

Overcoming Systemic Audism in Higher Education

Lloyd A. Godin

UT San Antonio

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Sofia Bahena, Ed.D.

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Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) students, staff, and faculty experience major inequities every day. Despite the legislation, mandated accommodation, and communication services that have improved access, obstacles remain. Access and accommodation have not removed the systemic barriers embedded within higher education nor have they ensured equitable inclusion (Bloom & Palmer, 2023; LaChapelle & Nelson, 2024; Palmer et al., 2019, 2023).

This becomes clear when DHH individuals are examined outside of the traditional disability framework. Contemporary Deaf scholarship recognizes Deaf identity, Deaf culture, and use of American Sign Language (ASL) as core components of the Deaf experience. The medical model, which has long treated deafness as a deficit requiring repair, is rejected. Instead, DHH individuals are viewed as a cultural and linguistic minority forced to navigate a world structured by hearing expectations (Baschnagel & Bell, 2023; Garberoglio et al., 2021). The distinction shifts the discussion from one of compliance to cultural and linguistic equity for DHH individuals.

The systemic nature of the barriers DHH individuals face is explained through the concept of audism. This paper defines audism as a system of beliefs and practices that privilege hearing people and hearing ways of being while marginalizing Deaf people, Deaf culture, and signed languages (Paulsen, 2016; Robinson & Henner, 2018; Wilks, 2025). It is embedded in the assumption that hearing is normative or superior. Audism has shaped higher education from the beginning through practices, expectations, and policies that privilege hearingness as the default standard (LaChapelle & Nelson, 2024). Consequently, higher education is Deaf-exclusive, requiring DHH individuals to develop strategies for persistence.

DHH individuals continue to report a lack of accessible classrooms and meetings, a reduced sense of campus belonging, a low Deaf-affirming climate, increased social marginalization, and the continuous burden of self-advocating for access. However, successful DHH individuals persist through resistant, navigational, familial, and social forms of capital, as well as mentorship, identity affirmation, and strategic navigation of hearing-dominant systems (Baschnagel & Bell, 2023; Garberoglio et al., 2021; LaChapelle & Nelson, 2024).

This brief asks: What experiences of audism are common among Deaf/Hard of Hearing (DHH) students, staff, and faculty within higher education? What resilience factors have successful DHH students, staff, and faculty used to persist and succeed despite the systemic audism they face? The current literature demonstrates that DHH individuals within higher education commonly experience systemic audism through communication barriers, inaccessible environments, low expectations, resistance to accommodation, social isolation, and linguistic and racial microaggressions. At the same time, the field demonstrates that successful DHH students, staff, and faculty persist by drawing upon Deaf community cultural wealth (DCCW), particularly self-advocacy, navigational capital, mentoring, Deaf identity, peer and family support, and resistant capital.

Systemic Audism in Higher Education

Hearing-Centered Institutional Structures

Audism is not a rare interpersonal issue. It is a persistent structure built into how higher education defines access, communication, belonging, and academic legitimacy. Institutions may provide accommodation, but access remains inconsistent. As a result, DHH students must continue to request support, respond to accommodation failures, and explain their communication needs to faculty and peers. Hearing-centered structures remain intact when

institutions treat access as an individual request. It should be a shared design responsibility.

Access is not just the individual accommodation process. It also depends on institutional attitudes, communication practices, technology, services, physical spaces, and opportunities for social engagement (Palmer et al., 2019).

The same pattern appears in more recent access and inclusion data. DHH students rated their postsecondary environments at only 65/100, with accommodating learning environments rated higher than campus connectedness and DHH-affirming climate (Palmer et al., 2023). This is significant because even the strongest area remained incomplete, while weaker scores show that institutions often stop short of creating belonging and affirmation. Access is not universally applicable, as many DHH students have other intersecting marginalized identities. Institutions may meet basic compliance requirements yet still fall short of creating learning environments that are fully inclusive, responsive, and affirming (Palmer et al., 2023).

