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# The rural interpreter: perspectives on professional development and professional partnerships

Erin Trimble  
*Western Oregon University*

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# The Rural Interpreter: Perspectives on Professional Development and Professional Partnerships

Erin Trimble  
*Western Oregon University*

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- Thesis  
 Field Study  
 Professional Project

Titled:

THE RURAL INTERPRETER: PERSPECTIVES ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND PROFESSIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

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Graduate Student: Erin McHenry Trimble

Candidate for the degree of : Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies

*and hereby certify that in our opinion it is worthy of acceptance as partial fulfillment  
of the requirements of this master's degree.*

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**THE RURAL INTERPRETER: PERSPECTIVES ON PROFESSIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT AND PROFESSIONAL PARTNERSHIPS**

By

Erin McHenry Trimble

A thesis submitted to  
Western Oregon University

In partial fulfillment of  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies

December 2014

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When sorrows like sea billows roll; Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, It is well, it is well, with my soul" (Spafford, 1976).

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"The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts  
and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Philippians 4:7

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## ABSTRACT

### THE RURAL INTERPRETER: PERSPECTIVES ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND PROFESSIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

By

Erin McHenry Trimble

Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies

College of Education

Western Oregon University

December 2014

There currently exists a limited body of knowledge on rural interpreters. What little research has been done has looked at rural interpreters based in educational settings. This study is an opening look at interpreters who maintain a community based practice in a rural county, and is an initial appraisal of the professional development needs of rural interpreters. I examine if current trainings are designed with rural interpreters in mind, and if rural interpreters are able to acquire new skills, techniques, and knowledge that are applicable to their communities.

This study sought to answer the question: How can the implementation of a structured interprofessional learning community aid the professional development of a rural sign language interpreter?

I collected data on three categories: the general background of my participants, how rural sign language interpreters access and perceive current professional development opportunities, and the role of the rural interpreter in their local professional community. Looking at these three topics allowed me to consider if the current professional development system is meeting the needs of rural sign language interpreters and the communities they serve. Lastly, this study sought to examine if the implementation of an interprofessional learning community would be a viable option for rural communities.

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Background**

As a junior high student, I had a standing Wednesday evening babysitting job for a family with a hard of hearing son. I initially learned basic signs from the family, and then enrolled in the community education courses offered by my community college, the College of Southern Idaho. My interest was piqued! Soon thereafter, I decided to become an interpreter. After my sixteenth birthday, I was able to take credit bearing American Sign Language classes, again at the College of Southern Idaho. Upon graduating from high school, I transferred to William Woods University. I completed my coursework in four years, and graduated *magna cum laude* with a Bachelor of Science degree in American Sign Language/English Interpreting.

I began my professional interpreting career as an educational interpreter in Forks, Washington. It was in this graciously welcoming community that I began to understand what living in a remote area meant. Until that point, I had always considered myself to have lived in rural areas, but not necessarily remote. Remote now meant driving an hour between stoplights. After three years in the rainiest part of the contiguous United States, I was ready for a drier and sunnier climate. I moved to Bend, Oregon (300 days of sun each year!) in 2006 and continued practicing as an educational interpreter in a K-12 setting for an additional seven years. Starting in 2012, I transitioned from K-12 educational interpreting into more community and post-secondary based interpreting.

Deschutes County, where Bend is located, is technically a metropolitan county; however, it still maintains many characteristics of a rural community.

I have spent my entire career in small town settings, and in these settings, I found it challenging to obtain continuing education units because of the distance and expense. I have heard repeatedly from other rural interpreters that it is not worth their time to seek certification. It was through these experiences, frustrations, and stories that I became interested in exploring whether these challenges were true for other rural interpreters as well. If this is a common phenomenon, what could be done about it? My passion to bring professional development to the rural interpreter was ignited and refined.

### **Statement of the Problem**

This study sought to answer the question: How can the implementation of a structured interprofessional learning community<sup>1</sup> aid the professional development of a rural sign language interpreter? By collecting and analyzing data related to how rural sign language interpreters access and perceive current professional development opportunities, as well as the role of the rural interpreter in their local professional community, I explored whether the current professional development system is meeting the needs of rural sign language interpreters and the communities they serve. Lastly, this study initially sought to examine the implementation of an interprofessional learning community as a viable option for rural communities.

Maintaining an interpreting practice in a rural area carries some unique challenges. Currently no research has been conducted on the profile or needs of the rural

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<sup>1</sup> *Interprofessional Learning Community*: A community of professionals dedicated to meeting together in a structured manner with the intent to gain knowledge and skills from each other.

sign language interpreter maintaining a general practice. However, two studies (Shaffer, 2013; Yarger, 2001) have been completed on the rural interpreter based in educational settings. Often, the rural interpreter is primarily employed by the local school district, supplementing his or her income by freelance interpreting in the evenings, on the weekends, and over the summer. One of the unique challenges rural interpreters face is the significant hurdle in accessing continuing education units (CEUs), regardless if they are a community or educational interpreter. Obtaining ongoing professional development hours is a requirement to maintain licensure for nationally certified interpreters. The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf requires 80 hours of continuing education units every four years (Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, 2014). For rural interpreters, meeting this requirement can be a challenge, and it may also be a deterrent to seeking certification.

Across the profession, current professional development offerings tend to fall into four categories: regional or national conferences, urban half-day or full-day workshops, online (synchronous and asynchronous) opportunities, and working with a mentor interpreter. For each of these types of offerings, there are challenges associated for the rural interpreter:

- To attend a national or regional conference requires time, expense and effort. Additionally, for communities with only a few interpreters, having two or more interpreters out of town often leaves communities with insufficient interpreting coverage.
- To attend a half-day or full-day workshop also requires time, expense and effort, especially for the individual traveling from a remote location. A half-



day or full-day workshop often requires overnight travel and lodging, turning a \$30 workshop into a \$200 expense. For interpreters employed by a school district, that amount may represent their entire allotted professional development funds for the year, yet still not be enough to cover their remaining professional development needs.

- Participating in online opportunities can be a challenge when rural and remote communities still struggle to access reliable high-speed internet connections (Curran, Fleet, & Kirby, 2006; Shaffer, 2013).
- For interpreters residing in communities where they are the sole provider of interpreting services, there may not be a qualified mentor available locally.

Given these problems, this study proposed to test the following purpose: If the professional development needs of rural interpreters are not being met by current professional development opportunities, then interprofessional learning communities are a solution to meeting these needs.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This research adds to the limited body of knowledge on rural interpreters. At the same time, it is an opening look at interpreters who maintain a community-based practice in a rural county and an initial appraisal of the professional development needs of rural interpreters. It examines whether current trainings are designed with rural interpreters in mind, and if rural interpreters are able to acquire new skills, techniques, and knowledge that are applicable to their communities.

Given the limited literature related to the rural interpreter, I explored the literature related to other professionals serving in rural communities to make comparisons. During

the course of this study, I looked at the challenges faced by other rural professionals, and their similarities to the experiences of rural interpreters. I read published research to find solutions from other fields that might be applicable to interpreters. I was surprised to see recurring themes emerge from Australian dermatologists (Kurzydlo, Casson, & Shumack, 2005), Canadian mental health practitioners (Church et al., 2010), and medical professionals in the United Arab Emirates (Revel & Yussuf, 2003).

My original purpose was to examine the challenges faced by rural interpreters in pursuing their professional development needs and desires, to discover what is working and what is not working, and to analyze the use of an interprofessional learning community as a possible solution. As the research progressed, I discovered what little interest there was in the interprofessional learning community focus group was for a monthly meeting, rather than for weekly meetings. In designing the study, I had prepared for a timeline that included a weekly focus group. Considering the interest level was mediocre, at best, for participating in a weekly focus group, I concluded that the data indicated not enough interest in proceeding with that portion of the research. Lastly, through the interviews I conducted with some amazing men and women, I came to feel passionately about validating the voice of the rural interpreter.

### **Theoretical Basis and Organization**

My plan in designing this study was to use an educational research methodology with an action research application. The two-part approach allowed for a mixed-methods approach to collecting data. Initial data was gathered through interviews with rural interpreters that sought to establish perceptions of—and attitudes toward—professional development. When designing the research project and considering the types of research

approaches to employ, action research became the best fit. Action research, by definition, “is a systematic approach to investigation that enable[s] people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives ... [focusing] on specific situations and localized solutions” (Stringer, 2007, p. 1). By including stakeholders in the process, my goal was to include an insider’s perspective on the problem and to hear their ideas for possible solutions.

Based on my previous experience as a rural interpreter and the published literature on other rural professionals, I predicted that participants would be experiencing some degree of professional isolation. Using that knowledge, I opted to conduct live interviews of interpreters rather than design an online survey. According to Seidman (2006):

At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make [up] that experience.... It demands that our actions as interviewers indicate that others’ stories are important. At the heart of interviewing research is an interest in other individuals’ stories because they are of worth. (p. 9)

As I conducted the interviews, participants validated this sentiment by expressing how connected they now felt to the research, how much they appreciated this research, and how much they were looking forward to seeing the results. Because of my current and previous experiences as a rural interpreter, when I was designing this study I had to be aware of my insider perspective and bias. In an attempt to minimize the effect of this bias, I sought trusted counsel from colleagues and classmates on my design and questions before submitting my proposal to the Institutional Review Board.

