Inter-institutional Collaboration: Our Process

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Abstract

As one of the early (1980’s), and leading, programs in interpreter education, Johnson County Community College (JCCC) in Overland Park, KS, once again is taking a bold, innovative step in collaborating with The University of Kansas-Edwards Campus (KU-Edwards) to re-envision interpreter education for this next generation. In 2016, JCCC announced their decision to transition from housing a two-year ASL-English interpreter preparation program to a American Sign Language Studies program. Simultaneously, JCCC faculty began collaborative discussions with The University of Kansas-Edwards campus administration, and the Director of KU’s School of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures. This is an ongoing collaboration which includes curriculum and outreach committees along with administrative support from both institutions. Program proposals are making their way through the appropriate University and Board of Regents channels for approval during the Fall 2018 semester. This paper describes the process of establishing this inter-institutional collaboration and developing undergraduate and graduate level programs which adhere to a language to interpretation model.

Keywords: American Sign Language, Interpreter Education, Curricula, Collaboration

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“Why am I still teaching interpreting students at the associate-level when I know a two-year interpreter education program is not adequate for them to gain sufficient language and interpreting skills?” For some of you, this might resonate. The 2005 RID mandate requiring a Bachelor’s degree for candidate certification eligibility prompted the need for examination of degree programs. According to the National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers (NCIEC)’s AA-Bachelor program report, “approximately 75% of the 145 identified interpreter education programs are offered at the associate degree level and housed in two-year institutions” (NCIEC, 2018). “So, how do I make this happen? What is the process of shifting interpreter education from associates-level to bachelors-level? Is that really the answer? What about graduate-level education?” You may have found yourself asking similar questions. The authors of this paper have continued to ponder these questions and more while shifting what future interpreter education in the state of Kansas will look like. Stacey Storme, one of the authors, and Betti Bonni were discussing Stacey’s sabbatical project investigating future program models and the possibility of a 2+2+1 program being established in Kansas. Betti captured it well and affirmed the work already in motion when she said “the writing has been on the wall for a long time, yet not much has changed” (S. Storme, Personal Communication, January 10, 2017). As Stacey also engaged in conversation with leading interpreter educators at national and international interpreting related conferences, they also responded favorably to our tentative plan of moving toward a language to interpretation model that a 2+2+1 program affords.

This paper discusses the process of shifting Johnson County Community College’s (JCCC) ASL-English Interpreting Preparation (AEIP) Program to the University of Kansas. It is the authors’ wish to share this information as other programs might be facing similar circumstances in their states.

History of Interpreting Education at Johnson County Community College and the Decision to Shift to ASL Instruction Only

Johnson County Community College (JCCC) was among the first colleges, along with Ohlone College and Madonna College to receive federal funding for the purpose of training interpreters. Jan Humphrey and Bob Alcorn were among the first faculty in the early 1980s. In 1998, Dr. Kim Kurz became the Program Chair of the Interpreter Education Program (IEP) at JCCC. Dr. Bern Jones and Darryl Luton were faculty at the time, and Stacey Storme joined the faculty in the fall of 2002. There were preliminary discussions about turning our associate program at JCCC into a 2+2 program at the University of Kansas. However, those discussions were tabled due to disagreement about where to house the program within KU’s structure. Both Drs. Kurz and Jones left JCCC and moved out of state to pursue new opportunities within the interpreting field. Darryl Luton took over the role of Program Chair at JCCC. In 2007, Stacey Storme attended the AA Directors Meeting-National Summit on AA-Bachelor Partnership in Denver, Colorado hosted by the NCIEC. Stacey left the summit inspired to pursue the University Centered model (Annarino 2010, p.51-66) During that same year, a formal statewide task force on interpreter education was established in order to bring together critical stakeholders to discuss options for
establishing a BA program in ASL-English Interpreting in Kansas. The taskforce met for a little over a year, yet was unable to reach consensus about the most effective approach. Stacey drafted a white paper (2009) stating the following recommendation by the faculty:

“We believe the most effective approach is to provide a full-fledged BA degree in interpreting. While we are open to a variety of approaches to accomplish this in the state of Kansas, we believe it would be most effective and efficient for JCCC to provide a Bachelor of Arts in Interpretation (BAI).”

