

Language: Classes are growing in popularity

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My schoolmates' parents wouldn't let their kids come near me."

Growing up with discrimination cemented Larson-Muhr's desire to devote her life to studying deafness. Now, Larson-Muhr, a certified Sign-linguist and head of the University's Communication Disorders program, is one of two instructors who teach American Sign Language at the University.

"There's really a growing interest in ASL. We offer three sections of Sign I and II, and they always fill up," said Larson-Muhr, who divides her time between the University and helping out with community events, such as interpreting for Mayor Jim Torrey's State of the City address Wednesday. Larson-Muhr's afternoon class was packed Tuesday, with waiting lists for each section.

"I've always been interested and have wanted to take it, just to know it for myself," said sopho-

more Whitney Reynolds.

ASL is more than just signs. It has a written form and its own grammatical structure that closely resembles Chinese or Navajo, and it can be more difficult than most students imagine.

"It's a physical language, too, and the course is more like a drama class because of all the expression you need to convey it," Larson-Muhr said, explaining that ASL has thousands of signs and variations. American Sign is only one of about 200 different forms around the world. Scholars estimate there are roughly 500,000 speakers in the U.S., making it the third largest non-English language in the country.

The popularity of Sign classes at the University indicates its growing prominence nationwide. More than 90 universities and colleges from Yale to East Texas State recognize ASL as a full foreign language.

The University, however, still does not accept ASL.

"It's a really controversial issue," said Teresa Quinn, interpreter coordinator at Disability Services. "Many people in academics don't regard it as a language because they feel it is not different enough from English, and also that there is no literature or culture connected with it," she said.

Hillary Gerdes, a University Senator who is on the Academic Requirement Committee, said she would like to see ASL become part of the curriculum. A motion was passed in 1994 by the Undergraduate Educational Policy Coordinating Committee that recognized its significance, she said. But the committee decided ASL should not be accepted as a language.

Yet many people, like Ruth Bradley, disagree. Bradley, a University interpreter who has worked with the deaf since 1967, calls the policy "discrimination" and one that creates barriers to deaf students.

"Far too many people who should know better don't recognize it," she said. "It's insulting when someone degrades your language, because language is a great deal of who we are as people."

Bradley argues that despite some academic objections, ASL does have a rich literature and culture.

"There's film, poetry, and plays written in and for ASL," she said. "It's been proven and researched by linguists as having all the elements of a language."

Larson-Muhr said she will continue to advocate for ASL and fight misconceptions about it. She said her work interpreting for a seminar about Sudden Infant Death Syndrome recently made her mother realize her son's death was not the fault of her deafness.

"My mother just never had access to that kind of information before."

Proposal: Difficult to predict future changes in funding

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ture committees are working on proposals.

OSSHE's Budget and Finance Committee is working on Kitzhaber's suggestions to create a new budgetary proposal that allows tuition and state dollars to follow students to their institutions. The present system pools the tuition money from separate institutions and redistributes it.

OSSHE board member Tom Imeson, vice president of government, public affairs and communication for PacifiCorp in Portland, chairs the Budget and Finance Committee and also served on the governor's Higher Education and the Economy Task Force. The proposal is expected in late spring.

In the short term, it appears that the University will benefit the most, along with Portland State University, Dennis said. "They have the largest enrollment with the cheapest degree programs," he said.

Schools like the Oregon Institute of Technology and Eastern Oregon University are likely to lose out with the new tuition dis-

Gov. Kitzhaber's recommendations

- Changing the way tuition dollars are distributed so that the tuition students pay goes to their school instead of into the system budget
- Establishing a system budget process that shows what programs are being subsidized and why
- Shifting the management focus from the needs of individual institutions to the needs of the public and economic marketplaces; shifting budgetary priorities to match
- Achieving complete transferability of courses among community colleges, universities; facilitating transferability with private and out-of-state schools

tribution because of the high cost of their programs, he said.

Dennis said it is difficult to predict what the decentralization of tuition dollars will mean for individual institutions in the long run.

"At the University of Oregon, you could see bigger classes, you could see UO shying away from

more expensive programs that are important to the state," he said.

But the current favorable climate toward technology could also mean a redirection of subsidies to schools like OIT, which can show benefits to high-tech industries, and less subsidies for schools like the University, whose philosophy and English degrees are less appealing to business, Dennis said.

The Governance and Structure Committee is "looking at ways to increase campus autonomy over program creation and making campuses more enterprising," Clifford said. By more enterprising, Clifford said individual institutions need to be "more creative in meeting the needs of the state."

The Higher Education and Economy Task Force, which made one of the reports Kitzhaber based his recommendations on, is composed primarily of Oregon business leaders; it is chaired by John Lee of the Providence Health System in Portland and includes Eugene's Gretchen Pierce of Holt and Associates and Randy Pape of The Pape Group.

State aid

State appropriations for higher education from 1997-98:

Oregon State University	\$107,461,000
Oregon Health Sciences University	53,948,000
Portland State University	48,054,000
University of Oregon	45,388,000
Southern Oregon State University	16,122,000
Western Oregon State University	13,328,000
Oregon Institute of Technology	14,969,000
Eastern Oregon State University	11,393,000
Community colleges	195,873,000
Student aid	16,250,000
Other	16,250,000

SOURCE: The Chronicle of Higher Education

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