

EVALUATION OF THE  
COURT REPORTING PROGRAM  
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The Court Reporting Program is a skill-based program that "is designed to prepare the student to meet the qualifications to sit for and pass the state certified shorthand reporters exam." The Court Reporting Program is an integral part of Humphreys College and encourages its students to seek a Bachelor of Science degree in realtime captioning and reporting, thus requiring students to take additional academic courses.

**Program Objectives**

Though further detailed in Appendix A, the objectives of the Court Reporting Program are listed below:

1. To develop mastery and application of a conflict-free machine shorthand language.
2. To develop a minimum of 97.5% accuracy in the transcription of live single-voice dictation material dictated at 200 wpm.
3. To develop a minimum of 97.5% accuracy in the transcription of live three-voice deposition material dictated at 180 wpm.
4. To develop a minimum of 97.5% accuracy in the transcription of live four-voice court material dictated at 200 wpm.
5. To gain knowledge of the general and special terminologies likely to be encountered in court proceedings, depositions, hearings, and other meetings.
6. To gain a thorough knowledge of the computer technology currently in use by court reporters in performing realtime computer-aided transcription.
7. To develop fluency and accuracy in reading steno notes aloud in class, as directed by the instructor.
8. To develop a thorough knowledge of transcript formats used by court reporters.
9. To develop a thorough knowledge of research materials and techniques available to court reporters.

This list of objectives shows at a glance that Court Reporting is different from many other programs of study normally associated with a college education. Even when compared to hands-on training in advanced chemistry or biology programs, court reporting requires very specific levels of accuracy of its students. In some ways this is a pass or fail program, with each level requiring high degrees of competency and skill before a student can be allowed into the next higher level. In addition, very diligent and intelligent students may be unable to attain adequate mastery of the

"skill" involved in realtime transcription, and one student may take a year more or longer than another student to attain a specific speed or accuracy.

Given this understanding, an evaluation of the program will be unable to focus on graduation rates or grade point averages. Rather, this evaluation limits itself to a general overview of the program and focuses on the degree to which stated objectives are being met. Information is gathered from a variety of sources but depends primarily upon surveys and interviews with present students in the program, previous students within the program, and employers likely to hire these students.

### **Student Retention, Graduation Rates, and General Services**

The number of students enrolled in the Court Reporting Program has varied over the last five years. The beginning of the 1998 academic year showed 70 enrollees, yet the following year this had dropped to 32. The numbers have slowly risen and held steady since then, the Fall 2002 quarter showing 55 enrollees and the Summer 2003 quarter, normally lower than the rest of the year, showing 49 students. 2001 records show a graduation/retention rate of 27%, low when compared to the overall college average of 34%. Of all students enrolled in the Court Reporting Program in Spring 2002, 42 were in the certificate program, 6 were in the associates program, and 9 were in the bachelors program, for a total of 57.

Such inconsistent student enrollment rates may also be a part of a normal cyclic pattern many other court reporting schools experience. A 2002 report by the National Court Reporters Association titled The Status of Reporter Education notes that "because of the length of time it takes to complete their education, the school enrollment and professional market cycles are out of alignment." (p. 5) This same report criticizes the lack of resources court reporting programs devote to follow up on student prospects, a potential weakness that the Humphreys College Court Reporting Program exacerbates by failing to follow up on students who drop-out or develop specific plans to increase student retention.

The 2002 NCR Report also studied the average amount of time it takes for a student to go through a program, 64 months to become a licensed CSR in California. (p. 9) Humphreys College compares favorably with an average of only 54 months. The five year pass rate of 38% exceeds that of the state's 33.5% pass rate. In addition, court reporting students at Humphreys College have the additional option of obtaining a four-year degree during their period of study.

Advising within the department is accomplished through different methods, and there are certain components of the advising process that are required by the Court Reporters Board of California (CRBC). The students are divided by speed level between the three full-time faculty members for degree and registration advising. Students are required to obtain the advisor's signature on each quarterly registration form. In addition, students must schedule an annual advising appointment where the student's progress is discussed as required by the CRBC. At this meeting, the student completes an advising form that asks specific questions about their progress and their awareness of options and changes within the court reporting profession.

There is a procedure in place for advising students who must enroll for a machine class for which they have received two "IP" (in progress) grades. The student must complete a form, "Petition to Re-enroll in Machine Courses," which is then signed by the program coordinator and the dean of instruction. Upon completion of four consecutive quarters at the same speed level, a meeting is scheduled with the student, the program coordinator, and the dean of instruction to review the student's progress (attendance, homework, class work, etc.). At this meeting, alternate programs and career choices may be discussed.

