

Marketing Plan

Oakland Community College
Sign Language Studies

September 2004 –December 2005

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Figure 1 SLS Program Description	2
Competitive Analysis	3
Labor Market Analysis	3
Target Markets	5
Strategy A: Standard Marketing Tool Package	7
Strategy B: University Advertising	9
Strategy C: OCC Education Students	9
Strategy D: School District Outreach	10
Strategy E: Agency Referrals	11
Timeline	14
Goals & Objectives	14

Introduction

While OCC has offered limited courses in American Sign Language (ASL) for a number of years, the designation as a complete Associate degree program occurred only recently. With the designation as a new program to the college, strategic marketing attention must be given to position the product to appropriate target markets; the program and institution that clings to the philosophy of “build it and they will come” will not survive in today’s competitive market.

In order to develop appropriate marketing strategies an understanding of not only the product but also competition and the labor market must be fully understood. Research conducted by the OCC Office of Institutional research finds that the Sign Language program enjoys limited competition, a favorable outlook for employment sectors and a well-defined target market. These factors point to a highly targeted marketing strategy to define the program as a quality training option for those already in or preparing to enter the field.

The OCC Program

The offerings in Sign Language Studies have grown from three courses to a total of 17 required for the completion of an Associate in Applied Science. The program is based at Highland Lakes, under the English and Humanities Department and has a curriculum code of SLS (Sign Language Studies). Courses have been offered at HL, Auburn Hills and Orchard Ridge campuses. An average of six sections are offered in Fall and Winter semesters, and fewer than four in the Spring and Summer.

The following table contains the requirements and degree description taken from the OCC 2004/05 catalog.

Figure 1

Sign Language Interpreter Program (SLS.AAS)

Associate in Applied Science Highland Lakes Campus

In this program, leading to an Associate in Applied Science Degree in the Sign Language Interpreter Program, students will gain knowledge of the Deaf community, culture and language, with emphasis on interpretation. The program is designed to train students to be qualified and certified interpreters for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Successful completion of the program requirements qualifies the student to take exams for the State of Michigan Quality Assurance (QA) certification.

Major Requirements			Credits
<u>SLS</u>	1000	American Sign Language (ASL) I	3
<u>SLS</u>	1001	Orientation to Deafness	2
<u>SLS</u>	1010	American Sign Language (ASL) II	3
<u>SLS</u>	1020	American Sign Language (ASL) III	3
<u>SLS</u>	1030	American Sign Language (ASL) IV	3
<u>SLS</u>	1050	Linguistic Principles of ASL	3
<u>SLS</u>	1100	Fingerspelling and Number use in ASL	2
<u>SLS</u>	1150	Beginning Sign to Voice	3
<u>SLS</u>	1211	Non-Manual Communication	2
<u>SLS</u>	1250	Principles of Interpreting	3
<u>SLS</u>	1501	Deaf Culture and History	3
<u>SLS</u>	1550	Intermediate Sign to Voice	3
<u>SLS</u>	2100	Advanced Fingerspelling and Number Use in ASL	2
<u>SLS</u>	2150	Advanced Sign to Voice	4
<u>SLS</u>	2250	Advanced Interpreting/Transliteration	4
<u>SLS</u>	2800	Mock Quality Assurance	2
<u>SLS</u>	2900	Sign Internship/Independent Study	3

Required Supportive Courses			Credits
<u>ENG</u>	1510*	Composition I	3
<u>ENG</u>	1520*	Composition II	3
Recommended Elective^H			
<u>MED</u>	1103	Medical Terminology	3
<u>PSY</u>	2510*		3
<u>SOC</u>	2510*		3
<u>ANT</u>	1540*		3

See Graduation Requirements for an Associate in Applied Science Degree

H When all courses marked with an asterisk are completed, students may apply for a certificate.

* Course may be used to meet General Education requirements.

Competitive Analysis

Only three other institutions were found to offer a Sign Language program: Mott Community College, Lansing Community College and Madonna University. This gives OCC a geographic advantage and could be used to position it as the only ASL training resource in Oakland County. Two of the three, Madonna and Lansing, offer a certificate in addition to degrees.

Knowledge of sign language and interpretation is often used as an additional credential in many jobs, such as K-12 teachers. A short-term certificate could be easily marketed to those currently working in education and would be recognized as a valid credential by employers. It is highly recommended that OCC begin the process to implement a certificate in signing. That process is outside of the scope of this marketing team; therefore the strategies outlines in this 15-month plan will promote only the existing product, the associate degree in applied science.