Audism is most evident in classroom communication access. Real-time captioning can provide meaningful access, but student narratives show that reality is often more complicated. Access often depends on paperwork, faculty cooperation, service quality, accessibility resource coordination, technology, and the student's persistence. Some students described overcoming internal barriers, such as embarrassment or hesitation about using captioning. Others described external barriers, including delayed accommodation, inaccurate captioning, resistance from professors, peer pushback, and service lapses. Communication access is not simply about captioning provided as accommodation. It is about the service being timely, reliable, normalized, and supported across the classroom environment (Jolly et al., 2024).

Online learning environments show the same systemic barriers in a different format. LaChapelle and Nelson found that DHH students experienced inequitable access when extrinsic

support, effective technology, and consistent hearing assistance resources were unavailable. Online communication systems were not designed around DHH access needs, leaving participants feeling frustration, anger, alienation, and isolation. This finding is vital as online learning is often assumed to be flexible. Flexibility does not automatically equate to accessibility. Absent intentionality in design, online learning can reproduce hearing-centered norms. This occurs through inaccessible audio, inconsistent captions, weak faculty preparation, and technology that requires DHH students to do additional work to participate (LaChapelle & Nelson, 2024).

Institutional audism follows DHH individuals into research, internships, graduate education, and professional training. Positive interpersonal interactions in research settings can still result in DHH interns being denied full access (Majocha et al., 2018). Research experiences often depend on informal conversations, side comments, and mentoring relationships. When interpreters, captioning, or culturally competent mentors are absent, DHH students can be excluded from spaces where learning and professional connections occur. Therefore, DHH underrepresentation in STEM is better understood as a result of inaccessible research environments rather than student ability (Braun et al., 2017; Majocha et al., 2018).

The same structural barriers appear in doctoral and professional pathways. Wolsey et al. found that DHH doctoral students persisted when they had consistent access, supportive relationships, meaningful collaboration, and a sense of control within their programs. Their success depended especially on supportive and safe academic environments (Wolsey et al., 2023). Schooler et al. (2021) also found that DHH students training to become psychologists needed signed classroom communication, mentoring with DHH faculty, and faculty who actively resisted bias in internships and externships. These studies extend the argument beyond

undergraduate accommodation by showing that hearing-centered structures also shape who is welcomed into advanced academic and professional roles (Schooler et al., 2021; Wolsey et al., 2023).

Deficit Framing and Social Marginalization

Deficit framing appears throughout the literature as the second major expression of systemic audism. In higher education, DHH students are seen only through a disability lens. This neglects their identity as members of a linguistic and cultural community with distinct knowledge, language, and ways of learning. The Deaf community explicitly rejects this deficit view. As members of a linguistic and cultural minority, DHH students' experiences provide an important context for understanding how they navigate higher education. This shift is relevant because the problem is not DHH students' presence in higher education; the problem is the institution's tendency to treat hearing-centered norms as neutral and Deaf-centered practices as special adjustments (Johnson et al., 2020).

Deficit framing is especially visible in both classroom practices and hidden curriculum. Stapleton found that Black DHH college students experienced racism and audism through non-diverse curricula, hearing-centric evaluation methods, and faculty-student interactions that communicated low expectations or invisibility. The hidden curriculum included whose knowledge was excluded, whose communication style was privileged, and whether visual language and Black DHH experiences were treated as legitimate academic resources. This demonstrates that audism operates through ordinary classroom practices that assume hearing, speech, and written English are the default measures of intelligence and participation (Stapleton, 2016).

An extension of this analysis showed how Black DHH college alumni experienced intersecting racist and audist microaggressions through invisibility and trivialization. Participants described the absence of Black DHH administrators, faculty, mentors, role models, and culturally relevant campus programs as a form of invisibility. They described trivialization when educators moved too quickly past racist and audist incidents or minimized the harm caused by them. This also occurred when accommodations were deemed sufficient, even as the broader campus climate remained unsafe. Social marginalization is not only about access to communication. It is also about whether students see themselves represented, protected, believed, and valued within the institution (Stapleton & Croom, 2017).

