

# UNDERGRADUATE COUNCIL MEETING

April 15, 2002

Members present:

Jim Imamura, K.J. Park, Gail Unruh, Kathy Roberts, Hilary Gerdes, Faye Chadwell, Karen Sprague, John Nicols, Steve Ponder, Wendy Mitchell, Anne Leavitt, Dave Hubin, Bob Zimmerman, Kate Kranzush, Craig Hickman

Members absent:

Herb Chereck, Paul Engelking, John Postlethwaite, Scott Pratt, Marian Smith, Amanda Stocker

Guests:

Sherman Wilcox, Stormi Cannon, Jo Larson Muhr, Jim Evangelista, Spike Gildea

Meeting began at 8:35

## **American Sign Language Guest Speaker**

Hilary Gerdes introduced Sherman Wilcox, a Professor of Linguistics at the University of New Mexico. The UNM has accepted ASL as meeting the foreign language requirement. ASL is a natural language, not invented, and it is not a representation of a written language. British sign language and ASL are not close relatives. French sign language and ASL have a 70% overlap, meaning they share many of the same signs. Students who learn sign language learn many of the same things as students who learn foreign language, such as vocabulary and culture. Professor Wilcox spoke of three aspects to learning a foreign language:

1. Students are exposed to the way different languages work.
2. Students come away with new cultural values and beliefs. They see multiple perspectives while experiencing 'cultural shock'.
3. Students experience 'intellectual shock', meaning their core beliefs and assumptions are challenged.

A question and answer period followed Professor Wilcox's introduction.

## **How can ASL proficiency be demonstrated by transfer students?**

The Sign Communication Proficiency Interview (SCPI) is used to test the students' proficiency of ASL grammar and understanding.

## **What is deaf culture?**

How a people organize and perceive their world is considered their culture. The culturally deaf prefer to associate with each other.

### What is deaf literature?

Deaf literature consists of poetry, narratives, ABC stories and success stories. Ella May Lynns is a well-known deaf poet in San Francisco who speaks of the deaf as bi-lingual. They write and speak English and also ASL. Deaf literature appears in both ASL and English. ASL is not a written language, although there have been three proposals for writing it:

1. In 1960, William Stokey proposed a phonographic system that did not catch on.
2. A system of sign writing was proposed but is rarely used.
3. A system of sign font has been developed but the deaf community has not embraced it.

The deaf community rejects a system of deaf writing because the story 'becomes dead' when it is written. The deaf community sees no need for writing ASL because they are bilingual. They already write English and use ASL for their 'oral' language.

Spike Gildea, Assoc. Professor of Linguistics, compared some of the Native American languages to ASL. Native American languages are a good parallel to ASL because ASL is an unwritten language surrounded by English language culture. It can be difficult to translate other languages because the words and ideas don't always transfer across cultures.

### What are the customs and values of deaf culture?

The deaf culture has a different world view which depends on who the deaf person is communicating with. The deaf depend on each other for their information, since they can not get information from the television or radio.

Deaf culture is regarded as a high context culture (similar to Japanese). American culture is considered a low context culture. Culturally deaf would consider a cochlear implant as cultural genocide.

Cultural differences can be defined as simply as how a deaf person would respond to 'What did you do today?' A deaf person would respond with each detail regarding the time he or she woke up, had coffee, took a shower, etc. A hearing person would respond with something simpler, such as, 'My day was fine'. Deaf people don't hear their roommates' showering and other details, and naturally explain more. A deaf person would not necessarily explain this level of detail to a hearing person because he/she is bi-cultural.

What is the ASL literature curriculum?

If you are competent in ASL, you don't just read the poetry, you experience the poetry or theater by becoming immersed.

How can the UO library or language lab support ASL?

A video and visual library would be helpful.

Spike Gildea thinks the main function of language is to record and preserve the culture. Four years of a foreign language is usually not enough to be proficient. The best way is to immerse yourself in that culture for a period of time.

Are there examples of deaf artistic expression?

Chuck Baird is a deaf artist whose art is a good expression of the deaf culture.

What would a second year ASL program include?

Many colleges have a good curriculum now in place and this could be used. UO wouldn't have to invent something new. The cultural components that are now in place at the UO could be enhanced. The second year level courses would also include a translation of the language. The UO currently has about 45 students in ASL classes. It is recommended that classes should contain about 15-20 students.

Is there a distinct body of deaf literature?

There is a body of deaf literature and also translations of other literature.

Sherman Wilcox will give a lecture this morning at 10:00 am in the Ben Linder room at the EMU.

Meeting adjourned at 9:44