Labor Market Analysis

Interpreters work in a variety of settings including medical, legal, religious, mental health, rehabilitation, performing arts, and business. They may work for television stations or other providers of information or for court systems, schools and other public agencies. Many with educational backgrounds and/or certification in the Sign Language/Interpretation field typically find employment with state and local governmental agencies as well as the private and public sectors.

Salaries vary depending on many factors including geographical location, education, experience and credentials.¹ Salaries range from \$10,000 to \$50,000.² Some

part-time interpreters and/or freelancers might earn between \$20 and \$45 per hour, depending on education, training, experience and employer. Freelance interpreters may earn anywhere from \$12-\$40 an hour. Interpreters employed by agencies earn anywhere from \$15,000-\$30,000 per year depending on the agency and level of their credentials. Highly skilled, credentialed interpreters may earn anywhere from \$40,000-\$50,000 per year.³

1999 National Occupational Employment Estimates and Mean Wage Estimates for Interpreters and Translators

Employment	\$13,640	*RSE=5.55%
Mean Hourly Wage	\$14.16	*RSE=2.0%
Mean Annual Wage	429,450	*RSE=2.0%

**Note: RSE- Range, Standard of Error.*

<http://www.bls.gov/oes/1999/oes273091.html>

Percentile Wage Estimates for Interpreters and Translators

Percentile	10%	25%	50% Median	75%	90%
Hourly Wage	\$7.70	\$10.02	\$12.94	\$16.88	\$21.66
Annual Wage	\$16,010	\$20,840	\$26,920	\$35,110	\$45,050

<http://www.bls.gov/oes/1999/oes273091.html>

¹ http://www.lcc.edu/communication/sign_lang/careers/ Lansing Community College: May 02, 2003.

² Ibid

³ Family Independence Agency www.michigan.gov/fia/0,1607,7-124-5460_7260_21376-14878-00.html (May 02, 2003).

There is a strong need for qualified interpreters with credentials as the field is rapidly expanding. Schools, government agencies, religious institutions and private businesses employ interpreters. They work in many different environments, part-time, full-time, freelance and salaried. The rule is the more mobile the individual is the more marketable they become. Hence, the more likely the individual will find employment in the interpreting field.

Recent changes to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and efforts to increase employment opportunities and accommodations for the deaf and hard of hearing should mean increased job opportunities. Advances in technology and greater social acceptance of the deaf also contribute to the increased opportunities. According to the Los Angeles Times, “above average growth in the field is projected through 2008 for interpreters.”

Target Markets

In a 2003 survey of current OCC sign language students, nearly three-quarters of the 79 respondents stated they were taking courses to enhance their current knowledge of the field. Nearly 75 percent stated that they would use the knowledge for job-related purposes, either as a major or minor part of their current job, or to gain a new job with a current or new employer. Forty-one percent had jobs somewhat related to the field. This points to a target market of people who use ASL to some extent on the job or wish to have a career where they use it. The typical places of employment include state and local government agencies, school districts, and private and public agencies. This points to several key target markets:

Paraprofessionals, teachers, counselors in K-12 districts: The State of Michigan requires interpreters working in grades K-12 to have graduated from a state-approved program. In most other jobs, certification is preferred, but not yet required. The OCC program prepares students to take the state and national certification exams.

Students in education programs at other colleges: Sign Language is a sought after additional credential for the education graduate and may be an elective or a requirement, depending on the course of study. Students specializing in a minor or major in special education would be key candidates to take Sign Language courses.

OCC Students: Three primary categories of current and former OCC students can be targeted for the SLS program.

Liberal Arts/Education Students: While OCC does not offer an Education degree, students pursuing an Associates in Liberal Arts can designate Education as their intended area of study. These students have the intent to transfer to a four-year institution to pursue their teaching certification and bachelor's degree but may be interested in taking Sign Language courses while at OCC. They may also choose to return to OCC for this specialized training.

Former OCC SLS students: The expansion of program offerings may be an attractant for former students to return to OCC to continue training in sign language skills.

Early Childhood Development/Mental Health-Social Work: Similar to the education students, sign language is a sought after credential for students pursuing this career area. The courses could be marketed as electives within the program or as an additional degree.

Interpreter agencies: Agencies, both public and private, not only hire interpreters but also refer family, friends and those working with the deaf to appropriate training programs. Building relations with these agencies will not only increase the awareness of OCC's program, but also give it credibility within the deaf community.

