

**Court Reporting Education in the United States**  
**National Court Reporters Association, Vienna, Virginia**

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Abstract:

The skilled and qualified court reporter is and will continue to be the superior method of verbatim record preservation and retrieval available now and for the foreseeable future. In the United States, court reporting has a history of pen writers, steno reporters and voice recognition reporters. Since the inception of NSRA (National Shorthand Reporters Association) in 1899, as an organization court reporters have studied, analyzed, and adapted to changes in the field of court reporting to benefit the American judicial system.

The conversation about court reporting education began in 1921 as stenographic machines became competitive. Over the next three decades, NSRA (currently National Court Reporters Association) explored the possibility of establishing court reporting training in the United States. But it wasn't until 1954 that NSRA established the first approval process for schools.

(Key Words)

National Shorthand Reporters Association (NSRA) became National Court Reporters Association (NCRA) in 1991.

## **Introduction**

For more than 100 years, the National Court Reporters Association has served as the largest, most influential organization within the stenographic court reporting profession. Formerly known as the National Shorthand Reporters Association, the organization's name and mission has adapted as innovation has led court reporters to become leaders in bringing technology into courtrooms and depositions as they seek to establish standards of quality and competence for making the record and integrating technology with the stenographic record for the benefit of the legal system as well as society as a whole. Court reporters look to NCRA not just to establish benchmark certifications for verifying levels of quality and competence, but also to serve as the understood leader for representing the interests of the profession within legislative circles, for providing information surrounding the ever-changing dynamics within the legal arena, and for creating a professional network that they can use to acquire the advice and ideas to advance their businesses and their careers. In short, NCRA defines the profession of stenographic court reporting in North America, through its day-to-day representation of stenographic reporters, and through its commitment to ensuring the highest level of standards are met within the profession. Education has been one of the pillars of which NCRA stands, as it is the future of the court reporting profession.

## **History**

The basic idea and value of machine-generated shorthand systems brewed in the creative juices of a legion of known inventors dating back to 1868. The earliest thinking was obviously a by-product of mechanical writing and inventions relating to the typewriter. Forty-six inventors in all brought their machine shorthand ideas to a high enough state of development to warrant United States patents in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

In the United States, there are a number of keystone events throughout the years which dramatically influenced the evolution of the keyboard design, machine construction, the system of writing, education and the way in which court reporting is delivered and documented.

Through the centuries people have used various means to capture the spoken word and preserve speed. The first known use of shorthand in a United States court system took place in 1866, when the verbatim handwritten notes of author Philander Deming were used to establish what was said in a court case in Albany, New York. United States courts had been following the practice in England of relying on the judge's notes to keep a record of what happened during a trial.

Gregg Shorthand was first published in 1888, in two little paper-covered pamphlets, under the title, "Light-Line Phonography." Five years later, in 1893, a revised and greatly improved edition was published under the title, 'Gregg Shorthand.' As the years progressed, Gregg Shorthand became a multi-level process in which the reporter recorded the proceedings using shorthand, and then dictated from their notes into a tape recorder. The dictation process alone required two hours for every one hour of testimony. The testimony was then transferred to audio tape and a stenotypist typed out an official document of the proceedings.

Speed competitions were soon introduced, and in the early 1900s, most winners of national contests used Sir Isaac Pitman shorthand system. An educational highlight was the completion, after 25 years, of the Phrase Book of Pitmanic Shorthand, arguably the most practical and valuable publication for Pitman reporters ever published. Pitman preeminence prevailed for many years until it was challenged by the "great" Gregg writers. Their system became the manual system mostly used in the United States. It wasn't until the 1975 National

Shorthand Reporters Association (NSRA) Convention that it was noted from the panel members that they saw a fading out of manual writers in the field of shorthand reporting.

Miles M. Bartholomew, an official court reporter was the father of the Stenograph machine. He received a patent in 1897 on the first American shorthand machine. With later improvements, the Bartholomew Stenograph attained the first real degree of success in the reporting field. But between 1885 until shortly after the turn of the century, another imaginative and versatile inventor named George Kerr Anderson also patented a number of ideas. His machine, the Anderson Shorthand Typewriter, was used to report President McKinley's inaugural address. As the years progressed, many steno machines were developed and the ways of writing shorthand were put into the market place.

Voice writing, formerly called "stenomask," was developed by Horace Webb in the World War II era. Prior to inventing voice writing, Mr. Webb was a Gregg shorthand writer. Mr. Webb wanted to create a reporting method that allowed court reporters to dictate directly during proceedings, eliminating the shorthand process altogether. Many years were spent designing the stenomask and perfecting the voice writing method.

In 1921 Thomas Bengough, a chartered shorthand reporter from Toronto, stressed the need for training, testing and certification of reporters. Debate continued on how many years of study were necessary for certification as a reporter -- most thought a four-year course leading to a college degree in reporting was sufficient, while some argued that six years of study would be even better. This did not sit well with many older, experienced reporters who had never attended college. Other topics of discussion centered around which system of shorthand should be taught, how to best recruit instructors and students, and what teaching salaries should be paid.

## **NCRA Certification Background and Experience**

When the stock market plummeted on "Black Thursday," October 24, 1929, the nation's economy went along with it. It was a frightening and confusing time for everyone, and it threatened to tear out the very heart of the industries and workers who built this country. Members busied themselves with two important issues: legislation and education.

Throughout the decade, controversy swirled over which system of shorthand reporting was superior, and the membership divided itself into two camps: the pen writer versus the stenotypist. There would be no quick resolution to this issue.

Members also continued the discussion of creating a college course for shorthand reporting, but a survey indicated that there was still a lack of interest among prospective students and insufficient funds for such an endeavor. The membership did agree on the need for continuing education and filled the void by directing the Association's Committee on Professional Education to write a series of educational articles in *The Shorthand Reporter* (an NSRA publication), covering such topics as law, medicine, and English.

