

Proposal for Individualized Major

American Sign Language and Human Services

As I just recently entered my senior year of college at the University of Louisville, I thought I had everything figured out. I entered my freshman year in 2020 with the declared major of American Sign Language Interpreting Studies. When I picked this major I was mainly drawn to specifically, the language of ASL. Entering ASL 101, I only knew the alphabet, had never met any Deaf people before, and was a little intimidated by plunging into a brand new area of study. Even though on paper, it didn't look like I had much experience or reason to pick this major, I was still always interested in the language. As I continued to study ASL, I felt myself becoming more and more captivated by not only the language but the new culture that I was learning about too.

Going through the interpreting program, I learned so much about Deaf culture, ASL, the interpreting profession, and myself as a student. From Fall of 2020, to now, Fall of 2023, I have learned a tremendous amount of information. All throughout the program I always felt like I wrestled with the thought of what I wanted to do with my interpreting degree. I was constantly conflicted on if I wanted to interpret, or just work with the Deaf community. I always felt like I was just settling for a potential career in interpreting. Anytime I was asked the question "Why do you want to be an interpreter" I felt like I could never truly answer it. I knew there were other opportunities to work with the Deaf community and ASL but I felt pressured into going down the interpreting path only because it was my major. I reached out to my professor in the interpreting program and asked for advice on what to do with how I was feeling about my goals in life. After having conversations with my professor, I was presented with the Individualized Major Plan as one of my options. For my individualized major, I chose the title "American Sign Language and

Human Services”. I plan to integrate the approved Arts and Sciences minor in Deaf studies, Diversity and Inequality, and Linguistics.

As a result of being an ASL interpreting student up until now, I have already fulfilled the requirements for a Deaf Studies minor. This is the official A&S UofL minor that will be incorporated in my Individualized major, ASL and Human Services. The classes I have taken that apply to a Deaf Studies minor have grown my knowledge of the Deaf community tremendously. These classes are the reason that I have grown a desire to work with the Deaf community as well. Learning about a new culture and actually having the opportunity to be invited into it has also had a major impact on my interest in working in this field. Along with the classes that fulfill the Deaf studies requirement, I have also been able to take American Sign Language classes all four years of college. The language has been pertinent to my interest in the Deaf community and I have been very fortunate to partake in classes that continue to teach me about the language of ASL.

For one of my concentrations, I will be going down the route of Diversity and Inequality. When I was a sophomore, I picked up the minor because I thought it would broaden my perspective in a world where there is constant injustice. My reasoning behind adding this minor to my ASL interpreting studies coursework was so that it benefitted me when working with the Deaf community and different intersectionalities within the community. The courses that I have taken relating to this concentration have educated me in areas that I was unaware of before. For example, most of the courses that I have taken for this concentration are courses like sociology of families, sociology of sexuality, and social theory. The content covered in these courses will benefit me in what I hope to be my future career.

As my other concentration, I chose to focus on Linguistics. I had a little bit of exposure to linguistics from my ASL interpreting major. I enjoyed studying language and how it is formed and used in our society. Furthering my education in this area of study will grow my knowledge in how ASL and English are both used in our culture and how that affects our interactions with people. Understanding the impact and influence language has on our daily lives is really important to working with the Deaf community. With that, the Deaf community is not only a group that uses a different language, but a whole different culture. The coursework in a Linguistic concentration will expand my knowledge on the relationship between language and culture, which will then give me a better understanding of how to apply these differences when working with another culture.

As I was deciding what minor and concentrations to integrate for my individualized major, I had my future goal in mind. Even though the interpreting program here at UofL provided me with so many opportunities and knowledge, I have realized that the specificity of studying interpreting would not assist me with reaching the goal I have for working with the Deaf community. My goal for the future is to work in the field of Deaf organizations or ministries. A specific interest I've had for some time is working with families that contain parents with Deaf children. 90% of Deaf children are born to parents who can hear, and there is often a disconnect because the majority of hearing people don't know ASL or have any knowledge of the Deaf community. My goal and desire is to be able to serve and work with these types of families, and provide them with resources that will benefit their interpersonal relationships by guiding them through language barriers that they might face. I think working with an organization or ministry that provides these types of services is a field that I have felt drawn to ever since my first Deaf culture class in 2020. The major I am inquiring about will

benefit me and help me reach the intent of my goal because each different area of study is important. Knowing about the Deaf culture and being immersed in it will provide me with the experience I need and thus far have. The Deaf studies minor has already served me well in the respect of opening my eyes to different possibilities in the field of ASL. The linguistics concentration is also beneficial and serves the specific service of providing me with the knowledge of how language affects people. In the certain field that I'm interested in, accessible language is typically the first barrier between the parents and the child. With studying and focusing on linguistics, I will be able to provide families in these types of situations with vital information about language for them to best navigate their family's plan from then on. Finally, the diversity and inequality concentration will also provide me with a broader perspective on how different types of people face a variety of differing struggles. Wanting to go into this field, I will be working with people of all different race, class, ethnicity, gender, and many more intersectionalities.

The degree that I am proposing for my individualized major is one that is not offered at the University of Louisville. The only approved major that involves ASL is the interpreting program. And although this program has served me a tremendous amount and taught me more than I could have imagined, it is too specifically oriented to the interpreting profession. After conversing with my professor, we both agreed that specializing in interpreting would not be of benefit to me if I didn't have the desire or goal to be a certified interpreter. The American Sign Language and Human Services degree provides a broader range of study that will better serve my future career path. At Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts, there is a program titled ASL and Human Services. I researched the requirements of this degree and all the courses listed for the program are the same courses that I have both already taken and plan to take for my

individualized major. Using the resources and contacts I already have from being an interpreting student for the past 3 years, I plan on reaching out to a couple organizations such as First Steps and Kentucky Hands and Voices, that do the work I'm interested in. In my last year of college, starting to contact these organizations with questions about how to get more involved will better benefit me for post-graduation and potentially set me up for career opportunities. In conclusion, I believe that my American Sign Language and Human Services degree will broaden the opportunities with organizations like this past the field of being a sign language interpreter, and also serve the intent of my future goals.