National access and inclusion data show this pattern at a broader level. DHH students rated campus connectedness and DHH-affirming climate lower than accommodating learning environments. This suggests that classroom access does not equal social inclusion or cultural affirmation. DHH students may have access to the classroom while still feeling disconnected from campus life, leadership opportunities, peer relationships, and DHH-affirming spaces. In this way, institutions can meet a narrow definition of access while still failing to create a campus environment in which DHH students can experience belonging (Palmer et al., 2024).

Social marginalization is also intensified by intersectionality. Bloom and Palmer reported that DHH students enrolled in undergraduate education are diverse across gender, race, disability, veteran status, age, family structure, and first-generation status. Their report showed that an estimated 237,000 DHH students were enrolled in college, with nearly half having an additional disability, and DHH students were more likely to be first-generation students than hearing students. These data challenge any singular view of DHH student experience and push

against institutional responses that treat DHH students as a singular, uniform population (Bloom & Palmer, 2023).

Torres makes this point more specifically through the experiences of first-generation DHH Latinx college students. These students navigated linguistic and cultural complexity, parents' education levels, communication patterns between home and school, college preparation, minority-status stress, and the additional complexity of being DHH in Latinx families and educational systems. The successful graduates in the study had expectations of pursuing higher education, established goals, used support services, and demonstrated assertiveness and independence. These findings challenge deficit-based assumptions by showing that persistence was tied to student strengths, goals, and strategies, while also showing that institutions often overlook the cultural and linguistic realities of first-generation DHH Latinx students (Torres, 2019).

Deficit framing is not limited to students. Robinson and Henner argue that institutions often profit from ASL programs yet continue to marginalize the DHH community. Their critique highlights a contradiction: ASL is popular and financially beneficial to institutions, but DHH individuals remain underrepresented in faculty roles and unsupported in campus life. This analysis depicts how Deaf language and culture can be appropriated and consumed by hearing institutions without transforming the institution's relationship to DHH individuals. Central to this analysis is the idea that a campus cannot claim Deaf inclusion by treating ASL as an enrollment opportunity but Deaf expertise as optional (Robinson & Henner, 2018).

Weber et al. and Skyer and Cochell offer a related challenge to deficit framing. They center Deaf aesthetics, multimodality, ASL video-publications, and critical Deaf pedagogy. These approaches do not frame Deaf ways of knowing as barriers to overcome. Instead, they

present them as sources of design, pedagogy, and academic power. Weber et al. (2024) found that using Deaf aesthetics to redesign curricula reduced cognitive load and improved learning for a DeafBlind student. It also benefited hearing students. Skyer & Cochell (2020) similarly argued that ASL and visuospatial modalities can resist audism in pedagogy and research. They do this by challenging the assumption that academic knowledge must be organized through hearing-centered and text-centered forms (Skyer & Cochell, 2020; Weber et al., 2024).

Audism as a Systemic Pattern

Audism appears across a variety of higher education contexts. It also appears when Black DHH and DHH Latino/a students are made invisible, and when policies provide access without affirming Deaf language and culture. Higher education may comply with legal access requirements while still remaining structurally hearing-centered (LaChapelle & Nelson, 2024; Palmer et al., 2019; Stapleton & Croom, 2017; Wilks, 2025).

The strongest pattern is the gap between accommodation and inclusion. Accommodations alone are insufficient to address systemic audism. They are necessary, but they remain limited because institutions continue to operate using hearing-centered norms. A captioned lecture does not automatically create belonging. An interpreter does not automatically produce faculty accountability. An accessibility services office does not automatically transform the hidden curriculum. Legal protection does not automatically dismantle audist assumptions (LaChapelle & Nelson, 2024; Palmer et al., 2019, 2023; Robinson & Henner, 2018).

