

Deaf and hard-of-hearing scientists call for equity, inclusion

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Providing some basic standards of support will greatly increase diversity in fields of science and medicine, a group of hard of hearing and deaf scientists argue in a perspective published in the journal *Frontiers in*

Education.

The perspective was co-authored by more than 40 deaf and hard of [hearing](#) engineers, scientists and clinicians from around the world, including four from Oregon Health & Science University.

The Oregon Hearing Research Center at OHSU includes nine faculty, staff and graduate students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Many co-authored a 2017 viewpoint published by the journal *Science* calling for a distributed network of peer mentors across academia for deaf and hard of hearing trainees, rather than a single specialized institution.

The new publication builds on the previous publication by laying out a series of concrete actions for professional societies.

"We strongly believe in paying it forward," said co-lead author Brad N. Buran, Ph.D., an OHSU research instructor in the hearing research center who is deaf. "As we become successful scientists, we have the expectations that we will support deaf and hard of hearing trainees who are working their way up the ladder."

The new publication lays out five pillars to support deaf and hard of hearing scientists for professional societies representing the fields of science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine:

Foster peer-mentor groups

Unlike traditional mentoring, the authors write that peer mentorship refers to formal or informal mentoring among people who share a common identity, including hearing loss. It can be especially valuable for underrepresented communities and people with disabilities.

Proactively provide equal access

Professional conferences should provide captioning without expecting attendees to request it.

Buran noted that captioning talks and symposia at conferences benefits plenty of people, including non-native English speakers, attendees seated farther from the stage, or older attendees experiencing mild forms of hearing loss. He added that this is just as important in the workplace, including lab meetings and seminars.

"Collaboration and communication are key elements of our discipline," Buran said. "Historically, great burden has been placed on us to ensure we have the accommodations we need for communicating with our colleagues."

Ease financial burdens

The authors cite the Association for Research in Otolaryngology, or ARO, as an example of a professional society that has provided financial support for deaf and hard of hearing trainees to receive [financial support](#) to attend conferences, furthering their scientific and professional growth, and promoting equity for trainees with disabilities.

Recruit for leadership positions

Diverse perspectives at the senior level of an organization helps to foster innovation. To that end, the authors call for scientific and professional organizations to provide opportunities for deaf and hard of hearing faculty and trainees to on take leadership roles. For example, John Brigande, Ph.D., associate professor of otolaryngology/head and neck surgery in the OHSU School of Medicine, is hard of hearing and serves

on the leadership council of the ARO.

Establish a culture of inclusion and equity

The authors call for scientific and professional organizations to not only take steps to support their diverse members, but encourage all members of the organizations to reflect, grow and advocate for inclusion and equity in their professional and personal lives.

In addition to Buran, the other lead authors of the publication include Julia Jones Huyck, Ph.D., associate professor of speech pathology and audiology at Kent State University; and Kelsey L. Anbuhl, Ph.D., a postdoctoral fellow in the Center of Neural Science at New York University.

The two senior authors are J. Tilak Ratnanather, D.Phil., associate research professor of biomedical engineering at Johns Hopkins University, and Peter S. Steyger, Ph.D., professor of medicine in the Creighton University School of Medicine. Steyger was previously a professor in the hearing research center at OHSU and now directs the Translational Hearing Center at Creighton.

More information: Julia Jones Huyck et al, Supporting Equity and Inclusion of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Individuals in Professional Organizations, *Frontiers in Education* (2021). [DOI: 10.3389/feduc.2021.755457](https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2021.755457)

Henry J. Adler et al, Community network for deaf scientists, *Science* (2017). [DOI: 10.1126/science.aan2330](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aan2330)

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