

# PERSPECTIVES

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## The SIGNS of silence



### A PAINFUL ROUTINE

CASEY HOLDAHL

I've been trying to learn sign language for the past two years. After speaking Japanese for two years and retaining none of it, and after a brief and unsuccessful stint with Spanish, I had all but condemned myself to the fact that I am just one of those people who cannot pick up languages.

I was ready to give up on ever being able to mark the bilingual box on a job application, when I stumbled upon the a small subheading of the School of Education in the course catalogue: Communications Disorders & Sciences.

I didn't really have any idea what this was, but I was a few credits short and desperate to find a class that wouldn't infringe on my strict "no classes before 10 a.m." policy.

I was surprised to find out that the University offered a Beginning American Sign Language class. I figured that maybe my problem with languages stemmed from my inability to make the "rah" sound in Japanese or the rolling "r" in Spanish. Maybe my problem was my tongue, not my mind. So with hopes of being able to pad my somewhat pathetic resume with a statement of bilinguality, I registered for Beginning American Sign Language.

It wasn't until later that I realized the University apparently doesn't believe I should mark the bilingual box. I guess the University's stance is that American Sign Language isn't actually a language but rather is the byproduct of a "disorder": deafness. This is offensive to some — myself included — but unfortunately, it's not surprising.

For those who don't know, which is just about everyone that isn't deaf, sign language is not English for the deaf!

I know that our American sensibilities tell us that if deaf Americans speak it and it's called "American Sign Language," then it must be English for the deaf. It's not. ASL has it's own sentence structure and grammar, just like every other language. ASL is no more like English than any other language. So why doesn't the University consider ASL it's own language? The problem lies in the way society, including the University administration, views deaf people.

The debate is whether there is such a thing as a Deaf culture. I wasn't aware of this until I started taking ASL. Like most people, I was ignorant to the fact that deaf people have their own culture. You can be deaf and not be a member of the Deaf community. It depends on whether you "speak" ASL. First off, the community has its own language, and more importantly, it has its own set of values.

Members of the Deaf community don't consider their inability to hear "disabling." It's simply something different, such as skin color or sex. Deaf people are proud of their deafness. This is why most members of the Deaf community are so opposed to the new cochlear implants. They feel that by taking a deaf person and giving them hearing, doctors are in a way committing cultural genocide against the Deaf community, which they are.

It is more difficult to be deaf in a hearing society, but so what? It's not easy to be a minority of any kind, especially in this country. Does that mean that doctors should develop a surgery to make everyone into upper-class heterosexual Caucasian men, just because then our culture will accept them? Of course not.

So why doesn't the University offer an ASL language program? One possibility is that if it did, the University would be admitting that being deaf isn't a "communication disorder." Rather than trying to understand and welcome the Deaf community, the University can just label deafness a disability and call it a day.

What if the University had its own

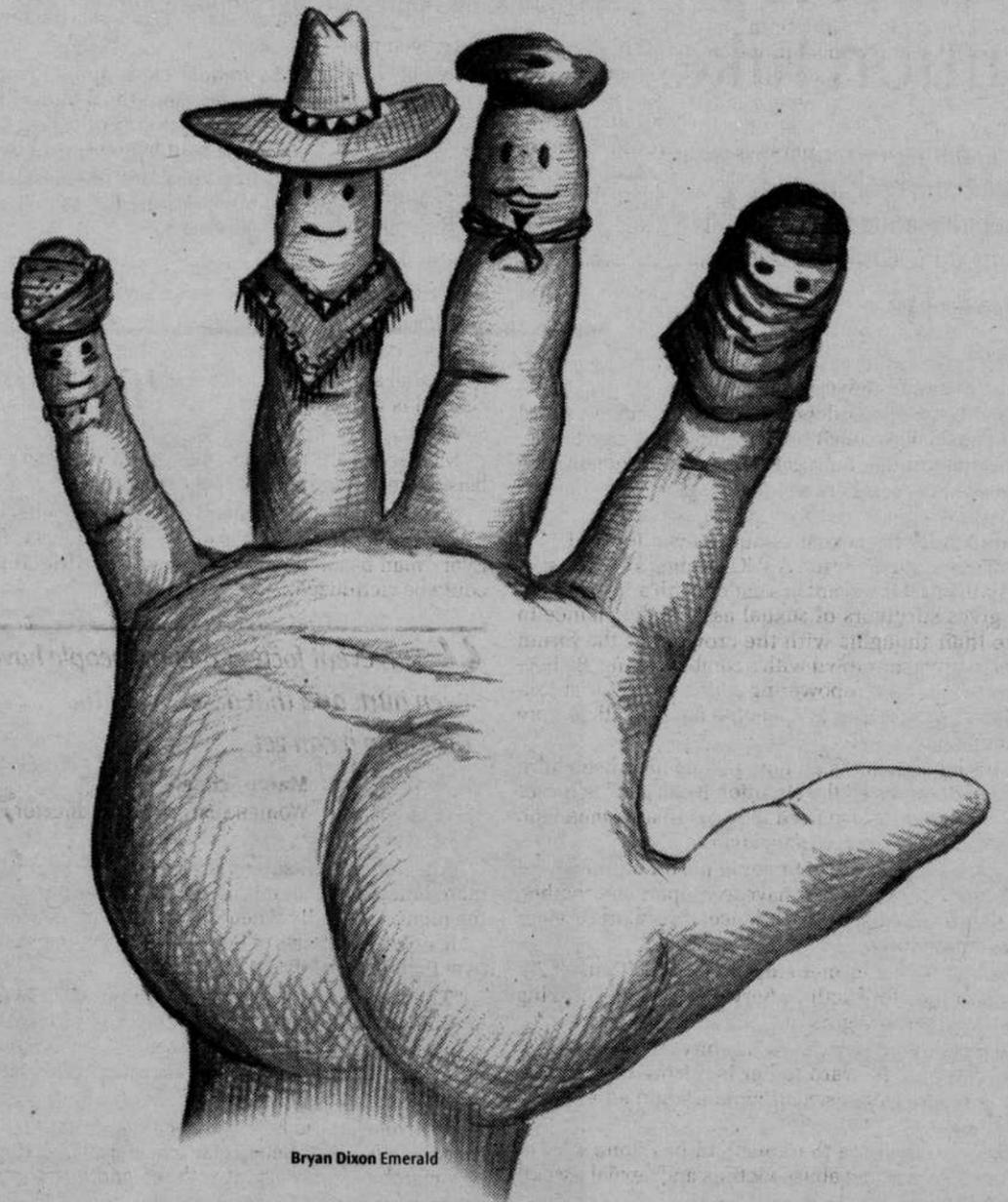
ASL program, such as the one at Western Oregon University? More Deaf people might actually enroll here! Then the University would have to provide services, such as interpreters, which would siphon money from integral campus programs such as stadium renovations

