

Establish an “American Sign Language & Interpreting” Degree Program at the University of Nevada, Reno

Interpreter Training at UNR – Proposal Details

This project is a coordinated effort to address many problems in the Deaf Community with a comprehensive unifying solution. The proposal for a Baccalaureate Degree program in “American Sign Language & Interpreting” was developed with an eye toward the unique challenges faced by the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community in Northern Nevada.

What are the challenges facing Deaf Nevadans?

1. Deaf Education lags behind public education.
2. The Deaf community has high unemployment rates.
3. Many Deaf are dependent upon government assistance/institutions. (Those without jobs collect SSDI.)
4. There is a serious lack of sign language interpreters in Northern Nevada, particularly in the community setting.
5. Many state institutions are non-compliant with ADA title II for lack of available, qualified resources. (Legislature, government services, hospitals etc)
6. There is currently no Deaf service center in Northern Nevada.
7. Deaf community members continue to struggle with accessibility issues in their daily lives
8. Only 28% of K-12 interpreters in Washoe County School District are certified at an acceptable level, indicating that nearly three quarters of Deaf students receive sub-par communication access during their entire public education.

Our mission is Two-fold:

1. [To train a cadre of interpreters to work in our communities; and](#)
 2. [To employ Deaf individuals as part of the program’s implementation.](#)
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1. The Interpreter Training Program.

The ITP will train interpreters to work in our community. Qualified interpreters are in high demand at all levels of education and in the community at large. Graduates with a B.A.S. in interpreting will find a fertile job market. The demand for skilled interpreters is not limited to our local area; there is work to be had in all 50 states, in schools, businesses, and increasingly in Video Relay Service settings.

The scarcity of highly skilled interpreters in Northern Nevada has been persistent and continual. This lack of service providers means that communication access for the Deaf and HoH (hard of hearing) Community is severely limited. Creating new, homegrown will reduce state liability by providing the resources needed to satisfy community demands for accessibility, and provide employment for many people.

Increasing the interpreter pool in Northern Nevada will improve the quality of K-12 interpreters, as WCSD will have access to a greater number of qualified applicants, forcing unqualified interpreters to improve, or move out of the system.

Interpreting is a job that is in high demand, and part of a growing field. Establishing an ITP program in Northern Nevada will create interpreting jobs, and enrich the quality of life for Deaf and Hard of Hearing people.

Interpreting is a good middle class job.

From the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics:

Sign Language Interpreting

Requires a Bachelor's degree, fluency in ASL, voluntary certification.

Projected growth: 46% between 2012-2022

Average salary: \$47,920

<http://www.bls.gov/ooh/media-and-communication/interpreters-and-translators.htm>

2. The Deaf Jobs Program

The ASL and Interpreting degree program should also function as a Deaf and Hard of Hearing jobs development program. The program should employ a few highly qualified Deaf individuals in stable teaching and administrative positions, but it can also employ Deaf community members on a part-time/temporary basis at all levels of the program.

I strongly recommend that the staff be composed of 50% or more Deaf native/fluent signers. Positions at each level of employment within the program will be reserved for qualified Deaf individuals.

3. We must cultivate and maintain a strong working relationship with the Deaf Community in Northern Nevada. Without their support the program cannot succeed. The uniqueness of American Sign Language, as a modality different from spoken language, presents the first challenge to any would-be learner. Other challenges for sign language interpreters are outlined in the WIOA recommendations: The Deaf population is extremely diverse, as a result of medical advances, and because of the influx of immigrant populations, the functionality and types of sign systems used can vary greatly. Some Deaf consumers have co-occurring disabilities, or cultural backgrounds that influence language acquisition and use. For this reason, an interpreter cannot successfully meet the needs of a wide spectrum of language users unless that interpreter has a deep understanding of the internal structure of American Sign Language, and exposure to its various subsets and pigeon signing systems (SEE, PSE etc.).

The best, and perhaps, the only way to acquire such specific knowledge is through instruction by, and exposure to, native sign language users. Therefore, the Deaf community is essential to the training of qualified interpreters. Without native language users to provide exposure and training, our students will be unable to achieve the level of fluency required to succeed.

That's why this isn't a simple degree curriculum proposal. What we hope to implement is a jobs development program for a very specific population: the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. While the degree program itself cannot employ a high number of Deaf people, it can provide meaningful, well paid, stable positions to a few qualified Deaf individuals, whose presence on campus will create a locus of opportunity and growth for the Deaf community at large. It can also engage the Deaf community with small piece meal work that will draw them up to campus and involve them in our program. The small price we pay for their time and expertise goes a long way toward building social capital with our most important stakeholders, the community the interpreters will serve: the Deaf Community.

4. Bridge Building.

This proposal aims to build working bridges between several entities within our community.

- o From the Program to the social service sector: we will create home-grown interpreters that can serve in K-12 settings, post secondary settings, and in the community providing access to government services, hospitals, police and court rooms. Program team members are already in conversation with WCSD stakeholders to facilitate the transition of new talent into the school system.
- o The program will also train CDIs (Certified Deaf Interpreters) to help us bridge the communication gap to the most sensitive Deaf populations: those with MLC (minimal language competency), or mixed sign modalities, which are common among Nevada's Deaf Latino population, and in our mental health settings. Demand for CDIs is extensive within the legal and mental health systems of Northern Nevada. The lack of local CDIs means that the state must pay for CDIs to be flown in from other states at great expense. The creation and use of CDIs within our program is a top priority.
- o We must also build a bridge to the Deaf Community; we can reach out and open space for the Deaf Community on campus, both literally and figuratively by engaging their talent and support for our program. When we employ Deaf professionals at the top of the program, the benefits can land on both sides of the fence: with both hearing and Deaf jobs, with both hearing and Deaf investment in the outcome.

5. Interpreting students and General Reciprocity

The Deaf community helps to train our interpreters ~ and our interpreters volunteer to assist the Deaf community.

Reciprocity engenders cooperation and social capital, which will boost the success of our graduates entering the field.

Before they graduate, our ITP students will volunteer in the Deaf community as SSPs (specialized service providers) They can assist the community in many ways while gaining language mastery. Community engagement will be integral to the curriculum, meaning our students may be available for:

- o Elderly Home visits
- o Big brother/sister match ups
- o English learning/translation assistance

- o Volunteers for Deaf youth activities

6. Internships for our graduating interpreters:

The Disability Resource Center at TMCC and Student Services Director Jill Stein, have graciously agreed to host onsite internships for our seniors. We intend to reach out to other disability service departments on every local campus to coordinate internship opportunities for our students - who in turn, will provide those departments with a larger pool of interpreters to draw upon.

Interpreters in training need opportunities to shadow more seasoned interpreters and CDIs when ever possible. By allowing our graduating seniors a chance to pair up with working interpreters and CDIs, we will be able to prepare them for evaluation using the ASLPI Interview evaluation offered by Gallaudet University, or the SLPI offered by Rochester Institute of Technology. Armed with a degree, and passage of the ASLPI, plus extensive experience, they will enter a fertile job market.

Outcomes -

An Integrated, high quality ITP will:

- Create local jobs for Deaf and hearing alike.
- Engender social capital within and between communities as we work toward a common goal.
- Act as an institution of support for the Deaf community by example, and in practice.
- Relieve the burden of many state institutions that struggle to provide interpreting accommodations.
- Improve education for Deaf and Hard of Hearing children in Northern Nevada

Thank you - For questions, comments or suggestions please contact:
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