Institutions may provide interpreters, captioning, accessibility services, online tools, and formal policies. However, DHH individuals still report barriers to full participation across academic, social, and professional spaces. For this reason, the literature pushes the field beyond a compliance model and toward an equity model grounded in access, belonging, affirmation, Deaf

expertise, and institutional responsibility (Jolly et al., 2024; Palmer et al., 2023; Robinson & Henner, 2018). Equity cannot be measured only by the presence of accommodation. Equity must be measured by whether DHH students can participate fully without repeated access labor. It must also account for social isolation, cultural erasure, and the pressure to prove legitimacy in hearing-centered spaces (LaChapelle & Nelson, 2024; Palmer et al., 2019, 2023; Robinson & Henner, 2018).

Audism and persistence are therefore intertwined. Audism creates the barriers that make persistence necessary, while persistence reveals the forms of capital DHH students use to resist those barriers. This relationship appears across undergraduate education, community college, STEM mentoring, online learning, doctoral education, psychology training, captioning services, and the experiences of Black DHH and DHH Latinx students. This pattern appears across multiple higher education contexts. Therefore, the problem is not limited to one campus, office, professor, or technology. It reflects a broader institutional logic that treats hearing-centered education as normal and Deaf-centered education as supplemental (Bowman & Crowe, 2023; Schooler et al., 2021; Torres, 2019).

Resilience Factors

Self-Advocacy and Navigational Persistence

DHH students persist through higher education by developing self-advocacy and navigational capital. However, the research does not frame this persistence as proof that institutions are inclusive. Instead, persistence often reveals the extra labor students perform because institutions are not designed for them. Johnson et al. found that DHH community college students drew on resistant, navigational, social, and familial capital to access and persist in

higher education. This shifts the focus from what DHH students lack towards strengths, relationships, and strategies used to navigate institutions not built for them (Johnson et al., 2020).

Navigational capital is especially important in hearing-dominant institutions. DHH students must learn how to protect their access, identity, and academic goals. Listman and Dingus-Eason found that DHH mentors supported STEM mentees by modeling professional identity, building self-advocacy, and connecting them to broader scholarly networks. Navigation is not simply knowing where to file paperwork. It is learning how to claim space in academic fields where Deaf professionals are underrepresented and where hearing norms often define what a scientist looks and sounds like (Listman & Dingus-Eason, 2018).

Self-advocacy appears in the literature as both a strength and a burden. In Jolly et al.'s study, some students accessed real-time captioning only after navigating delayed services, faculty resistance, embarrassment, and prior negative experiences. These stories should not be idealized. When students must repeatedly explain or troubleshoot their access needs, the institution shifts the work of inclusion onto them. The same act can show student agency while also revealing structural failure (Jolly et al., 2024).

LaChapelle and Nelson similarly found that extrinsic support in online learning positively impacted self-advocacy, autonomy, engagement, emotion, and the availability and effectiveness of technology-assisted hearing resources. Self-advocacy was strongest when DHH students had accessible structures behind them. It was less effective when they were left to fight for access alone. The literature challenges the idea that resilience alone explains DHH student success. Self-advocacy can be empowering when supported, but exhausting when institutions fail to share responsibility. DHH students can and do advocate for themselves, but equitable systems should

reduce the amount of self-advocacy required for basic participation (LaChapelle & Nelson, 2024).

Baschnagel and Bell add another layer by connecting DHH students' unique stressors to coping strategies and drinking-to-cope motivations. They found that DHH students endorsed greater levels of emotion-oriented and task-oriented coping than hearing students, while also reporting higher drinking-to-cope motivations, particularly among those using greater emotion-focused coping. The costs of navigating hearing-centered environments are not only academic. Coping is part of persistence, but some coping patterns may reflect the emotional weight of isolation, labor for equal access, and minority stress (Baschnagel & Bell, 2023).

Craig et al.'s work on the Adapted COPE Scale also helps frame coping as a necessary but underexamined part of Deaf college persistence. Their study showed the importance of measuring coping strategies in ways that are reliable and valid for Deaf college students, rather than simply importing tools normed around hearing populations. This is methodologically and conceptually important. If the field uses instruments that do not account for Deaf cultural, linguistic, and access experiences, it risks misreading how Deaf students manage stress and persist (Wolf Craig et al., 2011).