and batons for the newly commissioned DPS "officers."

As long as the University administration continues to overlook the existence of a Deaf culture, ASL will be nothing more than a way to communicate with people with a "disorder." ASL at the University should be a

program dedicated to learning and speaking the language of another culture. So much for being bilingual.

Casey Holdahl is a columnist for the Oregon Daily Emerald. His views do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald. He can be reached at choldahl@gladstone.uoregon.edu.



Bryan Dixon Emerald

### Letters to the editor

#### Male rape victims need support, too

Before I begin, I should make it quite clear that I think that Sexual Assault Support Services, the Women's Center and the Take Back the Night people are doing an incredibly valuable thing, and they are doing a fabulous job.

However, today I noticed one of the signs along 13th Avenue that read, "10 percent of rape victims are men." Not only should it probably read, "10 percent of reported rape victims are men," but it brought up another question in my mind.

Ten percent of our society is reportedly gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered or in some way not straight. This statistic is quite similar to the first. These two comparable numbers, though, receive a quite different treatment from society. While we often go out of our way to acknowledge, respect and accept non-straight people (as it should be!), our brothers, fa-

thers, lovers and male friends who are rape or sexual assault victims often are ignored and not even allowed to talk about their pain and shame, which is no less than any woman's trauma in the same situation.

We send the message to women that regardless of what they did, wore or said, they didn't deserve to be raped or assaulted. Of course this is true, but why are we sending it only to women? Not only do our men need to hear this message just as much as women do, they need to know that they are welcome in a healing community such as SASS or Take Back the Night.

Lauren Manes  
 junior  
 linguistics/French

#### Date rape victims aren't liars

I would like to respond to the letter written by Charles G. Haller II ("Is every unwise choice a drugging and raping?", ODE, May '14). I was really disturbed by his opinion that most

date rape victims are liars. My question to him is: Who the hell wants to be labeled as a rape victim? I don't!

I don't want my lifestyle, my integrity or my sanity questioned in front of a jury of my peers. I don't want to relive every detail of a night I would rather forget. I certainly wouldn't want to have to deal with the stupidity and insensitivity of people like Haller, who are so quick to judge others by their own meager life experiences.

For you, Haller, I have two words: Get help.

Andrea Patterson  
 senior  
 journalism

#### Less sports, more scholarship in the Emerald

I would like to commend the Emerald on its editorial "shaming" the recent benign attempt at a reprimand for the commercialization of sports on this campus. I would also like to commend the paper for its coverage

of events such as the pow wow this weekend put on by the Native American Student Union.

I might suggest that there is even more room for coverage of such events. Perhaps something beyond the daily "Calendar" to let students know of other student organizations and their activities. I would go even so far as to suggest a separate section devoted entirely to student organizations, their activities and even profiles of outstanding members. If sports players can get this level of coverage, why can't other student groups?

If the Emerald is that adamant about taking action against the role sports plays on our campus, I would suggest starting in its own backyard by devoting less coverage to the very sports it addresses and more to the student activities that promote scholarship and the pursuit of intellectual growth.

Joseph Snider  
 graduate student  
 architecture/historic preservation

#### CORRECTIONS

The boxing match between Nathan Osborn and Greg Bae ended in a minor decision, not a TKO ("In your corner," ODE, May 16)  
 The Emerald regrets the error.

A pro wrestler was incorrectly identified in the small photo accompanying Monday's story about "Rowdy" Roddy Piper's benefit at McArthur Court. The caption should have read: "Michelle Star, right, throws Miss Pittsburgh across the ring."

The Emerald regrets the error.