

Deaf Events at Augustana

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“It’s really about exposure for us,” said Kaitlin Fleet, a third year interpreting major. She also said that deaf events can be anything from interpreted church services to superbowl parties.

Open houses serve as one of the on campus opportunities to interact with the Deaf community. They happen on the second Thursday of each month and take place in the Madsen Center rotunda, or just outside on the green. Each open house has a different organizer or leader who plans a game or conversation topic for the group.

In the game, the leaders of each group started with a movement, and the rest of the circle had to go around and copy this move exactly. If someone did it wrong, they were out. Each time the movement returned to the leader, he or she added a new movement on to the last one. The task got harder and harder as the competitors came up with wild flailing motions to repeat.

The students and community members alike began to laugh as people started dropping out on silly mistakes. Members of the Deaf community attempted to help those still in the game by signing the action to them, usually to no avail. When someone dropped out, they joined the growing number on the sidelines trying to help.

The Deaf community members smiled and congratulated the students for getting as far as they did. The friendships made before began to emerge as the group animatedly talked.

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“When they find other people that are deaf like them and can communicate and they can relate to, they find a new family,” said Michal Barnes, a sophomore ASL interpreting major.

Deaf events on campus bring the Augustana community and the Sioux Falls Deaf community closer. “Folks from the Deaf community are most welcome to come and enjoy events on campus.” Director of Accessibility and Academic Support Susan Bies said.

Bies coordinates all of the interpreters for deaf students on campus if we have them. Currently, there are no deaf students on campus, and those that are hard of hearing do not require interpreters. She does her best to accommodate requests from community members when they wish to attend an Augustana event as well.

Supporting the Deaf community at on campus events can be as simple as using a FM system. An FM system consists of a basic microphone and radio-style feed into a hearing aide that the user wears. To work, this system only requires handing off a microphone to the speaker. Then, the user can hear everything said by the wearer.

Teachers and students on campus have become accustomed to seeing the little microphones in classrooms and ASL interpreters at theatre productions. The Deaf Awareness Club at Augustana strives for this kind of acceptance, and now turns its attention to public awareness of the Deaf community.

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Public support for Deaf communities has been growing recently, including the “Deaf President Now” movement at Gallaudet University. The Deaf Awareness club invited a few of the participants in this movement to lead a panel discussion this March in honor of Deaf History Month. Lydia Bruns, the public relations manager of the club, spoke about the labels on the Deaf community.

A difference between Deaf and deaf exists, which many people are unaware of. Deaf with a capital D represents the Deaf community, while a lowercase d refers to the physical state of deafness. Bruns said that many believe deaf to be a synonym with dumb, an assumption wholly untrue.

“We don’t want those stigmas out there,” Bruns said. “We want to break all of them and just open everything up to the [Deaf] community.”

Deaf Awareness and the ASL interpreting majors both organize events on campus to reach out to the Deaf community of Sioux Falls. As Fleet says however, it is more for the students to learn about and become part of the Deaf community.

The interpreting majors plan the open houses and a few other open to the public activities on campus, all of which are conducted in sign language. One of the most interesting things about on campus deaf events lies in the translating. Instead of events for hearing people translated into ASL, these events are in ASL and translated for the hearing community.

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Susan Bies discussed some of the popular technology used now to include hard-of-hearing students. She said that they approach deaf and hard of hearing accommodations on a case by case basis, and that the system of inclusion has changed since the South Dakota School for the Deaf closed as a physical location in 2005. Bies believes the changes in technology are due to mainstreaming these students.

The changes affect both classroom and extracurricular life for the students. The FM systems make classroom interaction easier, but do not solve the problem completely. Teachers and hard-of-hearing students work together to come up with a plan for each class. Often, a student coordinates with classmates to get the notes from class and to participate in study groups.

With the FM systems and interpreters, almost any event can become a deaf event. On campus, Bies coordinates with event planners to allow the students with these systems to enjoy an event. Community members receive the same courtesy as much as possible, provided the request for accommodation is made early enough. "We certainly want them to feel like they can participate," Bies said.

The interpreting program and Deaf Awareness do their best to make this kind of consciousness campus-wide, which is why the new systems are important. The stereotype that deaf students are dumb takes a hit each time these students show up to class and participate. The strongest weapon against these stigmas is education, and making it easier for students to participate in class educates the non-deaf students.

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Deaf Awareness hosts the largest on campus deaf event each year. A variety show called *Burst of Sign* fully planned and produced by the members of the club occurs in Kresge Recital Hall every spring. This event embodies of the mission statement of Deaf Awareness and the ASL program. It not only fosters awareness of the Deaf community, but helps fight the stereotype that the deaf are unintelligent.

This year, *Burst of Sign* will occur at seven p.m. on April 29 and 30. The Deaf Awareness members and ASL majors encourage all students to go and to bring community members with them.

As the gathering of community members and students finished up their game at the deaf open house, many started making plans for the coming weeks. This community seemed to be one fully connected despite their differences.

"They have a beautiful language and a beautiful culture," said Fleet. "There's so much you can learn from them."

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