Membership in NSRA grew steadily early in the century. A bright spot during the Depression was unanimous passage by both houses of Congress in 1936 of a national reporting certification bill. However, President Roosevelt vetoed the measure. The association rebounded by launching in 1937 its Certificate of Proficiency (CP), a reporting skills exam that, while voluntary, helped compensate for the absence of a true national Certified Shorthand Reporter (CSR) credential (the CP would be succeeded by the Registered Professional Reporter (RPR) certification, with its continuing education requirement, in 1975).

Perhaps the most important accomplishment on the education front was NSRA's creation of the Committee on Certificates of Proficiency. The committee established the criteria for the

Certificate of Proficiency -- five-minute dictations of literary material at 160 words per minute (wpm); jury charge at 180 wpm; and testimony at 200 wpm. There was no written knowledge component. All three portions had to be passed at once. That first CP test in 1937 was given at five locations around the country. In that year, 27 members passed the test and became the first CP holders in reporting history (today, more than 7,420 reporters hold the RPR, which replaced the CP).

The Certificate of Merit (CM) was introduced in 1949 to recognize a higher level of proficiency. Speeds were literary at 200 wpm; legal opinion at 240 wpm; and testimony at 260 wpm. The Merit could be passed one leg at a time.

Standards for the Certificate of Proficiency were upgraded in 1973 to 180 wpm for literary; 200 wpm for jury charge; and 225 wpm for testimony. At the same time the association instituted additional rules and guidelines for grading the tests and verifying the results for both the CP and the CM skills tests. One result was that the Federal Judicial Center recommended that federal reporters with five years of satisfactory service and who are CM holders receive a five percent salary increase.

Adopting the recommendations of management consultant John Evans, NSRA in 1975 added a written knowledge component to the CP skills test to create the Registered Professional Reporter designation. The written portion and all three skills portions had to be passed at once. NSRA began working with an outside testing agency to assure the validity of the program, a practice that has continued to the present.

The RPR also carried a continuing education requirement, compelling certification holders to earn 30 continuing education credits every three years, with each credit representing an hour of approved continuing education. The requirement changed to the standard measure of continuing

education units, or CEUs, in 1999, with one CEU representing 10 hours of formal organized learning activities under responsible sponsorship, capable direction, and qualified instruction. Adhering to this broad industry standard added to the credibility of the credential and to the likelihood that NCRA certifications would be acceptable to outside entities, such as licensing boards and regulatory authorities.

The growth in realtime reporting and the diversity of specialties employing realtime led to creation in 1996 of the Certified Realtime Reporter (CRR) designation. The CRR test originally consisted of five minutes of dictation at speeds that varied between 180 and 200 wpm. The test now is given at a fixed rate of 180 wpm. Candidates must already be RPRs to sit for the CRR and must earn three continuing education units every three years to maintain certification. The federal court system and some state court systems offer a salary increase to realtime-certified reporters.

In the 1980s and 1990s, new avenues for realtime stenographic writing skills emerged. In addition to the capability of creating instantaneous translation for deaf and hard-of-hearing participants in judicial settings, closed captioning was developed to display text on a television or video screen, to provide a transcription of the audio portion of programs as they occur. Viewers include deaf and hard-of-hearing consumers, as well as the community for whom English is a second language. Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) is a near-verbatim, speech-to-text interpreting service for people who have hearing loss and would not be able to fully participate otherwise. It provides translation of spoken words as well as environmental sounds and is used for live events, such as educational classes, conferences, business meetings, doctors' appointments legal proceedings, and social situations. A CART

provider may be on site or in a different location, using the Internet to deliver the text to the consumer (referred to as remote CART).

The Certified Broadcast Captioner (CBC) and Certified CART Provider (CCP) designations were introduced in 2003 to provide a certification path for those realtime reporting specialties. Each consists of a written knowledge test in addition to a five-minute realtime skills test at 180 words per minute. CBC and CCP certification holders must earn three continuing education units every three years to maintain their certifications.

NCRA also offers certification programs for credentials as a Registered Merit Reporter (RMR); Certified Legal Video Specialist (CLVS); Certified Reporting Instructor (CRI); Certified Program Evaluators (CPE), who evaluate our court reporting training programs; and Certified Manager of Reporting Services (CMRS).

## **Education**

Machine shorthand, and court reporting in general, got a boost from news coverage of the 1935 trial of Bruno Hauptmann for the kidnapping and murder of the infant son of Charles and Anne Morrow Lindbergh. A team of four stenotypists rotated in five-minute intervals to provide attorneys and media with completed transcripts of each day's proceedings within five minutes after the gravel fell.

In 1940, a report by the Committee on Education referenced "the need for better education of reporters, better reporting, and the value of professional education ...." The Committee's immediate objective was the establishment of short courses in non-shorthand subjects, beneficial to all reporters.

As NSRA reached its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, 1954 brought the first discussions of an approval process for schools. NCRA President Joseph Sweeney explained, in his President's Message, that there was a need for an approval process for court reporting programs due to the increasing demand for competent reporters and due to the fact that there was little difference in pay between the salaries of office stenographers and court reporters. The Association established a set of goals: (1) to find prospective students who would stay with the program until graduation, (2) to encourage schools to offer an adequate curriculum for their reporting students, and (3) to assist graduates in finding employment as reporters.

The first formal committee to develop and carry out the approval process was approved in August 1954. The committee was called the Approved Reporter Training Committee and later became the Board of Approved Reporter Training (BART). In May 1955, a total of 17 reporting programs had been approved by the Approved Reporter Training Committee. In addition to filing a notarized statement attesting to the fact that the standards were being met, approved programs were "investigated" by an individual appointed by the chair of the Committee. The "investigator" then filed a report which was reviewed by the Committee. The Committee would vote to grant approval or veto approval.