Deaf Identity, Community, and Relational Support

A consistent pattern across the literature is that persistence is shaped by Deaf identity, community, peer support, family support, and mentoring. Bowman and Crowe found that social connection is especially important for DHH college students because language access makes relationships possible without intermediaries. Their study of emergency online learning at Gallaudet showed that students experienced positive emotional adjustment overall despite the disruptions of COVID-19, and the discussion pointed to institutional and community supports as

part of that outcome. The significance of this finding is not that online learning was easy; rather, Deaf-centered environments can buffer disruption because language, culture, and community are already built into the institution (Bowman & Crowe, 2023).

Community support also appears as a central form of cultural wealth. Braun et al. developed the Deaf Mentoring Survey around a community cultural wealth framework, identifying factors such as Deaf community capital, asking for accommodations, and communication access. Braun et al. found that mentoring was strongest when DHH mentees worked with mentors who were Deaf or familiar with the Deaf community. Effective mentoring is not culturally neutral. DHH students benefit when mentors understand Deaf culture, communication access, and the barriers students face within hearing-centered institutions (Braun et al., 2017).

Wolsey et al. reached a similar conclusion with DHH doctoral students. Mentoring mattered, but it had to include access, supportive relationships, collaboration, and a safe academic environment. A safe space was not merely emotional comfort; it represented an academic environment where DHH students could access communication, build relationships, collaborate, and maintain a sense of control over their education. This connects directly to persistence because doctoral education is not only about coursework and research productivity. It is also about whether students are seen as legitimate scholars and whether their intellectual work is supported within accessible relationships (Wolsey et al., 2023).

Schooler et al. found similar patterns in psychology education and training. DHH students emphasized the importance of signed classroom communication and mentoring opportunities with DHH faculty, while also describing peer conflict, identity tensions, and discrimination in internships and externships. The need for DHH faculty is not symbolic. DHH

faculty provide language access, cultural understanding, professional modeling, and direct resistance to biases that hearing faculty may not recognize or challenge. Representation is not only a diversity goal. It is a structural condition that helps DHH students persist (Schooler et al., 2021).

Family and community support also shape persistence for DHH students with intersecting racial, ethnic, and first-generation identities. Torres found that successful first-generation DHH Latinx students set goals, used support services, and demonstrated assertiveness and independence. These strengths existed alongside family, linguistic, and cultural complexity. Stapleton and Croom found that Black DHH alumni often sought mentors and role models outside the institution when campus spaces failed to affirm Black DHH identity. Across both studies, persistence depended on relational support, but students often had to find that support beyond the institution's formal structures (Stapleton & Croom, 2017; Torres, 2019).

Deaf identity should be understood as an academic resource. Johnson et al. (2020) showed that DHH students used social and familial capital in community college, while Stapleton (2016) showed that Black DHH students used community cultural wealth to resist racist and audist microaggressions. Deaf identity, Black DHH identity, DHH Latinx identity, ASL, peer networks, and chosen family are not peripheral to academic success. They are part of the knowledge base students use to survive, interpret, resist, and persist within institutions that often misunderstand them (Johnson et al., 2020; Stapleton, 2016).

Resistance as Survival and Success

Resistance appears throughout the literature as both survival and success. Stapleton defined Black DCCW as the knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts used by Black DHH people to survive and resist macro- and micro-forms of oppression. This framework is necessary

because it refuses to interpret persistence as assimilation. Black DHH students did not simply adjust to racist and audist classrooms; they named inequity, relied on community, drew from resistant capital, and challenged oppressive assumptions. Their persistence, therefore, functioned as a counternarrative to deficit explanations of DHH student outcomes (Stapleton, 2016).

Skyer and Cochell also frame resistance as epistemological and pedagogical. Their analysis of ASL video-publication argued that Deaf pedagogy and research can resist audism by centralizing ASL, visuospatial modalities, and Deaf counternarratives. Resistance is not only a student behavior; it can also be a scholarly method and a pedagogical design. When Deaf knowledge is produced and shared in ASL and multimodal formats, it challenges the assumption that academic legitimacy must be filtered through hearing-centered norms of language, publication, and classroom communication (Skyer & Cochell, 2020).