## **Limitations of the Study**

As with any study, there are limitations that must be addressed. When I designed the study, I intended to conduct all face-to-face interviews, without utilizing alternate methods such as Skype. As I began receiving responses of interpreters interested in participating, the response soon exceeded my initial goal and my ability to physically travel to all locations to conduct face-to-face interviews. However, utilizing technology as I did with emails, Facebook group posts, Skype interviews, and so on, limited me to interpreters who had internet access and were comfortable with technology. By conducting the face-to-face interviews for a portion of my data collection, I believe that I accessed data I would not have obtained had I relied solely on internet methods.

Another significant limitation was the fact that I only recruited interpreters in Idaho and Oregon. Initially, this decision was based on my desire to conduct face-to-face interviews. Interpreters in Idaho and Oregon experience extreme winter weather, making traveling over mountain passes treacherous. Rural interpreters in other states may face other hurdles when traveling to professional development workshops, and I was not able to gather that data.

## **Definitions of Terms**

- **Action Research:** a research approach that “seeks to change the social and personal dynamics of the research situation so that the research process enhances the lives of all who participate. It is a collaborative approach to inquiry that seeks to build positive working relationships and productive communicative styles” (Stringer, 2007, p. 20).

- **American Sign Language:** Often referred to as ASL, it is the official language of the American Deaf community.
- **Demand Control Schema:** a structured discussion framework for understanding the complexities of the work of interpreting as laid out by Dean and Pollard (2013), based on the initial work of Karasek (1979) and utilized as reflective practice.
- **Freelance:** A colloquial term used by interpreters to refer to independent contract work obtained through private contracts, an agency, or referral service.
- **Interpreter Training Program (ITP):** A two- or four-year college program to train pre-professional interpreters in the practice of interpreting.
- **Interprofessional Learning Community:** A community of professionals dedicated to meeting together in a structured manner with the intent to gain knowledge and skills from each other.
- **Metropolitan:** A term used to describe a core urban area, including the commuting areas surrounding the core.
- **National Association of the Deaf (NAD):** The “civil rights organization of, by and for deaf and hard of hearing individuals in the United States of America” (<http://nad.org/>).
- **Practice Profession:** Professions that require theoretical knowledge and technical skills plus the critical compliments of assessing the complexity of interpersonal actions and responding accordingly.
- **Professional Development:** Activities such as workshops, classes and formal mentoring undertaken by a professional to succeed in his or her field.

- **Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID):** The national organization for interpreters in the United States.
- **Rural:** “the terms ‘rural’ and ‘rural area’ mean any area other than--(i) a city or town that has a population of greater than 50,000 inhabitants; and (ii) the urbanized area contiguous and adjacent to such a city or town” (Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, 2002).
- **Urban:** An area of more than 50,000 residents (United States Census Bureau, 2014).

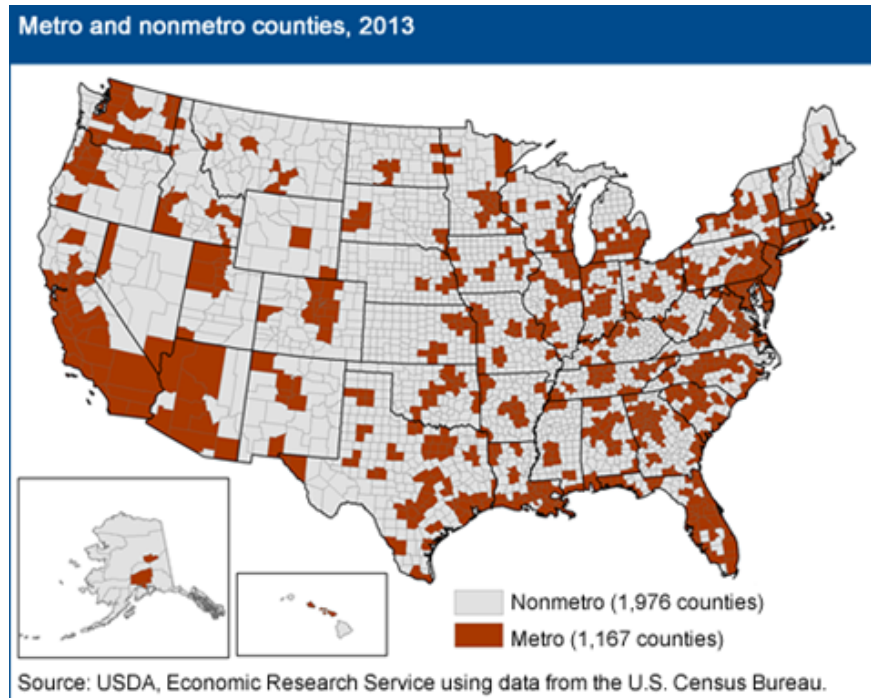
## Chapter 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Whereas the available literature on rural interpreters is limited, I looked outside the field of interpreting to find literature on rural professionals in the United States, as well as rural practitioners in other countries. The available literature presents findings on the obstacles faced by rural professionals and discusses the validity of interprofessional education as a tool to combat the stated obstacles.

#### **Definition of a Rural County**

The United States Department of Agriculture defines a rural area as “Nonmetropolitan counties [that] include some combination of: open countryside, rural towns (places with fewer than 2,500 people), and urban areas with populations ranging from 2,500 to 49,999 that are not part of larger labor market areas (metropolitan areas)” (United States Department of Agriculture, 2014). As of the year 2013, 46.2 million Americans lived in non-metropolitan counties: 15% of the population resides on 72% of the land area of the country (United States Department of Agriculture, 2014), as shown in Figure 2-1. The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf does not currently track the demographics of urban and rural interpreters, so there are no numbers available on percentages of urban interpreters versus rural interpreters (S. Wedge, personal communication, May 16, 2014).



*Figure 2.1:* Metropolitan and non-metropolitan counties

### **Obstacles for Rural Professionals**

Working and residing in a rural community carries its own obstacles for many professionals. In 2003, The President’s New Freedom Commission on Mental Health concluded that “rural issues are often misunderstood, minimized, and not considered in forming national mental health policy. Too often, policies and practices developed for metropolitan areas are erroneously assumed to apply to rural areas” (Sawyer, Gale, & Lambert, 2006, p. 1) Sawyer et al., go on to characterize rural areas with the following characteristics; “low population density, limited and fragile economic base, cultural diversity, high level of poverty, and limited access to cities” (p. 1). Key challenges identified for rural mental health professionals include professional isolation, inadequate infrastructure for telehealth connections, lack of continuing educational opportunities,



lack of financial incentives for professionals to work in rural areas, poor in-service training of, and dissemination of information to, rural practitioners (Sawyer et al., 2006).

A rural community is not just a miniature big city; there are unique challenges to being a member of a small, rural town including limited anonymity and limited access to services.

Kurzydlo, Casson, and Shumack (2005), in “Reducing professional isolation: Support scheme for rural specialists,” looked at dermatologists working in rural communities and the effects of professional isolation. They found most rural dermatologists who manage a solo practice, are often several hours away from urban colleagues, and thereby limited in their opportunities for professional interactions. For most rural sign language interpreters, these characteristics also hold true. Kurzydlo et al. also found that most rural dermatologists satisfied their professional development requirements by attending the annual professional conference. In contrast, most urban dermatologists satisfied their requirements by attending local clinical meetings hosted by teaching hospitals. The data revealed that 86% of rural dermatologists felt professionally isolated and that for 95% of practitioners, residing in a rural location negatively impacted their ability to satisfy professional development requirements. Most of the feedback received indicated that the biggest barriers to satisfying professional development requirements were the costs incurred related to time, travel, and opportunity (Kurzydlo et al., 2005).

These challenges are also found when examining educational interpreters working in rural settings. Yarger (2001) found that interpreters working in rural communities must navigate “the existence of highly distinct and often highly localized cultures and

forms of communication, and isolation issues” (p. 17). Every interpreter that Yarger interviewed declared a desire for accessibility to workshops and most expressed willingness to travel long distances for such opportunities, if such were available. Participants in Yarger’s study also expressed a desire for mentors. Similar to the rural dermatologists in Kurzydlo et al.’s (2005) study, the rural educational interpreters’ primary source of satisfying professional development needs was through attending workshops.

### **Interprofessional Education as a Means to Combat the Obstacles**

The challenges of a rural practice are not limited to American practitioners. Rural medical professionals in the United Arab Emirates have also struggled to satisfy their professional development requirements. In a study by Revel and Yussuf (2003), medical professionals practicing in the rural areas of the Al Ain Medical District did not have access to professional development opportunities prior to the study. They found that it would not be conducive to bring the medical staff to a centralized urban area, and therefore decided to take the training to the rural practitioners. The researchers designed a method of adult education that incorporated reflections of current practices, small group learning, and case-based approaches; they invited all disciplines of medical staff to participate (Revel & Yussuf, 2003). Data revealed that attendance never dropped below 93% during these trainings, and practitioners indicated new skills and knowledge were being applied in the times between training sessions. Results also indicated that the “the use of a case-based learning model in practice-based continuing professional education proved effective, interesting and enjoyable...The model of practice-centred,

multidisciplinary, case-based learning may be particularly effective for rural centres” (Revel & Yussuf, 2003, p. 275).