In order for the proposed BAI at Johnson County Community College to have proceeded, the Kansas Legislature would have had to act. This was untenable. Therefore, JCCC applied for and was granted accreditation by the Commission on Collegiate Interpreter Education (CCIE) in 2010. This process enabled the faculty to maintain their focus on providing quality interpreting education, while continuing to explore possible collaborations. Between 2010 and 2016, it became clear that the values of the JCCC AEIP more closely aligned with the language to interpretation model (Aborn 2010, p. 67-76) rather than the University Centered model. Crucial conversation among the faculty, and in conjunction with their advisory board, led to the difficult decision to close their interpreting education program and devote their energies and expertise on American Sign Language and Deaf Studies. The AEIP faculty at JCCC believed that refocusing their program would not only better meet the needs of their students and greater community, it would also create more opportunities for transfer students wanting to pursue other degrees for working with the Deaf community.

A Sabbatical Project and Establishing the Relationship with KU

Stacey was granted a year-long sabbatical leave during the 2016-2017 academic year to focus on the following three objectives: 1) to investigate and determine viable options for re-focusing JCCC’s AEIP to maximize the rich resources that they offer at JCCC by building pre-professional course programming (including interpreting, social work, early childhood education, etc.) that could be transferred to universities for completion of BA degrees; and, 2) to research options for effective articulation agreements and/or possible for BA opportunities onsite at JCCC or nearby satellite campus of other institutions; and, 3) determine the feasibility of JCCC offering endorsements and Continuing Education opportunities for professional interpreters to be recognized by the Kansas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

The University of Kansas was one of the possible universities on the list for consideration. The university opened a new School of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures (SLLC) in September 2014, and hosted its first annual Convocation in September 2015. Kim Bates, in her role as Interpreter Coordinator at the University of Kansas, attended the convocation and was struck by the school’s mission of providing culturally-centered language instruction. Kim was a member of the 2007 statewide taskforce, and has also been a long-time practicum site supervisor and mentor for students from JCCC’s AEIP. Stacey and Kim had had informal conversations during the Spring 2015 semester where Stacey shared that she would soon be applying for a sabbatical for the 2016-2017 academic year. Believing that a golden opportunity was presenting itself, Kim requested a meeting with Dr. Marc Greenberg, Director of the SLLC. During their January 21, 2016 meeting, Kim described a bit of the history of ASL-English interpreter education in the state, including JCCC’s ongoing search for the right collaborative partner. Dr. Greenberg, agreed that this was worth further conversation with Dave Cook, Vice-Chancellor and Dr. Marilu Goodyear, Associate Vice-Chancellor at the KU-Edwards campus in Overland Park, KS. The second meeting with these administrators took place on February 18, 2016. At the conclusion of this meeting the Dr. Goodyear was given the go ahead to have an initial exploratory conversation with Stacey Storme and Darryl Luton, Dr. Greenberg, and Kim Bates. Once the connection between JCCC faculty and KU administrators was made on March 22, 2016, Kim Bates returned to a supporting role as needed, while
Stacey continued her work of ensuring proper fit between institutional partners and pulling together individuals to participate on outreach and curriculum committees.

While Stacey was still exploring options, the KU-Edwards campus hired Dr. Ruthann Atchley as an Assistant Vice-Chancellor for Undergraduate Programs, and was immediately tasked with working with Stacey to assess program feasibility. At the conclusion of their first meeting, Dr. Atchley turned to Stacey and said, “It’s clear that this has to be a 2+2+1 type model” (S. Storme, Personal Communication, July 6, 2016). It was at that moment Stacey knew KU-Edwards was the right partner. The administrators at KU turned out to be our allies and champions throughout the process. Dr. Ruthann Atchley and Stacey continued to meet on a several occasions, and in March 2017, they, along with Kim Bates, all attended the International Interpretation and Translation Research Symposium held at Gallaudet University in Washington, DC. Stacey and Dr. Atchley met with several stakeholders in the interpreter education field including Dr. Kim Kurz who was the Department Chair at the Rochester Institute of Technology’s National Technical Institute for the Deaf (RIT/NTID) at that time. During their meeting, Dr. Atchley invited Dr. Kurz to become their consultant regarding this project and to come to the University of Kansas to help them develop their curriculum.

