When did you first become aware of VR?

C: A long time ago. My high school years. I graduated, and VR supported me to come here, to Gallaudet, for one year. I got thrown out for a whole list of reasons. So VR stopped supporting me until just recently. This past spring semester, they started again.

R: So you were paying for it yourself for a short time, or did you just recently come back to school?

C: Yes, right. I went to community college and I paid for that myself. Until I was a junior, then I came back to Gallaudet.

R: You recently transferred here?

C: Yes.

R: Recently? Last year?

C: This past spring semester, yes.

R: Okay. You became aware of VR through your HS, right?

C: Yes.

R: How much do you know about VR?

C: I know about the services I am getting, my needs, things like that...related to school.

R: And why did you decide to look for help from VR?

C: I can't afford to pay for school myself. It is expensive.

R: Okay. What services do you get from VR?

C: Help with tuition, books, and dorm. I have \$1,400 for dorm, \$1,000 for tuition, and \$300 for books. The rest I have to pay myself.

R: Is there a reason that VR is not fully covering everything?

C: They give me the maximum of what NC allows.

R: Okay. Are you getting other services from VR, or only money?

C: [Shakes head] What I need for school. Other bills and things, no. VR themselves supports part of my schooling. That's it.

R: Do they give you counseling or job evaluation or anything like that?

C: No.

R: No? Okay.

C: I have not asked for it, I guess. So I don't get it.

R: Okay. Describe your experience with VR so far.

C: Pretty good. The only thing that is lacking is communication. That bothers me.

Recently, my old counselor retired and I got a new counselor who is not yet into the swing of things. That's about it. They are very direct with me; honest, open. They tell me what I can get and why and all that. Pretty good.

R: Okay. Your previous counselor was deaf or hearing?

C: Hearing.

R: Did they sign?

C: Signed well.

R: Do you know if your new counselor is hearing or deaf?

C: I have no idea.

R: You don't know their name or anything?

C: Nothing. They told me I got a new counselor last May. I have been waiting. Now it's July...

R: Last May?

C: May.

R: Oh, recently. Okay.

C: I don't even know who or when. I plan to go home in 2 weeks. I will contact VR again and ask who I will start working with in the fall.

R: What satisfies you about VR?

C: The support that they can give me. The services they can provide me.

R: Do you have other family that is helping to support you through college?

C: No.

R: Yourself?

C: Yes.

R: Through your job?

C: Yes, right.

R: What does not satisfy you about VR?

C: Information, communication. Not getting what I need. I need to constantly ask them to get it, I know that. I sent an e-mail recently and they still have not responded. I don't know what's happening there.

R: What do you mean by communication? You mean not enough?

C: Not enough. I am not getting what I need to know. For example, I am getting ready for fall. I have been waiting since May. There is one month before school starts and I don't have the information I need. I don't know how much support they will give me, things like that.

R: You feel the process is slow or on hold?

C: [Nods] Yes, very slow. E-mail...I still have not got a response and it has been a month. I am waiting. Last May I sent an e-mail and still no answer. I understand that maybe it's because people are on vacations and stuff, but I have been waiting for an e-mail.

R: Do you feel like VR supports your goals?

C: Yes.

R: Not money support, but supports you and your goals?

C: Pretty much, yes. They have not turned me down or said "no" yet. Everything I have asked for, they have given me, and they give what they can give. Every state has its own allowed amount to give.

R: Do you feel that VR meets your needs?

C: Pretty much, yes. Except for responding. Other than that, yes. Pretty much.

R: Is there any other information you want to add about VR?

C: It is very common around Gallaudet to complain about VR. But I don't really feel that way. I guess it is better to know that VR can't help me with everything. Some things you need to do yourself. A lot of deaf people depend on VR. VR is there to help, yes. But really a lot of things you have to do yourself. I feel better knowing that now. A while ago, I felt the same way as those others do now.

R: So, you think that some of the people at Gallaudet have a negative impression of VR?

C: Not some, but it seems like a lot. Rumors...

R: When there are rumors, what do they say?

C: VR doesn't pay for everything. They don't support students' goals. They give what they need. For me, I am satisfied with what VR gives me. But...

R: So, your experience is more positive?

C: I guess so. I have not had any problems with VR. Not yet. Just with getting a new counselor and finding out who they are.

R: How do you contact your counselor?

C: E-mail.

R: E-mail.

C: Before I would phone, and they respond quickly with phone. But it is expensive to call long distance. So I send e-mails, but I found out that e-mail is not the best way to contact VR. It takes a long time to get back to me. I don't understand that. I don't understand why, but...

R: Do you stop by the office when you visit NC?

C: Yes, when I go home next, I will stop by. I will ask who my counselor is and what is going on with school.

R: Anything else you wanted to add?

C: The counselor that I had was a VR Counselor for a long time. I guess for 20 years was my counselor...they went to Gallaudet 15 years ago. Now they are retired. I hope the new counselor knows a lot about the policies and what VR can do for me. Like my last counselor was very knowledgeable and did not have to look up everything to respond to me. We would sit down together and he would tell me what I needed and what VR could do for me. He knew a lot. I wonder if the new counselor will have the same knowledge or if I will have to wait for them to look everything up then respond to me. You know what I mean? Really if the new counselor is skilled like my last one...

R: Concerned about that. Before you looked for help from VR, do you remember the first time you looked for help?

C: Recently, no. A long time ago, yes.

R: A long time ago.

C: VR helped me with a class I took in high school and a couple of classes I took at community college. VR paid for the interpreter services there. But that was a long time ago like 16 or 17 years ago. I got interpreters at the classes I took at community college. That was the first time I got services from VR. Later I graduated and VR supported me coming here for college; that was the second time. They stopped and my case was closed. Now they opened again this past fall because I came to Gallaudet, but they did not have things ready for me. I was tired of waiting. It was the last minute. They said it was better if I waited and started in the spring semester. Then I come back and VR would support me.

R: I think that is a common complaint, working for school and everything's not ready.

C: I was tired of waiting because I decided in mid-July to leave Gallaudet. Then the work situation was not good. After doing that for a bit, then I decided to go back to school. In July, I thought I could get in for the fall, but I had to wait for Gallaudet to decide if they would accept me. I waited and waited and waited and heard nothing. I discussed it with my counselor, and they thought it was better that I wait until January. So, I did. Not a problem. [Doesn't seem to be too thrilled about this.]

R: One question I forgot to ask you in the beginning. How did you find out about my study?

C: I saw a poster you put up in HMB. I think. Yes, HMB.

R: Saw the poster?

C: Yes.

R: I am finished asking questions, but if you want to add something, that is fine.

C: I am pretty satisfied with VR. There is not a lot they can do for me. Some states allow full support, but not many.

R: Do you think it is fair?

C: No. It should be the same. But, they are state agencies and not federal agencies, right? They are under states which each have their own rules and policies. It just happens that North Carolina does not support fully like other states. It would be nice to have it; I could focus on school full-time. One negative about partial support is that I have to work, pay for my own expenses, and worry about finances and bills. I have to fill out applications [I assume financial, but he did not say]. But I know that most college students all over the world have to fill out the forms and figure out the paperwork.

R: Maybe the world is lost without forms.

C: I can do it, but...

R: OK. Thank you so much for helping me with this.

C: I hope I helped.

R: Thank you. Come on, and we will turn this off.

Interview #4 (Janet)

R: Thank you so much for volunteering to help with my study. I really appreciate it.

C: And what is your study for?

R: I will explain it.

C: Ok.

R: For this research study, I want to interview deaf students about their perceptions of VR. Maybe you want to share some of your experiences with me, maybe positive, maybe negative... I just want to get some feedback from deaf students themselves about VR.

C: Ok.

R: First, the two of us communicated through e-mail and you agreed to be videotaped.

C: Fine.

R: Now the first form explains what I am doing and that you agree to the interview. The second form is the approval for the video. Just read and sign if you agree.

C: Fine.

[Goes over forms]

R: Thank you. Ok. I want to go over some background questions about you, and then I will ask you about your VR experiences and that kind of stuff. Ok?

C: Ok.

R: How old are you?

C: I am 25.

R: 25. And you are female?

C: Yes.

R: Race?

C: ?

R: Race?

C: White.

R: Where are you from?

C: I am from California.

R: You were born there?

C: Yes.

R: Raised there?

C: Yes, well in the bay area. Palo Alto, San Mateo, San Francisco. I moved a lot in that area.

R: You get VR services from California?

C: Yes.

R: Ok. What is your major?

C: Now, I am in Design.

R: And you are an undergrad?

C: Yes.

R: OK. Are you working now?

C: Yes. I work for the washingtonpost.com....

R: ?

C: WashingtonPost.com. I am working for the photography department. I edit pictures and clean them up so that they look good online.

R: Do you work full-time or part-time?

C: Part-time. I definitely can't work full-time.

R: You are deaf, right?

C: Yes.

R: Is your family deaf? Or are they all hearing?

C: No. I am the only deaf.

R: Only one?

C: Yes.

R: You? Only you.

C: Yes.

R: Ok. What are your future career plans?

C: I would like to go to graduate school, but I am not sure what I would major in. Right now, I would like to major in something related to art. But, I can go off into another unrelated field like philosophy or religion. You know? But I definitely graduate school and traveling. That's after graduation. Then, after that, I would like...a good job. I am not sure yet. I am young, so I live by the minute, you know?

R: What year are you in school?

C: I will be a senior for the third time. I have been in school for 6 years now.

R: Do your parents help you with school, or VR??

C: No. VR helps me with school. My parents don't need to help me with VR...that is fine. But money from work, they help me to balance it. But I don't really need my parents, no. I am pretty independent like that, you know?

R: I understand. How much did you know about VR before you looked for help from them?

C: Really, my high school...I was in a deaf program that was already established with VR before I went to college. So I knew a little bit about that. When you graduate and go to college, they can help with money, things like that. I didn't know about that, and I like it. Until about 2 years ago, then I started to learn more about VR and what they can do and what they cannot do. It is better to do some research on your own before you get VR because you don't realize how much they can do for you or how much they can't do for you, too. It goes both ways.

R: What was your main reason for looking for help from VR?

C: I figured I would take advantage of it...not take advantage in a bad way, but they will pay for school and room, so why not? You know. I am not trying to pity myself because I am deaf, I should take advantage of it. No. They provide that service, so why not. Are you OK?

R: Ok. So you went to VR for help with paying for school?

C: Yes.

R: Did they give you other services?

C: No. You mean VR?

R: Yes.

C: No.

R: Like hearing aids? Or...?

C: No. It is a slow process to get hearing aids, so...because I am a graphic design major, they gave me a free laptop. They gave me a laptop because my department requires that I have one for interviews so I can show my work. Because they feel that most deaf people don't have the speaking skills to communicate with people, so they feel the laptop is a

benefit. Anyone who enters the design major must have a laptop. I told VR about this, and my chairperson of the design department wrote a letter and explained that laptops are required. So VR gave me one. It was the best thing! They did not have to do that, and they did that for me. It saved me money. That was really nice.

R: Do they pay for all of your schooling or half?

C: Half. They pay for my school, but I am on my own for the dorm. That is why I live off campus right now, I cannot afford the dorm.

R: Cheap.

C: Right. It is very cheap and the food is wonderful, too!

R: Funny [laughing]. Ok. You went to VR to look for help in paying for school, right?

C: Yes.

R: Ok. Describe your experience with the VR process.

C: My major, I think about...four different VR. I liked it because I wanted to major in design at that time in FC Graduate. And he didn't want me to because he felt that it was not a good match for me because it was so involved in the hearing world. Really it fit my dream, that was my dream, you know. Excuse me; don't tell me I can't do anything. I decided not to go to school for a year because I wanted to take time for myself and think about what I wanted to do. Because he scared me into thinking maybe I couldn't do design. Then the second year, I went to a different VR because we moved to a different city. So I had a different VR that was very supportive and nice. Time went on and they still did not do much either. Then I moved to another city and had another VR. No, it was because I went to Gallaudet. They gave me a VR specific to Gallaudet and RIT. Because many people from California move to DC or go to Gallaudet or RIT. So there was a VR

set up for that purpose; it is nice. It is easier for them to deal with one large group instead of one at one place and another in another school, etc. So I got them and at first, they said no to design. I was like, well I am going to Gallaudet anyways. Somehow they had come to fear that I would teach or something, and I was thinking no. I put that down so I could get into Gallaudet. So I came to Gallaudet, and for the first year, I heard that the design program here was improving. So I went to talk with my VR about getting into the program. They were still very hesitant. Then one semester, I found out more about my rights. I could major in anything that I wanted. But VR was concerned about the major at Gallaudet because they heard the program was not good because it is liberal arts. So studying design means there is a low chance that it will be good. So they came here for a year and check the students and make sure everything is fine. Talk with people from the arts program. And bought that the program is good. So they offered that I could get into the design major. But it was a long haul because I have wanted to study design since I was 18, and I am now 25. It just kept getting delayed. Still I can't say that I'm sorry. No. I don't care because I got what I want. And I am happy with that. I don't know what I would have done at 22 years of age anyway, you know. So it all came to good, yes. Now I have a new VR because my old VR...she was the best, I told her she was the best! It really is good for her! ...really she moved to a different job, and I got a new VR. They are really slow now and they don't speed up. Just like VR. You have to know VR, and what they tend to do, but it is a slow process. Ok. I mean as long as they are giving me free money. If they pay for it, I don't care, I will go with it. Still...not the best.

R: Your first VR Counselor was hearing or deaf?

C: He was...weird, I think he was deaf. Yes, he was deaf.

R: He himself was deaf?