In another example of case-based learning, student pre-professionals in Great Britain discovered working alongside pre-professionals from other fields, in a collaborative effort to provide care. was rewarding and beneficial. Feedback from this case study revealed:

Students gained insights into working interprofessional groups which enabled them to learn with, from and about each other. The insights into real teams and how professionals on the front line work had given them a richer understanding and made them feel more prepared for practice. (Anderson, Smith, & Thorpe, 2010, p. 236)

Findings from this study indicate that interprofessional learning communities can foster respect for the expertise of others and find common ground from which to work (Anderson et al., 2010). What does this mean? For interpreters, it means working alongside other professionals, sharing a common goal of providing quality services to the same consumer.

How often, as an interpreter, do I work with classroom teachers, school administrators, social workers, medical doctors, nurses, and case workers? Do I share a common goal of providing the best services for the client? In the majority of settings, providing the best services for the client is everyone’s goal. What if I had the chance to sit down with these other practitioners afterwards to discuss what went well, what would work better next time, how could I be more effective at supporting them in their role, all in a constructive manner? That is the very definition of an interprofessional learning

community. This collaborative approach brings appreciation for where the interpreter's roles begin and end, or overlap, and challenges the interpreter to grasp the significance of the value of services being provided (Leonard & Weinstein, 2009).

Now, looking at interprofessional learning communities designed with rural professionals in Canada, I found more evidence of these common themes. For mental health practitioners in rural Canada, feelings of professional isolation and lack of access to professional development opportunities emerges again (Church et al., 2010). After participating in a case-based interprofessional learning community case study, mental health practitioners summarized their experiences by indicating:

they had developed a more reflective practice; they had integrated new knowledge and skills into their practices; they had increased their referral network; new mental health collaborations had emerged; and the programme had sparked their desire for more mental health training. (Church et al., 2010, p. 438)

Participation in the program led to greater inter-agency collaboration and an increase in knowledge regarding the role and expertise of other professionals within the community (Church et al., 2010).

The challenges for rural professionals to obtain professional development hours—cost, insufficient replacement coverage, geographic isolation, poor technological infrastructure—are themes identified across professions in rural settings (Church et al., 2010; Curran, Fleet, & Kirby, 2006; Kurzydlo et al., 2005; Revel & Yussuf, 2003; Shaffer, 2013; Yarger, 2001). To compound these issues, rural professionals also described experiencing professional isolation (Kurzydlo et al., 2005; Whynot, 2013).

## **Application to Interpreters**

I have established common struggles faced by sign language interpreters and other practice professionals residing in rural locations. I have also examined case-based, interprofessional learning communities built on reflective practice theories. What if I took some of these examples and applied them to rural sign language interpreters? Could interpreters access mentors in their communities as a means of professional development, but find mentors from other professions? What would the mutual benefit be to both professionals?

Case supervision and reflective practice for sign language interpreters have been studied by Dean and Pollard (2013) in the United States, as well as by Hetherington (2012) in Great Britain. Hetherington discusses the need for consultative supervision, as she defines it, as a way to mitigate the work-related stress that comes with interpreting. Interpreters, in the course of an average day, will experience emotional and psychological stress as they navigate interpersonal dynamics. They also experience professional isolation, as many interpreters maintain a solo practice. Supervision can provide a tailored support system for the interpreter to unpack their own responses to situations they have interpreted and prepare for future interactions (Hetherington, 2012).

Many professions make a habit of utilizing structured and unstructured activities such as case conferencing, peer guidance, and mentoring to reflect on previous work and to guide future work. Dean and Pollard (2013) advocated for the term “supervision,” in the sense of “super+vision...discussing your work with one or more colleagues, the goal of which is to obtain a ‘superior vision’—one that you could not have achieved on your

own” (p. 143). A supervision leader is not an all-knowing supervisor, capable of wielding great power and authority ready to pounce on the slightest ethical infraction mentioned by the supervisee. Far from it. Rather, in this context, supervision is a supportive environment for a professional to gain new ethical decision-making skills and to refine those they already possess.

What could an interpreter learn from someone who is not an interpreter?

Counselors, bankers, social workers, spoken language translators, physicians, nurses, and attorneys working and residing in a rural community may have ideas on how to draw professional boundaries with clients you see at the only grocery store in town, how to decline work for which one is not qualified, and how to advocate for the necessity of providing services. Other qualities we can learn from each other:

- “Describing one’s roles and responsibilities clearly to other professions”
- How to “communicate and negotiate clearly and without jargon, orally and in writing, within small interprofessional groups, allied agencies and other organizations”
- How to “recognize and respect the roles, responsibilities and competence of other professions in relation to one’s own”
- “Modelling open-mindedness and willingness to learn from other professions”
- “Addressing prejudices, stereotypes and projections”
- Dealing with diversity and modelling cultural competence” (Leonard & Weinstein, 2009, pp. 219-220).

Interpreters face two major challenges that are common to other professionals practicing in rural communities. These two challenges are professional isolation and

limited access to professional development opportunities. Other professions have piloted interprofessional learning communities as an attempt to combat these two challenges.

Implementing a similar format by utilizing Demand Control Schema framework (Dean & Pollard, 2013) for structured discussions could be a potential option for rural interpreters.

## Chapter 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Design of the Investigation**

In Chapter One, I had predicted rural interpreters experience a degree of professional isolation, therefore I wanted to utilize a live interview to collect my data. To begin my study, I sought approval from the Institutional Review Board at Western Oregon University to conduct my research. Rural interpreters from Oregon and Idaho were identified by using the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) database, school districts, and state interpreting chapters. I then cross-referenced those names and addresses to counties identified as rural by the U.S. Census Bureau and made initial contact by email to those specific interpreters. After I sent out the emails, I also posted on each state's RID Facebook page asking for participation, in the hopes of obtaining additional participants. The Facebook posts advertised for interpreters willing to participate in a semi-structured live interview portion of a research project on rural interpreters. The post included a Google form link, allowing participants to sign up directly from the post. The Google form contained a required question for interpreters to select the rural county in which they resided and/or worked. Consent forms were distributed prior to the interviews and collected at the onset of the interview. I took notes with a Livescribe pen, which also functioned as an audio recorder. I then synced the audio files and linked notes to Evernote and secured everything with a password. All hard-copy consent forms, notes, and coded materials from interviews were kept in a locked cabinet in my home office.



## **Data Collection**

**Recruitment.** The initial emails were sent via a mass email with addresses obtained from the RID database. After a few days, I was concerned over a lack of response to the initial mass mailing. My main concern was that the original email had been filtered into spam folders due to the mass mailing, so four days following the first email, the recruitment message was sent out again, this time individual addresses. I obtained several more email addresses during that time period; those individuals also received personalized emails. This personalized approach to the emails was effective: Contacts were made, appointments were set up, and one request came in for a Skype interview. The interpreter making the request spends 10 hours a week commuting to work; while she very interested in participating in the study, she was not interested in spending an additional three hours driving to and from the interview. We began making arrangements for interviews at her work site, for herself and the other staff interpreters. Several more requests came in for Skype interviews from interpreters who wanted to participate but were out of town the two days I was conducting interviews. After reviewing my IRB application to determine that I had indeed asked to conduct live interviews but had not limited myself to face-to-face interviews, I set up an option for Skype appointments for future interviews.

After returning to Oregon, I sent out email requests via personal contacts, social media groups, the Oregon Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, educational service districts, and the Professional Supervision for Interpreting Practice group. Within six weeks, I had completed 20 interviews of interpreters residing in rural counties in Idaho

and Oregon. Fourteen interviews were conducted face to face; four were conducted utilizing Skype or Facetime; and two were done over the phone. These last two were with interpreters who did not have reliable high-speed internet access. The interviews ranged from 20 to 45 minutes.

**Population/Sample.** Participants were not asked to identify their age or sex. I was concerned this information would be too revealing for my sample size, and my participants would lose their anonymity.

I did not require interpreters to hold certification to participate in my study. There is currently no federal mandate requiring certification to practice as a sign language interpreter, and many states address requirements and license on an individual basis. Oregon requires Oregon Court Certification plus a Specialist Certificate: Legal (SC:L) for any legal interpreting. Educational interpreters in Oregon must have an Educational Interpreters Performance Assessment (EIPA) score of 3.5 (or higher) or hold RID certification. They are also required to have a college degree in interpreting (or related educational field) or have passed the written portion of the EIPA, and they must maintain 12 hours of professional development each year (Oregon Administrative Rule 581-015-2035, 2008). Educational interpreters in Idaho must hold an EIPA 3.5, National Association of the Deaf (NAD) III, or certification from RID to practice as an educational interpreter, and they must maintain 80 hours of professional development every five years (Idaho Statutes: Title 33, Chapter 13, 2006).

I allowed for interpreters to participate in the study if they lived in a remote metropolitan county, surrounded by rural counties. While by definition, the county may be labeled as a metropolitan county, due to the distance from other metropolitan areas

and the proximity to rural areas, these counties often reflect the rural-like characteristics of the surrounding area. These characteristics include limited anonymity, lack of access to professional development, and limited access to colleagues.