Career advising is accomplished within the classroom through discussions of current trends in legislation and career opportunities that are published in professional periodicals and other publications. Students are also encouraged to attend professional workshops and conventions whenever possible and are encouraged to join professional associations of court reporters. Speakers are brought in to address many different facets of the profession, and field trips are occasionally taken to the courthouse or to a deposition firm. Students participate in mock trial opportunities at law schools or through high school events. Students are also encouraged to join online mentoring programs which match students with a working reporters.

Several resources are available for students who require tutoring in specific subject areas. The full-time faculty members are available to assess and discuss plans that might assist a student who is struggling at a speed plateau. Students requesting assistance in areas of English, grammar, or punctuation are encouraged to seek the assistance of Dr. Michael Duffett. Dr. Duffett, through the tutoring center, also administers the English qualifier exams which the students must pass prior to sitting for the qualifier examinations. He is also available to assist students studying for the state certification exam. Full-time faculty member Kay Reindl conducts a six-week review course for those students who have qualified to take the state exam. The sessions are held twice weekly and prepare the students in the areas of professional practice, ethics, medical and legal terminology, and knowledge of the codes and laws relating to the court reporting profession.

The rapid advances in technology affect the court reporting program in various ways. The need for the students to be current with emerging technologies in the field appears early in the program. The emergence of realtime writing requires that students be better writers on the shorthand machine and that they be proficient with many software applications as well as hardware. These changes in the field require a commitment by the college to provide the tools (hardware/software) necessary to meet these advances. The building plans for the new campus allocate a designated space that will serve as the court reporting lab during the day and as a classroom at night. This lab is expected to be equipped with current computers and software so the students will be able to practice and master realtime writing skills.

These technologies are not a threat to the profession, but must be embraced by reporters because they make the reporter even more indispensable. Computers have allowed reporters to provide more services to their clients and to expand career opportunities for those who possess steno writing skills. In anticipation of the shortage of qualified broadcast captioners that will be required by 2006 to meet the rules of the ADA in regard to TV closed captioning, federal grant money has been awarded to schools willing to train in this specific area of reporting. Although the department has not looked into this area seriously, it is recommended that it be explored through networking with schools that do have broadcast captioning programs.

Finally, internal review by the Court Reporting Program in 1999 led to the requirement for all students to take two (2) quarters of theory rather than the standard one quarter of theory. Instructors were aware of student problems integrating a single quarter of theory into their work. When queried, schools around the country had noted similar problems followed by an increase in more time being devoted to the study of theory. Students at Humphreys College appear satisfied with this increase and instructors have voiced approval of increased student competency. A final proposal for this change in August 1999 is included in the Appendices.

### **Prior Reports and Reviews**

In March 2003 the Office of Examination Resources, a section of California's Department of Consumer Affairs, released a validation report on job knowledge and competency of certified shorthand reporters in California. The study reviewed reporting skills, language skills, professional practices, transcript production, products and technology applied to the profession of shorthand reporter. On average, the majority of reporters surveyed had been licensed for fewer than five years, worked in an urban setting, worked forty or more hours per week, considered themselves freelance reporters, and spent the majority of their time reporting depositions (page 16). This report was useful in providing some basis upon which to evaluate the objectives of the Court Reporting Program at Humphreys College and in the creation of a survey to gather information from students of this program.

On August 7, 2003, the Court Reporters Board released a School Performance Review of the Humphreys College Court Reporting Program. The review covered teacher credentials, positive daily attendance, student disclosure, academic and skill development requirements, qualifier exams, library and equipment resources, and other miscellaneous issues. In all areas the Program was found to be in compliance with Board requirements, the only area in question being a lack of information on the reasons why or professional direction of students that dropped out within one year after enrollment. No recommendations were made within the report for changes to be made to the Court Reporting Program at Humphreys College.

### **Program Evaluation Procedures**

Members of the Court Reporting Program Evaluation Committee met throughout the summer and fall of 2003 to design and carry out the evaluation process. Content areas were broken into three areas, focusing on the relationship between student and employer findings and the actual Court Reporting Program objectives. Two separate meetings with students were held in August 2003 and anonymous surveys were handed out for students to turn in on their own. Past students were then to be contacted to determine present place of residence, surveys then being mailed to them. Employers have also been contacted, primarily within the area of court reporting and captioning services.

### **Evaluation Findings**

The only areas of evaluation that have been completed as of late December 2003 are the student focus groups and anonymous surveys filled out by students presently attending Humphreys College and the surveys returned by students who had graduated or left the Program over the last ten years.

