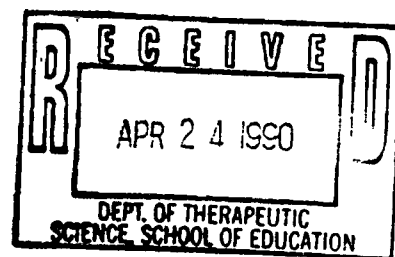


Associate Dean of the School of Education  
Jane Ayer  
Room 1080 Medical Sciences Center  
Madison, WI 53706



Dear Ms. Ayer;

I am writing to you regarding the course Manual Communications for Health Professionals (410) taught by [redacted] at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. This is the only American Sign Language (ASL) course offered by the University, and it has been said that this course will probably not be offered again. This course has greatly sensitized me to the Deaf community and has shown me how important it is to know ASL. We do not only learn ASL in this course. Some things we also learn include: differences between English and ASL, services that are available to Deaf persons, laws which benefit Deaf people and other persons with disabilities, we learn about the Deaf community, and we get a chance to interact with Deaf people both in class and outside of class through class assignments. I could write pages explaining the need for this course and the actual need for more ASL class sections and advanced ASL classes, but I will limit my discussion at this time.

I will soon be a pharmacist, and I know the importance of having effective communication with your patients. As an intern I have not had personal experience with any Deaf patients, however, several of my colleagues have. Many Deaf people do not have a high English reading level (as English is their second language) and written information is usually not understood well enough by a Deaf person. Pharmacy is only one field in which being able to communicate with a Deaf person in their own language is very important. I was very fortunate to be able to get into this class

because as I stated, it is the only ASL course at the University, and enrollment is very limited because of that. The University does offer a signed English course. Many people believe ASL is the same thing as signed English, but this is not true. ASL is a language (just like Spanish is a language). [Before taking this course, I was also naive about this.]

You probably have or will receive many letters regarding this issue, so I will not duplicate all the facts you will read in those letters. I want you to know that this is an important issue to me and many others. Several laws have recently been passed which will have positive effects for the Deaf community. It is sad to see this action of discontinuing the ASL course as a reflection of how this university stands when it comes to students and the general population with disabilities.

ASL can now be accepted for foreign language credits in universities in the state of Wisconsin. If the School of Education cannot continue this course, then maybe it is time for you to consider working on getting this course in the department it belongs, the foreign language department.

We cannot put the issue of this course on the "back-burner" and hope it goes away. The University must act.

Sincerely,

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April 12, 1990

APR 13 1990

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION  
Office of the Dean

Dean John Palmer  
Rm. 123  
Education Bldg.  
University of Wisconsin  
Madison, WI 53706

Dear Dean Palmer:

I am writing to you as a concerned member of the University community, and as someone who may be able to provide you with a different viewpoint than you have received until now.

I am a University employee who is enrolled in an advanced American Sign Language class. I hope to use this training in the future to become a sign language interpreter. My interaction and involvement with the deaf community began only a year ago, but it has certainly opened my eyes to a great deal of things.

I was once like you. A hearing person who knew little, if anything, about the deaf community. I knew that deaf people could talk with their hands, but that was about the extent of my knowledge. Like you, I did not think about the barriers that are placed in the path of the deaf person on a daily basis. Barriers placed there, not because of the person's deafness, but because of the inflexibility and uncaring attitudes of the hearing world.

I do not fault you for these attitudes. It is not a matter of cruelty or cold-heartedness. It is simply that you do not understand what it is like to be deaf. You have never thought about what it would be like to be forced to have a female stranger telling your doctor about your personal medical problems. You do not understand the frustration of being unable to call someone or ask for help when your car is broken down in a strange place without writing notes. Telephones are of no use without a teletypewriting (TDD) machine that you must carry with you, and strangers not only do not speak your language, but are afraid to talk to you because you seem different from them.

These are only a few examples of the ways in which the hearing world shuts out the deaf person. The only way to break down that wall is by education of the hearing community in the ways and language of the deaf community. And make no mistake; it is a community, with all of its own separate social patterns and rules of etiquette.

I wanted to enter that world and understand sign language for a long time, and so two years ago I enrolled in the University's "Introduction to Manual Communication" class. This class teaches Signed English. Signed English is a system of sign which follows English word order and syntax.