**Interview protocol.** A semi-structured interview format was utilized that asked open-ended questions (See Appendix A). This format enabled me to ask the same 15 questions of each participant, but it also gave participants freedom to express what they deemed to be of value. The participants were given a copy of the interview questions to reference during the interview. I concluded each interview by thanking them for their participation. I informed them my thesis would be published to the Digital Commons website in December, and I could email out the link if they were interested in seeing the results. My intentions were expressed for sharing my data the following spring in a workshop format. The majority of the participants appeared eager to have access to the results of the study.

### **Data Analysis**

After completing the interviews and sifting through the data, the interview questions were categorized into two groups. For the first group of questions and answers, a quantitative approach was used to look at the data. This group contained questions such as; How long have you been practicing as an interpreter? How many hours per year, on average, do you spend on professional development? On average, how far and how often do you travel for professional development opportunities each year? The answers from these questions are numerically based, allowing for charts and tables to communicate the data for each category.

With the second group of questions and answers, a qualitative approach was used to look for common themes in the answers. This group contained open-ended questions such as Describe for me your training, experience, and education in becoming an interpreter or What could an interpreter learn from another profession, especially in a rural community? These common themes were analyzed and documented.

The questions were then categorized into three sections: Profile, Professional Development, and Professional Partnerships. The Findings chapter was structured following these three categories. Within each category, a discussion was built based on the findings for each interview question in the order that the questions had been asked.

As I looked at each individual interview question, individual responses were transcribed and tallied. After completing this process for each question, trends and patterns were identified. The tallies were counted, and charts and tables were created for the quantitative data. Patterns, such as answers containing the key words “expenses,” “money,” and “finances,” were tallied as “money.”

**Questions related to profile.** The interview questions in this category were both quantitative and qualitative in nature. On the surface, the following quantitative question appears straightforward: “How long have you been practicing as an interpreter?” However, several respondents spoke of taking a few years off to raise their families. Some of the Deaf-parented interpreters struggled to define when they began to “practice” as an interpreter. A handful of the participants entered the interpreting field as a second profession, or as a first-time profession but later in life.

**Questions related to professional development.** I was curious to gather data on the exact types of activities rural interpreters were participating in for professional

development. As a researcher, I chose to use the term “professional development” rather than “continuing education,” as I was concerned that the term “continuing education” would skew the data towards specific types of activities. I wanted to collect data on all the various types of professional development interpreters are utilizing, sanctioned or not. Utilizing the term “professional development” enabled me to do so. Reflective practitioners are interested in lifelong learning (Schön 1987) beyond just collecting enough hours to keep their certification. Secondly, I wanted to hear from all rural interpreters, not just those who were certified.

The participants had much to say in this category. For each interview, the majority of the time was spent on answering and discussing these eight questions. None of the interview questions asked for specific trainings or workshops. However, the participants were quick to name institutions where they enjoyed attending workshops. Most of the data collected did revolve around sanctioned workshops and conferences. A few interpreters mentioned independent studies and/or non-sanctioned activities.

**Questions related to professional partnerships.** The last section, Professional Partnerships, contained four interview questions. Of the three sections, this one appeared to be the most difficult for the participants to answer. Several times I received “I don’t know” answers or even one-word answers. The open-ended format was of great value during this section, allowing me to ask follow up questions as needed.

## **Limitations of the Study**

By opening up the interviews to Skype and Facetime, I was able to collect data from more areas of the state than I would have been able to travel to during the data-collection timeframe. However, utilizing technology in the way that I did with emails, Facebook group posts, Skype interviews, and so on, limited me to interpreters who had internet access and were comfortable with technology.

This study utilized a small sample of rural interpreters, from a narrow region of the country. However, the data collected did experience saturation. I ended the call for participation in my study after 20 participants, as I was no longer hearing any new information.

The scope of this particular study was such that I did not endeavor to examine the experiences of rural interpreters from non-dominant cultures. Identifying information was not sought through the interview questions, and none of the participants addressed the topic.

With the recent increase in graduate studies available in interpreting and the subsequent rise in research, it is possible that some interpreters are experiencing a degree of participation fatigue. It is not possible to know how many interpreters declined to participate due to this factor. The timing of interviews is a critical factor when taking the participation fatigue into consideration. Participants may be reluctant to participate in yet another survey or interview if they have received multiple offers within a short period of time.

### **Profile of the Rural Interpreter**

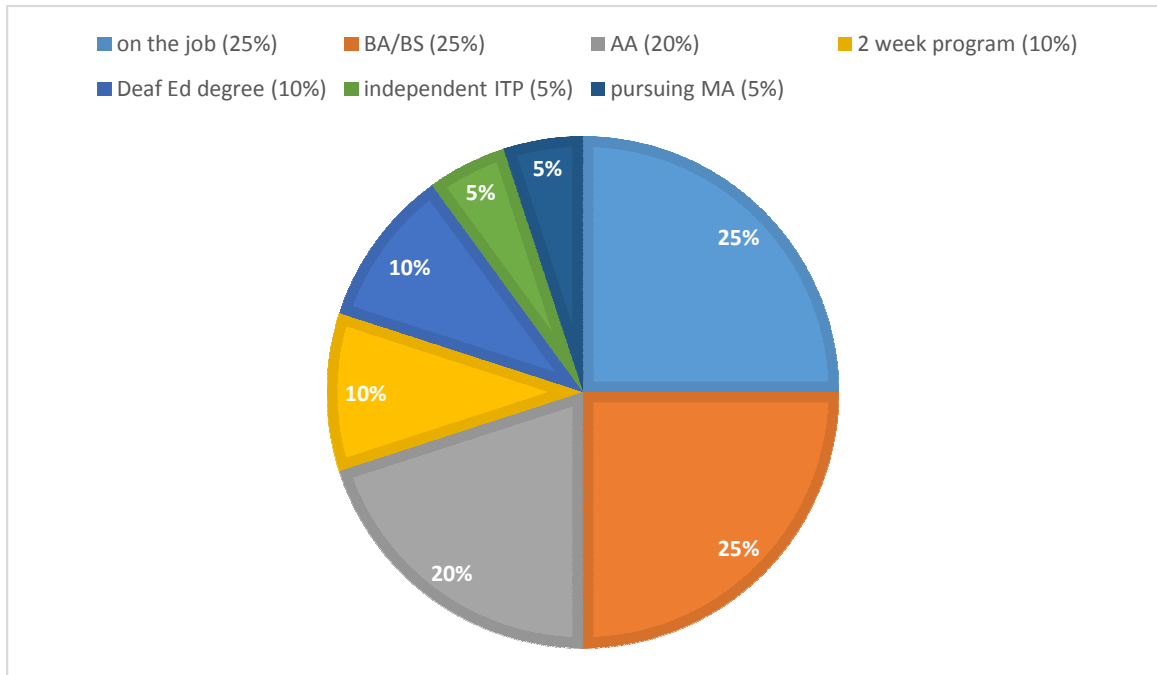
I opened each interview by collecting data on the general background of the participant to establish the current profile of today's rural interpreter. In recognition that each participant's journey to becoming an interpreter is unique, I asked them to describe their training, experience, and education in becoming an interpreter. This prompt allowed each participant to identify items of importance, such as Deaf family, formal education, exposure to Deaf culture, on the job training, and other defining experiences. Eight participants self-identified as having Deaf parent(s), sibling(s), partner(s), or childhood friend(s).

Of the 20 interpreters I interviewed, 65% had some form of formal interpreter training. Five participants held a Bachelor's degree in interpreting. Of these, five Bachelor degrees, three were Bachelor of Arts (Interpreting) and two were Bachelor of Science (Educational Interpreting). Four participants had Associate of Arts degrees from Interpreter Training Programs (ITP)<sup>2</sup>. An additional respondent clarified that they had graduated from an independent ITP not housed within a college or university. Two others stated they had participated in some of the original short-term summer ITPs. Two people responded that they had taken formal ASL courses but not formal Interpreting courses (but have degrees in Deaf Education). In addition, one participant is currently

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<sup>2</sup> An interesting note, among academic circles, the current preferred name is Interpreter Education Programs, not Interpreter Training Programs (ITPs). All of my participants used the term ITPs when referring to formal postsecondary training.