C: Yes.

R: But he didn't feel that you yourself as a deaf person could succeed in design?

C: Right. Study design.

R: Really?

C: I think he was a temporary counselor. Because when someone left the department, he took over that job for a short time so I don't think he was really a professional. He didn't know what he was doing. But he told me...I would love to go back and tell him 'Look! I am a design major now!' You know what I mean?

R: How did that make you feel that he told you that?

C: I don't know. I think after that I was shocked. My dreams were shattered; like an egg. You know? Ok. What am I going to do now? I am good at nothing. I am not good at anything except art. My dream... it is like he stole something away from me. You know? I felt...that's it.

R: Your other VR Counselors were hearing or deaf?

C: Deaf.

R: All of them?

C: Except for the third one. She was hearing, and very good. All were deaf except for the third one.

R: Ok. Interesting.

C: Interesting? It is strange how hearing people are willing to...listen to what I decide that I know what I want. But deaf people are like...limiting. I find it interesting but...I don't know.

R: Really interesting. Ok. You have finished describing a little bit about your experiences with VR Counselors. Are they in continual contact with you?

C: It depends. Some don't care as long as you give them what they want. Like book receipts, what you buy at the bookstore, anyway. But some contact you every month to see how you are doing. I had that for one year, then after that, I started to forget about it, you know. I was working for the Washington Post. Going back and forth between that and school; I felt like there was no time. But she let me do that because she knew I was responsible enough to go along and not have any problems. Ok.

R: Have you met with your new counselor before?

C: Yes, just recently. Last month. It was nice. I called her about hearing aids, and she would contact me, but no answer from them. I guess I have to say something to get a move on. Because I don't like to waste my time. I like to keep things moving. I have heard nothing for 2 ½ months. Maybe they are busy, because I think in the summertime VR has a different schedule than during the year. I don't know. I am not sure. I am just guessing. Anyway...

R: Is your experience with VR satisfying?

C: Pretty much. I just wish I knew more about it when I got it. Because it's like when you get something, you always gain more knowledge about it. Fine. I guess for now, I am satisfied with it. Fine.

R: What about VR does not satisfy you?

C: If they are not satisfied with me?

R: No. I mean what about VR does not satisfy you?

C: I think I would say that some of the people tell you what they want you to know.

That's all. They tell another person...(thinking)...really don't tell you everything that you need to know. Then you find out on your own and you're like 'shit! I should have done that.' But, they didn't tell me that. Because it's my right. They told me I couldn't major in design. Is that a rule? No. Because I remember that my old VR Counselor came to Gallaudet and gave a presentation about VR. He wanted to share his experiences with people here. Because he feels that VR does not treat them appropriately. So he says that we should have the right to pick any major that we want to. You should have proof with information and things like that, you know. If I had known that before...you know?

R: You need to get more information and education about VR from the beginning, right?

C: Yes.

R: Do you feel that VR is helping you meet your goals?

C: Helping me to...yes.

R: They are not preventing you from meeting your goals?

C: Now, no. Before yes, but now, no.

R: Before, yes. When they forced you to change your major?

C: Yes.

R: Ok. Before you went to VR for help with school, was that the first time you asked anyone for help?

C: I always thought I would help myself with college, or my parents would. You know.

Until I went to my high school with deaf people, and they had already planned that everyone who graduated from there received VR assistance. How did I know about it? I did not know of...what to do with it. No.

R: Is there anything else you want to add about VR?

C: It depends on who you are dealing with. You know. You may like VR or it's not the appropriate process. You can have on-site supervisors. You can have a special person, called a mediator, come in to both sites, things like that. They have that now. I didn't know that.

R: So, you know your rights.

C: Yes.

R: One question I forgot to ask you in the beginning. How did you find out about my study?

C: I found out about your study...e-mail. Gallaudet's e-mail. I read it and thought I could help.

R: Great! Why did you want to participate in the study?

C: I thought it was interesting because...I am an honest person and to educate the department of VR. Because the people who use VR there, really don't know much about it. I felt like sharing my experiences.

R: Ok. Anything more?

C: I don't know. No.

R: Ok. Thank you so much for helping me, I really appreciate it.

C: I hope this will help your research.

R: Thank you. Let's go out and turn this off.

Interview #5 (Michael)

R: Thank you so much for volunteering for this study of mine. I want to explain a little bit about it, then you will sign some forms. The two of us have been e-mailing each other. And you said it was fine if I videotape?

C: Yes.

R: Ok. What I want to do is find out deaf students' perceptions of VR services. Positive, negative, it doesn't matter. Ok?

C: Yes.

R: The first form explains what I am doing. The second form is the videotape consent. Read and sign them if you agree.

C: Fine.

[Reads and signs]

R: Ok. Thank you. Ok. I want to ask you some background questions, then some questions about VR. Okay?

C: Yes.

R: First, how did you find out about my study?

C: I was reading through my Gallaudet e-mail. I saw a newsletter talking about your research, and I thought 'Oh ok. That would be interesting.' So I tried it out.

R: Ok. Why did you decide to let me interview you? Why are you interested?

C: I thought it might help improve the relationship between VR workers and deaf clients.

R: Wonderful. Thank you. And how old are you?

C: I'm 23.

R: 23. And male, right?

C: Yes.

R: Ok. And race?

C: White.

R: Where are you from?

C: I am from Memphis, Tenn.

R: And you get VR services from Tenn?

C: Right.

R: Were you born in Tenn?

C: No. I was born in California. San Francisco. Then I moved Memphis when I was about 3 years old.

R: Ok. And you are deaf, right?

C: Completely deaf.

R: Completely deaf, ok. Is your family deaf?

C: No, all hearing. I'm the only deaf.

R: Only deaf. Ok. Does your family sign?

C: No, they don't sign.

R: So you voice with your family?

C: Yes, right.

R: Ok. Are you an undergraduate?

C: Yes, I am an undergraduate now. I am a sophomore.

R: Ok. What is your major?

C: I am a dual major in secondary education and theater.

R: Really? Both?

C: Yes.

R: What are your future plans with that major? Career plans?

C: With both majors combined, I plan to teach high school students who have learning disabilities. They learn things through the theater instead of the regular learning environment. I think that will be very beneficial for them.

R: Sounds neat!

C: Yes.

R: Interesting. When did you first hear about VR?

C: My freshman year in my high school.

R: Deaf school?

C: No, it was a mainstream school.

R: And you heard about it from your school?

C: Yes.

R: Why did you decide to look for help from VR?

C: My parents could not afford to send me to college with their money alone. So I knew I could get some kind of help, so I went to VR. I asked them if they would be willing to help me, and they said they would be very willing to. Everything!

R: Ok. Does VR pay full college for you?

C: Yes.

R: Full?

C: Yes.

R: Ok. Do you get other services from VR?

C: Before I came here, they referred me to a work agency. They help deaf people find a job. That's the only other service.

R: Ok. So they sent you to an employment agency to find a job...?

C: Yes.

R: ...but then you decided to go to college...?

C: I was working for 2 years.

R: Ok. Are you working now?

C: No, I am not.

R: College, only?

C: Right.

R: Ok. Before they referred you to an agency that helped you find a job...

C: Right.

R: ...then you went to college at Gallaudet?

C: Right.

R: Ok. Does your family help with money for college, or does VR?

C: No, not at all.

R: You said VR pays completely...

C: Right.

R: Does that mean tuition...?

C: Yes.

R: ...room and board...?

C: Yes.

R: ...books...?

C: Yes.

R: ...transportation...?

C: No, not transportation.

R: Ok. I just wanted to be clear what they helped you with. Another question about VR.

Describe your experience with VR.

C: So far, my experience with VR services has been pretty good. But it is sometimes difficult to get in touch with them. They are either too busy or not in the office. I call and they are not there, so I go and show up in person. They are there. They will tell me they are not there or in the office, whatever.

R: Must be difficult for you to just show up since their office is in Tenn. and you are here in DC, right?

C: I have my mother go there for me.

R: Oh. Do you keep contact through e-mail or regular mail or anything?

C: They are not very good with e-mail. They just got an e-mail system, so they are still in the process of learning how to use it.

R: Do you feel it is difficult to contact them when you need something or need help?

C: Right.

R: Ok. Are there any other experiences with VR?

C: (thinks) ... They are very supportive. They are very willing to do things that I need.

Anything I ask for, they provide.

R: Examples?

C: Like...when I didn't have enough money for books, I called them and said that I needed a little bit more money for books. I don't have enough money to buy them on my own. They said fine and sent me more money.

R: Good. Describe your experience with your VR Counselor.

C: I have two. The first one was not very good at all.

R: He was hearing?

C: Hearing, yes. I couldn't understand him and he couldn't understand me. To communicate, we had to write back and forth on paper. Problems with communication. Then he moved to a higher position, and I got another counselor. He is hard of hearing. He communicates fine. All my experiences have been pretty good so far.

R: Do the others who work in the office sign?

C: No. They are all hearing. They talk.

R: Do you have problems communicating with the other people in the office?

C: No. We just write back and forth on the paper.

R: So the counselor you have now is hard of hearing, right?

C: Yes.

R: He communicates fine?

C: Yes.

R: Ok. Do you feel that VR is meeting your needs at this time?

C: Yes. So far, yes.

R: And they help you meet your goals?

C: Yes.

R: What about VR satisfies you?

C: I am very satisfied with them. So, I would say I have a pretty high satisfaction rate.

R: What about VR satisfies you? What about their office satisfies you?

C: Could you clarify that a little bit more?

R: Positives about VR.

C: The office is open. If you need help, they will direct you to the right person. It doesn't matter that that person is not my VR Counselor. You can sit down and discuss it. Then they write a note to my VR Counselor so they can take over. They do a pretty good job.

R: Good. What about VR does not satisfy you?

C: Their office is in a federal building and I get tired of having to show my ID and explain why I am there every time I go in. That does not really satisfy me because if I go for personal reasons or an emergency, I get stopped and delayed. That is not a good thing. I understand the safety of the federal office, but I think it is a little too much trouble.

R: Is there anything about the office or your counselor that does not satisfy you?

C: That's the only thing.

R: Ok. Before you went to VR for help, was that the first time in your life that you had asked anyone for help?

C: Yes.

R: Ok. When we first started this interview, I briefly mentioned one reason why I wanted to do the interview; it is to help improve the relationship between VR and deaf clients.

What do you think needs to happen to do that?

C: The services for me have been great, but for other people, I know they get terrible service. They get bad counselors who are not really willing to help them. I feel bad for them because it shows favoritism. It is not fair, so I think the office should try to be fair. I

know one case that...one friend...who lived in a lower economic class. He really wanted to come here, but he was rejected because of his background.

R: So people at Gallaudet feel the services are not fair?

C: Right.

R: Not fair how?

C: For example, the boys get more money. They get a full ride while the girls only get half the money. So there is discrimination against gender. I think because they don't succeed as well as boys. Therefore, because the boys get a larger portion of the money, the girls are not able to succeed because of the limited options they have.

R: Ok. Is that because of gender or the state that they are from or...?

C: I don't know the state policy for VR, but I find it a bit odd that they would discriminate based on gender...or race... It's not appropriate.

R: Are there other ways you think VR could improve their relationship with deaf clients?

C: They could hire more people who sign clearly. It doesn't matter if they use ASL or PSE or signed English. Anything is fine as long as they sign.

R: Ok. Good point, thank you. Is there anything you want to add?

C: They recently added the e-mail system shows me that they are working on how to contact them. Before, the only way to contact them was on the phone. But it was not very effective because deaf people don't like to use the phone. Because the secretary in the office will say, 'They are not here!' Or, 'They are out somewhere...out of the office.'

R: You think that's a lie?

C: Yes.

R: Why do you think that's a lie?

C: Because...they lie because it only takes a little bit of time to say he's not there. But if I drove there and showed up, I would find he was there.

R: Do you know why that happens? Why they say they aren't there but they are?

C: I think they hire secretaries who don't like disabled people.

R: That is terrible. I am finished with my questions, if you want to add anything, fine.

C: That pretty much covers it.

R: Ok. Thank you so much for volunteering for this study. We will go outside and turn off the video camera.

Interview #6 (Paula)

R: Thank you so much for volunteering for this interview.

C: Sure.

R: I am going to explain a little bit about what I am doing, then I will have you sign some forms. In the e-mail, you said you agreed to the videotape, right?

C: Right.

R: I have a form for you to sign, and the form says that you agree to interview. Ok?

C: Ok.

R: Really what I am doing is I want deaf students' perspectives about the VR process and services. Anything you want to share with me, I have some questions, positives, negatives, and how you feel about VR's help, meeting your goals.

C: Ok.

R: Here are the forms, read it and you can ask me questions.

C: OK.

[Reads and signs]

R: Thank you. Ok, I have some background questions first, ok?

C: Fine. Yes.

R: How old are you?

C: I'm 23.

R: 23. Ok. And you are female?

C: Yes.

R: [Laughing] I want to know that, can't assume anything.

C: Right. Can't assume. Right.

R: Right. Your race?

C: Black, African-American.

R: Ok. You are deaf?

C: Yes.

R: Is your family deaf? Or are you the only deaf?

C: My younger sister and I are both deaf. And I have two distant cousins who are deaf.

There are four or five of us in the family.

R: Ok. Does your family sign?

C: Some of them do. My parents sign. Some of them don't. It is really a home-based sign.

R: Ok. And where are you from?

C: Texas. Dallas, Texas. That's my home.

R: I remember your e-mail said 'sex...no, Texas girl,' right?

C: Right.

R: I remember that. And are you getting VR services from Texas?

