

## **AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT**

Since I was a little girl, I knew I was destined to be a teacher. However, it took me quite a few years to figure out just what type of teacher I want to be. I started my sophomore year convinced that I was going to apply into Neag School of Education as an Elementary Education major, but after I took Sociolinguistics of the Deaf Community, my future career plans changed. One lecture, in particular, served as a pivotal moment in my sudden change of heart. Early in the semester, our professor brought in a guest speaker. He is a Deaf graduate student here at the University of Connecticut, and he came in to share his story of growing up profoundly Deaf. His parents never learned to sign, and he was raised orally. He was mainstreamed in public schools, and had little involvement in extracurricular activities. He commented on how he always felt alone, and that his teachers often ignored him instead of offering help or support. His story stayed with me, and I knew in that moment just what type of teacher I want to be.

As an aspiring future teacher of the Deaf, I believe it is crucial to focus my undergraduate career on American Sign Language and Child Development. Extensive research has shown that Deaf students greatly benefit from the presence of American Sign Language in their classes. With that being said, I think it is necessary for a majority of my plan of study to incorporate the American Sign Language classes offered at the University of Connecticut. In addition to the introductory sign languages courses: ASLN 1101, ASLN 1102, ASLN 1103, and ASLN 1104, courses such as Advanced ASL (ASLN 3305), Interpreting in Educational and Other Settings (ASLN 2700), and Methods of Teaching ASL (ASLN 3266) will provide me with a solid foundation in American Sign Language that is necessary to be effective in the classroom. However, to be a successful teacher of the Deaf, I need to learn more than just the language. The Deaf have a culture unique to the Deaf Community, and I want to be able to understand and

appreciate these aspects of my future students' culture. Courses such as Introduction to Sociolinguistics of the Deaf Community (LING 2850), Cultural and Linguistic Variation in the Deaf Community (LING 3850), and Women and Gender in the Deaf World (WGSS 3254) would enable me to immerse myself into the Deaf culture.

In addition to focusing on American Sign Language and Deaf Culture, the other portion of my plan of study is directed towards child development. Developmental Psychology (PSYC 2400) will provide me with the general information regarding the stages of development most children undergo. In addition, this course taught by Marie Coppola, will also include the study of different developmental processes experienced within the Deaf community. While this will provide a strong foundation for my understanding of child development, I plan to take it one step further and study extensively how children acquire language. 90% of Deaf children are born to hearing parents, which unfortunately means many enter school with little to no language. Thus, as a future teacher of these students I want to help introduce and develop the language they are missing, and I believe courses such as Speech and Language Acquisition (SLHS 2204) and Introduction to Language Disorders in Children (SLHS 4254) will allow me to do so. Furthermore, Disabilities: A Lifespan Perspective (HDFS 3250) will study how various education systems will support the Deaf students and their families.

A major in American Sign Language and Child Development not only helps in my long-term goals of earning my Master's in Deaf Education, but will also be helpful in my internship and service abroad trip this summer. During the summer of 2017, I will be interning at The Children's Center for Communication and Beverly School for the Deaf. Upon my first visit at the school, I knew immediately that I could envision myself working there after graduation. My skills in American Sign Language will enable me to communicate with all the students and

teachers. Moreover, this internship will allow me to immerse myself in the Deaf culture and apply the knowledge that I have learned in my Deaf culture classes. In addition to my internship, I will be travelling to Thailand this summer to volunteer at an elementary school located in one of the tribal villages of Chiang Mai. Most of my time in Thailand will be spent helping the local children to develop and strengthen their English language skills. Thus, my focus on language acquisition will provide the necessary resources I will need to accommodate the students in Thailand. This will serve as an incredible opportunity to gain experience familiarizing students to a language they have had little or no exposure to, which parallels the experience of many deaf students who enter school lacking efficiency or fluency in either American Sign Language or English. In addition to my internship and traveling to Thailand, I intend to continue my studies at Boston University, where I hope to earn a master's degree in Deaf Education.

I am forever grateful for the guest speaker who came into my class, as he helped me design a future career path that I am truly excited to embark on. He helped me discover a passion for working with Deaf children which I most likely would not have found on my own. Once I become a teacher of the Deaf, I hope I can play a role in ensuring that no student of mine will experience that same isolation. Earning my Master's in Deaf Education will definitely not be easy, but it will absolutely be worth it.