Weber et al.'s (2024) work on Deaf aesthetics extends this resistant framework into curriculum design. Deaf-centered design can transform educational interaction by reducing cognitive load, improving learning, and benefiting both DHH and hearing participants. This is resistance because it does not begin with accommodation as a retrofit. Instead, it begins with Deaf ways of learning, seeing, touching, interacting, and processing as design principles. The implication for higher education is clear: institutions should not merely adapt hearing-centered curriculum after DHH students arrive; they should redesign curriculum around Deaf-informed pedagogical knowledge from the beginning (Weber et al., 2024).

Robinson and Henner's argument about crippling the university also frames resistance as institutional transformation. They argued that ASL and Deaf Studies can help universities engage disability in more critical ways. However, this requires institutions to support DHH students, DHH faculty and staff, and Deaf communities rather than simply benefiting from ASL's

popularity. This distinction is relevant. An institution can expand ASL enrollment while still propagating audism if DHH faculty are excluded, DHH students lack access, and Deaf community knowledge is treated as marketable content rather than intellectual authority (Robinson & Henner, 2018).

Resistance also appears in the legal framing offered by Wilks. Deaf legal theory challenges the law's hearing bias by naming how legal systems frame DHH individuals through hearing assumptions. For higher education, student resistance often occurs within policy structures that are already shaped by audism. When students challenge inaccessible communication, limited DHH faculty and staff representation, insufficient captioning, or hearing-centered evaluation, they are not requesting special treatment. They are challenging the assumption that hearing norms should define education for everyone (Wilks, 2025).

Patterns of Persistence

Across the literature, DHH persistence is not presented as simple individual determination. Rather, persistence is made possible through self-advocacy, coping strategies, navigational capital, social capital, familial support, DHH mentors, Deaf identity, and resistant capital. These forms of cultural wealth are powerful, but they also expose the unequal distribution of responsibility within higher education. Institutions should not require Deaf students to exert so much energy to make higher education accessible for themselves. The goal should not be to produce students who are endlessly resilient in the face of audism; the goal should be to create institutions where DHH students' language, culture, knowledge, and access are assumed from the start (Baschnagel & Bell, 2023; Johnson et al., 2020; Listman & Dingus-Eason, 2018).

Implications for Higher Education

The literature points toward transformation, not accommodation alone. Deaf aesthetics, ASL video-publications, Deaf mentoring, and DHH faculty representation all support a Deaf-centered model of higher education. Culturally competent captioning, centralized accommodation funding, DHH student centers, Deaf-led ASL programs, and DCCW further strengthen this model (Braun et al., 2017; Palmer et al., 2023; Robinson & Henner, 2018; Skyer & Cochell, 2020; Weber et al., 2024).

These studies do not simply call for institutions to add services after barriers appear. They call for institutions to redesign learning, communication, research, mentoring, policy, and campus life. In this model, DHH students, faculty, and staff are not treated as exceptions to the hearing norm. This is the central contribution of the literature: systemic audism persists, but Deaf community knowledge offers a framework for building something better (Palmer et al., 2023; Robinson & Henner, 2018; Skyer & Cochell, 2020; Weber et al., 2024).

The brief asked two questions. What experiences of audism are common among Deaf/Hard of Hearing (DHH) students, staff, and faculty within higher education? What resiliency factors have successful DHH students, staff, and faculty used to persist and succeed in spite of the systemic audism they face? The literature showed that Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) individuals within higher education consistently experience systemic audism through barriers in communication, learning environments that are inaccessible, low expectations, resistance to accommodation, social isolation, and an intersection of linguistic and racial microaggressions. However, DHH students, staff, and faculty are successful and persist when they draw on DCCW, specifically self-advocacy, navigational capital, mentoring, Deaf identity, peer/family support, and resistant capital.