C: Yes. From Dallas, but the headquarters is in Austin. They spread out into branches because Texas is a big state. So, I get it from Dallas.

R: Ok. And you are an undergrad?

C: Yes. I am an undergrad majoring in Early Childhood Education. I am a senior right now, I graduate May '02. I hope to be a teacher of young children. I prefer kindergarten or 1st grade, but we'll see.

R: Ok. Deaf school?

C: ?

R: Deaf school?

C: It doesn't matter. I will work with any. The undergraduate program trains us to work with hearing kids, it is general. If you want to specialize in deafness or multiple disabilities, or family-centered early childhood education, that is the MA program. I have not decided if I want to get into the MA program.

R: You are not sure?

C: Not sure, right.

R: When you graduate, what will you do? Will you look for a job?

C: Yes.

R: ...or you are not sure about anything?

C: I am waiting on that right now. This fall, I am taking a graduate course. That is my 'test' to see if I want to go to graduate school. Then in the spring, I will take another graduate course while for my undergraduate I am a teacher's aide in the fall. That is part of my requirements for graduation. In the spring, I will have student teaching; I will have a class where I am teaching kids myself. Before I graduate, that is my test to see if I feel confident enough to teach next fall. Really, I applied for a job, but I decided to wait on that. VR said they could support me through graduate school. I found out about it last year, that they could support me for graduate school.

R: Really.

C: But I have to ask for it and explain my reasons for going to graduate school. Why I feel I need an MA. I could.

R: Really?

C: Yes.

R: That's wonderful!

C: Yeah, it's great! Some of the counselors before did not know, but my current counselor told me, 'yes'!

R: How did you first find out about VR?

C: Fall of 1992? Ok, I graduated from high school in 1997. Someone in my family told me about the VR services that they provide for schools in-state or out-of-state. Then I thought there was another organization for deaf people called DCHH for people who were living in Texas and they provide services like tuition waivers. Which they do. But if you are out of state, they provide books, telephones, and hearing aids. VR does guidance work. I thought it was interesting. So I went...no, I called. They gave me their phone number so I called the office. I explained to them I wanted to get into Gallaudet, and asked if it was possible for them to me there. They said 'yes.' I have to be eligible to get into the program, and then I am automatically in. I said fine. So I made an appointment and met with my counselor. I had my old counselor first, then my second counselor. The first counselor seemed impressed that I was from a mainstream school where I had interpreters all day. I was in the top of my class, and she seemed impressed but African-American, it is appropriate...

R: Explain that more in-depth.

C: Me as an African-American?

R: You said she was not impressed...?

C: She was not impressed with my educational status. I graduated from high school...

R: And why do you think she was not impressed?

C: Because I am African-American. I felt a little race tension. She felt it not appropriate for African Americans to go to college. Her eyes are interested, but

behind...ok...because my family is educated. My mother graduated from Texas University. It is a very large school, but she graduated from there. My grandmother graduated from another school. My uncles are educated. My grandparents are educated, so....My uncle is a social worker. So it runs in the family, they are all educated. My cousin is third generation, not first. People assume first, but it's really third. Assume, assume, assume. So that counselor had already assumed that. So I went ahead and filled out the form, said I was eligible. She met my mother and was embarrassed. She changed her attitude. She realized that my mother has high expectations. My mom wanted to know if they would support me or not. After that, the counselor said she could do many things like provide hearing aids. They could provide a whole list of things. Thank you. That's all I ask. They support half of my schooling because of my parents' income. If it was under \$23,000 or \$25,000 or something like that... Oh ok. State policy limits how much VR can provide for out-of-state. Ok. First, they will provide services in the fall and spring. She left after one year. I was really satisfied in a way because she was very racist. Then my second counselor was African-American herself, and was very laid back. The two of us really established a good relationship. Made sure I was keeping up with my studies. She was keeping in contact. Before...the policy changed...before, VR had to keep in contact every 60 days, now it is 30 days. They make sure I am still in school, I am meeting what VR expects of me with my GPA, and I send them my course transcript, and keep myself up to date. So far, they will support me until I graduate.

R: Ok. So they pay half.

C: That is for the first 2 years. By the third and fourth year, they pay almost all. Because my GPA is really good and I made the dean's list three semesters in a row.

R: Ok. So they pay tuition...

C: ...tuition, dorm, I have a waiver for that. Because I am an RA. That means you get waived.

R: Right, ok. Books?

C: Books, yes.

R: Transportation?

C: Transportation, yes. Once a year. They pay the airfare once a year, so I can go home and visit VR and my family.

R: Ok. Oh, I forgot my question. Do you get other services from VR, or do you only get money?

C: For now. If I need a new hearing aid or more testing....I have had that before with my previous counselor. But, that stuff I can get if I need it. I just have to ask.

R: Ok. Describe your experience with your first VR Counselor.

C: She was very uptight, she was very demanding as far as what courses I should take. I felt...ok. I still studied and when I showed her my GPA, she looked at it and said 'not bad.' I was like 'not bad? That is wonderful. I had over a 3.0.' To her it is not bad, but ok. Maybe her experience limits that. Ok. My parents said that she may assume those things. Let her learn for herself, so I said ok fine. I don't let her get to me. Ok, she assumes things, fine. Now she moved to another state, so I wonder if it hit her yet.

R: Is she hearing?

C: Yes, she is hearing.

R: Does she sign?

C: Signs well. Her husband is deaf. She signs well.

R: So you did not have any problems communicating with her?

C: None My second counselor, the same, there are no communication problems. Signs well. When I transferred, I thought I wouldn't be able to, but she signs related to disabilities and deafness.

R: So she had experience with disabilities and deafness?

C: Yes, she worked with people who had disabilities, like blindness. But in Texas, they have separate service for the blind. They are separate from the deaf. The counselors have the option of either one.

R: Ok. So your experience with your second VR Counselor is positive?

C: Oh, yes, very positive! She is new, so it was a little awkward at first. She did not know who to speak to, but she picked it up fast. Now, the contact is great!

R: Every 30 days, she contacts you, right?

C: Contact through e-mail, phone call, or fax. I fax my grades, my midterms. Before, I had to fax my midterms, but sophomore, junior, and senior years, you don't get midterm grades.

R: So you feel the contact has been pretty steady?

C: Oh, yes!

R: You are satisfied with that?

C: Yes. They send me questions about school, books, student accounts. I get financial aid too, so whatever I get, then VR pays the rest. That is based on what we agreed before school.

R: Ok. Describe your experience with VR in general.

C: In general?

R: I mean not specifically about your counselor. I mean VR.

C: Oh, VR. Nice. I am really impressed that they are there to provide services for us to work or that leads to work. I mean they are not there pushing us to go to college or training school. For me to become a teacher I had to get a degree, therefore, they are supporting that. But most of the time they provide services for people at work or that lead to work. I think it is very nice that they provide those services for people with disabilities. Because we are limited in our experiences, and it is nice to have that.

R: Do you feel that VR meets your needs at this time?

C: Most of the time, yes.

R: Most of the time?

C: Sometimes I try to get something and they can't give it to me because it is not part of the contract or...you have to inform them exactly what you need. They don't know what you need to get into school. For example, I recently asked for more money for books, and she told me they had already set the limit for the amount of money that I could get for books. I said ok. So I explained that so far, I have had a waiver, so is it possible to increase the amount for my books. She said she would see what they could do, so they increased it finally! So, yes and no, as long as you have a 2.0 and up you can see that they are willing to increase the money for books. I appreciate that. They really can bend and give you what you need, but you have to be really picky. You have to be prepared to show them. My books cost more, that never happened to me before! I can't guess how much my books will cost. But I had my list of books and their prices,

R: It sounds like you are saying that students need to educate themselves about what they need?

C: Yes, right. Exactly. They need to do the research...ask questions...VR...people assume wrong. I went home last month, to meet with my VR. They have a new client meeting for people who are new and do not yet know the system. It is nice. So they set up a videotape, so you know what VR is for. Many people assume wrong. People say, oh I thought that, or that, or that. But no, this tape explains everything you are eligible for. It explains the process, too, so I have a picture of that, instead of learning while in process. I don't have to back up and ask why we are doing things.

R: Ok. What about VR gives you satisfaction? What about VR satisfies you?

C: I am very satisfied with VR. They try to meet my needs. They try their best. Like with my books, I wanted to see what they would do, and they were able to do that. She got approval from her boss who said "Sure! Sure! Sure! Your grades are wonderful! Keep it up! Let her graduate! Get her out of here!" It is a success case, that is important, I'm sure.

R: Right. What about VR does not satisfy you?

C: The first....Generally, VR depends on attitude. I know many people who have high potential to do well in school or training or work, but they don't get the services. Or whatever that means. Whether they are closed or whatever, because maybe they have too many clients. I think they need to screen that out. It is better than just putting them with anyone and then being frustrated. They should be able to work with someone continuously. They need to straighten it out a little more. Give people one semester of probation or something. Or a 1-year probation or something. If they don't meet the requirements, cut them off! Pull in someone else. That's how I feel.

R: So there are people who have more potential, and maybe the money should be for them, and not for...?

C: ...Right, they are not getting the money. Right. Instead for clients they have now or for clients who have left in the middle of the year. They have that money set aside for the person already, of course. But that money goes back, and you have to ask for it for new clients. They can fill it out and give it a try, and there are many who did. They provide services to the new clients, but not the established ones. They have limited government money that they can give to people, and they should use it for those who do well and meet their expectations.

R: Ok. Before you looked for help from VR, was that the first time you had ever looked for help?

C: Yes. What do you mean before VR?

R: Is that the first time in your life that you asked anyone for help?

C: You mean VR? Ohh. If I go way back, I went to a mainstream school, so I got an aide there. I got an interpreter so I guess that was the "first." I could understand the classes. In middle school, I had gone to tutoring so I could understand. I was mainstreamed for the entire time I was in school. I was the first deaf in the school body. The tutor would help me catch up if I was behind. I had those kinds of services, and they helped me. I continued that, and then I got VR.

R: Ok. I think I am done with my questions. Is there anything you want to add about VR?

C: Is this VR general or state to state?

R: It doesn't matter. I am just interviewing students, so states, it doesn't matter to me.

C: Oh ok.

R: Whether it is specific to Texas or general that is fine.

C: Fine. Because I noticed that some states don't provide services. VR is under what company? Which corporation do they work for, because the government gives VR their money. Ok. Then VR decides what to do with that money. But I am curious about how they feel about the government pressuring some of the state VRs by saying, 'You have more successful clients that are working. They are not dependent on SSI or SSDI.' I know some students who really wanted to go to graduate school, but couldn't because VR said no. They will only support you for 5 years. That's what I think. They will support you for 5 years or x number. I understand that, it is a money issue. They pay a lot of money for a BA degree, then to add an MA. They feel they have to prove to themselves they did well for the BA. But they should be able to get an MA because it is a 1- or 2-year program. Go part-time or full-time. It is my opinion that VR should filter out who has potential and who is better off working. You know?

R: Ok.

C: You can't assume a high school background. Because a high school background is totally different from a college background. I know people who did well in high school, but did not do well in college. Or, they did terrible in high school, but did an amazing job in college. So, you can't really assume. I feel that sometimes VR Counselors select people at random or first-come, first-serve. I just feel they shouldn't do that. They should support everyone who is eligible to get into the program.

R: Ok. Good point.

C: Yes. Really.

R: Ok. Anything else you want to add?

C: The money...each state gets a different amount of money. Does that money come from the federal government or the local? That's my thing. It is very vague. They just say they get it from the government, but they won't give specific information. Who is providing the funding? Is it private? Government? That is what I am curious about. It seems like I can't understand until I get in the VR system, maybe, I don't know.

R: Maybe you would prefer that they give you...

C: Oh yeah. That way I can see where they are coming from. I understand some VRs are very mean and uninviting to their clients, and others are friendly and inviting. I wonder why is that?

R: Doesn't sound fair.

C: Right. It's not fair. That's my feeling. I am sorry, but I do better than this person and you are telling me you can't afford it? Then they give me a song and dance about already having the money set up for this other person because they asked first. You came in after, so you get what is left. This small amount. I think there needs to be more of a fair system, where everyone can get the services they need. If they fail, the first semester, or break the first agreement, then they should be cut off. They should bring in a new person to replace the old client because the file is already there. There should be a smooth transition for that.

R: Ok. One more question that I should have asked you first. How did you find out about my study?

C: It was a flyer. You had a flyer?

R: Yes.

C: Yes, it was a flyer.

R: And an e-mail, both.

C: You had a flyer. I saw it said VR clients. I said 'oh yes!'

R: You saw the flyer, not the e-mail?

C: I did not get the e-mail until after I e-mailed you. That's when I got it. You had already e-mailed me and explained about your research study and asked if I was qualified. I said yes!

R: I remember that. I was just curious how you first found out.

C: Flyers. Then I had an appointment with you, fine. Then I went to Texas, and my friend told me about the interview. So I said, oh yeah, I am supposed to do that. So I contacted you again. She told me she felt good interviewing with you and telling you her concerns with VR. I encouraged her to tell other people to tell VR. Because some people, especially in Texas, don't like their VRs. I like my VR, but she didn't. I know the process; I understand the system. Maybe if they understood the system better, they would feel....or maybe if their counselor **[word]**...or they feel cheated out of the system.

R: Why did you decide to participate in this interview?

C: I wanted to expose to you and to others about the VR system. The good and the bad. I am sure that you have heard the good and bad things about other states. I was hoping I could be the spokesperson for us. Research shows this. Nice. You can get numbers; know what is satisfying, what is not satisfying. You know? Numbers. I assume you are doing a survey for that kind of stuff too. I know the interview, too. So you can put that down for us. I remember that Gallaudet provides a survey under the financial aid office that you fill out and give back to them. I think that was freshman and sophomore years. That was nice. I have heard nothing so far.