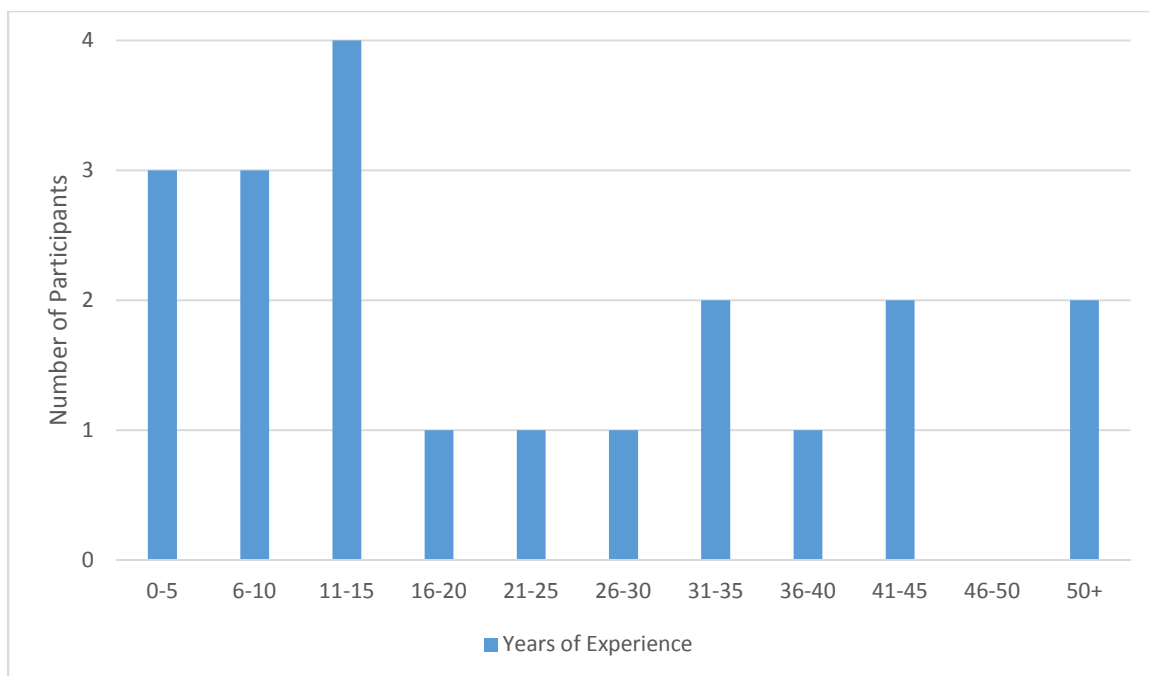
earning a Master of Arts in Interpreting. Lastly, five interpreters responded that they had on the job training. This data can be seen in Figure 4.1.



*Figure 4.1.* Participants' Education by Category

Next, I asked the participants to reveal how many years they had been working as an interpreter. The Deaf-parented interpreters spoke of interpreting as early as 10 years old, primarily for their parents, in settings such as church. Others spoke of being exposed to ASL in college, and at that time becoming interested in interpreting. Complete results are detailed in Figure 4.2.





*Figure 4.2. Participants' Years of Experience as an Interpreter*

My next goal was to identify the types of employment rural interpreters sustained: were they a staff interpreter employed by a school district or did they maintain a solo practice? I also wanted to find out if rural interpreters are maintaining multiple streams of employment. Lastly, I wanted to explore when, and if, rural interpreters were retiring. (See Table 4.1).

Table 4.1

*Participants Employment Locale*

Staff position at a single institution	4
Staff position at a multitude of institutions, including VRS companies	3
Combination of staff positions and solo practice	7
Solo practice only	4
Retired	0
Interpret plus maintain another career	2

The two participants who indicated they maintained another career outside of interpreting were Deaf Education teachers in the K-12 setting. Both of these interpreters indicated the interpreting that they were doing Video Relay Service (VRS) work was an attempt to be exposed to adult users of ASL. Based on these results, rural interpreters are practicing their craft in K-12 classrooms, in postsecondary classrooms, commuting to VRS call centers in urban areas, and out in their local communities. In reality, 50% of interpreters are maintaining multiple sources of interpreting employment. These rural interpreters are more experienced and have more formal training than Yarger (2001) found. Rural interpreters are working in a variety of settings beyond—and often in addition to—the K-12 classroom. In addition, this sample also reveals rural interpreters with 40-plus years of experience continue to actively maintain their practice.

### **Professional Development**

After establishing the background of the rural interpreter, I moved on to perceptions of professional development. The first question I asked was, “What is the value of professional development for an interpreter?” Most respondents initially answered with a one-word answer, and then expanded on their thoughts and feelings. Three interpreters responded with “invaluable.” Other immediate answers include “critical (two responses),” “everything,” “crucial,” “integral,” “really important,” “very important,” and “a necessity.”

One recurring theme discussed was the importance of technical skill development, and specifically the exposure to new vocabulary. Eight interpreters mentioned this aspect of professional development. They expressed sentiments such as, “You can’t always do

things the same way” and “You think your skills are top notch and pretty soon they’re not.”

A second theme to materialize was the importance of networking. Eight interpreters also mentioned the value of establishing and maintaining connections within the professional community. For rural interpreters who often experience professional isolation, this chance to gain support for a few hours or a weekend can be rejuvenating. For rural interpreters who often work in isolation, networking ranked high as an opportunity to gain job leads, to be around other interpreters, and to feel connected to a community of professionals.

The third theme to emerge was exposure to new ideas and fresh perspectives as the profession of interpreting emerges and grows. Again, eight interpreters expressed this theme as important to them. The eight participants spoke of wanting to provide top quality services and hoping to obtain new skills to be able to use upon their return to their home community. For the participants who also mentor new interpreters, they discussed the importance of having empathy for how difficult it can be to learn new concepts.

A fourth theme to appear was the need to be lifelong learners. Nine interpreters mentioned ideas such as: “This work always has room for improvement”; and how “Research teaches us more every year. We have to stay abreast”; “You do not want to become stagnant”; and “Without it you stagnate and your students suffer.” While this fourth theme appears to be similar to the third theme, there is a subtle difference between the two. The third theme focused on external skill development for the purpose of providing better services to consumers. The fourth theme focused on satisfying innate curiosities and intrapersonal needs.

A fifth theme emerged in relation to accountability. Five respondents mentioned the need for maintaining professional standards and keeping their certification(s) current.

They spoke of professional development addressing those needs. Testimony included:

- “You know you’re not doing the best you can”
- “The only way to know if you’re doing a good job”
- “The only way to know if rural interpreters are qualified”
- “It’s how you don’t know what you don’t know. You need the interaction, support, the organization behind the profession to deal with unprofessional and rogue interpreters. Without professional development you are out there rowing your own boat and untouchable”

One last respondent discussed the role of professional development in shaping how interpreting is viewed and recognized as a profession. With active professional development in place, the field of interpreting has transitioned from the helper model to the practice profession model we have today.

### **Types of Professional Development**

During the course of answering this question, most respondents provided two or three types of activities they participated in for professional development (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2.

*Types of Activities Participants Engaged in for Professional Development.*

Workshops	17
Mentoring	3
Employer provided trainings	6
Conferences	7
Online	11
Self-initiated activities	1
Graduate school	1
WRIEC sponsored conferences	2

The participants were quick to tell of both activities they enjoyed and activities that were frustrating experiences. High praise was given specifically to the Professional Supervision of Interpreting Practice program at Western Oregon University (WOU), the WOU Silent Weekends, the Sorenson trainings, the CATIE Center, DeafWay Conference in Utah, and Front Range Community College. Frustrating experiences fell into two categories: either trying to access online opportunities or experiences at regional and/or national conferences. Several telling comments regarding the online experiences included “I don’t seek out online things unless I am out of time”; “I love, love, love the live streaming session when I have access to high speed internet”; “I am not a good self-studier”; and “I have not yet tried online.”

Following up on the regional and national conferences experiences generated even more comments falling strongly into two categories. Conferences referred to by name included Registry of Interpreters of the Deaf (RID), National Association of the Deaf (NAD), and Children of Deaf Adults (CODA) International. The interpreters often loved the conferences and described them as “a shot in the arm” or “the biggest party in

town.” However, even if the interpreters loved the conferences, they all expressed regret at the cost involved:

- “Time and money are always an issue”
- “I enjoy going, but it is costly if it is not in my state”
- “I can go if it’s not too far to travel. My kids are still little.”
- “I’ve gone but only when part of the cost was picked up.”
- “I’ve gone to regional conferences when they have been close enough to drive to.”
- “It’s an expensive way to get CEUs.”