In 1997, BART became known as the Council on Approved Student Education (CASE). The term "approved program" became "Certified program." Over the years, CASE has created, reviewed and implemented various educational standards required for court reporting programs. Those educational standards that govern NCRA-Certified court reporting training programs are called the *General Requirements and Minimum Standards (GRMS)*, and CASE is charged with maintaining and updating those standards. CASE regularly assesses the impact of changes within the profession and in consumer needs and preferences and recommends any actions

necessary to ensure that NCRA program certification efforts remain relevant. The most recent changes were implemented in August 2010.

### **CASE Certified and Participating Programs**

Currently there are 60 NCRA-Certified Court Reporting Programs. In addition to periodic review by CASE to verify their continued adherence to the *GRMS*, all NCRA-Certified programs are accredited by agencies recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. In 2005, in an effort to raise the level of all education, NCRA also created the Participating Program designation. While not subject to the independent review by CASE, these programs have stated their commitment in providing realtime reporter education by being able to access all NCRA resources.

### ***General Requirements and Minimum Standards (GRMS)***

The *General Requirements and Minimum Standards* developed by CASE are the same for all realtime education programs classified as certified, whether an institution is applying for the first time or applying for recertification.

CASE publishes in the Journal of Court Reporting and elsewhere, and makes available to the public, a list of institutions whose realtime reporter education programs have met the *General Requirements and Minimum Standards*. CASE's advice, services, and cooperation are available to all who offer such an education program.

### **Eligibility:**

All NCRA-Certified institutions must be licensed or certified by the state in which it operates, must be accredited by a body recognized by the U. S. Department of Education, and must be eligible for participation in Title IV Federal financial aid. The institution must be legally

organized and authorized to conduct its program under the laws of its own state and community. It must maintain an up-to-date catalog, program information, or catalog addendum, and the information must meet CASE minimum standards.

NCRA offers eligible schools/programs NCRA certification for judicial, captioning, and Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) programs. The judicial certified realtime reporter education program shall offer at least instruction in a realtime translation theory and speedbuilding, English, law/legal terminology, anatomy/medical terminology, judicial reporting procedures, technology, current events, and must facilitate an internship program. The CART and captioning programs shall include the same core judicial courses, as well CART and captioning technology and speedbuilding requirements specific to those careers.

#### Graduation Requirements:

Specific graduation requirements for judicial reporting students include the following minimum standards:

1. The student shall pass three (3) five-minute tests with 95 percent accuracy at each of the following speeds: 225 words per minute testimony (two-voice), 200 wpm jury charge, and 180 wpm literary.
2. The student shall complete at least 40 verified hours of actual writing time during the internship experience.

Specific graduation requirements for captioning students shall include the following minimum standards:

1. Write three five-minute, literary broadcast material takes at 180 wpm (syllabic and/or word count) at 96 percent verbatim accuracy.

2. Transcribe a minimum of two five-minute, two-voice, non-realtime tests with a minimum of 95 percent accuracy, dictated at a minimum speed of 225 wpm.

3. If the program has a judicial track, the 225 Q&A testing material will satisfy this requirement. Students must submit unedited captioned translations of three 15-minute programs on varied topics for course evaluation taken from the internship experience.

4. The student shall complete at least 25 verified hours of actual writing and 15 hours of research and dictionary preparation during the internship experience.

Specific graduation requirements for communication access realtime translation (CART) students shall include the following minimum standards:

1. Write three five-minute, 180-wpm realtime literary material takes with 96 percent verbatim accuracy.

2. Transcribe a minimum of two five-minute, two-voice, non-realtime tests with a minimum of 95 percent accuracy, dictated at a minimum speed of 225 wpm. If the program has a judicial track, the 225 Q&A testing material will satisfy this requirement.

3. Students must prepare a realtime translation of two 30-minute segments of CART services on varied topics for course evaluation taken from the internship experience.

4. The student must complete 15 hours of research and dictionary preparation and 25 hours of writing, for a total of 40 hours internship experience.

### **Scholarships and Awards**

The Council on Approved Student Education recognizes outstanding educators and students at each annual convention. The CASE Award of Excellence to an Outstanding Educator is given in recognition of dedication to students and extraordinary contributions to reporter education.

CASE also awards \$1,500, \$1,000, and \$500 CASE Scholarships to three outstanding reporting students who meet the eligibility criteria each year. Students submit an essay on a chosen topic, they must have achieved 140-180 words per minute at the time of the submission, and they must have an exemplary academic record.

### **National Court Reporters Foundation (NCRF)**

The National Court Reporters Foundation (NCRF) was established in 1980 as the charitable arm of the National Court Reporters Association (NCRA). NCRA is the professional organization for stenographic court reporters and has approximately 20,000 members. As the foundation for court reporting philanthropy, NCRF supports the court reporting and captioning professions through philanthropic activities funded through charitable contributions.

Over the years, NCRF has developed programs to support all facets of NCRA's membership and the court reporting profession. NCRF has conducted research relevant to the profession; educated the public about the benefits of our technology; awarded scholarships to court reporting students; developed a program to support students by paying their memberships in NCRA; distributed grants in support of realtime services for the deaf and hard-of-hearing community; awarded a grant to support a teaching courtroom at the College of William & Mary; partnered with the Library of Congress and other national organizations to support a national archive documenting our nation's veterans' histories; produced exhibitions at National Court Technology Conferences to educate the judicial community about the benefits of stenographic reporters; and funded NCRA's participation in Intersteno, an international organization, to ensure that NCRA presents the stenographic profession in the global community.