R: About VR?

C: Yeah, about VR. It is nice. There are questions because financial aid feels pressure from VR and they go back and forth. So they did a survey. Since then, I have heard nothing, until you.

R: Mine is separate.

C: Yes.

R: But I can't help students with individual VR Counselors...

C: Right!

R: But I want to have awareness. When I write my paper and say, these eight students said this. What is similar, what is different. Then later, I would like to interview other deaf people, not just college students.

C: Yes.

R: But people who are working...

C: Yes.

R: People who are training and doing supported employment and things like that.

C: Yes!

R: I just want a deaf person's perspective. I am a former VR Counselor.

C: Yes! Oh!

R: I think I know some reasons why the deaf community does not like VR...

C: Right.

R: ...but I am hearing. I want to hear it from the deaf.

C: Oooh..the deaf person.

R: ...not from me, a hearing person.

C: Right. Right. Do you feel that hearing people get better services? It was bad for you?

R: Oh no! I mean that I used to be a VR Counselor myself.

C: Oh, you were a counselor!

R: For the deaf, yes.

C: Oh!

R: I was a VR Counselor for the deaf myself.

C: Oh, ok.

R: I had deaf clients. So, as a VR Counselor for the deaf...

C: Ok.

R: I think I understand a lot of the problems with deaf people and VR.

C: Right.

R: but, I am hearing...

C: I understand!

R: I want the perspective of deaf.

C: Right.

R: And client, not counselor! I was a counselor myself. But I want client, deaf client, perspective.

C: Oh! Yeah, that is good!

R: I find it interesting. I really appreciate it! Thank you so much!

C: Sure. Do you go to the University of Maryland to get your doctorate degree?

R: Yes.

C: Then when you get that paper, you will be finished?

R: Yes. I hope so. I just need to publish that.

C: Good. I wanted to mention that I have a friend who graduated from here then went back home. She wanted to get more services. She wanted to get an interpreter and go back to training school for an insurance company. Once she got her bachelor's degree, then transfer to another insurance company. You need to have an insurance background. But VR would not provide her any services because her case was closed a long time ago. I want to know exactly how long it takes, post- ...it seems a little fuzzy. It would be nice if they gave us a handbook or something we could look through. They can be vague because it depends on who is the boss and things like that. I feel that my case is very successful so why not take advantage of that? I have a good-paying job so allow me to take the training to learn what insurance involves. Allow me to get that job, because everything matches like the benefits. That's all. I just want to get a job! That's all. So, I feel that she should be able to get that.

R: A book would be nice. A book like you are saying would be nice. There is something called a post-training book.

C: Yes.

R: So maybe what you are saying is that more information and education for clients...

C: Yes. Ok their case is closed, but what can they do after they work for 8 or 9 years and they want to get in later? I assume, and I am only assuming that VR feels that they can afford it on their own. They assume you have a job. 'Yeah I have a job, but I need interpreting services. And pay half of my courses; I don't want to pay for all of them.' Try to give financial aid to married couples to celebrate or something. I don't know. I think it is interesting how they decide they are finished, bye bye. That's it. OK. I don't like that.

R: Ok, we are going to go ahead and leave and turn off the video camera.

C: Ok, good.

APPENDIX E: CASE STUDIES

Pilot Study Case #1 – Renee

The first person interviewed for the pilot study was a 21-year-old, single, Caucasian female. Renee appeared outgoing, expressive, and very talkative. Renee was born hearing, however, gradually became Deaf after developing Otitis Media. Renee has one sister who was born Deaf and the rest of her family is hearing. Renee reported that, even though she was the only one who signed with her sister, she did “not really” grow up signing. Although there were only 2 years between them, her sister was gone a lot and she did not see her very often. Renee was born and raised in Florida.

At the time of the interview, Renee was an undergraduate student at Gallaudet University, majoring in Communication Arts. Renee was also working on Gallaudet’s campus, coordinating events for “Deaf Way 2.” At the time of the interview, Renee stated that she plans to graduate in 2 years. Her current goal is to obtain an internship with the United States Air Force (USAF) in their public affairs department. She stated that, when she was hearing, she wanted to join the Air Force one day. Renee hopes to get a job with the USAF as a civilian when she graduates Gallaudet. After working in that job for 2 years, she hopes to go back to graduate school, either in the military or as a civilian.

Renee found out about this research study when she received the advertisement the researcher sent out to the Gallaudet community via electronic mail. She stated that she “saw VR and was instantly attracted because I know that not many Deaf people are interested in researching VR and what works and what doesn’t work. So I thought I would come and share it.”

Reason for Seeking VR Services

Renee indicated that she sought VR services because her sister told her that VR would help her with school. Renee was a senior in high school at that time and her sister informed her that, since she has a disability, she would have trouble getting benefits and insurance. Renee's sister suggested that she visit VR, and Renee decided to see "what they could do for me." Renee stated that she "didn't know how they could help me." According to Renee, no information about VR was provided to her by personnel at the Deaf school she attended during her junior and senior years of high school. There was no Transition Specialist at the Deaf school she attended, and she was not provided with information about VR by her Guidance Counselor. Renee indicated that, if she had not heard of VR services prior to going to Gallaudet University, she would have learned about it upon her arrival. She stated that everyone talks about VR at Gallaudet, comparing and contrasting the services provided by the different states.

Renee shared that "in a way" it was difficult for her to seek help from VR, as she doesn't like "handouts." She felt like accepting money for school was "like, oh you poor little deaf person, here is some money." Renee asserted that she doesn't feel like that, yet at the same time, she believes that "my deafness blocks me from going to a university like Georgetown, a hearing university." Renee stated that she prefers to have VR pay for her to go to Gallaudet, where she doesn't need an interpreter, therefore, she feels there are pros and cons to accepting help from VR. Other than accepting sign language interpreters in public schools when she was younger, seeking help from VR was the first time Renee sought help due to her deafness.

Renee identified financial support for college as the primary need she had when she sought services from VR. She stated that her VR currently pays for her college tuition, room and board, tutors, and co-fees. Renee mentioned that her state VR does not pay for her transportation, even though some other state VR systems do.

Experiences with VR

Renee discussed a few other ways in which VR supported her, besides money. She stated that, soon after she first sought help from VR, she essentially disconnected herself from them because she was not doing well in school. She decided to withdraw from school; however, as she had already signed on with VR for them to pay for 5 years of school, she informed them that she thought something was wrong. Renee explained that she couldn't pay attention and was always distracted in school. VR thought that this might be the reason that she was not succeeding in school and consulted a previous psychological test. The psychologist had previously reported that Renee had a slight attention problem, but not enough for special education. Based on Renee's self-observations and the previous psychological report, VR sent her for disability testing. It was discovered that Renee has a mild case of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and medication was prescribed.

During this process, Renee was out of school for one year. During this year, Renee worked and had no ties with VR. Renee stated that, when she felt she was ready to go back to school, she tried to reconnect with VR; however, VR did not think she was ready to return to Gallaudet and suggested community college instead. Renee stated that she thought at the time that they were being "stingy," and that "they didn't want to pay all of that money again and be wrong again," which she understood. After a struggle

regarding this issue, a compromise was reached and Renee attended summer school at Gallaudet University. She went to classes and proved to them she could do it and, Renee reports, VR has financially supported her education ever since. Renee expressed that, for the most part, VR worked with her to figure out this difficult situation.

Renee stated that an aspect of VR that is not satisfying to her is that she wished they would use sign language. As none of her VR Counselors have signed, Renee has always used sign language interpreters. Renee feels that there are barriers associated with this “because interpreters are not always right.” She further explained that often when interpreters voice interpret they say it wrong, albeit unintentionally. Often, interpreters may misinterpret the meaning of her facial expressions or pick a different word choice than she intended. Renee also stated that, because an interpreter is a third person in the conversation, and she doesn’t always have direct eye contact with the counselor, she feels disconnected from the conversation. Due to the fact that Renee’s VR office has so many Deaf consumers, they employ what they call “on-site interpreters.” Renee feels that it is nice that they make this provision; however, the interpreters have a high turnover rate. Renee prefers someone she can sign with directly, stating, “I have not heard a single deaf person say they like interpreters. Direct communication is best.” Renee shared that her VR office has a supervisor who has worked with Gallaudet for many years and doesn’t sign. Renee stated she doesn’t understand how someone can work with Deaf consumers for so many years and still not sign. She feels that this is “a big negative” and that there is a separation between the consumers and the counselors. Renee offered the information that the state of Florida wants to put VR under the Department of Education rather than the Division of VR and wonders if that will make a difference.

Another area in which Renee experienced dissatisfaction with VR is surrounding the issue of hearing aids. Renee went back and forth with her VR Counselor regarding whether or not she should wear hearing aids. Renee didn't really feel that she needed the hearing aids; however, her VR Counselor felt that she should get them. Renee stated that she figured it wouldn't hurt, so she agreed. Renee stated that she functions pretty well with them, however, they give her an uncomfortable headache. Renee mentioned this to VR and has been struggling with this issue because she doesn't really want the hearing aids. VR stated that they felt she should have them. After Renee graduates from college, VR does not envision her going back to school, thinking she will go straight to work. Because of that, her VR Counselor ordered her hearing aids. That way she could continue working and hear what is going on. Renee keeps the hearing aids in a little box. She asserts that she felt forced to get the hearing aids because, "I think that all of my VR is hearing, so they are really supportive of utilizing as much hearing as you possibly can; because that will make you successful." Renee further explained by illustrating something she has noticed about some of the other Deaf consumers that she knows that use the same VR office that she uses. She stated that they do not go to Gallaudet, they attend community college and VR won't even support that fully. Renee feels that this is odd; they pay fully for her, why not for them? She understands that every person is an individual and their cases differ from hers; however, this makes Renee wonder because "VR seems to really be the same. You need to hear, fine, we will give you some hearing aids, make you hearing, send you off to work, and you will be successful. That kind of thinking." When asked how she felt about this, Renee shrugged it off and said, "I don't

depend on them anyway. Many Deaf believe that many people have that pity, 'Oh, you poor deaf person.' So, VR is no different."

When asked if she thought VR perceives Deaf people as disabled, Renee responded with an immediate, "Yes." When asked how she felt about that, there was a long pause. When asked if she personally felt that Deaf people are disabled, Renee replied, "No. Well yes. I mean it depends. The word 'disabled' to me is not the same as 'disabled' to her. The word is defined by how the world perceives those people. It has to have special connotations. You know?" Renee further went on to say:

VR views deaf people as disabled. I think that the general population views deaf as disabled. They pity us. I really don't need that pity. Many deaf people are not against taking advantage of that pity. Some of them have a good job and they are still on SSI (Social Security Income). I don't like the idea that people look at me as disabled and they will help me. But at the same time I use their services so that is a little bit of a conflict.

Renee gave an example to illustrate what she meant by this conflict:

It's like if someone met you on the street and just looked at you and pitied you and wanted to give you \$1,000, do you take the \$1,000 or not? No, because it's like 'so what.' You know? But, most people I know would take the \$1,000 and say thank you. I think it is the same thing. Because you are deaf, you get money and 'here's your services.' You are deaf, so you are disabled. And in a way they are right because it will be difficult for me to go to school. It will be harder for me to get a job. At a community college, VR will reinforce that I need interpreters and note takers. I need a whole list of services that VR will contact the state and

get for me. VR will advocate for the needs of their consumers. It is the same with jobs too. VR will get you a job and work everything out. It makes the lives of deaf consumers easier. If I look for a job in the classified ads, I have to call through relay. Employers already make decisions from that. Many people hate relay anyway because it takes 5 minutes to talk, and it is slow. It is not like fluent voice. You know? So VR works out all of that and helps to set up everything smoothly. It substitutes for us as an approach. It's a conflict. I don't know how many deaf people think about that.

Renee expressed the opinion that the concept of VR is good, but she thinks the problem is that each state is different from the others. Her opinion is that, if there was one standard VR system, it might be run or managed better. She stated that each state government is different and that some counties are run differently as well. Renee gave the example of her county in Florida; her county has more Deaf people than any other county in Florida, therefore, receiving more money than other counties. Renee feels that the quality of services change based on which county you live in. Renee also shared that all of the Deaf students at Gallaudet talk about their experiences with VR, comparing and discussing the differences between them. 'My VR pays for that. Oh, yours doesn't?' Renee also thought that it was interesting that some states' VR come to Gallaudet to meet their students. "It is like a 'VR Day,' about 26 VR flock to Gallaudet and meet with all the students from their state. California does that, Texas does that." Renee further explained that at this time the VR Counselors come and mingle with their students, so it is obvious who has a lot of contact with their students. Renee stated that Florida does not

do this; one reason might be that Florida doesn't have enough students who go to Gallaudet.

Renee stated that, overall, her experience with VR has not been bad, however, she thinks:

...overall it is important that we who use VR don't DEPEND on VR too much; because as soon as something happens they go running to VR. Or, 'That's messed up, I have run to VR.' Or, 'I need something!' and run to VR. VR is their crutch until they can function on their own.

When asked if her VR experience has been satisfying for her, Renee replied:

In a way, yes. It's yes and no, you know? I don't expect too much from my VR, c'mon. I am pretty self-sufficient. I can function on my own. If VR no longer existed, I could still make ends meet. I am motivated. It is not what VR has done for me. Really, I am more than satisfied with that. We have our tiffs. We either agree or disagree, I think that's normal. Better to have two different perspectives. That's normal. But my overall experience with VR is that I am satisfied with it. They pay for school and I can't ask for more than that.

