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**RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT**

Throughout the United States, a vast number of people accept the fact that American Sign Language (ASL) is just that, a language. Unfortunately, not enough people agree. Many facets of Deaf culture and community (also those closely associated with the Deaf) are affected by the actions of those who don’t understand, and this has been a cause of consternation for many years. One such topic that I shall address is that the majority of colleges and universities in the United States don’t accept ASL as a foreign language in their programs, and what efforts are being done here at Dixie State University to change that.

The fact that ASL is a legitimate language isn’t something to be argued. ASL “contains all the fundamental features of language—it has its own rules for pronunciation, word order, and complex grammar” (*American Sign Language*, National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders - <http://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/hearing/pages/asl.aspx>). However, even though this is nationally accepted, many Universities find it difficult to justify accepting it as a language suitable for their curriculums. An example of this view of ASL comes from Mike Hills, the senior associate director of Admissions at Denison University in Ohio, who said, “It is not considered a foreign language by some schools because it is based on English, and sign language does not have the importance of other foreign languages.” (Colleges Not Accepting Sign Language Causes Students to Struggle, The Report Card - <http://thereportcard2010.wordpress.com/2010/07/08/colleges-not-accepting-sign-language-causes-students-to-struggle/>)

On the other side of the line, there are many colleges who do understand ASL, and accept it freely as a foreign language in their programs. For example, Florida State University has made specific and effective endeavors to allow students to study and utilize ASL in the course of their degree. Their official website states that students are free to take ASL as their foreign language, “except where a particular foreign language(s) has been specified by a major or department” (*College of Arts and Sciences requirements*, Florida State University - http://artsandsciences.fsu.edu/Undergraduate-Students/Current-undergraduate-students/College-of-Arts-Sciences-requirements). Many other universities have made it possible for ASL to be accepted. Sherman Wilcox, Ph.D. of University of New Mexico organized a list of 160 colleges and universities in the United States that accept ASL, and the list is expected to grow.

I personally am very new to ASL, and Deaf culture in general. Because of this, I still have to work at understanding Deaf culture in certain situations. However, during my research (which has personal significance to me due to my current educational situation here at Dixie State University) I found some of the views and examples to elicit surprising emotional responses. When I found the quote from Mike Hills, from the University of Ohio, (quoted above) for example, I was appalled at the viewpoint, and immediately found myself disliking his opinion. I was also profoundly impressed with the amount of Universities and colleges throughout the United States that do accept and promote ASL in their individual programs, in one form or another.

This information has been extremely useful in my continuing efforts to initiate the acceptance of ASL as a satisfactory language requirement for the Bachelor of Arts degrees offered here. Currently I and (name omitted), along with the support and assistance of those at the Deaf Center and the ASL Department at DSU, have been taking several important steps to make this goal a reality. One discovery during this process that has been a crucial find for the cause is the Utah Code Title 53A-13-101.5, which outlines in detail the laws surrounding the inclusion of ASL in college and university programs. An example of how greatly it assists the movement to integrate ASL into DSU’s program is as follows: “American sign language shall be accorded equal status with other linguistic systems in the state's public and higher education systems.” (*Utah Code Title 53A-13-101.5 Article 2*, Utah Code - http://www.le.utah.gov/code/TITLE53A/pdf/53A13\_010105.pdf).

With this and other resources being gathered, we’re getting closer to achieving our goal. We are currently conducting a survey around the campus, and soon to have more around the community, in order to gather information concerning the opinions of the people this change would effect. From there we’re considering the different avenues to take to bring these results to the people necessary to drive the change into effect, such as petitions, board meetings, propositions, and the like. With continued efforts, research, and growing support, ASL should soon be an accepted BA language qualification here at DSU.