In 1990, then NCRA Librarian-Historian Robert H. Clark donated his world-renowned collection of books and artifacts related to the history of writing and shorthand to NCRF, and the Robert H. Clark Library was established to preserve the history of the court reporting profession and to establish an educational venue of national significance. Among notable items are a 1687 edition of the bible in shorthand, the complete works of Shakespeare in shorthand, and an 1889 Anderson Shorthand Typewriter.

Several of NCRF's programs outlined above are specifically in the educational realm and directly related to supporting students, schools and instructors. Since the early 1990s, the Foundation has awarded about \$55,000 in scholarships, resulting in almost 60 awards to deserving students, whether they are just starting their court reporting educations or in their first year of work.

In order to get students involved in NCRA, NCRF established the Student Initiatives Program, whereby NCRF pays a student's NCRA membership dues in return for that student transcribing two histories under NCRF's Oral Histories Program. Currently, 361 court reporting students are participating in this program. Of those, 181 have completed two oral history transcriptions each to earn complimentary student memberships in NCRA: 42 are new student members, and 139 are renewing student members of NCRA.

Relative to support of educators and instructors, NCRF awarded grants to several educators in the mid-1990s in support of various research they were conducting related to productivity and graduation rates.

In support of schools, NCRF funded the creation and production of a book of models and guidelines for schools to use on providing access through CART services to deaf and hard-of-

hearing students. *Realtime in the Educational Setting* was first made available in 1995 and was updated in 2000. NCRF also created a guideline for schools to use when setting up and conducting a “VHP Day on Campus,” to get students involved in the Student Initiatives Program by transcribing veterans’ histories under the Veterans History Project (VHP). NCRF remains committed to providing quality support of NCRA’s members through exceptional educational programs.

### **Virtual Mentors’ Program**

NCRA is committed to excellence both in the court reporting profession and in the next generation of court reporters. To this end, NCRA offers a way to bring court reporters and students together so that students can get the guidance and encouragement they need and so that today’s court reporters can nurture the future of court reporting. Court reporters and students are partnered into a mentoring relationship that increases their networking opportunities.

### **Commitment to Education**

NCRA recognizes the continued need for a strong reporter education system and has dedicated leadership, management, and resources to advancing improvements in reporter training and in building even stronger relationships with our schools.

### **Reporter Education Commission Research**

In 2004, both NCRA’s Strategic Planning and Annual Planning Committees implemented the Reporter Education Commission as a result of a 2003 report which concluded that the traditional model of recruitment and education “has never experienced a significant success rate.” It noted that “Continuing modest numbers for admission, graduation and successful

transition to the profession suggests the need to fast-track new approaches and perhaps radical changes... NCRA needs to take a fresh objective look at the traditional educational model, as well as at alternative approaches. This approach does not necessarily suggest abandoning the current educational structure, but rather considering other educational models and building on and complementing what is currently working in reporting programs.”

The two primary responsibilities of the Reporter Education Commission were:

1. strengthening the reporter educational system, and
2. strengthening our schools.

The Reporter Education Commission focused its research on the following:

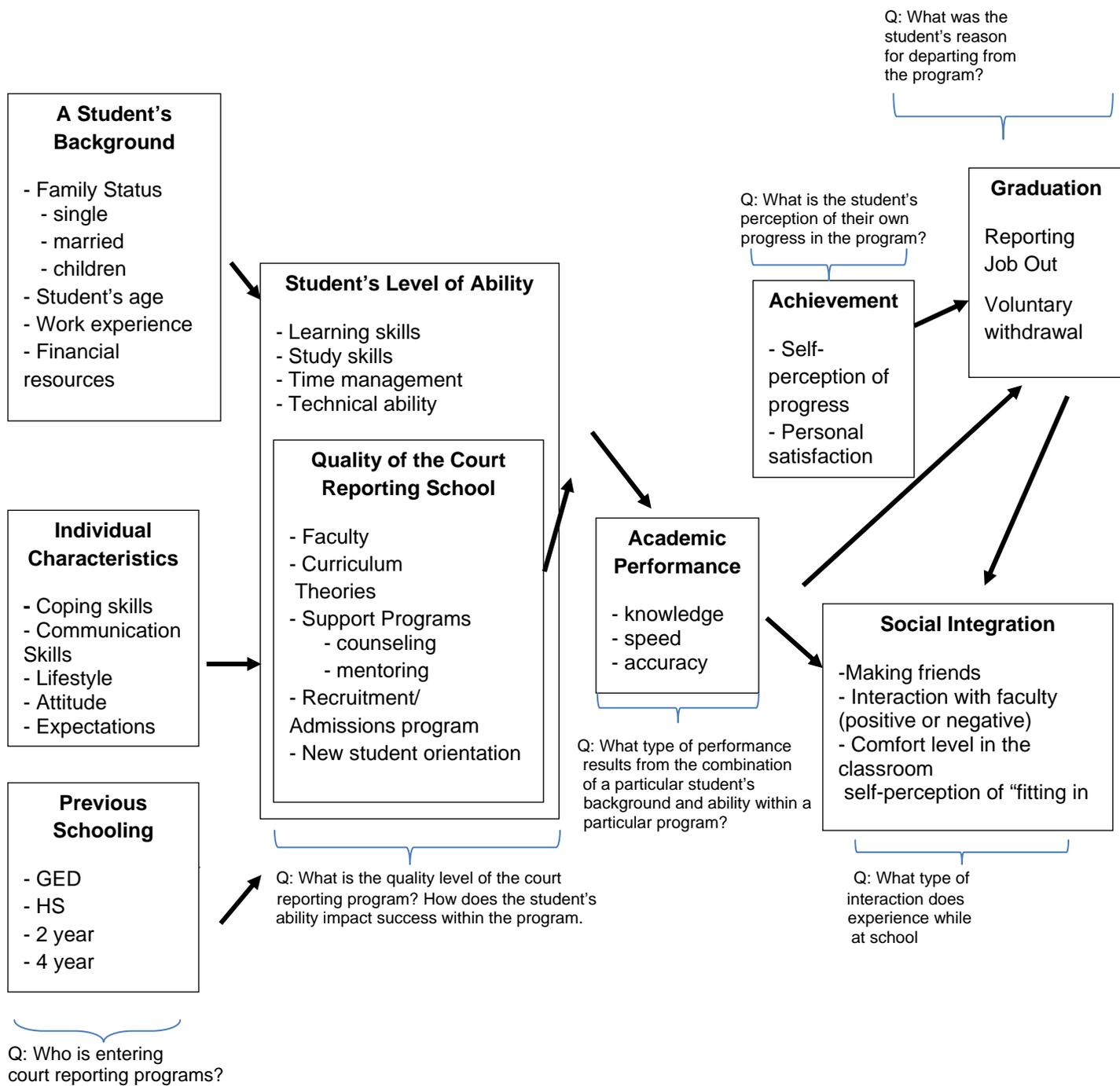
- Student recruitment efforts
- Quality and quantity of students entering and completing their education
- Steno theories
- Strengths and weaknesses of current educational models
- Distance learning
- Academic standards of schools
- Apprenticeships and other programs to ease the transition from school to work
- Reasons students hit plateaus
- NCRA's certification and testing program
- NCRA's court reporter program approval process