Experiences with VR Counselor

Renee indicated that she is on her fourth VR Counselor in 4 years and that none of those counselors knew how to sign. Renee had her first VR Counselor for 3 months; this VR Counselor was temporary until they could hire someone. Renee then had her second VR Counselor for a period of 2 years; that counselor was promoted and Renee had another temporary counselor. Then her fourth VR Counselor was hired. Renee felt that her new counselor was "very good." He did not know how to sign, which Renee felt was

a negative, however he was currently taking classes. Renee indicated that her current counselor had “moved up” and she would be assigned a new VR Counselor. This new counselor will be her fifth VR Counselor in 4 years.

Renee expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that she has changed VR Counselors so often. Renee stated that she is not sure why they change counselors so often; she wonders if it is because the system doesn't hire enough, or if the counselors are promoted or find a job that they like better. Renee explained that her VR office in Florida does not have counselors that are Deaf and it is her theory that, since they are all hearing and don't sign, therefore having to pull in sign language interpreters, that they may feel frustrated with consumers and transfer to positions where they can communicate with consumers. Renee feels that her VR services get put on hold because she keeps transferring to other counselors. Whenever she called to try and set up an appointment, her VR Counselors were either in a meeting or couldn't set up a meeting with her. She was informed that they would set up an appointment with her through electronic mail. As Renee attends Gallaudet in Washington, D.C., and her VR office is in Florida, she tries to set up appointments for when she will be visiting home, however, her VR office couldn't fit her into their schedule.

Renee stated that she also has trouble contacting her VR; her primary relationship with them is limited to faxing them information that they need regarding school. Renee feels this is a significant problem that affects her VR services and she would prefer more contact with them. Renee shared her opinion:

VR really has a lot of power, they can really help someone; someone who needs a push or maybe someone who needs to get their foot in the door, or maybe needs

that kind of guidance. You know? VR is good because they can sit down with you and talk with you. They try and help you succeed with your goals. That is really good. So, I prefer someone who could keep me in check. I think that's important, especially when I am 2,000 miles away.

Renee continued to explain that her previous counselor used to contact her through e-mail; however, her new counselor never e-mails her. Her current VR Counselor, whom she has yet to meet, contacts her once a month to see if she is doing well in school, however, Renee prefers someone who knows what her plans are and takes notes, so that when they do have a face-to-face meeting the counselor knows who she is.

When asked if she felt as though she could contact her VR Counselor for help if a problem popped up, Renee stated that it depends what the problem is. She feels that so much is based on your relationship with your counselor; are you comfortable with your VR Counselor, how comfortable do you feel telling your counselor things? Renee feels that these questions are always important in the consumer-counselor relationship, so it depends on who your VR Counselor is. As Renee has never met her current VR Counselor, and has limited contact with him, she wouldn't feel comfortable going to him if she had a problem with school, problems with grades, or with issues associated with her deafness. When asked if she planned to seek help from VR in the future for help obtaining an internship or job, Renee stated that Gallaudet has a career center which is more convenient than returning to Florida. She asserted that she prefers to use Gallaudet's Career Center because they have a relationship with the federal government; versus VR, which has a relationship with the state government.

Pilot Study Case #2 – John

The second, and final, person interviewed for the pilot study was a 19-year-old, single, Caucasian male. John expressed his eagerness to “help” with this study. John was born Deaf. Both of John’s parents are Deaf, however, he thinks they were born hearing and became Deaf due to illnesses. John also has a younger brother who is Deaf, however, they think he was also born hearing and became Deaf through illness. John is the only one in the family who was born Deaf. John’s family signed as he was growing up. John was born in New York City, moved to New Mexico when he was 6 years old, and continues to maintain his residence there.

At the time of the interview, John was a sophomore undergraduate student at Gallaudet University, pursuing a double major in Psychology and Photography. When asked how he planned to use his majors, John replied:

I am not really sure yet. I don’t have any goals for my life yet. I have not yet decided for myself. Both of my majors fascinate me. Those are the two that I have liked the best so far in any school. So I decided to use those as they are my best skills. They help others so much.

John is not currently working; however, he is looking for a job on campus. When asked about his future career plans, John replied that he doesn’t know yet. He further explained:

I don’t see myself working everyday. I don’t want that for my life. I want to be active. Go out, change the world. Living in Manhattan. Living big. That is what I want. So maybe Clinical Psychologist or a Photographer for a magazine. Not sure yet.

John informed the interviewer that he found out about this research study from his friend's girlfriend, who suggested that he participate. John also stated that he "enjoys helping people finish their studies. My major is Psychology; I know how hard it is to get people to help with research."

Reason for Seeking VR Services

John explained that he sought VR services for money for college because his parents cannot support him at all. According to John, his parents went through a bad divorce about 3 years prior to this interview. He stated that they have bills to pay and that "it is best that they not support me except for maybe \$2,000 a year. That's all. So I can't expect them to help me. Everything I've been doing so far is mostly on my own with VR and scholarships." John receives some financial support from VR and receives the President's scholarship from Gallaudet University. VR required John to continue applying for benefits from the federal aid and the Pell Grant, among other places. According to John, VR had to reduce some of their benefits to him so he could continue getting those other benefits.

When asked how he found out about VR, John replied that growing up he always knew VR was there. He explained that his parents are Deaf and they know about VR and the Deaf community talks about VR and going to their counselors. John stated that you hear about VR often.

John stated that seeking services from VR was the first time he had asked for help. He shared that his mother has asked the church for food and his father has asked his parents and brothers and sisters for help because he was broke, but that this was his first time asking for help.

John identified financial support for college as the primary need he had when he sought services from VR. He stated that VR currently gives him financial assistance for college and provides no other assistance to him. When asked if he is aware of the other services VR has to offer, John replied, “Most people use VR for two things: money for college and to help them find a job. For other things, most people tend not to rely on VR. We try to find other sources to help us with other things.”

Experiences with VR

When asked to share his general experience with VR, John replied, “VR did not really expect me to do a lot. They did not expect me to succeed at anything at all.” John further explained that VR expected him, with their support, to work as a mechanic on cars, doing bodywork and engines. John stated that this was all VR expected of him, even though he had a 3.4 GPA from high school, high test scores from the SATs, was salutatorian from the Deaf school, was valedictorian when he transferred to the mainstream school, and received a letter from his state. John stated that he sent all of this information to VR to plan for college and tutoring and whatever other assistance he might require. A meeting was set up between John and his VR Counselor and, according to John, after reviewing all of his information, the VR Counselor remarked, “Wow, you are a very, very bright boy. I am curious, what kind of job are you planning to look for? VR can help with that.” John stated that this surprised him and he informed the VR Counselor that he was not really looking for a job at this time and wanted help and assistance in paying for college. John’s impression was that this took the VR Counselor aback and she replied, “You want to go to college? We will help you to find a job. That is really much better for you.” John stated that this went on back and forth for quite awhile and finally

the VR Counselor agreed to have VR assist John with finances and tutoring for college. John's opinion is that after all of that, his VR Counselor still thinks he is better off looking for a job than going to college.

When asked why he thinks VR thought this, John replied:

Really, I think it is because VR has bad experiences with that. Many times, people go to college, and they come back, get in trouble, get suspended, or kicked out. So far, many things like that have happened and only a few actually succeed wonderfully. I know a few people from the Deaf school who succeeded wonderfully in college. In the past, I have known some who have gotten into trouble, or suspended, or kicked out and come back home. I think that VR feels like 'why should we send kids out of state?' So, I have been going back and forth with them – 'I am not doing this,' 'I am not doing that.' Everything is going wonderfully so far! But even after that, VR is still edgy; and they are not really willing to support me fully.

When asked how he feels about this situation, John replied, "I feel it is another step in dealing with everyday life. I just deal with it. Fine, I just take it and move on. Just have to succeed and work through it, that's it."

When asked if he felt that VR was meeting his needs, John replied that, after the earlier struggle between his wanting to go to college and his counselor wanting him to look for a job, VR is meeting his needs now. He further stated that he wished they would give him more financial assistance so that he could live off campus. He explained that VR has not had to meet any other needs, as his only need is financial.

When asked if John felt his experience with VR is satisfying he replied:

Really, no. Not really. I mean that I have to find other things, find other sources to help me. Plus, I worry about life, how I will get through with what I have now.

VR refuses to help me with anything else. It is really superficial. They don't really help me with anything I need like financial problems or anything. I can't go to VR because I know that I have to depend on others here. I don't really think VR is helpful; they are more like a source of money for me. It is just like a scholarship that I get from them. That's all.

John further explained that there are many things about VR that doesn't satisfy him.

According to John, VR refuses to pay for him to travel from Gallaudet to his home.

According to John, other state VR systems of the Deaf people at Gallaudet are willing to pay for things like traveling, interpreting, tutoring, etc. and his VR in New Mexico is not.

John discussed how this is not fair, however, he understands the reason for the situation.

John's opinion is that maybe other states have more money to give than his state. John stated that this does not make him feel good and he wishes his state could give a little bit more. John shared his belief that he feels that his state's VR is very different from other states' VRs:

So far I have had many people in the deaf community tell stories about VR as very needy. But, when I hear stories about VR in New Mexico, they are always focused stories. Like VR is always cutting, they have many problems, people have to fight with them, and people get sent all over the place. There are a lot of problems to face. I hear a lot of paranoia, when I meet people at Gallaudet and I say VR is lousy. People tell me they love their VR Counselor. I look at them funny. A lot of people tell me stories about VR: 'VR is so nice. They give me

everything. They meet all my needs. We eat together and all of that good stuff.’ I look at them, ‘Really? Wow!’ Growing up I always thought that everyone had the same experience with VR; that it is awful, have a lot of problems, have to fight, and not giving all kinds of support. Other states are a lot nicer. I was very surprised by that. Maybe New Mexico is different because there is not enough money. I don’t know. My experience is different from other people’s experiences. When asked if he heard more positive or negative stories about VR when he was at Gallaudet, John replied, “Definitely more positive.”

John expressed that he wished VR knew more about him. He stated:

Things like encouraging me, counseling me about things that would help me out.

Those kinds of things I would like them to encourage me, a few things are:

thinking of which courses to take, I think it would help me to take more credits,

getting money earlier. Something like that. Maybe offer feedback about what I am

doing so far. Something back home that I can depend on.

John stated that he does not feel he is getting any of this now and doesn’t feel he can talk to his VR Counselor about it.

Experiences with VR Counselor

John indicated that he has had the same VR Counselor since he applied for college and feels that his experience with her has been positive. His VR Counselor is hearing and does not sign. When asked how he communicated with his VR Counselor, John replied that his mother, who is skilled at speech-reading, was present for their first meeting and acted as an interpreter. John stated that his mother has the most contact with the VR Counselor and he has only met her three times. The rest of their contact has been

via TTY, e-mail, and fax. John indicated that he does not really have a relationship with his VR Counselor. He further explained that he will send e-mails and it will be three or four days before he gets a response. John's opinion is that his questions are not being answered in a timely manner and, when he does finally receive a response, it is usually an evasive one. He states that he will ask a direct question and she just dances around it until he tells her to answer him directly. John further stated that:

VR does not really care about anything I do. All VR really cares about are the grades at the end of the semester. They ask me, 'What are your grades?' so I send them my grades. That's all they are really waiting to know.

When asked if the fact that his VR Counselor does not sign was a barrier to John's success in the VR process, John replied:

I don't think so. We don't really use VR that much except for work and college education. People in the deaf community don't really think that VR is really important. They go on in their own lives and forget about it, until 'Oh, I need help for my son to go to college.' Or, 'I lost my job!' Then they go to VR. But mostly VR is there, and Deaf clients are not the majority of their clients.

Case Interview #1 – Tanisha

The first person interviewed for this study was a 26-year-old, single, African-American female. Tanisha appeared articulate, expressive, and very open to sharing her opinions about VR. Tanisha was born Deaf. Tanisha's parents are hearing, she has a Deaf brother, and she has a Deaf cousin she has never met. When asked if her family signs, Tanisha replied, "Yes, they all sign. I made sure of that." Tanisha was born and raised in Maryland.

At the time of the interview, Tanisha had recently graduated from Gallaudet University, with a degree in Psychology. Tanisha was also working on Gallaudet's campus with students in the new Health Careers Opportunities Program (HCOP) and as a Resident Assistant (RA) in the dorm. At the time of the interview, Tanisha stated that she plans to attend New York University (NYU) in the fall, pursuing a master's degree in Deaf Therapy. Tanisha hopes to obtain an MA in a Deaf rehabilitation field, and possibly become a VR Counselor "where I can encourage more deaf people to go to school and get degrees. It's not just about me. I want to go into a school-counseling program and get a job working with international students. I want to work with people."

Tanisha found out about this research study when she saw an advertisement posted on the campus of Gallaudet University.

Reason for Seeking VR Services

Tanisha indicated that her first exposure with VR was when her older brother applied to VR for help. Tanisha was 7 or 8 years old at the time and her brother was 15 or 16 years old. She remembers her brother receiving a Zenith television with captioning from VR. As a result of this experience, Tanisha knew that college students received services from VR. According to Tanisha, she first applied to VR when she was 10 or 12 years old and they explained what to do when she graduated from MSD.

Tanisha expected encouragement when she first sought services from VR. According to Tanisha:

...they would throw all kinds of ideas and options for me to choose from. I expected they would be a source of information. I expected they would give me

options like vocational training, college, community college. I thought I would have a place to go with choices, but I really didn't.