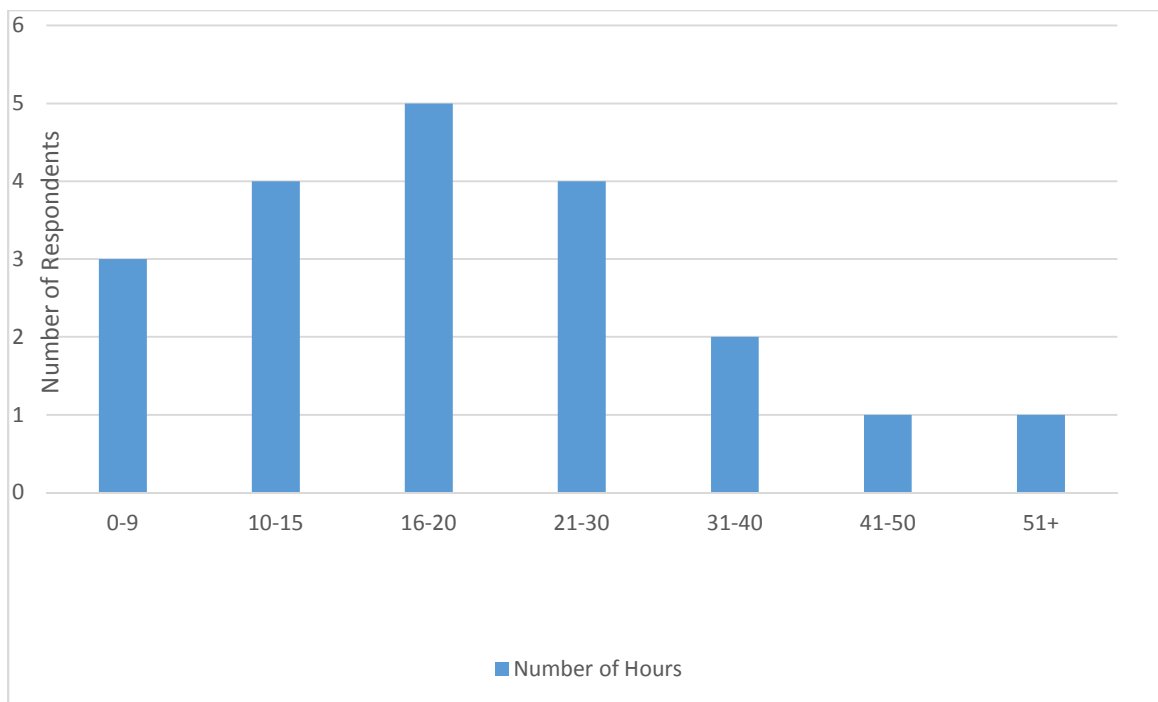
If the interpreters had not yet attended, cost was the primary deterrent.

- “I’ve not attended because of the cost. I still have kids at home.”
- “I’ve only gone to state conferences, never a regional or national. All I hear is dollar signs.”
- “The distance is prohibitive.”
- “They are too expensive when I don’t need the CEUs.”

Two interpreters expressed great hesitation in attending regional or national conferences. They reported a perception of conferences being attended by proficient interpreters, and of less proficient interpreters not being welcome. One stated, “I feel like there is a caste system. I don’t want to pay a lot of money to go and be judged...I’m not nationally certified...Oh, you don’t have Deaf family? Instantly I’m nothing.” Other interpreters spoke of the politics and business meetings as being hard to swallow and not well suited for their personalities.

## Time Spent on Professional Development

Even when faced with great distances, rural interpreters are diligent in pursuing their professional development. More than half of the participants (13/20) responded that they average 10 to 30 hours of professional development annually. Two respondents even measured their time weekly, demonstrating their focus to actively pursuing lifelong learning. Three interpreters did indicate that they just do not have the stamina to be as diligent as they once were. They mentioned being not as willing to travel as much, if at all, as in previous years. All three of these interpreters have over 40 years of experience. Details are found in Figure 4.3.



*Figure 4.3.* Participant's Average Annual Hours of Professional Development.

These hours are purely “seat time” and do not factor in any travel time. It is when I add the travel time to this “seat time,” where rural interpreters’ dedication to their professional development becomes evident.

## Time Spent Travelling for Professional Development

When asked how far and how often they traveled to attend professional development opportunities, all of the respondents were quick to say that they attended whatever workshop was available locally. The topic did not matter. However, Table 4.3 demonstrates that when they did travel, average annual time was 5.7 hours.

Table 4.3

*Round Trip Time Spent Traveling to Professional Development Opportunities.*

<u>Hours Spent Traveling</u>	<u>Number of Respondents</u>
I don't leave town any more/up to 1 hour	4
4 hours	3
6 hours	3
8 hours	8
10+ hours	2

Eleven participants indicated that they traveled these distances one to two times a year. Four people stated they satisfy their requirements online or locally. The other five participants did not indicate how often they traveled. The overall consensus was that rural interpreters travel more than interpreters in the city. One respondent believes, "It wouldn't be unreasonable to assume it would be 20 hours a year (of travel time) if you want to get any development." Data from this study reveals 40% of the participants are willing to travel the equivalent of an entire work day to be able to attend a professional development opportunity.



## **Impact of Location**

Surprisingly enough, when asked how location impacts their ability to satisfy requirements, eight of the 20 respondents indicated that their location was not a factor in satisfying their requirements. Between their employer(s) providing trainings and transportation, and online offerings, they all felt satisfied with being able to accrue enough hours. However, there were caveats. Without employer sponsored trainings or transportation, it would be difficult and expensive. They also added that specialized training is still impossible to access. One respondent did indicate things are better than they used to be. Of the remaining 12 answers, four themes emerged:

- **Finances.** Comments regarding how their location made a financial impact included statements like: “the really good stuff requires a plane ticket” and “it’s more expensive to satisfy my requirements because it requires time and money to go out of town.”
- **Travel time.** Comments regarding how location made an impact on travel time included statements like: “you have to give up your entire weekend” and “it requires travel outside of my area.”
- **Logistics.** Comments regarding how location impacted logistics included: “conferences and workshops are not so family friendly,” “finding sub coverage is tough,” and “I can’t take what’s interesting, but what’s available”
- **Dissatisfaction with online opportunities.** The majority of the respondents indicated they were aware of online opportunities for professional development, but only two responded they using online offerings as their first choice for satisfying requirements. Most people implied online offerings only as a last

choice with one respondent saying, “It’s efficient but you lose collaboration and it feels passive. I don’t feel engaged.”

## **Obstacles**

What are the obstacles to satisfying professional development requirements? The participants spoke of the primary obstacle being cost, specifically of having to travel further to find more affordable options and of having to fuel, food and hotel costs on top of workshop registration fees. The top three obstacles mentioned were the costs involved, the distance, and the time. When asked to expand on these answers, a clearer picture emerged on the interrelatedness of these obstacles. Using the data from above, the majority of the participants are driving a total of eight hours to attend a professional development opportunity. This length of a trip requires an overnight stay in a hotel, fuel costs, and food costs in addition to the workshop costs. Eight hours of driving is also eight hours of not working and not earning income. One participant clearly summed this up when they remarked, “I’m not one of those \$40/hour interpreters. I work in the schools.” Also telling were the comments regarding inconsistent professional development funds from employers. Some years the employers would have monies available for the staff interpreters to access, and some years the monies were not there.

Several of the interpreters I interviewed commute significant distances over the course of the week. When asked about the obstacles faced in obtaining professional development, one participant referred back to the question regarding how much time she spent traveling for professional development. She commutes roughly 10 hours a week and stated, “The additional travel time is daunting on top of the commute.” The small percentage that indicated insufficient notice for professional development opportunities

also happened to be a participant that did not yet have high-speed internet in her area (See Table 4.4).

Table 4.4

*Obstacles in Satisfying Professional Development Requirements*

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Money	12
Distance	12
Time	8
Limited Choices in Topics	5
Family Obligations	4
Motivation	1
Insufficient Notification	1
Lack of Local Mentors	1
Lack of Specialization	1

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### **Perceptions**

Next, I asked the participants the following questions: Do you believe that current trainings and workshops are designed with rural interpreters in mind? Why or why not?

Four participants believed yes. Interpreters from Idaho had high praise for the Idaho Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (IRID), and their efforts to reach rural interpreters. They appreciated how IRID rotates locations throughout the year.

However, some of the burden lies within the interpreters themselves. The participants answered that rural interpreters are not always taking advantage of what is being offered.

Eleven participants believed that some trainings are designed with rural interpreters in mind and some are not. The participants felt the local workshops are designed with rural interpreters in mind, but bigger conferences are not. However, a

couple of larger regional programs were mentioned as geared toward rural interpreters. These specific examples included The Distance Opportunities for Interpreter Training (DO-IT) Center and the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA) videoconferences.

Three interpreters indicated professional development opportunities are not designed with rural interpreters in mind. The participants expressed sentiments that the locations are hard to get to and that the planners are not considerate of travel requirements. One participant expressed the conclusion, “Workshops require sacrifices to get there. They really require a two-income family.”

Two respondents indicated professional development opportunities were not designed with rural interpreters in mind, but it did not matter, because rural interpreters do the same work as urban interpreters. They felt their location did not impact what they were learning as much as the difference found in consumer expectations.

### **Making Changes**

I wrapped up the professional development section by asking the participants what they would change about current professional development offerings. The most common answer (5 times) was bringing presenters to town more often and/or having presenters being willing to travel to them more often. The second most common answer was to have more workshops more often, but a shorter format, such as a single day instead of an entire weekend, or even a two or three-hour workshop once a month. Two interpreters brought this idea up. Thirdly, interpreters wanted to see higher caliber of presenters in their areas. Two participants suggested this. Three interpreters mentioned the need for affordable professional development, including stipends from employers.

The participants named specific topics and venues they wanted to access. Four interpreters mentioned wanting more options closer to home, including webinars and access to videoconferences. Two interpreters wanted access to in-depth specific topics, such as elementary school math and including affect when interpreting for African Americans.

Learning environments were important for four participants. Two interpreters mentioned wanting to combat passivity and encourage willingness to “talk about scary things.” Two interpreters mentioned the need for friendly environments that respect the learning styles of all students. The discussion revolved around how content is aimed towards college graduates, yet not all interpreters hold degrees. They felt these presentations can be inaccessible for some attendees.

