



photos by Brianna Jetter/Observer

Above: Senior McKenna Trinker holds back tears as Rob Harden, director of Disability Support Services and ADA Compliance Officer, leaves their Tuesday meeting. Harden states that he didn't want to "intimidate" the students, as they had claimed.

Right: Pam Wilson, associate director of Disability Support Services explains why the transcribers resigned to six hearing-impaired students.



Transcribers: DSS deals with lack of transcribers while students wait for appropriate accommodations

continued from cover

Such new technologies have provided a door to what Tinker describes as the "hearing world." Programs and accommodations in the classroom setting, such as ASL translators, note takers and the TypeWell system have given Tinker and other students like her the opportunity to interact the best they can with hearing students in a classroom setting.

TypeWell is a computer software system that involves having someone type what is being said in the classroom. The transcription is then sent wirelessly to the student who is reading another laptop. Students are then able to follow along with the discussion in class with a 10- to 15-second time lag, depending on the typing speed of the transcriber.

Up until Feb. 13, this system was in effect and accommodating students' needs. On Tuesday, Feb. 12, five of seven transcribers turned in their 24-hour notices to Rob Harden, the director of Disability Support Services (DSS) and American Disabilities Act (ADA) Compliance Officer.

Two transcribers were left, though one had an injury. The final transcriber is only a part-time employee.

The reasons the transcribers resigned included a lack of confidence in Harden, as well as injuries, such as carpal tunnel, due to being over-worked.

Harden said that limited information can be given because of personnel issues. According to Harden, DSS had no prior knowledge of the transcribers' resignations.

"We're in an odd position because the university is saying that we're not supposed to share a lot of information about this stuff," Wilson said. "Yet we know the students don't have the whole story and we would love to tell them what's going on."

Since then, the students have been left in the dark.

"It's heartbreaking to not get the education like everyone else — to be excluded," Tinker said. "You're not alone, but you are. It brings me back when I was alone on the playground. It's not fair."

Tinker and five fellow hearing-impaired students expressed their concerns to Harden at a meeting last Tuesday.

Freshman undeclared Courtney Peters was among the students. She was recruited to Central based on the TypeWell system.

According to Peters, her high school years consisted of struggling in classes getting by with 2.9s and 3.2s without the use of TypeWell.

"I worked harder than any other 4.0 student would but I still didn't come out on top," Peters said.

"We basically became mute. We're unable to voice our opinion. We do have voices, but we can't use them if we are lost and confused."

COURTNEY PETERS, FRESHMAN, UNDECLARED

Once Peters came to Central, her GPA rose to a 3.6. She credits the improvement to the Typewell system.

Currently, Peters' grades, as with the others', are in jeopardy.

"We basically became mute," Peters said to Harden during Tuesday's meeting. "We're unable to voice our opinion. We do have voices, but we can't use them if we are lost and confused."

According to Tinker, she recently received a failing grade on a project due to the lack of adequate accommodations.

"I can't keep rewriting my life," Tinker said. "If I did that, my life would be a double life, trying to fix what I missed."

The students present at the meeting covered six main points that they wished to see happen, including the rehiring of their former transcribers. Each of them averaged between two and five years' experience.

"I don't want to hire people who walk out on students with 24 hours' notice," Harden said. "I think it's unprofessional and it's unethical."

Bam Wilson, associate director of disability support services, was also present during Tuesday's meeting.

"I know that this is really difficult for you guys because you don't have the facts," Wilson said. "If we could tell you, we'd look really good in the process."

According to Peters, the students felt the meeting was for them and their concerns. Included in the meeting was a demonstration of a new CART software system that could fix the current dilemma.

"I wish we'd had more time to talk," Harden said. "I'm not sure if I'd had more time if it had been more helpful. It sounds like you're stonewalling but you're not, you're following policies and procedures of the institution you work for."

To the shock of the students, Harden left approximately 40 minutes into the meeting.

Prior to him leaving, Peters had commented on how she felt intimidated by Harden during a one-on-one meeting she had with him.

"I honestly don't believe I have the power to trust you enough to get this fixed," Peters said.

Harden claimed that he was frustrated by this comment, not understanding how someone could be intimidated by someone they hardly knew.

"You try not to intimidate them by letting other people [talk] and then get blamed for leaving the meeting," Harden said. "It's awkward at best. It's awkward."

According to Wilson, Harden's leave was planned ahead of time.

Kyle Gillis, a TypeWell transcriber, left the meeting the same time Harden did, claiming that 40 minutes of typing was too much for him.

Gillis' leaving concerned the students because without TypeWell, some of the students could not follow along what was being said during the meeting.

CART was used instead of TypeWell as a demonstration. It lasted for one hour and was actually implemented in classrooms yesterday.

Harden pointed out that CART was not being used as a replacement for TypeWell, but as a technological addition.

CART works similarly to TypeWell, though it takes words verbatim and transcribes them into a caption on a computer screen.

Professors and students would speak into a microphone that would then be typed up by a captionist hired by the company.

Harden and Wilson informed students they could file a complaint through the Office of Equal Opportunity.

"The institution is protected," Harden said. "Our hearts are with the students, not the legal stuff and I wish it would end."

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