Tanisha also sought financial assistance for college when she applied for services from VR. She stated that her VR paid for her college tuition, room and board, and books. VR has also provided Tanisha with new hearing aids and glasses. Tanisha mentioned that it would be nice if VR paid for her transportation to go home for Christmas and for summer vacation.

Experiences with VR

Tanisha informed the researcher that VR will not financially support her pursuit of a master's degree. She agreed that it might be because she has graduated from college; however, she also feels that it is political. According to Tanisha, she cannot find work in the psychology or Deaf-helping fields with a bachelor's degree; they all require a master's degree. As she feels that she needs an MA, Tanisha is fighting with VR to support her graduate work. At the time of this interview, VR was denying Tanisha's request. According to Tanisha, the reason that VR is denying her request is that, "I think they don't like to support colored deaf people; they like to support white people, and its like colored deaf people are getting oppressed." When asked what makes her think that VR does not support people of color who are Deaf, Tanisha replied:

Because I am the first black deaf person from the Eastern Shore to get a BA. In Maryland, I am the first black deaf person to get a degree. I know of two other people who got full support from Maryland to go to graduate school. I have been fighting with them and explaining to them, but they say, 'no, no. We have supported you for 4 or 5 years and we think that is enough.' I explained to VR

that my parents paid taxes for 20 years, my grandparents paid taxes for 20 years and, if I get my MA degree, we are talking about 20-30 years that I will work. I will be paying taxes. I will be paying back more than VR paid me anyway.

Tanisha commented that, in an indirect way, VR oppresses her.

Tanisha went back a bit further to explain her relationship with VR regarding college. According to Tanisha, when she was a sophomore or junior at MSD, representatives from different colleges would come for a work/college fair. The purpose of this was for the colleges to explain what the work force provides and what colleges tend to provide. VR also attended these fairs to explain the services they could provide. Tanisha researched different colleges and careers at the fair. Tanisha also spoke with VR representatives at the fair and was asked if she was from the Eastern Shore. Tanisha replied that she was and VR explained that VR is done by county in Maryland. Tanisha filled out paperwork with her name, phone number, etc. Shortly after that, the Maryland School from the Deaf contacted Tanisha and asked her what she wanted to do after high school. When she replied that she wanted to go to college, they recommended that she take a career test to see what her strengths and weaknesses were, which she agreed to. According to Tanisha, she was informed that the test results indicated that she fit best with work that required vocational training. Tanisha further explained:

I felt like, 'Whatever. But ok, fine.' I had other classmates that were from deaf families and VR encouraged them to go to Gallaudet University. So, I wondered, 'Why not me?' So anyway, I just continued on. After graduation, I was working, and I told VR that I wanted to go to community college. VR said, 'Fine', and they supported that. But I still felt like community college was not giving me

everything I wanted. I wanted more. So I asked if I could go to Gallaudet University. They asked me, 'Why?' So I explained that I wanted to get my BA degree so I could get a job. An AA degree will not help me in the long run, but a BA will. So we argued about that. On my own, I did some research and found the University's phone number and other information. I gave the information to VR, and they kept wanting to hold on it. So I met someone who encouraged me to go to Gallaudet. I thought about it and I made the decision that I wanted to go to Gallaudet. So I asked VR and they finally said they would pay for me to go to Gallaudet.

Tanisha took the SATs and was accepted to Gallaudet University. VR informed her that she had to keep her GPA up or they would not continue to support her. Tanisha attended Gallaudet and admitted that she was "clueless about how everything works at school." Tanisha explained that "everything got messed up with the VR money" and she had to figure out who was responsible for paying Gallaudet money for tuition and she could not return to school until the situation was straightened out. Tanisha reported that this was a new experience for her and her freshman year was really awkward. A mentor suggested that Tanisha talk to financial aid and VR. The situation was resolved when VR paid Gallaudet and Tanisha subsequently returned to Gallaudet. Tanisha reported that throughout the next year "things went ok. I had ok grades, and VR said they would not support me. I felt it was not fair that my friends were continuing to get support even though their grades were the same as mine. So I argued with them about this, and I think it is because I am black. So fine, I went to a community college and took courses to show

VR that I can get good grades. So fine, VR decided to support me again, and I went back to Gallaudet. They supported me through to graduation.”

Tanisha stated that during her sophomore, junior, and senior years, VR “got better.” She explained by saying that VR had all the money ready for books, food, and dorm. Tanisha reported that she would arrive at Gallaudet and everything at financial aid would be ready for her.

Tanisha stated that an aspect of VR that is not satisfying to her is that it would be nice if VR provided her with technical equipment. According to Tanisha:

...other students get computers and laptops, and all kinds of things. But, my VR has not given that to me. Why? They say, ‘no, it is under the county in Maryland, their budgets are all different, and they are not the same.’ They get monies from the state and then, once they get it, they can budget it however they want. I still don’t understand because under the county, they still have Maryland VR meetings every year. They discuss how to use the money, and I am not sure what the political point is.

Tanisha further explained that she thinks the VR support you receive is different depending on which county or state you live in. She commented that each county gets money from the state of Maryland, so the amount varies for each county, which she does not understand.

Another aspect of VR that Tanisha expressed dissatisfaction with is that she feels VR did not encourage and support her. Tanisha expressed the opinion that she feels this is because she is black and Deaf. Tanisha further explained that she has met “many good deaf people in her hometown.” Many of these people engaged in vocational training;

however, it is Tanisha's opinion that some of these individuals were very smart and could go to college. According to Tanisha, VR denied them going to college and insisted that they engage in vocational training. Tanisha also stated that most of these individuals are not aware of what services VR can provide them and should be educated regarding this.

When asked what aspects of VR experience have been satisfying for her, Tanisha replied, "I would say that they are paying for school completely. They are paying for 4 years for me to get my BA degree. They give me hearing aids sometimes. And, they pay for new glasses for me."

Tanisha's final comments about her experiences with VR:

I hope that one day VR will help deaf, and other kinds of people...deaf, blind, wheelchair, handicaps. Because they are human beings and have the same value as other people. You know VR likes to make categories and tell people what they can and can't do. I would like that to be done with. I don't want to be the first black deaf woman in 30, 40, or 50 years. I want to use this to empower people in the community. I want to make a community so that it will be easier for our children and their children.

Experiences with VR Counselor

At the time of the interview, Tanisha was on her second VR Counselor. Tanisha stated that her first counselor was a Deaf man and their relationship was "not bad"; however, things were "all screwed up." According to Tanisha, she informed her VR Counselor that she wanted to go to Gallaudet University and he wanted to know what field she wanted to study. Tanisha replied, "I don't know. That's why I want to go to Gallaudet University. To find out what I want to do." The VR Counselor replied that

Tanisha must have a clear goal and that there was no way VR would pay for 4 or 5 years of school if she did not have a goal. Tanisha's argument was that Gallaudet has different introductory courses (Introduction to Psychology, Introduction to Business, etc.) that she wanted to explore and that she did not want to pick a major and then later decide she didn't like it. The VR Counselor insisted that she pick a major and suggested Psychology. Tanisha agreed to this and asked if she pursued Psychology and later decided she did not like it, she could change her major. The VR Counselor stated that she could and just to come in and talk to him if she decided to change.

Tanisha's first VR Counselor left and a new VR Counselor took over. Tanisha stated that she was "a nice hearing woman. She learned sign language and we had a good relationship." According to Tanisha, she realized during her junior and senior years that Psychology "was not my thing." Tanisha called VR to let them know this and her VR Counselor was very upset. The VR Counselor stated that they had already paid for Tanisha to attend college for 2 years and would pay a total of 4 to 5 years for her to obtain her Psychology degree. Tanisha explained that she realized that Psychology was not her thing and that when she first came in to VR she did not know what she wanted to do. According to Tanisha, "it was a big fight." Tanisha explained that she would like to work with people and VR replied that they are paying for her to get her psychology degree and psychology deals with people. Tanisha recalled that she and VR "argued and argued and argued."

I was told that if I changed my major, they would not support me any more. We signed a paper and agreed on that, but my former counselor told me I had to pick

a major to go to Gallaudet. We argued and argued, too, so I finally just said, 'Fine, I would major in Psychology.'

Tanisha admitted to feeling forced into this decision and that her first VR Counselor said one thing and her second VR said another.

Tanisha reported that the last 1 or 2 years she has not had a lot of contact with her VR Counselor.

I lost respect for the VR system. I feel that I lost respect for them. My counselor would e-mail me every month to see how I was doing in school. I send them two replies a semester. All for what? We make contact through the phone if we have to. We keep contact, but not everyday.

Case Interview # 2 - Carla

The second person interviewed for this study was a 27-year-old, single, Puerto Rican-American female. Carla appeared outgoing, expressive, and a strong self-advocate. Carla was very articulate about her opinions regarding VR. Carla was born Deaf and her parents and two older sisters are also Deaf. Carla was born and raised in Bridgeport, Connecticut.

At the time of the interview, Carla was a sophomore undergraduate student at Gallaudet University, majoring in Social Work. Carla is not currently working, however, she stated that most of the time she volunteers. At the time of the interview, Carla stated that she plans to graduate in 2 ½ years. Her current goal is to focus on her undergraduate work, pursue graduate school, obtain her LSW certification, and set up her own practice. Carla stated that she does not mind working with a variety of people, such as children, adults, agencies, the government, and abused children. Carla explained in detail her social

work-related work experiences in Boston over the last 5 years. Carla was very vocal about her issues with her supervisor and her apathy toward following policies and procedures. It was these experiences that led her to go back to school and focus on obtaining a degree.

Reason for Seeking VR Services

Carla initially sought services from VR during her senior year of high school. Carla worked closely with VR, exploring college programs and their entrance requirements. Carla eventually decided to drop the college idea, as she felt her life's focus had been on school success—classes, honors program, student congress, etc. Carla felt that she needed a “test for success” and decided to pursue the work world. Carla and VR worked out an agreement that they would share the responsibilities of looking for employment for Carla. Carla indicated that this was “good team work.” After working for 5 years, Carla sought VR services because she could not support herself through school. Carla further explained that she tried to find other financial assistance, such as scholarships, and was consistently turned down. Initially, Carla tried attending Gallaudet part-time and then working two or three jobs to support herself. Carla indicated that she became a workaholic and, as school was important to her, she wanted to focus on school and not miss any of the school experience. Carla indicated that she has known about VR since she was a student at the Deaf school. According to Carla, VR is always going to the Deaf schools and explaining what their purpose is and the services they provide.

Carla identified financial support for college as the primary need she had when she sought services from VR. She stated that her VR currently pays for her college tuition, books related to her college classes, and her housing. VR has also provided Carla

with hearing aids and alarms. Carla mentioned that VR does not pay for food, transportation, or office supplies.

Experiences with VR

When asked to describe her experiences with VR, Carla replied:

My experience with VR has been pretty good. The communication seems to be clear between us. They know my goals. I explained what I want. I had no problems. If there are problems, we work them out. It is not a strong, in-depth relationship, however.

Carla gave an example of this statement when she described a problem she had with a math class she took at Gallaudet. Gallaudet University requires that you take Algebra 1, 2, and 3. Carla barely passed the first two and struggled with the third. She informed VR that she would prefer to take it during the summer session. According to Carla, VR informed her that they will pay for the first and second semesters, however, they do not pay for summer school. Carla's response to this is, "Where are my rights?" Carla stated that she explained to VR that she really struggles with math and is trying to maintain her GPA. After much consideration, Carla decided to withdraw from the Algebra course. Carla informed VR of this and, according to her, VR was "pissed off." Carla went on to explain her frustration:

I lost my money because I withdrew. Is it possible for me to support myself? I told them to look at my grades. So far, I have been a good student. Not perfect, but so far everything has been a B or an A. But, one F? Of course, I am struggling. Math is my weakness. I know it is my weakness. I feel confused and that VR is not supportive. I don't feel supported, and I feel sick. We have been

talking so far, and you (VR) know that math has been my weakness. Is it possible to get support for that? Maybe a 'special needs' class for math. English and the other classes are fine, but for math...numbers just make me crazy. I keep thinking about it and it disgusts me. I am limited there. This situation could affect my money for the future. You know? So, I decided not to withdraw from the class. I stayed. I failed everything till the last test. I turned it in and sweated it out. When I finally peeked, I passed! I got a D! I was so relieved! So I went to meet and discuss it with VR, and I told them that I passed. They said, 'Great!' I said, 'Hey, why can't you advocate for me and support me. You couldn't advocate for me and support me? You couldn't approach your supervisor to discuss this? You've known all along that I have trouble with math. Each class, I get a D. If I would continue, I would either get an F or a D. Where is the support for summer school? I would be able to focus on it. Eight hours everyday for three weeks. I could study and improve. Where is the support for me? If I am having problems, you should be supporting me, THE CLIENT, my needs.' They reply they can't because of money. All they talk about is politics and money. I don't care!! You should support me! I am just one person, not many. Supporting one person is nothing. I feel that VR does not know how to support people.

Carla finished explaining this issue by stating that VR does not "support my needs."

They don't support paying for summer school. That is really two negatives, but they fall under one: not supporting my needs...VR refuses to take care of anything. I am disappointed. I am willing to advocate for myself. I am willing to

confront them to let them know I have serious needs. I am willing to haggle with them. They should provide more options.