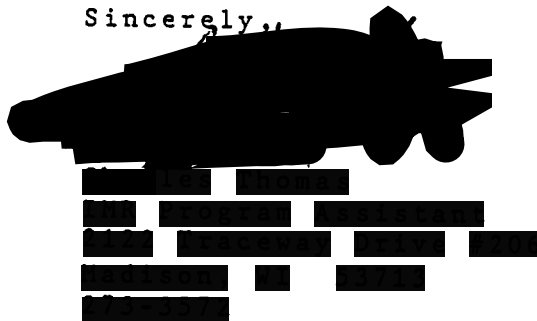
It uses some of the same signs as ASL, but was invented by hearing people to be forced on the deaf community in an effort to make the deaf people conform to a hearing world. I got top grades in my class, and was proud that I could finally sign. I never gave thought to the fact that the teacher did not know or interact with any deaf adults, and that we never once talked with any deaf people in the class.

I met my first deaf person about two months later, and I was shocked to find that I could barely communicate with him. You see, Signed English is not the language of the deaf community. The deaf people are not just people who cannot hear. They are proud of their heritage, customs, and language just as the foreign students here are. You would not try to force French students to learn a new "French" that had been invented by people who were not French! They would resent and look down on this as much as the deaf people resent and look down on Signed English. Signed English attempts to take away the identity of the deaf community.

Some may argue that, if the deaf people wish to get along in the world, they had better adapt. The answer to that argument is; they do. Every day, all day, the deaf person is forced to conform to a hearing world which tries to exclude him or her. Isn't it about time that we did something to let them in?

I am asking that you either reinstate the ASL class, or use your influence to make sure that it is relocated within the University system. Not only because it is fair to the deaf community. Not only because the skill of Bambi's students that I have met speaks for itself. But so that hearing people, like you, have the chance to know and understand the deaf world on its own terms.

Sincerely,

A large blacked-out redaction covers the signature and the first several lines of the address block.

cc: Donna Shalala  
Jane Ayer

Monday, April 2, 1990

Dean John Palmer  
UW - Madison  
School of Education  
Room 123 Education Building  
Madison, WI 53706

APR 6 1990

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION  
Office of the Dean

Dear Dean Palmer,

I have recently learned that American Sign Language (Manual Communication for Health Care Providers, 410 - Department of Therapeutic Sciences) will no longer be offered as a course at the University of Wisconsin - Madison. I am very disappointed in this decision, and I hope that ASL will soon be reinstated.

I took the American Sign Language course in the fall of 1989. I was fortunate to get a place in the class, as there has consistently been a tremendous demand for the course and a long waiting list. The demand is justified; American Sign Language is the primary language of the Deaf community in the United States, and the ability to communicate with these people is essential, perhaps especially within the fields of education and occupational and physical therapy.

The University climate is currently ripe for increasing the offerings in American Sign Language, yet instead the introductory course has been dropped. The legislature has just passed a bill according ASL credit as a foreign language at the high school level. While students of other languages will be able to continue their studies at the university level, students of ASL will be unable to even associate with a university community of ASL students and faculty, let alone study to increase their fluency.

The University, and the larger Madison community, are suffering from a shortage of sign language interpreters. While a beginning class in American Sign Language does not produce interpreters to fill that need, it does serve as a necessary introduction to the need for interpreters and to other issues facing the Deaf community. I know of at least two students from my ASL class who will be entering interpreter training programs in the fall of 1990. Several of the other students, myself included, are pursuing American Sign Language in order to use it in other fields, including psychology and education. Those of us continuing in the study of American Sign Language began our interest in sign language and the Deaf community in the class we took at the University; we did not enter into the class with the intention of pursuing careers related to Deafness. As an introduction to ASL as well as Deafness and related issues, that one class has changed the course of our lives.

The University has proclaimed a commitment to diversity, to working with students from different backgrounds who have different needs in a university setting. Members of the Hearing Impaired population are among those diverse students, and offering training in their language and culture is an important step toward accepting and supporting them.

I urge you to reconsider the decision to discontinue American Sign Language as a course offering at the UW - Madison. The class is of considerable importance to the students as well as to the hearing impaired clients, patients, and community members those students later work and socialize with.

Sincerely,

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cc: Jane Ayer  
Bob Christiaansen