

# *The History and Background of Deaf Culture*

## Course Information

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*This course might be of particular interest to students that want to study audiology or learn American Sign Language. There will be no pre-requisite courses in order to take this course. This course is not restricted to any one major, this is an elective history course that is available to any student.*

## Course Description

*By learning the background and history that makes up Deaf Culture, people can gain a better understanding of the perspectives of Deaf Culture and improve modern day relations.*

## Course Schedule

### **Unit 1: Controversies in Deaf Education**

**BIG Question:** *How has difference in language affected the way students are taught over the course of time?*

**Argument of the Unit:** *Due to the fact that language adapted and used first by deaf children (or other bilingual students) is different from that of their educators that speak solely English, lawmakers have come up with several different solutions over the course of time.*

**Key Words:** *Bilingual, minority language, bicultural, language barriers, bilingual capability*

**Link to Reading:** [Educating the American Sign Language Speaking Minority of the United States](#)

**Annotation of Reading:** *This article helps give suggestions of some solutions for the educational controversies in deaf education that have existed since long before there were any schools for the deaf in the United States. The class will start off by learning a bit about the divide between speech and sign education, and will be asked to think about how the inability to hear could be a hindrance to learning how to speak English. The class will then read and discuss the article “Educating the American Sign Language Speaking Minority of the United States,” and review the steps that have been taken to help educate deaf students. It will be pointed out that there are several different legislations that have been passed to aid language-minority children and several programs that were drafted to make the preliminary education process easier. The class will explore how for a very long time the education of language-minority children was deemed near impossible until progress was made and laws were made to protect the children’s educations.*

### **Unit 2: The Founding of Deaf Education in the United States**

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| <b>BIG Question:</b> <i>What was so revolutionary about Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet's accomplishment?</i>  |
| <b>Argument of the Unit:</b> <i>Thomas H. Gallaudet is given the credit for bringing the very first start of deaf education in the United States. This was done by convincing Laurent Clerc, an influential deaf French teacher of sign, to partner with him to enable the deaf students of the United States to have a language to communicate.</i>  |
| <b>Key Words:</b> <i>Thomas H. Gallaudet, Laurent Clerc, signs, sign name</i>   |
| <b>Link to Reading:</b> <a href="#">America's Founders: Friends of the Deaf</a>   |
| <b>Annotation of Reading:</b> <i>American educator Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet is a very well-known figure in the history of Deaf Culture. Gallaudet met a young deaf girl named Alice, and realized that she had a lot of potential, and yet no source of education or means of communication. Then, he realized that this problem must have been faced before, so he went to study abroad at a school for the deaf to teach those who were deaf how to communicate. He knew of a school for the deaf in England, so he was granted permission to study the teaching techniques of the school. Once Gallaudet was in England and saw that educators were forcing students to speak, he felt strongly this was wrong. He knew there had to be a better way. Gallaudet found his answer in France where he started learning French sign language. While he was there, Gallaudet was able to convince one of the teachers, Laurent Clerc, to come back to the United States to found a school. This would be the very first school for the deaf in the United States, and the very start of American Sign Language. This builds the foundation of the course for students as they move into other issues and learning.</i> |

### **Unit 3: Attempt at Eradicating ASL & Deaf Culture**

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| <b>BIG Question:</b> <i>How did deaf students respond to the attempted eradication of sign language and Deaf Culture?</i>   |
| <b>Argument of the Unit:</b> <i>Deaf students continued to sign and teach others sign under threat of harsh punishment, this only brought the community closer together.</i>  |
| <b>Key Words:</b> <i>Surveillance, corporal punishment, language acquisition, constructivist, pedagogy</i>  |
| <b>Link to Reading:</b> <a href="#">Signs of Resistance: Peer Learning of Sign Languages Within 'Oral' Schools for the Deaf</a>   |
| <b>Annotation of Reading:</b> <i>Though this article does not cover the attempted eradication of sign in the United States, it covers the events of multiple cultures and reveals a pattern. This pattern very closely reflects that of what happened in the United States. People began to fear anyone with qualities that made them different and wanted to erase any subcultures, like that of the deaf community. Boarding schools for the deaf opened up and forced deaf children to give up sign language under heavy surveillance with a severe threat of harsh punishment if they so much as waved. This hurt their language learning, but it did not have the full, intended effect. The children resisted and turned to teaching each other signs whenever the opportunity arose. This form of schooling and resistance that followed shows up like a pattern in many cultures, as shown through multiple examples in the article. This makes the class more relevant for worldwide events.</i> |