Marketing Strategies

As a new program, the SLS program needs to have in place standardized College marketing tools provided to all new programs, in addition to some targeted strategies.

Strategy A: Standard marketing tool package

The College Marketing Department will provide assistance in creating the following components for marketing the program to external and internal audiences:

I. External Marketing Tools

- a. Program brochure – designed for potential students, this brochure contains specific program information including courses and degree options. Information on the labor market, typical places of employment and salary ranges are also included for those considering the field as a career.
- b. Website – a Sign Language Studies program website will be created under the OCC institutional website. After initial creation, the department will assume responsibility for updating and promoting the site.
- c. Marketing Brochure – While the program brochure is an information resource, the marketing brochure establishes the image of the program and increases awareness. This piece is designed as a sales tool with emphasis on testimonials and visual elements.

Cost: While much of the work will be done in-house, a budget must be given for the printing of the program and marketing brochures. A budget of \$3,000 is recommended for the external marketing pieces.

II. Internal Marketing

As with all new programs, it is important to raise awareness internally so that members of the college community can effectively market the program and handle inquiries resulting from advertising and publicity initiatives. Members of the Sign Language department will notify counselors and recruiters about the program offerings with copies of the brochures and presentations at meetings. The department should also seek permission to make a brief presentation at a Board of Trustees meeting. This should be done as soon as the marketing materials are available, preferably in time for registration for the Winter 2005 semester.

The department should also seek out partnerships with other academic departments where appropriate. A primary opportunity is to work with the Police and Fire academies to publicize the benefits of sign language as a communication skill when working with the public.

Upon approval of the marketing plan, the College Marketing Department can begin to publicize the program to all internal audiences through the college communication vehicles OCCurrences and Quintet. A press release should also be produced and sent to the regular media contacts.

Strategy B: University Advertising

To reach current education students who may consider taking sign language courses as a guest student at OCC, a series of ads will be placed in college publications (i.e. newspapers/electronic newsletters) at Oakland, Wayne State, Eastern Michigan, Western Michigan, Central Michigan and Michigan State universities. The ads will appear in early 2005 in the months of February, March and April and encourage students to consider the Summer sessions at OCC. A budget of \$2,000 will be established for this advertising campaign.

Strategy C: OCC Students

The three groups of OCC students will be reached through a mail campaign.

A list of names and addresses of current and former Liberal Arts students who have indicated an interest in Education should be requested from the Institutional Research office. These students will receive a brochure and letter describing the expansion of the program. The timing of the mailing should coincide with the academic calendar, promoting upcoming semesters and ample time to register. The same strategy will be implemented for the former SLS students and Early Childhood Development/Mental Health students. Each group will receive a customized message in the letter signed by department members.

Cost: A mailing budget of \$500 will be established for this initiative.

Strategy D: School District Outreach

The primary objective of this strategy is to raise awareness of the SLS program with employees of K-12 school districts in Oakland, Wayne and Macomb counties. The campaign will consist of a letter and brochure sent to five groups:

district superintendents	directors of special education
school principals	currently employed paraprofessionals
high school counselors	

The marketing materials will stress the high quality of instruction for anyone working with the deaf or hard of hearing students such as teachers, paraprofessionals and social workers. It should also stress that completion of the OCC degree program can lead to state certification. This one-time communication campaign should take place prior to December 2004. The estimated budget for this campaign, which includes mailing list creation and postage, is \$1500.00 (The cost for the brochures is absorbed in Strategy A.)

Strategy E: Agency Referrals

A secondary way to reach those already working in the field will take place by partnering with two primary agencies: The Registry of Deaf Interpreters, Inc. (RID) and the Michigan Division on Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DOD).

The Registry of Deaf Interpreters, Inc. is a national membership organization of professionals who provide sign language interpreting/transliterating services for deaf and

hard of hearing persons. Established in 1964 and incorporated in 1972, RID is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

RID advocates for the increased quality, qualifications, and quantity of interpreters through a triad of services:

- Professional Certification through a National Testing System (NTS)
- Professional development through the Certification Maintenance Program (CMP) and Associate Continuing Education Tracking (ACET)
- Promoting a Code of Ethics through Ethical Practices System (EPS).