Many individuals – including students, graduates, educators, administrators, guidance counselors, firm owners, court reporters of all levels of experience, official reporters, freelancers, managers, CART providers, and captioners - participated in focus groups, online surveys and phone interviews to share their views on the profession.

Throughout the research process, the Commission, in conjunction with CASE, sought to conduct their work in an open and transparent manner, thereby providing a variety of opportunities for all interested stakeholders to participate in the process. Because so many members had a vested interest in the health of the educational system, the Commission and CASE sought to take into account as many different viewpoints and opinions as possible, and to test those opinions against objective data and educational expertise, both from within the reporting profession and from without.

The reporter educational model presumed that students enter a program with various pre-entry characteristics, such as prior work experience, attitude, lack (or availability) of financial resources, family responsibilities, various degrees of previous education and individual skills and abilities. Factors such as those are related to the initial goals and expectations that students bring with them. Such goals and expectations can be further divided into education goals and commitment to a particular program (i.e., judicial reporting, CART, captioning, etc.) in which students are enrolled.

The model also presumed that once enrolled, students begin to have various institutional experiences in the court reporting school, including academic performance, manual skill development, and interactions with faculty and peers. Each of those “variables” may affect the student’s success or failure in achieving academic goals and, in turn, successfully transitioning into the reporting profession. The model below imposes order on those many variables so that research could be conducted in an organized fashion.



Because of the comprehensive and broad research agenda identified by the Commission and its initial planning meeting, members adopted a two-pronged approach. First, the Commission focused on conducting quantitative research (electronic surveys) done by NCRA to establish a strong foundation of not only what was known to be empirically valid, but also what were the many member perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the current educational system. Secondary research (collection and analysis of prior research) also played an important part in the quantitative research efforts, because it allowed the Commission to build on areas of investigation that had already been reviewed.

Second, after establishing a strong baseline of information through quantitative research, the Commission focused on qualitative research in the form of intensive interviews and focus groups so that it could drill down into key issues for a more in-depth perspective. Further, by reviewing responses to NCRA surveys, the Commission was able to identify likely participants for qualitative research activities.

A study was next conducted on behalf of the National Court Reporters Association by the Education Policy Institute, to provide information and direction that may in turn help the Association to support the court reporter education system and increase the retention and persistence rates of court reporting students. The purpose of the study was to explore the realities of court reporter education and discern the practices and strategies that either support or impede the progress of students through the educational pipeline. To this end, this report concluded with a series of recommendation for NCRA, court reporting firms, and schools with regard to improving student retention, graduation rates and ultimately the transition to the profession.

To do this, NCRA relied mostly on the information collected by NRECA Market Research Services in 2005. Their thorough review of court reporting education, through a series of interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires of the major stockholders in the education process including firm owners, instructors, current students, graduates, and dropouts, helped form an idea of what is happening along the educational side of the profession.

Following the research, recommendations were submitted to the Reporter Education Commission for consideration. An implementation team was formed and charged with implementing approved initiatives in a timely, effective, and consistent manner. The initiatives include the following:

**Recommendations Made by the Reporter Education Commission to the NCRA Board**

	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Benefit to Whom?</b>	<b>Impact of this Initiative</b>
1	Plan for Creating an Ongoing Assessment and Distribution of Best Practices in the Court Reporter Education System.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educators</li> <li>• Administrators</li> <li>• School owners</li> </ul>	Facilitates the regular collection and distribution of best practices to all programs on a wide range of topics relevant to the reporter education system.
2	Plan for Expanding NCRA’s Role in Student Recruitment Activities of Court Reporter Education Programs. Reporter Education Commission and CASE will develop a comprehensive, effective, and measurable two-year student recruitment strategy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Court reporting students</li> <li>• Firm owners</li> </ul>	May identify key traits in students that lead to success in the court reporting profession.
3	Plan for Building a Stronger Relationship with School Owners and Administrators.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrators</li> <li>• School owners</li> <li>• Educators</li> <li>• NCRA</li> </ul>	Greater strength through alliance building between court reporting program owner/administrators and NCRA. Increase/improved dialogue may lead to stronger education programs.
4	Plan for Enhancing Professional Development Opportunities for Court Reporter Educators.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educators</li> <li>• Students</li> </ul>	Greater support for educators in terms of relevant, timely, and affordable professional development opportunities.