When asked what some of the other areas were about VR that did not satisfy her, Carla gave an example of problems she had with VR regarding paperwork. Carla had filled out all of her paperwork, submitted it, and was waiting for VR to send money. The money never arrived. When she called, she was informed that she was missing forms. There was a lot of confusion and a lot of waiting in between Carla's contact with VR. Carla stated, "VR should attend training workshops every month. They don't know how to fill out all this paperwork. They stall by saying they are working on it, but they really don't know how to do it! That wastes my time." Carla stated that she thinks all of these issues should be taken care of before school starts and that "Gallaudet and VR need to coordinate things!" Carla's opinion is that both VR and Gallaudet take too long to resolve these issues and that they are "not sharing information with each other."

Another area that Carla expressed concern over is her hope that all of VR can provide brochures and information about services to consumers so new intake consumers can make decisions. Carla further explained that, as a new consumer, she had to do things for herself. She would have to ask, "Do you have a brochure on this topic?" Carla felt that she had to bug people to find out information that she was curious about. Carla stated that she did not expect them to sit there and explain everything to her in ASL; however, she thinks she should be given the materials to read over and ask for an explanation if she has questions. Carla's opinion is that information regarding VR should not be hidden so consumers have to ask for it, especially if the consumer is new and does not know what kind of information they are seeking.

When asked what aspect of her VR experience has been satisfying for her, Carla replied that, from her perspective, communication is good. She explained that her communication with VR occurs every 3-6 months and her VR Counselor will touch base with her and make sure that her classes are progressing well.

Experiences with VR Counselor

Carla informed the interviewer that her VR Counselor is Deaf, a graduate of Gallaudet University, and started working for VR 2 years prior to this interview. Carla explained that her VR Counselor is a good person, however, she does not understand what it means to be an advocate. Carla stated that she had to teach her VR Counselor the concept of what an advocate is and that it means she supports her consumer. Carla shared that some VR are responsible for placement and have preconceived ideas about Deaf consumers, "They don't understand them. They think they are trouble. I don't believe in judging." When asked if it was her opinion that her VR Counselor judges, Carla replied:

Yes. A little bit. Yes. It turns me off. She doesn't judge with me. She knows I will speak up. I won't just accept it. I will let her know that I don't like it. I will question it and have a dialogue. I want to discuss it so I understand the other side. I am willing to listen. I am not shy. I won't just be polite and have a small dialogue. If you offend me, I won't be upset, my ego won't be hurt. I want to think about these things. Okay. Empowerment...VR doesn't want that. VR doesn't teach consumers how to be powerful. That is like handing out power to people and saying you are empowered. Okay. Things are under VR's control. But it is not my power. When you are not empowered, VR can take advantage of that. That's not fair.

Case Interview #3 – Brian

The third person interviewed for this study was a 34-year-old, married, Caucasian male. Brian appeared friendly and eager to help out with this study. Brian was born Deaf. His parents and sister are also Deaf. Brian was born and raised in North Carolina.

At the time of the interview, Brian was a junior undergraduate student at Gallaudet University, majoring in Communication Arts. Brian was also working as a Staff Residential Assistant (RA) in the dorms of Gallaudet University on the weekends. At the time of the interview, Brian was not really sure of his future career plans. He expressed interest in working in a residential school program as a dorm supervisor, or something related to working with kids in the residential school dorms. Brian stated that he needs to research this more. Brian found out about this research study when he saw the advertisement posted in a building on campus.

Reason for Seeking VR Services

Brian first became aware of VR during his high school years. While Brian was in high school, VR paid for a sign language interpreter for one of the classes he took. VR also paid for sign language interpreters for classes that Brian took at community college. According to Brian, this was 16-17 years prior to the time of this interview and was the first time VR supported him. A few years prior to this interview, Brian went to VR for the second time and sought financial assistance for college, as it is expensive and he could not afford to pay for school himself. VR financially supported him to attend Gallaudet University. Brian attended Gallaudet for 1 year and, “for a whole list of reasons,” he was thrown out. VR subsequently ceased supporting Brian, and he attended community college until the spring semester prior to this interview. At that time, Brian

transferred back to Gallaudet University and VR started supporting him again. Brian shared that VR currently pays \$1,400 for board, \$1,000 for tuition, and \$300 for books. Brian stated that he has to pay the rest himself, as VR gives him the maximum that the State of North Carolina allows. When asked if he receives any other services from VR, Brian replied, “No... I have not asked for it, I guess. So, I don’t get it.”

Experiences with VR

When asked about his experiences with VR, Brian replied that it is “pretty good.” He went on to explain that the only thing that is lacking is communication. According to Brian, his previous VR Counselor recently retired and his new VR Counselor is “not yet into the swing of things.” Brian said that VR is very open, direct, and honest with him, and they tell him “what I can get, and why, and all that.” Brian further explained:

It is very common around Gallaudet to complain about VR. But I don’t really feel that way. I guess it is better to know that VR can’t help me with everything. Some things you need to do yourself. A lot of deaf people depend on VR. VR is there to help, yes. But really a lot of things you have to do yourself. I feel better knowing that now. A while ago, I felt the same way as those others do now.

According to Brian, a lot of people at Gallaudet have a negative impression of VR and there are rumors going around that VR does not pay for everything and that VR does not support students’ goals.

Brian has a bit more positive impression and states, “They give me what I need. For me, I am satisfied with what VR gives me.” Brian later added, “I am pretty satisfied with VR. There is not a lot they can do for me. Some states allow full support, but not many.” When asked if he thought this was fair, Brian responded:

No. It should be the same. But, they are state agencies and not federal agencies, right? They are under states which each have their own rules and policies. It just happens that North Carolina does not support fully like other states. It would be nice to have it; I could focus on school full-time. One negative about partial support is that I have to work, pay for my own expenses, and worry about finances and bills.

Brian feels that VR “pretty much” supports his goals. He stated they have given him everything he has asked for and have not turned him down yet. He added that everything he has asked for, they have given him, and “they give what they can give.”

Brian stated that an aspect of VR that is not satisfying to him is that there is not enough communication. He stated that he has trouble getting the information he needs and he has to constantly ask again. Brian gave an example of this by sharing that he is trying to get ready for the fall semester. He explained that he has been trying to contact VR via e-mail since May to find out how much support they will give him and other information. This interview took place in July, and Brian expressed concern that there was 1 month left until the semester started and he still did not have the information he needed.

Experiences with VR Counselor

Brian reported that his previous VR Counselor was hearing and signed very well. He stated that the previous VR Counselor went to Gallaudet University and was a VR Counselor for about 20 years before he retired. Brian added that his last counselor was very knowledgeable and “did not have to look up everything to respond to me.”

According to Brian, he and his VR Counselor would sit down together and discuss exactly what Brian needed and what VR could do for him.

At the time of this interview in July 2001, Brian did not have any information about his new VR Counselor. He stated that he was told in May that he had a new VR Counselor and was still waiting to find out their name and have contact with them. Brian reported that his current method of contact with VR was via e-mail. He reported that he used to contact them by phone and they responded quickly; however, as it is expensive to call long distance, he switched to e-mail. Brian stated that he has found out that e-mail is not the best way to contact VR, as it takes them a long time to respond. At the time of this interview, Brian asserted that he planned to go home in 2 weeks and stop by VR to find out who his new VR Counselor is and what is going on with his school for the fall semester. Brian shared that he wonders if the new VR Counselor will be as knowledgeable as his previous VR Counselor, or if he will have to wait for them to “look everything up, then respond to me.”

Case Interview #4 – Janet

The fourth person interviewed for this study was a 25-year-old, single, Caucasian female. Janet was born Deaf and is the only Deaf member of her family. Janet was born and raised in California.

At the time of the interview, Janet was an undergraduate student at Gallaudet University, majoring in Design. When asked what year she is in school, Janet stated, “I will be a senior for the third time. I have been in school for 6 years now.” Janet was also working part-time for thewashingtonpost.com in the photography department. Janet’s job responsibilities included “editing pictures and cleaning them up so they look good

online.” Regarding her future career plans, Janet expressed interest in pursuing graduate school, possibly majoring “in something related to art.” Janet further explained that she could also pursue study in an unrelated field like philosophy or religion, but she was definitely interested in graduate school and traveling after graduation, and subsequently obtaining a “good job.” Janet added, “I am not sure yet. I am young, so I live by the minute, you know?”

Janet found out about this research study when she received the advertisement the researcher sent out to the Gallaudet community via electronic mail. She stated that she “read the e-mail and thought she could help.” Janet also shared that she wanted to participate in the study because she is an “honest person” and “the people who use VR really don’t know much about it” and she wanted to share her experiences.

Reason for Seeking VR Services

According to Janet, she first learned about VR when she was in high school. She was in a Deaf program that was already established with VR, so she had some knowledge of VR before she graduated. Janet stated that she started to learn more about VR, such as what services they can or cannot provide. Janet emphasized, “It is better to do some research on your own before you get VR because you don’t realize how much they can do for you or how much they can’t do for you too. It goes both ways.”

When asked the main reason she sought VR services, Janet responded:

I figured I would take advantage of it...not take advantage in a bad way, but they will pay for school and room, so why not? You know. I am not trying to pity myself because, ‘I am deaf, and I should take advantage of it.’ No. They provide the service, so why not.

Janet identified financial support for college as the primary need she had when she sought services from VR. She stated that her VR currently pays for her college tuition.

According to Janet, VR does not pay for her housing or provide any other services. Janet later added that it is a requirement of the graphic design department to have a laptop computer so that she can show her work when she goes on interviews. Janet stated, “Because they feel that most deaf people don’t have the speaking skills to communicate with people, so they feel that the laptop is a benefit.” The chairperson of the design department wrote a letter to Janet’s VR office explaining that laptop computers are required. Janet stated that VR gave her one, which she felt was “the best thing” and saved her money.

Experiences with VR

Janet discussed some of the struggles she had with VR regarding her desire to study design. She shared that she has had four different VR Counselors. According to Janet, her first VR Counselor did not want her to study design “because he felt it was not a good match for me because it is so involved in the hearing world.” Janet stated, “Really it fit my dream. That was my dream, you know? ‘Excuse me; don’t tell me I can’t do anything.’” Janet consequently decided not to go to school for a year “because I wanted to take time for myself and think about what I wanted to do. Because he scared me into thinking maybe I couldn’t do design.” The next year, Janet moved to a different city and had a different VR Counselor that, according to Janet, was “very supportive and nice.” However, time went on and “they still did not do much either.” Janet moved to another city in California and was assigned a VR Counselor that was specifically for people going to Gallaudet or RIT. According to Janet, this VR Counselor initially turned down her

request to study design. Janet stated that she decided to attend Gallaudet University anyway, and established teaching as her choice of major so that she could become accepted. Janet attended Gallaudet University for a year and noticed during this time that the design program was improving. She went to her VR Counselor to discuss getting into the program; however, VR was still hesitant. Janet stated that, during the course of one semester, she found out more about her rights and realized that she could major in anything she wanted. According to Janet, VR was concerned because, in their opinion, the design program at Gallaudet University was not a good one. VR visited Gallaudet over the course of a year, talking to people in the design department and interviewing students in the program. According to Janet, VR decided that the program was a good one and offered to support Janet in the design program. Janet stated:

But it was a long haul because I have wanted to study design since I was 18, and now I am 25. It just kept getting delayed. Still, I can't say that I'm sorry. No. I don't care because I got what I want. And I am happy with that. I don't know what I would have done at 22 years of age anyway, you know? So, it all came to good, yes.

Janet stated that an aspect of VR that is not satisfying to her is that VR does not give consumers all of the information they need to know in the beginning, such as a consumer's rights. As an example, Janet shared that her former VR came to Gallaudet and gave a presentation about VR. The counselor wanted to share his experiences with VR because he felt that VR did not treat Deaf people appropriately. He shared that the consumers have rights and should be able to pick any major that they wanted to. Janet also learned that consumers have a right to have on-site supervisors or have a mediator

that will come to both sites. Janet felt that all of this was information that the consumers should have at the beginning of the VR process.

When asked if she was satisfied with her VR experience, Janet replied, “Pretty much. I just wish I knew more about it (VR) when I got it. Because it’s like when you get something, you always gain more knowledge about it. Fine. I guess for now I am satisfied with it. Fine.” Janet indicated that VR is currently helping her to meet her goals. She stated that, earlier in the process, they were preventing her from meeting her goals by not allowing her to pursue her choice of major; however, she is not being prevented from meeting her goals at this time.

Experiences with VR Counselor

Janet indicated that she is now on her fourth VR Counselor, as the one that supported her entrance into the design department at Gallaudet moved on. Janet stated:

They are really slow now and they don’t speed up. Just like VR. You have to know VR, and what they tend to do, but it is a slow process. Ok. I mean as long as they are giving me free money. If they pay for it, I don’t care, I will go with it. Still...not the best.

Janet stated that her first VR Counselor was Deaf. According to Janet, he did not feel that Janet could succeed in the field of design because she was Deaf. Janet’s opinion was that he was not very professional and that he did not know what he was doing. When asked how she felt when the VR Counselor told her that she, as a Deaf person, could not succeed in the field of design, Janet shared:

I don’t know. I think after that I was shocked. My dreams were shattered; like an egg. You know? Ok. ‘What am I going to do now? I am good at nothing. I am not

good at anything except art.' My dream...it is like he stole something away from me. You know? I felt... 'that's it.'

When asked how frequently she had contact with her VR Counselors, Janet replied that it depended on the counselor, stating, "Some don't care as long as you give them what they want." Janet explained that she has had VR Counselors contact her every month to see how she was doing and some just required that she turn in her paperwork. A few months prior to the time of this interview, Janet had been in contact with her fourth, and current, VR Counselor. Janet stated that she contacted her VR Counselor to discuss the purchase of hearing aids. According to Janet, the counselor stated she would contact her, however, Janet has had "no answer from them."