The implications are clear. DHH inclusion in higher education cannot remain limited to legal compliance. Accessibility services are essential for inclusion; however, they do not, and cannot, automatically ensure full participation in campus life. DHH individuals continue to navigate systems where hearing-centered norms are the default for membership (Palmer et al., 2024). Higher education must move beyond the accommodation-based model toward a Deaf-affirming equity model that values DHH individuals as members of a cultural and linguistic community worthy of inclusion (Baschnagel & Bell, 2023; Garberoglio et al., 2021).

Access must be treated not as the sole responsibility of accessibility services but as an institution-wide responsibility. Accessibility services offices coordinate essential support. However, they cannot independently change the full campus experience. Classrooms and advising interactions, campus communication, hiring practices, student life, and overall institutional culture influence the campus experience of DHH individuals. True access is more than providing accommodation. It is the creation of a campus where DHH students, staff, and faculty can belong, participate, and be valued in a Deaf-affirming environment (Palmer et al., 2024). DHH individuals are left isolated and disconnected and are repeatedly forced to advocate for basic access when institutions fail to address audistic barriers.

Higher education institutions need campus-wide standards for equitable access instead of expecting DHH individuals or their allies to identify access problems to be corrected after the fact. Communication equity must be woven into the fabric of higher education institutional operations from the outset. Interpreters and CART services are already required under the ADA & The Rehabilitation Act Section 504. However, full access goes beyond those services. It also requires captioned media, visually based teaching practices, accessible online courses, access to

campus experiences outside the classroom, and faculty training on DHH inclusion (LaChapelle & Nelson, 2024; Palmer et al., 2024).

Persistence is more than just access inside the classroom. Institutions must intentionally support DHH individuals outside the classroom. Meaningful support requires access to Deaf peers and mentorship, campus-wide visibility of ASL, and spaces that affirm Deaf culture and language (Garberoglio et al., 2021; Palmer et al., 2024). To accomplish this, institutions should hire Deaf Faculty and staff. They should support Deaf-led student organizations. Mentoring opportunities that value Deaf identity and cultural knowledge must be made available.

The focus must be on the cultural-linguistic equity framework. Accessibility law remains essential. However, it is not enough when used as the only lens for understanding DHH experiences. Disability-only models that only ask whether the required accommodation was provided are outdated. A cultural-linguistic equity model asks whether institutional systems continue to uphold hearing norms that marginalize Deaf language, identity, and ways of knowing (Baschnagel & Bell, 2023; Garberoglio et al., 2021). This shifts the focus of responsibility. DHH individuals are no longer expected to fit into hearing-centered systems. Instead, institutions should redesign existing systems to allow DHH individuals to participate as full linguistic, cultural, intellectual, and social members of campus life.

Institutions need greater accountability. Higher education cannot continue waiting for DHH individuals to identify barriers after they occur (LaChapelle & Nelson, 2024; Palmer et al., 2019). Institutions need to proactively design access, belonging, and participation into the campus-wide experience. Institutions need to examine whether their campus climate is Deaf-affirming. They must also track repeated access failures and commit funding to communication

equity. Decision-making and policy evaluation should include DHH individuals to ensure that belonging and participation are built into institutional practice rather than assumed.

Each college experience is unique. However, common experiences are influenced by factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, disability status, socioeconomic status, and language background (Garberoglio et al., 2021; Palmer et al., 2023). Further research should examine how audism intersects with race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, disability, language background, and institutional type to better understand how different DHH individuals experience and resist exclusion in higher education.

NOTE: The Use of AI

Several short assignments were given to “build up” to the final product. AI was used for the short assignments with all prompts previously shared. Grammarly and Microsoft Word were both used to correct spelling and grammatical errors. Zotero was used for citations and references. When metadata for the sources was not loaded by Zotero, AI was used to provide the information from the articles.¹ AI was also used to “review” the final product to ensure all assignment requirements were met.²

¹ <https://chatgpt.com/share/69fcb363-9cd0-83ea-8240-0dbc17320d41>

² <https://chatgpt.com/share/6a00ff55-86e8-83ea-8c35-03070cdefe08>

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