5	Plan for Creating a National Dictation Database for Students, Educators and Professionals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students</li> <li>• Professionals</li> <li>• Educators</li> <li>• Administrators</li> <li>• School Owners</li> </ul>	Facilitates the speedbuilding process for students and professionals with easy to access online dictation material.
6	Plan for Modifying and Improving Current Approval Process for Court Reporting Programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Theory developers</li> <li>• Students</li> <li>• Educators</li> <li>• Administrators</li> <li>• School Owners</li> </ul>	This plan is designed to raise the level of quality in all court reporting programs by supporting those programs seeking NCRA approval (certification) through meeting the General Requirements and Minimum Standards, and to involve those programs who do not seek approval, but wish to strengthen their programs.

	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Benefit to Whom?</b>	<b>Impact of this Initiative</b>
7	Plan for Replacing the Current Theory Text Approval Process. Additional Recommendations from the Reporter Education Commission.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students</li> <li>• Educators</li> <li>• Administrators</li> <li>• School Owners</li> </ul>	This plan is designed to remove restrictions from theory developers allowing them to upgrade and improve their theories as appropriate based on feedback from users and the impacts of technology.
8	Plan for Introducing Regional Workshops for Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students</li> <li>• Educators</li> </ul>	This plan is designed to offer up to three regional one-day workshops and one online workshop in 2007 to students in targeted areas of the country featuring high-quality instruction on subjects related to “professionalism in the workplace.”
9	Plan for Performance Recognition and Rewards for Students and Educators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students</li> <li>• Educators</li> </ul>	This plan is designed to provide performance recognition and incentives to court reporting educators and students.
10	Plan for Expanded Internship Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students</li> </ul>	This plan is designed to provide funding for expansion of internship opportunities for all students, especially those in remote areas.
11	For a Pilot Test of a Competency-based Court Reporting Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students</li> </ul>	This plan is designed to provide funding to pilot test a competency-based, total immersion court reporting program with established reporter training program(s).

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Educational Model

As a result of the Reporter Education Commission Summary and Recommendations, NCRA first concentrated on outreach to schools and programs. A new position – Assistant Director of Education -- was created with a focus on working with the education community to forge stronger relationships and provide hands-on assistance. Expansion of training for court reporting educators resulted in the development of Regional Court Reporting Instructor (CRI) Orientation opportunities, held on-site at our Certified programs. While NCRA's Annual Convention & Exposition always includes a student track, mini campus conventions were developed, also held on-site at Certified programs, in an effort to bring the convention experience and learning opportunities to more students. Students attend educational and motivational seminars, learn about current trends in the profession, and network with working professionals. Hardware and software vendors exhibit the newest in products, allowing students to stay current with technology.

Other initiatives were implemented. NCRA established Community of Interest Committees specific to, but not limited to, school owners and administrators, educators, and students. They meet by conference call and via an email listserv, where they can exchange ideas, discuss topics relevant to school practices, and formulate best practices. A section of the NCRA website is devoted to each community of interest. A student quarterly newsletter called *Up To Speed* was established in 2009. The mission of this newsletter was to provide students with information that will help them succeed in school and make a smooth transition into their chosen careers. *Up to Speed* includes a note from the current NCRA President, articles from working reporters and educators, spelling and proofreading tips, history, links to the working world, words of wisdom and resources. *Caseline*, the NCRA educators' newsletter is published twice a

year. It includes educational trends, articles from educational experts, and teaching tools and tips. NCRA's Marketing Department is currently conducting research on best practices for school marketing will be providing marketing tools and products to assist schools in recruitment efforts.

### **Total Immersion Pilot Program**

One of the key initiatives to be advanced following the Reporter Education Commission research was the development of a pilot program that would examine whether a skills-based education model could result in reducing court reporter training time and getting graduates out into the workforce more quickly. While the basic elements of learning a steno theory and building speed on the steno machine will always remain a personal accomplishment that each individual must achieve, several innovative approaches were employed in the areas of student admissions and screening, the steno theory taught, dictation tools and methods utilized, curriculum modification, and personal coaching. It was the goal of the pilot to explore whether the experimental curriculum that immersed students in daily machine practice could improve student speed progression and overall performance, resulting in higher completion rates, when measured against performance in our traditional court reporting programs.

Developing an innovative program of this nature was more challenging than anticipated, with the most spirited debate centering on the extent to which academic courses should be included and whether accreditation restrictions should play a part in this experiment. In November of 2007, a task force of subject matter experts was appointed and tasked with creating a program that could carry out the NCRA Board's vision of an "immersion" program, and by late 2008, the project began to take shape. The Total Immersion Task Force determined that the pilot would be taught online, and the decision was made to place it outside the traditional accreditation framework. The task force outlined the components of the program and then moved rapidly to

get each component into place – writing a steno theory, selecting an instructor, developing an academic exam, making decisions on equipment needs, giving input on budget requirements, and developing the criteria for the selection of the students. The project was transferred to the National Court Reporters Foundation (NCRF), so as not to be delayed as NCRA completed its five-year re-accreditation of NCRA’s continuing education programs with the Accrediting Council for Continuing Education and Training (ACCET).

NCRA received applications from 198 student candidates, and the field of applicants was narrowed with each step in the application process: review of high school and college transcripts and essays, successful passing of the academic exam, and phone interviews with the instructor and task force members. The 23 students who were serious contenders were given an aptitude screening inventory called the Attentional and Interpersonal Style (TAIS) Inventory. Once an overall assessment of the final candidates was made, 15 students were selected to participate in the pilot.