Two interpreters emphasized that interpreters need to have a “toolbelt” of skills to work with a wide range of consumers. They felt that trainings did not always respect the diverse needs of Deaf consumers. One participant spoke of rural interpreters having limited access to language models and the other participant spoke of working with a range of d/Deaf students, some who use sign language and some of whom do not and probably will not.

Lastly, the participants discussed recommendations for interpreting as a professional field. Two participants spoke of a desire to see a professional development chairperson at RID and a required membership to state and national organizations to be licensed to interpret. One participant wanted to see ITPs have separate tracks for educational interpreters and freelance interpreters. One final participant did not want to

see any changes. That individual was amazed by what is available locally and felt the local presenters were qualified.

The participants clearly knew their obstacles. They also were able to quickly and easily generate a list of ideas that would be attractive and reasonable. This clarity of their responses indicates that they have spent time previous to this study analyzing the obstacles and identifying possible solutions.

### **Professional Isolation**

The last phase of my research delved into interpreters' working relationships with colleagues, consumers, and other professionals in their communities. Rural interpreters do not work in isolation as they have Deaf consumers and hearing consumers in most interpreted interactions. However, most rural interpreters work alone without a team interpreter. I wanted to determine if a similar rate of professional isolation existed for rural interpreters as experienced by the rural dermatologists and social workers in Kurzydlo et al. (2005) and Church et al. (2010). Five of the participants feel professionally isolated all the time. Nine of the participants interviewed indicated they feel professionally isolated sometimes. Six participants do not experience professional isolation.

The interpreters who work on a staff with other interpreters did not experience professional isolation. They all credited the support of their team as a significant factor in reducing their feelings of isolation. The interpreters who do experience isolation named three factors: working alone, not having a support system at their place of employment, and not having professional colleagues in close proximity.

The majority of participants indicated that sometimes they feel professionally isolated, but there are periods when they do not. The factors that help to mitigate the isolation include having non-interpreting professionals around, having access to colleagues digitally, working in a VRS call center, being involved in the local Deaf community, Facetiming with Deaf family, teaching Deaf students, and having other interpreters in the area.

Factors that increased feelings of isolation comprised the following:

- “not having colleagues that I feel like I can discuss things with”
- “when my personality does not mesh with the few colleagues around”
- “when I need to reflect, but I have limited opportunities because everyone knows everyone--it feels like I can’t talk to anyone”
- “limited opportunities to team interpret”
- “working in schools as the only interpreter, especially if working with a single student”
- “my boss is 70 miles away and I only get to meet with her once a month”
- “being the only certified interpreter in town.”

It is concerning that 70% of rural interpreters experience professional isolation either sometimes or all the times. As pointed out by Church et al. (2010), professional isolation can increase burnout. Professional isolation can increase client concerns over “privacy, confidentiality and dual-relationship issues” (Ryan-Nicholls & Haggarty, 2007, p. 42)

### **Professional Partnerships**

Rural interpreters are experiencing professional isolation as they daily practice their craft. However, one advantage they have is access to other professionals in the course of interpreting assignments. I asked the participants to describe what an interpreter could learn from another profession, especially in a rural community. Beyond the self-evident benefit of access to jargon and vocabulary, interpreters felt like rural professionals could teach interpersonal skills such as:

- when to consult with and refer to other professionals
- coping skills for difficult consumers
- understanding the unique dynamics of a rural community
- how to keep professional and private lives separate
- confidentiality
- professional presentational skills

Intrapersonal characteristics were also mentioned. Traits such as resilience, commitment, tenacity, creativity, patience, and kindness were noted as traits an interpreter could learn from another professional.

These skills and traits are valuable tools to building a well-rounded and competent interpreting career. In a small, rural community, it is entirely possible that a professional will have repeated encounters with a difficult client. Having the skills to navigate those interactions can lessen the vicarious trauma such interactions bring.

Local power dynamics and traditions are often magnified in rural communities. For interpreters who “transplant” into rural communities, having a local culture coach can ease the transition into local life and prevent embarrassing blunders. For interpreters who



remain or return to their home communities, they may already be familiar with these local traditions, power dynamics, and power and authority dynamics.

Initially, the participants struggled with this question. It is possible that the mindset of interpreting being a unique profession has contributed to the lack of collaboration initiated by interpreters to other professionals. After providing the participants time to think over the question, they all eventually felt they could gain knowledge of some kind from other professionals in their community. However, none of the participants mentioned an intentional approach to cultivating collegial relationships with non-interpreting professionals.

Seeing that interpreters can learn from other professionals, how well do other professionals understand the role of an interpreter? When I asked the participants this question, only one interpreter responded that their role is “fairly well” understood. Eleven interpreters responded that their role is somewhat understood. Eight interpreters responded that their role is not understood by other professionals.

Eleven participants mentioned the importance of exposure and experience in understanding the role of the interpreter. The more experience and exposure someone had had to an interpreter and/or the Deaf community, the better understood the role of the interpreter. With less experience and exposure the interpreter had to do more educating. Several interpreters mentioned that they could not count on the Deaf consumer to be knowledgeable about the laws and/or the role of the interpreter. One specific example included the interpreter having to explain to the Deaf consumer that she could not provide a ride home.

Two people mentioned competing against the business model set forth by spoken language translators in their community. They spoke of businesses reluctant to hire interpreters after experiencing free translation services from family members and volunteer translators from the local refugee center. If a professional Spanish translator was hired, they rarely charged more than minimum wage, according to one of my respondents. Businesses were relating the hiring of a sign language interpreter to be the same as hiring a spoken language translator.

### **Interprofessional Learning Community Participation**

Lastly, I asked the participants if they were interested in participating in a weekly focus group to study the benefits of an interprofessional learning community. Interpreters and other professionals would meet together in a structured format to share their unique collections of knowledge and resources. Only five participants were interested in the expressed format. An additional 11 participants became interested if the weekly sessions were replaced by monthly sessions. Five more participants had no interest. Three individuals indicated they would need more information regarding specific time and location before deciding if they were available to participate. With this mediocre response for the weekly session, I concluded that the data did not support pursuing the second stage of my research as designed. There is clearly an interest in participating in interprofessional learning communities, and it will be worth pursuing as future research.

## Chapter 5

### RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

With 72% of the United States land mass considered rural (United States Department of Agriculture, 2014), the unique obstacles faced by rural interpreters need to be acknowledged and addressed. The participants in this study were eager to have a chance to express their thoughts and perceptions, and they had insightful and feasible solutions for addressing the obstacles.

#### **Recommendations Based on Demographics**

As the current rural interpreter population ages out and decreases their availability to work, the profession must consider the recruitment of interpreters to ensure sustainability of interpreting services in rural communities. Along with the recruitment needs comes the need for a viable support network to prevent burnout, turnover, and isolation.

The field of interpreting must also recognize the roadblocks rural interpreters face when seeking certification. In very small communities, there may only be one interpreter. Every time that interpreter leaves town to pursue certification or professional development, the community may be left with insufficient interpreting coverage. In addition, there may be limited incentive to pursue certification as a means of making oneself more marketable, as there may be no other competition for interpreting services. Lastly, rural interpreters may already be struggling to justify their fees, and increasing their rates to cover the cost of maintaining their certification may not be feasible.

## **Recommendations Based on Professional Development Needs**

The participants in this study offered several recommendations for reducing the obstacles they face in accruing their professional development. Given that the two biggest obstacles for rural interpreters were money and distance, I will address those recommendations first. The first recommendation was to offer a reduced rate for educational interpreters or for interpreters within the first few years of their career. As a profession, we can examine how other practice professions handle this concept. The Oregon State Bar offers a reduced rate on bar dues and conference costs for new attorneys with less than six years of practice (S. Trimble, personal communication, Nov. 14, 2014).

Repeatedly, the participants requested that presenters be willing to travel to smaller cities, outside of the major cities traditionally served by regional and national conferences. As a workshop presenter and coordinator, I am challenging myself to be willing to travel to places like Klamath Falls, OR and Twin Falls, ID to meet the needs of the interpreters living in these communities. In much the same way as itinerant preachers travelled on horseback and preached a circuit when serving a congregation over a large geographical distance, I need to examine my heart of servant leadership for my colleagues and my willingness to travel to their locales.

Currently, none of the participants feel encouraged to bring their families along to conferences. I recommend exploring what other professions utilize as key features for their conferences to be considered family friendly. It will also be important to explore affordability options for families to attend conferences together.

Lastly, I recommend targeted workshop topics for new interpreters at conferences. This approach will clearly advertise to new interpreters and recent graduates that they are welcome at conferences and that there will be specific information relevant for them. Again, this model can be found in other practice professions such as the legal field.

### **Recommendations Based on Professional Partnerships**

Initially, only 25% of the participants were interested in participating in the focus group for the interprofessional learning communities. However, when offered a monthly format, instead of a weekly format, the interest level increased to 55%. Given the new level of interest, I recommend testing this hypothesis. The scope of a monthly format over six months or more may be more suited to a doctoral dissertation.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The biggest limitation to this study pertained to the sample. Twenty interpreters from two states is not a comprehensive analysis of the rural interpreter. Interviewing rural interpreters from other states could produce valuable data to determine if the themes discovered in this study are valid for interpreters in other regions of the country.