While OCC has a very good relationship with local agencies that service this population, it would benefit from the recognition of being a RID Approved Interpreter Training Program. It is also recommended that the program seek to become an RID Approved Sponsor. This designation would allow the college to host classes and workshops as part of the Certification Maintenance and Associate Continuing Education Tracking programs of RID. All RID registered interpreters must earn CEUS through approved programs to retain their certification.

The Michigan Division on Deaf and Hard of Hearing operates under the Family Independence Agency. This state office concentrates on helping improve the lives of Michigan's 1 million Deaf and Hard of Hearing citizens. It receives input from its 13-member citizens Advisory Council appointed by the Governor and provides the following services:

Technical Support

- Assist deaf and hard of hearing persons with referrals to public or private agencies dealing with their specific problems or concerns.

- Assist employers, educational institutions, service agencies, and businesses with suggestions to make their programs and services accessible to deaf and hard of hearing persons in compliance with state and federal laws.
- Analyze legislation and present testimony to the legislature on issues affecting deaf or hard of hearing persons.
- Assist other state agencies to assure that the needs of deaf and hard of hearing persons are considered in policy development.

Information and Referral Services

- Respond to public inquiries regarding deafness.
- Provide Orientation to Deaf and Hard of Hearing trainings.
- Publish DODHH Bulletin.
- Publish The Michigan TTY/Service and Interpreter Directory
- Maintain and distribute statistical data related to deaf and hard of hearing persons.
- Maintain a statewide list of services for deaf and hard of hearing persons.
- Refer expert witnesses.
- Conduct general workshops and seminars.
- Conduct annual DODHH Silent Retreat

Interpreter Information and Services

- Consult with the appointing authorities on the need and use of qualified or certified interpreters.
- Assist state agencies and the public in locating qualified oral and sign language interpreters.

- Administer the statewide Quality Assurance Interpreter Screening Program as required by the Public Act No. 204 of 1982.
- Provide technical assistance to interpreters.
- Conduct interpreter information workshops.
- Provide interpreting services to state government agencies.

OCC should make it a priority to become a RID approved sponsor and a state approved program. A letter seeking state approval should be sent to the DOD State Advisory Committee immediately. These designations will result in increased public relations opportunities and will aid in spreading awareness of the OCC program throughout the region.

In addition, the program will seek out advertising opportunities and submit articles to the various DOD publications including the DOD Bulletin newsletter and the Interpreter Directory. Further opportunities that would increase awareness of OCC's program include hosting workshops and seminars at OCC campuses and participating as a sponsor of the DODHH Silent Retreat.

The combined costs for this strategy include possible application fees to become an RID Approved Sponsor, limited website or newsletter advertising and other possible sponsorship opportunities. A small budget may be approved to pay the appropriate department personnel for the time involved to compile the necessary reports required by RID and to pursue the relationship with the DOD. If the department pursues the CEU market, additional monies may be needed to develop short courses and specialized workshops. For the short-term marketing plan, the recommended budget for Strategy E is \$2000.00

Timeline

Execution of the marketing strategies may begin immediately upon final approval of the plan, with all activities completed within 15 months (approximately September 2004 –December 2005). All components of Strategies A and C should be completed in the first six months, followed by Strategies B, D and E. A detailed implementation plan including department responsibilities and printing and advertising schedules will be created by the OCC Marketing Department.

Goals & Objectives

While the objective of introducing the new Sign Language Studies program to the marketplace is achieved through creating and sustaining awareness, the measurement of success will be increased enrollment in SLS courses. An analysis of credit hours for the program over a ten-year period of 1992/93 through 2002/03 shows that the program has remained relatively consistent in the number of credit hours for many years recording an average of 600. It reached its peak in 2002/03 with 843 credit hours. This jump directly correlates to the creation of the associate degree and thus, an increase in the number of courses offered. With increased marketing support, it is expected that the program will continue to increase at a rate slightly higher than the college average. A benchmark of 1400 credit hours by the end of the 2004/2005 academic year is expected. To ensure continued success of the program, enrollment increases will need to be supported with additional section and course offerings at times and locations suited to the target audience, particularly those already working in the schools districts.

Over a period of fifteen months \$9,000 will be spent to increase awareness of the new SLS program at OCC. With highly targeted strategies, the expenditure should result in not only increasing enrollment in SLS courses, but also increasing the awareness and reputation of OCC as a quality provider of interpreter training.

The strategies in this plan were created in the context of current labor market needs and requirements. When and if the State of Michigan institutes mandatory certification or CEUS for interpreters the plan would need to be revisited to put appropriate emphasis and resources to meet those requirements.