The pilot was launched on March 16, 2009. The students were highly motivated and entered the program with strong technology backgrounds. They focused on learning the steno theory during the first quarter. Speedbuilding was the primary focus for the second through sixth quarters, but students also focused on English, medical and legal terminology, and court procedures. Case CATalyst software training was provided.

The pilot utilized several innovative components, which will be featured in-depth in future articles in NCRA’s monthly *JCR* publication.

Below is an overview of the Total Immersion Program and the progress students made during the pilot program.

## Research of Court Reporting Education

2004 - 2007

### Total Immersion Pilot Program Developed

2008 - 2009

### Application Process

Educational Background  
Academic Testing  
Essay  
Interview  
*The Attentional & Interpersonal  
Style (TAIS) Inventory*

### Total Immersion Pilot Program Begins

March 16, 2009

<b>March 16 - June 5, 2009</b> Theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Theory</li> <li>• 15 students continued</li> </ul>
<b>June 15 - September 4, 2009</b> Speedbuilding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 13 students continued</li> <li>• Two students at 140 words per minute (wpm), seven at 120 wpm, three at 100 wpm, and one at 80 wpm.</li> </ul>
<b>September 14 - December, 2009</b> Speedbuilding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 12 students continued</li> <li>• Three students at 160 wpm, four at 140 wpm, four at 120 wpm, and one at 100 wpm.</li> </ul>
<b>December 28, 2009 - March 26, 2010</b> Speedbuilding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 11 students continued</li> <li>• One student at 180 wpm, one at 160/180, three students at 160 wpm, three at 140 wpm, two at 120/140 wpm, and one at 120 wpm.</li> </ul>
<b>April 5 - June 25, 2010</b> Speedbuilding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 students continued</li> <li>• One student at 200 wpm, two students at 180 wpm, one at 160/180 wpm, three at 140 wpm, and one at 120 wpm.</li> </ul>
<b>July 6 - September 24, 2010</b> Speedbuilding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 students remained in the full 18-month program</li> <li>• One student graduated. One student was at 200 wpm, one at 180/200 wpm, one at 180 wpm, one at 160 wpm, and one at 120 wpm.</li> </ul>

## **Pilot Innovations**

*Admissions and Screening* – The innovative approaches for this experimental pilot began with student screening. The desire was to identify the students who would be most apt to succeed in a skills activity such as court reporting training, and The Attentional and Interpersonal Style (TAIS) Inventory was selected by the task force as the desired aptitude screening tool for the pilot applicants.

The focus of TAIS is to measure the specific concentration and interpersonal skills necessary for effective decision-making and for the coordination of mental and physical processes in high-pressure situations. The TAIS results identify the specific environmental conditions likely to facilitate and/or interfere with an individual's ability to make effective decisions and perform at the upper limits of their physical and mental potential. TAIS results also identify the specific behaviors an individual needs to change to improve performance.

*Theory* – The task force wrote its own theory for the pilot. The theory took realtime concepts into consideration, but it relied on some artificial intelligence for conflict resolution. The students focused on learning the phonetic sounds and writing what they heard. A computer dictionary was also developed for the students.

*Dictation Tools and Methods* – The students had access to both Realtime Coach and Stenograph University, web-based speedbuilding tools, and they were given regular assignments in both. And since those tools focus on set-speed dictation, the pilot took a different approach in its live daily classes, using concordance drills. For concordance drills, the instructor dictates words, then the words in phrases, then the phrases in a full sentence, and then the sentences in a longer segment. This reinforces the outlines and gets them ingrained, both mentally and in how

they feel to your fingers, so as to promote accuracy. The pilot students had extremely high accuracy rates when transcribing their speed tests.

***Academics*** – General education courses were not part of the pilot. The intent of the experiment was to have the students not be encumbered up front with academics, but rather to immerse themselves in time on the steno machine. The academics that were deemed essential were incorporated in two ways. Medical and legal terminology, court procedures, and even grammar concepts were built into the dictation, so the students were absorbing the information as they were being drilled on their machines. And secondly, supplemental PowerPoint lessons were created and loaded into the online course site for the students to access. The lessons included English coursework, proofreading exercises, and plurals and possessives worksheets,

***Personal Coaching*** – Coaching is considered one of the most effective learning methodologies. It is not the same as either teaching or mentoring. Teaching involves showing or telling a student how to do something, such as discussing errors on an exam or giving guidance on correcting a writing style flaw. Mentoring involves an industry expert offering solutions and answers to the student they mentor, conveying their approach to the profession and sharing their knowledge, rather than asking them questions that challenge them to change their thinking and behavior. The coach's role is *to provide structure, foundation, and support, so that students can begin to self-generate the results they want on their own.* Coaching is the process of inquiry, relying on the use of well-crafted questions, rather than continually sharing the answer, to get students to sharpen their own problem solving skills. Simply stated, coaching is allowing one to learn based on what they already know and providing critical guidance only when necessary.

## **Task Force Analysis**

The Total Immersion Pilot Program ended on September 24, 2010. Since the pilot was taught online, interviews were conducted with 13 of NCRA's online programs, to gather comparative data. Annual Report statistics and survey information from our traditional schools were also gathered. Following review of the analysis materials in December 2010, the task force met to assess the findings.

## **Pilot Findings**

*Prior level of education was not a factor in student performance.* Results indicated that pilot students with previous degrees did not necessarily do better than those without degrees. Two students who dropped early in the pilot had bachelor's degrees, and one had a master's degree. Task force members, however, felt that the academic test, developed by the task force and administered to candidates, was instrumental in identifying students with strong verbal and grammatical skills. Many of the academic test questions involved vocabulary knowledge, and a major factor in building speed is recognizing vocabulary words quickly so that you can write them phonetically. While all 15 pilot students answered more than 75 of the 100 academic exam questions correctly, nine of the 15 (including four of the six who finished the entire 18-month course) scored 85% and higher.

