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## ASL interpreters in high demand

By Bob Waite  
*Emerald Contributor*

American Sign Language is a unique form of communication. It is fluid motion, facial expression, mime and emotional content without speech.

"It paints pictures in the air," said former University ASL teacher Susanne Beaman. "ASL is a very visual and natural language."

Because few but the deaf are fluent, there is a large demand for ASL interpreters to serve the approximately 200 deaf people in the Eugene-Springfield community, Beaman said.

The Disabilities Act, expected to be signed by President Bush, may increase that demand by expanding the rights of disabled citizens to rights equal to those of other minority groups.

Televised Senate hearings now offer an ASL interpreter.

Beaman was a victim of budget cuts at the University Speech Pathology, Audiology department several years ago, leaving Iris Peters as the remaining ASL teacher.

"It's really sad because people need to take at least three ASL classes before they can even apply for interpreter training," Beaman said of this year's budget cuts.

She is a freelance ASL interpreter.

"(Myles) Brand said this is symptomatic of our general funding situation," said professor Ned Christensen, director of Speech Pathology, Audiology.

Christensen said the University has taught ASL for the past eight to 10 years, but never with the intent to certify ASL interpreters.

Summer term students will be able to take second and third level ASL courses but further budget cuts limit next year's classes to just the first level.

"It was one of those decisions we had to make in an economic situation," Christensen said of this year's budget cuts. "Sign language was never a major requirement. I looked at many alternatives, there just weren't many there."

University students will be able to take levels two and three in summer 1991 if there is enough demand, Christensen said.

"The reason why we need ASL classes at the UO is that not only does it spread an awareness of deaf people, but some of these people may wind up in the university system," said Janet Reed, teacher for the Cascade Regional Program for the Hearing Impaired.

"There are about 90 deaf students just in the 4J system," Reed said.

"All teachers graduating should have at least one ASL class," she said. "It's in their best interest to take those classes. You're prepared when you have a deaf kid in your class."

Why not teach the deaf English?

"To teach a deaf person English is like trying to teach us Chinese by lipreading and not hearing a thing," said Beaman, whose parents are also deaf. "We are the ones who have the capability to learn their language."

Some deaf people can lip-read, she said, but those people could hear as children and have some knowledge of English.

A person who was born deaf

has no way to master a language that is difficult for people who can hear, Beaman said.

This year there is only one deaf University student, Beaman said, but next year she believes there will be three or four.

Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act reads, "Any program receiving federal funding has to provide interpreter services for the deaf," Beaman said.

That includes the University, LCC, Sacred Heart Hospital, the police and the U.S. Forest Service, Beaman said.

As one who does this service, Beaman said personal freelancing pays about \$15 per hour while the public schools pay \$7 to \$8 per hour and the courts pay \$20 per hour.

"It's a good way to earn a living as you're going through college," she said. "It's a good stepping stone that can lead to teaching and counseling."

However, "Most full-time interpreters burn out after about five years. Interpreting is hard to do full-time, you're dealing with words all day," she said.

And there are health risks.

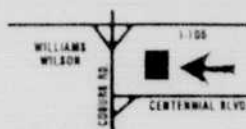
"People get carpal tunnel syndrome, interpreter elbow — ideally the interpreter is working about 20 hours per week."

Christensen said Western Oregon College in Monmouth offers an accredited ASL interpreter program and Lane Community College offers ASL classes.

Chemeketa Community College in Salem, Seattle Central Community College and UC Northridge in Los Angeles also offer good ASL programs, Beaman said.

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