I guess I will have to say something to get a move on. Because I don't like to waste my time. I like to keep things moving. I have heard nothing for 2 ½ months. Maybe they are busy, because I think in the summertime VR has a different schedule than during the year. I don't know. I am just guessing.

Case Interview #5 – Michael

The fifth person interviewed for this study was a 23-year-old, single, Caucasian male. Michael appeared polite and eager to participate in this interview. Michael was born Deaf, however, all of his family members are hearing. Michael explained that his family does not sign and that he uses his voice while communicating with his family. Michael was born in San Francisco, California, and his family moved to Memphis, Tennessee, when he was 3 years old.

At the time of the interview, Michael was a sophomore, undergraduate student at Gallaudet University, pursuing a double major in Secondary Education and Theater.

Regarding future career plans, Michael outlined his plans to teach high school students who have learning disabilities, stating, “They learn things through the theater instead of the regular learning environment. I think that will be very beneficial for them.” At the time of the interview, Michael was a full-time student and was not employed. Michael found out about this research study when he received the advertisement the researcher sent out to the Gallaudet community via electronic mail. He stated that he was interested in participating in the research study because he thought it “might help improve the relationship between VR workers and deaf clients.”

Reason for Seeking VR Services

Michael indicated that he first learned of VR when he was a freshman in a mainstream high school. His first experience with VR was when they referred him to a work agency. Michael worked for 2 years and then approached VR about attending college. He stated:

My parents could not afford to send me to college with their money alone. So I knew I could get some kind of help, so I went to VR. I asked them if they would be willing to help me, and they said they would be willing to. Everything!

Michael informed the researcher that VR pays for his tuition, room, board, and books, however, they do not pay for transportation.

Michael shared that seeking job placement and financial assistance from VR was the first time he has asked for help for himself.

Experiences with VR

At the time of the interview, Michael stated that, so far, his experience with VR has been “pretty good.” Michael added:

But it is sometimes difficult to get in touch with them. They are either too busy or not in the office. I call and they are not there, so I go and show up in person. They are there. They will tell me they are not there or in the office, whatever.

Michael expressed that it is difficult to contact VR when he needed something or needed help. Michael also added that his VR office had recently obtained an e-mail system, so they were in the process of learning it. Michael shared:

...they recently added the e-mail system shows me that they are working on how to contact them. Before, the only way to contact them was on the phone. But it was not very effective because Deaf people don't like to use the phone. Because the secretary in the office will say, 'they are not here!' or 'they are out somewhere...out of the office.'

Michael asserted that he thinks that the secretaries are lying when they say the counselors are out of the office. He explained his reason for thinking this by saying, "They lie because it only takes a little bit of time to say he's not there. But if I drove there and showed up, I would find he was there." When asked why he thought the secretaries would say the counselor was not there when he really was, Michael answered, "I think they hire secretaries who don't like disabled people." Michael stated that another aspect of VR that is not satisfying to him is that their office is in a federal building and he gets ...tired of having to show my ID and explain why I am there every time I go in. That does not really satisfy me because if I go for personal reasons or an emergency, I get stopped and delayed. That is not a good thing. I understand the safety of the federal office, but I think it is a little too much trouble.

On a more serious note, Michael indicated that some people at Gallaudet do not think VR services are fair. Michael stated:

The services for me have been great, but for other people, I know they get terrible service. They get bad counselors who are not really willing to help them. I feel bad for them because it shows favoritism. It is not fair, so I think the office should try to be fair. I know one case, one friend, who lived in a lower economic class.

He really wanted to come here, but he was rejected because of his background.

Michael went on to give another example of how some people at Gallaudet think VR is unfair:

For example, the boys get more money. They get a full ride while the girls only get half the money. So, there is discrimination against gender. I think because they don't succeed as well as boys. Therefore, because the boys get a larger portion of the money, the girls are not able to succeed because of the limited options they have.

Michael continued this train of thought by stating that he thought it was odd, and not appropriate, that VR would discriminate based on gender, race, or economic class.

Michael's opinion of one way that VR could improve their relationship with Deaf consumers is that "they should hire more people who sign clearly. It doesn't matter if they use ASL or PSE or Signed English. Anything is fine as long as they sign."

When asked about what aspects of his VR experience have been satisfying for him, Michael replied, "I am very satisfied with them. So, I would say I have a pretty high satisfaction rate." Michael went on to explain, "They are very supportive. They are willing to do things that I need. Anything I ask for they provide." Michael's example of

this statement was that there was a time when he did not have money to buy books and, when he contacted VR, they sent him the money to buy them. Michael also stated:

The office is open. If you need help, they will direct you to the right person. It doesn't matter that that person is not my VR Counselor. You can sit down and discuss it. Then they write a note to my VR Counselor so they can take over. They do a pretty good job.

In Michael's opinion, VR is meeting his needs at this time and they are helping him meet his goals.

Experiences with VR Counselor

Michael indicated that he is on his second VR Counselor. Michael stated that his first VR Counselor was "not very good at all." Michael explained that his first VR Counselor was hearing and they could not understand each other and had problems with communication. Michael stated that, in order to communicate, they had to write back and forth on a piece of paper. The first VR Counselor moved to a higher position and Michael received his second VR Counselor. The second counselor is Hard of Hearing and, according to Michael, "he communicates fine."

Michael mentioned that none of the other people who work in the VR office signed and they wrote back and forth on a piece of paper to communicate.

Case Interview #6 – Paula

The final person interviewed for this study was a 23-year-old, single, African-American female. Paula appeared outgoing, friendly, and very articulate. Paula was born Deaf and has a younger sister and two distant cousins who are Deaf. Paula reported that some of her family, such as her parents, sign and some of her family members do not.

Paula stated that their system of signing is really a home-based sign. Paula was born and raised in Texas.

At the time of the interview, Paula was a senior, undergraduate student at Gallaudet University, majoring in Early Childhood Education. At the time of the interview, Paula stated that she planned to graduate the following year. Paula expressed her hope of becoming a teacher of young children, preferably kindergarten or first grade. When asked if she planned to teach in a Deaf school, Paula replied that it did not matter, she will work with any population. She further explained that the undergraduate program at Gallaudet University was training them to work with hearing children, as well as Deaf children. Paula explained that, if you want to specialize in deafness, multiple disabilities, or family-centered early childhood education, then you would need to enter the master's program. Paula informed the researcher that she was unsure of whether or not she wanted to enter the MA program.

Paula shared that she is unsure of what she will do after graduation; she will probably look for a job. However, in the upcoming fall, while she is still an undergraduate, she will be taking a graduate course. According to Paula, this is her "test" to see if she wants to go to graduate school. The following spring, Paula will take another graduate class while working as a teacher's aide, which is part of her undergraduate requirements. Then, Paula will student teach. She will be the primary teacher of a class, and Paula feels that this will be her "test" to see if she feels confident to teach after she graduates. Paula indicated that she applied for a job but she decided to wait on that. Last year, Paula found out that VR will support her through graduate school. According to Paula, some of the VR Counselors she previously had did not know if they could support

her through graduate school; however, her current VR Counselor informed her that VR would support her through graduate school if she can explain her reasons for going to graduate school and why she feels that she needs an MA.

Paula found out about this research study when she saw a flyer advertising the study posted on the campus of Gallaudet University. She stated that she “saw it said VR clients. I said ‘Oh, yes!’” Paula informed the researcher that after she set up her appointment for her interview:

I went to Texas, and my friend told me about the interview. So I said, ‘Oh, yeah, I am supposed to do that.’ So I contacted you again. She told me she felt good interviewing with you and telling you her concerns with VR. I encouraged her to tell other people to tell VR. Because some people, especially in Texas, don’t like their VRs. I like my VR, but she didn’t. I know the process; I understand the system. Maybe if they understood the system better, they wouldn’t feel cheated out of the system.

When asked why she decided to participate in this interview, Paula replied:

I wanted to expose to you and to others about the VR system. The good and the bad. I am sure that you have heard the good and bad things about the other states. I was hoping I could be the spokesperson for us. Research shows this. Nice. You can get numbers; know what is satisfying, what is not satisfying. You know?

Reason for Seeking VR Services

Paula first learned about VR services from a family member, who informed her that VR provides financial assistance for schools in-state or out-of-state. Paula called the VR office and explained that she wanted to attend Gallaudet University and inquired if

this was possible. VR informed her that it was possible and that, if Paula was eligible to get into the program, then she was automatically in.

Paula indicated that VR paid half of her college tuition for the first 2 years. By the third and fourth year they started paying almost full tuition, due to the fact that her GPA is high and she made the dean's list three semesters in a row. Paula received a waiver for the dorm, as she is a Resident Assistant (RA). According to Paula, VR also pays for her books and for her airfare home once per year.

Experiences with VR

Paula expressed that she is impressed that VR is there to provide services for people that enables them to work or that leads to work. She further expressed that she thinks it is "very nice" that VR provides services for people with disabilities, "because we are limited in our experiences and it is nice to have that."

Paula discussed an aspect of VR that is not satisfying to her by stating that she knows many people who have the potential to do well; however, they are not getting the services they need due to the services that others are getting who are not meeting VR's requirements and who really should be screened out of the system. Paula further explained by saying, "they have limited government money that they can give to people, and they should use it for those who do well and meet their expectations." Paula shared:

...some states don't provide services. VR is under what company? Which corporation do they work for, because the government gives VR their money. Ok. Then VR decides what to do with that money. But I am curious about how they feel about the government pressuring some of the state VRs by saying, 'You have more successful clients that are working. They are not dependent on SSI or

SSDI.' I know some students who really wanted to go to graduate school, but they couldn't because VR said no. They will only support you for 5 years. That's what I think. They will support you for 5 years or X number. I understand that, it is a money issue. They pay a lot of money for a BA degree, then to add an MA. They feel they have to prove to themselves they did well for the BA. But they should be able to get an MA because it is a 1- or 2-year program. Go part-time or full-time. It is my opinion that VR should filter out who has potential and who is better off working. You know?

Paula finished this thought by adding, "I feel that sometimes VR Counselors select people at random or first-come, first-serve. I just feel they shouldn't do that. They should support everyone who is eligible to get into the program."

Another aspect of VR that Paula is dissatisfied with is the issue of funding:

Each state gets a different amount of money. Does that money come from the federal government or the local? That's my thing. It is very vague. They just say they get it from the government, but they won't give specific information. Who is responsible for funding? Is it private? Government? That is what I am curious about. It seems like I can't understand until I get in the VR system, maybe, I don't know.

Paula went on to explain that she understands that some VRs are very mean and uninviting to their consumers, and others are friendly and inviting. Paula stated:

It's not fair. That's my feeling. 'I am sorry, but I do better than this person and you are telling me that you can't afford it??' Then they give me a song and dance about already having the money set up for this other person because they asked

first. You came in after, so you get what is left. This small amount. I think there needs to be more of a fair system, where everyone can get the services that they need. If they fail, the first semester, or break the first agreement, then they should be cut off. They should bring in a new person to replace the old consumer because the file is already there. There should be a smooth transition for that.

When asked what aspect of her VR experience has been satisfying for her, Paula replied, "I am very satisfied with VR. They try to meet my needs. They try their best."

Paula expressed the opinion that consumers need more education and information about VR and the services they can provide. Her advice to consumers of VR was that they educate themselves about what services they need. They need to do the research about VR and ask questions. Paula gave an example of a meeting her VR office recently had for new consumers who do not yet know the VR system. They showed a videotape that explained everything about the VR process and what consumers are eligible for. Paula expressed the opinion that consumers make the wrong assumptions about VR and meetings and videotapes such as these can help clear up these assumptions. Paula also thought that VR should provide consumers with information, such as a manual, about what services are available to them after their cases are closed. Paula stated that if a consumer has career needs or services after they are employed, and their cases are closed, they do not know where to turn or what resources are available to them.

Experiences with VR Counselor

Paula's first VR Counselor was hearing and, according to Paula, signed very well as her husband is Deaf. Paula indicated that she had no problems communicating with

this VR Counselor. Paula described the VR Counselor as “very uptight, very demanding.”

Paula shared an experience she had with her first VR Counselor. According to Paula, her VR Counselor was impressed that Paula had attended a mainstream school where she used interpreters all day. Paula stated that she was at the top of her class, and the VR Counselor seemed impressed about that, but it was not appropriate because Paula was African-American. When the researcher asked Paula to explain this more in depth, Paula explained that the counselor was not impressed with Paula’s educational status:

...because I am African-American. I felt a little race tension. She felt it not appropriate for African Americans to go to college. Her eyes are interested, but behind them...ok...because my family is educated. My mother graduated from Texas University. It is a very large school but she graduated from there. My grandmother graduated from another school. My uncles are educated. My grandparents are educated; my uncle is a Social Worker. So, it runs in the family, they are all educated. My cousin is third generation, not first. People assume first, but it’s really third. Assume, assume, assume. So that counselor had already assumed that. So I went ahead and filled out the form, said I was eligible. She met my mother, and was embarrassed. She changed her attitude. She realized that my mother had high expectations. My mom wanted to know if they would support me or not. After that, the counselor said she would do many things like provide hearing aids. They could provide a whole list of things. Thank you. That’s all I ask.

Paula stated that this VR Counselor left after 1 year.

Paula described her second VR Counselor as “African-American herself, and was very laid back. The two of us established a good relationship.” Paula reported that there are no communication problems with this VR Counselor, due to the fact that she had previously worked with people with disabilities and who are Deaf. Paula reported being very satisfied with her second VR Counselor and the amount of contact they have with each other.

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