*Possessing the traits identified in The Attentional and Interpersonal Style (TAIS) Inventory was not a guaranteed predictor of success for court reporting training.* Using the TAIS Inventory screening was certainly helpful to the instructor in identifying how to most effectively work with each student one on one, knowing their strengths and weaknesses, and it gave the students more awareness of personal traits that they needed to be cognizant of or

characteristics about themselves that might explain their successes and struggles more clearly. But while TAIS, for example, identified the students who finished the full 18 months as having higher levels of focus, self-confidence, and the ability to perform well under pressure, several of those who left the pilot early showed some of these same traits.

The TAIS screening indicated that the greatest strengths of five of the six who completed the full 18 months were the ability to focus their concentration, the fact that they were organized, meticulous, completed tasks on time, and had an awareness of their surroundings, with the ability to read and react to what's going on at a given moment. But TAIS indicated that these traits were also the predominant strengths of eight of the nine students who dropped from the program.

*Task force members noted a higher retention rate in the pilot as compared with traditional programs.* There are many factors that cause students to drop out of traditional programs, and students dropped from the pilot for many of the same reasons – financial difficulties, family obligations, health issues, different expectations, and skill realities. NCRA gets figures from the Annual Reports completed by schools that allow us to calculate the average retention rate each year. During the 2008-2009 year, the most recent Annual Report, the retention rate was approximately 63% for traditional programs (Certified and Participating) and 74% for the Total Immersion pilot.

The TAIS Inventory identified students with a higher ability to discipline oneself, to follow through, and to avoid being distracted, but again, there were several who dropped who showed some of those same traits. The task force also identified other factors that may have contributed to higher retention – free tuition; small class size; experience and quality of the instructors; and personal coaching sessions.

*The Total Immersion students demonstrated quicker speed progression than their typical traditional counterparts.* The task force in its discussions noted that it is not uncommon for schools to have occasional students who progress rapidly through a program and complete in less than two years. But four pilot students (25% of the original starting class) were at 180 words per minute or higher at the 18-month point, with one student reaching 225 words per minute and completing her training.

### **Current Student Status**

The Total Immersion Pilot was a success on several fronts. Training in traditional programs, with full academic course loads, typically takes a minimum of two years – though the reality is that it takes many students longer to reach their graduation speeds. Yet, in this 18-month pilot, one student completed the program, reaching the 225-word-per-minute goal speeds and becoming a Registered Professional Reporter in January 2011. She is working in the Washington, D.C., area. Three other pilot students reached 180-200 words per minute, with one working in New York and New Jersey and one working in Washington, D.C. Both plan to continue to pursue certification.

Articles will be written in NCRA publications detailing various components of the program – admissions and screening methods, restructuring of limited academics, dictation tools and methods, personal coaching, etc. It is hoped that these articles will become the foundation for a dialogue with educators on which innovations contributed to student success.

We have learned much. While there is as yet no single answer to solving the question of what guarantees success in training for this skill, there are tools that can be incorporated into reporter education that contribute to student progression and enhance educator knowledge in how

to work with them. Of utmost importance, the skills-based structure of the pilot has given us much food for thought as we examine further whether radical changes need to be considered for delivering court reporter training.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit an essay for the first collection of Intersteno's Education Committee, and best wishes for a successful 48<sup>th</sup> Intersteno Congress in Paris in 2011.

### **Additional Education Tools**

RealtmeCoach™

Powered by Realtme Learning Systems, LLC

In 2005, Rex Allen and Jared M. Carman were asked by a court reporting school to develop reporting skills training that would significantly improve graduation rates, reduce graduation time, and help students become successful realtime reporters. They drew upon 30 years experience in creating learning technology for over a million people in Fortune 200 companies and schools to design Realtme Coach™. They also teamed with top reporting professionals and teachers, including Marybeth Everhart, RPR, CRI, and partnered with NCRA.

Realtme Coach™ (RTC) is a unique and powerful web-based learning simulator used by thousands of students and working reporters, captioners, and CART providers. Subscribers log in to their own RTC "learning portal" 24/7 to access thousands of practice options and drills. Video and audio "takes" are provided in many settings, including lit, depositions, jury charge, news, and more, with one to four voices, and with speeds from 60 to 300 words per minute. RTC analyzes writing instantly to isolate errors and patterns, and provides feedback, drills, and

coaching. It tracks practice time and quality, and encourages success with game-like features that make it “addictive,” as described by users.

## **Stenograph, LLC**

Stenograph was founded in 1938 and their first steno machine was manufactured in 1939. The founder was M.H. Wright, formerly a VP at LaSalle Institute that had taught machine shorthand via correspondence. His son, Robert Wright, helped perfect the stenograph machine and built the Company. Stenograph has been designing, engineering and manufacturing machines ever since.

Stenograph was an early pioneer in the computer-aided transcription (CAT) marketplace when software was written to the specific requirements of first mainframe then mini-computers before the advent of the personal computer. Today, Case CATalyst software is one of many used CAT software in the world. CATalyst BCS captioning software is also a product discerning captioners.

In addition to CAT software, Stenograph is prominent in the development and production of writing machines for both professionals and students. Stenographic keyboards are available for virtually every international language.

Software, writing machines and their supplies are only part of the picture. Stenograph also provides a wide array of instructional and curriculum materials for students and professionals and training using the latest in instructional technology through Stenograph University Online which was being developed in the late 1990s. Their latest venture is the acquisition of court reporting schools including Prince Institute in Montgomery, AL, and Denver Academy of Court Reporting.