The Curriculum Development Process

The first curriculum committee meeting was held September 13, 2017, at Johnson County Community College. Dr. Kurz attended via video-conferencing technology, and other new curriculum committee members, Dr. Petra Horn-Marsh, Bonnie Goben, Dr. Caroline Jewers, Interim Director of the SLLC, met with Stacey, Kim Bates, and Dr. Atchley in person. During this first meeting, Dr. Atchley summarized the work she and Stacey had completed and explained the university processes for new program development. The committee decided that the most efficient way to proceed with developing the curriculum would be a dedicated working retreat. Thus the first curriculum planning retreat was held December 3-4, 2017, for which Dr. Kurz flew to Kansas in order to participate.

For two, chilly, December days, Dr. Atchley facilitated group discussions using a model-process based on Collaborative Leadership in Action: A Field Guide for Creating Meetings That Make a Difference by Patrick Sanaghan and Paulette Gabriel. Using the theory of collaborative leadership whereby, “Collaboration involves a transparent and trusted communication process where all parties feel informed and can provide feedback and ideas to others with whom they work. Most importantly, collaboration involves shared decision making, where the decision rules are understood by everyone and all involved parties can inform or influence important decisions that can potentially impact them, especially resource allocation decisions.” (Sanaghan and Lohndorf, 2015, p. 6), the committee completed course sequences for the bachelor-level ASL & Deaf Studies program and the master-level Interpreting programs.

Part of the process included utilizing post-it notes to brainstorm what courses we thought should be offered in the programs. We were to write one course name and brief description of content per post-it note, and continue doing so until we had exhausted all of our possible ideas. Then we were asked to place these notes on a specific larger piece of poster paper. There were larger posters for each year of the program (years 1-4 for the bachelor’s level, and years 1-2 for the master’s level), divided into thirds—required courses, elective courses, and special course that would be nice to offer (see Figure 1). Committee members then took some time to review all the ideas posted. Next, Dr. Atchley provided a limited number of star-shaped stickers to each committee member to place on the most essential courses. This approach allowed us to generate many ideas, yet efficiently and effectively whittle them down to the most salient while building consensus on what courses the programs should include.

In March 2018, Dr. Atchley took a new position at the University of Southern Florida, and Dr. Shannon Portillo became the new Assistant Vice-Chancellor for Undergraduate Programs at the KU-Edwards campus. Dr. Portillo and Stacey met several times to get up to speed on the status of the program and continue to make progress.
The Current Status

During the 2018 summer months the curriculum committee began further re-envisioning these programs at the impetus of a substantial budget cut at KU. Dr. Portillo continued the role of program ally and champion by defending the need for this program to remain under development. Sometimes some of the most creative ideas are born from adversity—this is true in this case. After receiving the budget news, the curriculum committee convened for another working retreat; due to summer schedules Drs. Kurz and Jewers were unable to attend.

A Model for Consideration: More Dialogue and Research Needed

Inter-institutional collaborations are not limited to the institutes of higher education (JCCC/KU) but also includes collaborations with cultural institutions such as the Kansas School for the Deaf, and Museum of Deaf Arts, History, and Culture. We look forward to potentially partnering with these entities and others through future service learning opportunities for our students. This journey has been a rich learning experience for the authors of this paper. More dialogue and research are needed related to best practices for making these kinds of curricular changes, especially with some associate-level programs in interpreting that still in existence in our country. It is the authors’ hope to continue this kind of dialogue with other programs and educators in the field of interpreting and to update others regarding our process in the near future.
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Acknowledgments

The authors would like to recognize the following individuals for their commitment and ongoing work towards the goal of improved/enhanced interpreter education in Kansas.

- The Outreach Committee Members: Becky Yadrich, Robert Cooper, Darryl Luton, Patti Haskins, Bonnie Goben, Matt Gwynn, Jennifer Mason, Molly Pourhussin, Janie Prather, Brenda Clements.
- External Consultant: Kim Kurz
- Johnson County Community College’s ASL-English Interpreting Preparation (AEIP) Program faculty Ronald Symansky, Kimberly Kuhns, Darryl Luton, Bonnie Goben, Petra Horn-Marsh and Tamera Gwynn.
- Johnson County Community College’s AEIP Advisory Board members for their long standing commitment to interpreting and ASL education in Kansas.
- We wish to also thank the administration and their representatives at both Johnson County Community College and the University of Kansas Edwards and Lawrence campuses.
- Additional thanks to Debra Russell, Nigel Howard, Anna Witter-Merithew, and Amanda Smith for their feedback and guidance.

References