Another limitation was relying heavily on internet-based means of recruitment for participation. As I found, access to high-speed internet is still an issue for 10% of my sample population. It is entirely foreseeable that additional participants may have been reluctant to participate in the research due to the technology required (e.g., the Google forms, email, Skype, etc.). A broader-scale research attempt would need to consider additional methods of recruitment including paper mailings, phone calls, and personal referrals.

My interview tool did not look into the student loan debt of the participants. Now that the data analysis is complete and I see 65% of the participants have some type of formal interpreter education training, I want to know if and how student loan debt impacts their ability to attend professional development offerings.

Lastly, I would like to see research on if and when interpreters retire. In my research sample, I had two participants with more than 40 years of experience. Both indicated that their professional practice had slowed down in recent years, by choice, but had not ceased. Is this true for interpreters in all communities? Why or why not? What factors enable an interpreter to retire? What factors keep an interpreter working?

**Professional development.** The data from the study reveals that rural interpreters desire to be accessing and attending professional development opportunities. However, the biggest obstacles are the costs involved and the distance to attend. Further research could be conducted on whether entry-level and exiting professionals are attending the regional and national conferences? Why or why not?

**Professional partnerships.** The most concerning piece of data to emerge from the section on professional partnerships was the 70% of rural interpreters who indicated experiencing isolation sometimes to all the time. Further research could illuminate the types of isolation experienced—intrapersonal, interpersonal, and/or geographical. It would also be valuable to know if urban interpreters are experiencing similar levels of professional isolation. Exploring professional isolation and the correlation of risk-taking behaviors could lead to new data and possible ways to support colleagues experiencing professional isolation.

Lastly, I recommend conducting the interprofessional learning communities on a monthly basis to determine how much value can be gained from learning from the other professionals in our local communities.

## **Conclusion**

Rural interpreters are providing much-needed interpreting services in their communities. They are not heavily skewed towards any particular age bracket, and they are more educated and have more training than they did 16 years ago. Rural interpreters face significant hurdles in achieving professional development needs, yet they are diligent in their perseverance. They are willing to drive for long hours to attend workshops and conferences. High-speed internet is still not available to everyone. The data reveals professional isolation is a prevalent phenomena. Rural interpreters desire connecting with other interpreters and other professionals in their communities. A clearer picture of the rural interpreter has emerged, and at the same time, it is evident there is more to be discovered.

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## Appendix A

### THE RURAL INTERPRETER: PERSPECTIVES ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND PROFESSIONAL PARTNERSHIPS INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How long have you been practicing as an interpreter?
2. Describe for me your training, experience and education in becoming an interpreter.
3. What type of employment do you have? For example, are you a staff interpreter employed by a school district or do you maintain a solo practice?
  - a. Have you always maintained this type of interpreting employment?
4. What is the value of professional development for an interpreter?
5. What types of activities do you participate in for professional development?
  - a. Have you ever attended a national or regional interpreting conference? Why or why not?
6. On average, how far and how often do you travel for professional development opportunities each year?
7. How many hours per year, on average, do you spend on professional development?
8. Do you believe that current trainings and workshops are designed with rural interpreters in mind? Why or why not?
9. How does your location impact your ability to satisfy professional development requirements?
10. What are the obstacles to satisfying your requirements?
11. If you could change anything about current professional development offerings, what would you change?
12. Do you feel professionally isolated? Please explain your answer.
13. What could an interpreter learn from another profession, especially in a rural community?
14. How well do other professions understand the role of the sign language interpreter, especially the rural interpreter? Why or Why not?
15. Would you be interested in participating in a short term case study where sign language interpreters and other professionals meet together in a small group weekly to learn from each other? If so, please provide me with your contact information.

## Appendix B

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH INTERVIEW

#### THE RURAL INTERPRETER: PERSPECTIVES ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND PROFESSIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Erin McHenry Trimble from Western Oregon University. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about professional development opportunities for rural sign language interpreters.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.
2. I understand that most interviewees will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.
3. Participation involves being interviewed by Erin McHenry Trimble from Western Oregon University. I will have an opportunity to share information not covered in the interview questions if desired. An audio recording of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be collected. If I do not want to be taped, the interviewer will agree not to record the interview. I understand that this may mean that my interview may not be included in the published study.
4. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure.
5. I understand that the risks involved in participating in this study include time away from my family. Efforts will be made to find a time that is mutually agreeable to everyone, and the interview session will be kept to an hour. I understand that I am free to leave the session early without fear of being penalized. No other additional potential risks are foreseeable beyond those normally associated with discussing one's work with colleagues. I understand that potential benefits to being involved in this study include developing an understanding of the professional practice of others, acquiring skills and techniques applicable to practice professionals, and developing respect for the work of others. This study may help the interpreting profession better understand the needs of rural interpreters and the communities they serve.
6. I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB #712) at Western Oregon University. For research problems or questions regarding subjects, the Institutional Review Board may be contacted at 1-503-838-9200 or irb@wou.edu.
7. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions

answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

8. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

_____	_____
My Signature	Date
_____	_____
My Printed Name	Signature of the Investigator

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact Erin McHenry Trimble at 208-670-2180 or [etrimble13@wou](mailto:etrimble13@wou), or Pamela Cancel, my faculty advisor, at (503) 838-8803 or [cancelp@wou.edu](mailto:cancelp@wou.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights and treatment as a research subject, you may contact the office of Western Oregon University Institutional Review Board, at **(503)838-9200** or [irb@wou.edu](mailto:irb@wou.edu)

This form was adapted from the Consent for Participation in Interview Research form retrieved from: <http://digitalcommons.wou.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1011&context=theses> on April 15, 2014.

## Appendix C

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH FOCUS GROUP

#### THE RURAL INTERPRETER: PERSPECTIVES ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND PROFESSIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

**Introduction:** My name is Erin Trimble. I am a graduate student at Western Oregon University, working with my faculty advisor, Professor Cancel in the Division of Special Education. I am planning to conduct a research study, in which I invite you to take part.

You are being invited to participate in this study because you are a member of a rural community, maintain a professional practice, and have indicated an interest in participating in this study.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to examine if the implementation of an inter-professional learning community is a viable option for rural communities.

About six people will take part in this study.

**Procedures:** If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

- At the first session, you will be asked to give consent to participate in this study.
- You will receive instruction on the Demand Control Schema for case supervision.
- Together, as a group, you and the other participants will analyze a case, go through the process of supervision to generate a list of possible controls, consequences, and resulting demands.
- This process will repeat itself at each of the six sessions.
- At the conclusion of six weeks, you will be required to participate in an exit questionnaire. These exit questionnaires will be completed on paper, and will be distributed at the end of the last session.

**Study time:** Each weekly study participation will take a total of approximately one hour.

**Study location:** All study procedures will take place at a community center.

**Benefits:** Expected benefits include developing an understanding of the professional practice of others, acquiring skills and techniques applicable to interpreters, and developing respect for the work of others. This study may help the interpreting profession better understand the needs of rural interpreters and the communities they serve.

**Risks/Discomforts:** Potential risks and discomforts of participating in this study include time away from their family. Efforts will be made to find a time that is mutually agreeable to everyone, and the weekly sessions will be kept to an hour. Participants are free to leave early. No other additional potential risks are foreseeable beyond those

normally associated with discussing one's work with colleagues. If this potential risk does occur, they will be handled in the following manner: Participants will be free to remove themselves from the study, without fear of being penalized.

**Breach of confidentiality:** As with all research, there is a chance that confidentiality could be compromised; however, we are taking precautions to minimize this risk.

**Confidentiality:** Your study data will be handled as confidentially as possible. If results of this study are published or presented, individual names and other personally identifiable information will not be used.

To minimize the risks to confidentiality, I will code all data, so that names are not associated with the information. Data will be stored either electronically in password protected files, or if on paper, in a locked file cabinet in my office.

We will keep your study data as confidential as possible, with the exception of certain information that we must report for legal or ethical reasons, such as child abuse, elder abuse, or intent to hurt yourself or others.

**Retaining research records:** When the research is completed, I may save the interview samples, study notes, and exit questionnaires for use in future research done by myself or others. I will retain this study information for up to two years after the study is over. The same measures described above will be taken to protect confidentiality of this study data.

**Compensation:** You will not be paid for taking part in this study.

**Rights:** *Participation in research is completely voluntary.* You have the right to decline to participate or to withdraw at any point in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

**Questions:** If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact Erin Trimble at 208-670-2180 or etrimble13@wou, or Pamela Cancel, my faculty advisor, at (503) 838-8803 or cancelp@wou.edu. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights and treatment as a research subject, you may contact the office of Western Oregon University Institutional Review Board, at (503)838-9200 or irb@wou.edu

**CONSENT:**

You have been given a copy of this consent form to keep. If you wish to participate in this study, please sign and date below.

\_\_\_\_\_ Date

Participant's Name (*please print*)

\_\_\_\_\_ Date

Participant's Signature

This form was adapted from the University of California at Berkeley *TEMPLATE CONSENT FORM SOCIAL-BEHAVIORAL STUDY* retrieved from: [cphs.berkeley.edu/CF-Template\\_SocBehav.doc](http://cphs.berkeley.edu/CF-Template_SocBehav.doc) on April 15, 2014.