## Unit 4: Deaf President Now Movement at Gallaudet

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| <b>BIG Question:</b> <i>How were students able to advocate to the betterment of their education?</i>  |
| <b>Argument of the Unit:</b> <i>Deaf students were successfully able to gain support for the idea that a deaf president is just as competent as a hearing president, if not more so due to the fact they would be adept at relating to the deaf students in attendance at Gallaudet University.</i>   |
| <b>Key Words:</b> <i>Gallaudet University, sign language, oral method, hearing, endorsement</i>   |
| <b>Link to Reading:</b> <a href="#">History behind DPN</a> & <a href="#">The Week of DPN</a>  |
| <b>Annotation of Reading:</b> <i>This article is made up of two parts: the first part gives students a background understanding of why the protest happened when it did, what events lead up to the protest, and some historical information about the school. This background information will be beneficial for students as they go into the second part, which covers the events of the protest in segments broken down into day by day recounts. Both articles are important to gain a full understanding of the events as well as to help reinforce how radical the results of the Deaf President Now movement was. This was a momentous occasion, where the deaf students were able to advocate and gain support for the idea that a deaf president is just as competent as a hearing president. This was a proud moment for the students at Gallaudet University, as they saw that they, too could advance to such a position.</i> |

## Unit 5: Differences in Signing (Exploring Subcultures)

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| <b>BIG Question:</b> <i>How does sign language vary among different signers?</i>  |
| <b>Argument of the Unit:</b> <i>Sign language contains its own set of dialects; it tends to vary in different regions, ethnicities, and age groups.</i>   |
| <b>Key Words:</b> <i>Grammatical function, modality, dialect, language structure</i>  |
| <b>Link to Reading:</b> <a href="#">Sociolinguistic Variations In American Sign Language</a>  |
| <b>Annotation of Reading:</b> <i>This chapter will help students understand that there are subcultures within the Deaf Community that are represented by their own different variants to sign language. The focus here will be how there are noticeable differences in the signs that are used and how the signs get used in a grammatical standpoint in the different subcultures of Deaf Culture. The highlights will include pointing out a few unexpected differences in subculture, looking at deaf children that have hearing parents, as well as non-signing families that have a different dialects of sign language. The largest variations seem to be caused by age and region, knowing this means that education can be improved for deaf students for a much deeper understanding of this phenomenon. This is relevant because this research is geared towards the peers of the students in the classroom in addition to the students so that everyone will understand Deaf Culture with a clearer understanding.</i> |

## Unit 6: Backlas For Deaf Actress Speaking at Awards

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| <b>BIG Question:</b> <i>What are the reasons for the controversy over speaking at awards?</i>   |
| <b>Argument of the Unit:</b> <i>Oral educational methods are largely controversial, and talking was seen as an act of discarding sign as a means of communication. Ultimately, it is the ability to communicate that really matters.</i>  |
| <b>Key Words:</b> <i>Communication, stereotype, sign language, oral education, minority language</i>  |
| <b>Link to Reading:</b> <a href="#">Deaf Actress's Use of Speech Proves Divisive Among Peers</a>  |
| <b>Annotation of Reading:</b> <i>This newspaper article was essential in that it made sure to cover both sides of the argument, while mentioning and exploring the age-old question yet relevant of oral or signed communication. The article starts by going into why the negativity towards this particular decision, a lot of people felt that this feeds into the impression that a deaf person needs to learn how to speak in order to be successful. But the last few sentences counter this by proposing the idea that all forms of communication are fine and what really matters is being able to communicate with others, combining sign and speech can help overcome this obstacle. This controversy of sign or oral communication is a persistent controversy, and this instance could help students give a face to the parties involved with a popular event in which it was applicable.</i> |

## Unit 7: Modern Relations

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| <b>BIG Question:</b> <i>Using the information covered in class, how could society improve modern day relations with this culture?</i>   |
| <b>Argument of the Unit:</b> <i>By teaching people about the history and culture of Deaf Culture, modern day relations can be made a lot smoother.</i>  |
| <b>Key Words:</b> <i>Cochlear implants, hearing aids, letter signs, traditional signs, Gallaudet University</i>   |
| <b>Link to Reading:</b> <a href="#">Through Deaf Eyes</a> (video)   |
| <b>Annotation of Reading:</b> <i>This video goes over a lot of the topics in my syllabus with some additional topics as well, which makes it a really nice review at the end of the semester. After my students have used this video to review the course material and get some suggestions from the video, I would like to ask them to reflect and discuss some of their ideas for the ways that the modern relations can be improved. This video starts with the attempted eradication of Deaf Culture and American Sign Language and goes through the controversies that exist in the community and major events that have occurred since, until the backlash from when the award-winning deaf actress choosing to speak when she was giving awards one year. The argument is to get hearing people to understand the obstacles that deaf people have gone through and get them to respect the varying lifestyles.</i> |