#### *Present Students*

More than forty Court Reporting students attended one of the two sessions held to discuss the Court Reporting Program. Most had very positive points to make about the program. The single area of concern among all students, apart from the frustration of not picking up speed as quickly as they would like, was with the lack of computer systems and software to help in obtaining immediate feedback on speed and precision.

Written surveys were handed out to all students with the instruction to not put their name on their paper and to hand the survey in to the chair of the evaluation committee, Richard Chabot. Approximately 30% (13) surveys were returned. While there were a variety of personal gripes with the college, only a few specific areas of contention stood out in surveys or the focus groups.

Generally, in the minds of the students the Court Reporting Program appears to be meeting its stated objectives.

Specific areas students want given more attention are as follows:

- \* The college needs to increase the number of available computers and (CAT) software so that realtime transcription can be available for all students, in or out of class. Preferable would be a computer lab not accessible to the general student body.

- \* Fresh dictation material, material more immediately relevant to the court system, and less repetition. It was also requested that all instructors be certified.

- \* While students appreciate the English and grammar courses, they would prefer that more academics be offered in the mornings. Students would also like a class on how to put together and punctuate transcripts.

### *Past Students*

A survey with a stamped self-addressed envelope was sent to graduates of the Program as well as to a list of recent students who had left the Program for unknown reasons. The survey was similar to that given to those students presently studying at Humphreys College but included questions on their employment status.

Of the 15 completed surveys, 14 had attempted the CSR exam with 13 passes, 11 currently working as CSRs, 3 of them as official court reporters. Thus, the majority of surveys returned came from successful reporters. Their evaluation of the program during the 1990s was very positive. A majority saw a need for more training in formatting deposition and court transcripts. A majority also indicate a need for more attention to have been given to computer-aided transcription and particularly to real-time captioning and reporting.

Given that these students graduated and are presently using the skills gained from their studies in the 1990s, we can hardly use their comments to suggest change in the present Court Reporting Program. However, in a comparison with surveys received from students presently within the Program, both groups agree that real-time transcription needs more attention. It is recommended that the Program research and invest in the modern computers and software necessary to initiate such an improvement if students are to retain their high rating of the Program. In addition, while those who are successful as CSRs rate the Program highly, more information from those who are dissatisfied and leave the Program is called for. Perhaps in the future a yearly follow-up for those students who fail to return can be initiated and used in annual reviews. Finally, the objectives of the Court Reporting Department appear to meet the needs/expectations/memories of past students, indicating some degree of consistency within the Program.

### *Employers*

A non-random list of potential employers was assembled by committee members, focusing on those legal and deposition firms located in the San Joaquin, Sacramento, and Bay areas. Past students were requested for referrals to their employers, but the majority were chosen from telephone directories. Employers were called by telephone, told about the survey, and requested for a specific person to whom the survey could be sent. Only a handful of surveys have been returned thus far,

but the full list of potential employers has not yet been exhausted and this is seen as a part of an on-going evaluation process, not a one-time, one-shot exercise.

The survey focused on what employers were looking for in a court-reporter. Though the survey was primarily constructed for ease of completion with maximum validity, open-ended areas allowed employers a way to discuss their own concerns or preferences about court reporters. It was hoped that this kind of feed-back would inform the Court Reporting Program about how well its objectives met employer experiences and needs. While it is difficult to generalize with so few returned surveys, it is no surprise that deposition firms and the courts both emphasize accuracy and speed. Unfortunately, none of the returned surveys indicate a willingness by employers of court reporters to sit on a temporary advisory committee that could further the objectives and aims of the program and its students.

### **Recommendations**

Formal recommendations by the committee must wait until information has also been completely gathered from employers of graduates of the Court Reporting Program. However, at present, committee recommendations include the following:

- Invest in the hardware and software necessary to allow all students daily access to learn and practice real-time technologies. Dedicate a space as the Court Reporting lab, equipped with the hardware and software, and supervised as required by the CRBC. Ideally, for security purposes, the hardware would be for the exclusive use of the court reporting students.
- Broaden the range of options for students enrolled in the program. The priority of the program should be to prepare students for passing the CSR exam, but it should not be the only level at which success is to be measured.
- Require that all full-time instructors possess either a bachelor's degree or a current CSR license. Full-time instructors should be encouraged and have access to obtaining the certification of Certified Reporting Instructor (offered by NCRA), if desired.
- The department should hold annual meetings with current students so that hidden complaints or misunderstandings can be aired and discussed.
- Annually gather follow-up information on students who have left the program during the year (exit surveys).
- Organize the occasional and temporary advisory committee from local employers of court reporters as well as practicing graduates of the program. Such a committee could quickly review relevant data on the existing program while providing input on the changing realities of court reporters and their potential employers.