

## Hearing the needs of the deaf



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Richard Pinkiert is a document assembly specialist at the \$290 billion Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association College Retirement Equities Fund. His duties include mailing out documents to applicants for long-term care, and life insurance. Pinkiert sends out instructions concerning medical examinations, requirements for LTC application evaluations, insurance policies, and follow-up letters. He then must update the applicants' case status in the system.

Pinkiert also happens to be deaf. TIAA-CREF's relationship with the National Technical Institute for the Deaf at the Rochester Institute of Technology has already yielded two full-time employees for TIAA-CREF, including Pinkiert. A second former intern from NTID, Debra Archer, is now employed as a TIAA-CREF address correspondence assistant.

Linda Lippert, senior staffing consultant at TIAA-CREF, explains that the organization believes in meeting the needs of a diversified population, both inside and outside the company. "We have been committed for along time to the practice of a diverse workforce through the hiring, career development, and promotion of minorities," explains Lippert.

But, while it is traditional for engineering and other tech students to require internship experience, employers are hardly racing to recruit students with disabilities. According to Paul Seidel, acting director at the Center on Employment at RIT's NTID, only 35 U.S. companies contact them annually to recruit deaf student for co-op programs. Among them are IBM, Citibank, Chase, Eastman Kodak, and TIAA-CREF.

"We're in favor of having a representation that's consistent with the outside world." Says Lippert.

For the past 10 years, TIAA-CREF has taken between two and four student interns from NTID, always with a view toward future employment. Lippert visits Rochester each year to interview potential candidates for a 10-week internship position. Students are typically placed in computer and processing areas, but graphic artists and accounting majors also have been among past NTID interns.

"The need to communicate with my colleagues is certainly an integral part of the job," Pinkiert says, but "usually I can rely of lip reading and, if need be, communicate by written word."

And, "The fact the TIAA-CREF serves colleges and universities makes the job particularly gratifying since I greatly appreciate the education that I received at RIT's National Technology Institute for the Deaf."

Frances Denmark

Employers can access information on the NTID internship program at [www.rit.edu/ntid/coops/jobs/](http://www.rit.edu/ntid/coops/jobs/)