April 24, 2019

TO: Members of the Board of Trustees

FROM: John A. Elliott
Interim Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

RE: Bachelor of Arts in American Sign Language Studies

RECOMMENDATION

That the Board of Trustees approve the Bachelor of Arts in American Sign Language Studies in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

BACKGROUND:

The Bachelor of Arts in American Sign Language Studies will offer students the opportunity to interact within a global society and to communicate and collaborate in another language within a variety of fields including science, technology, business and healthcare. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, medical professionals who know sign language, including speech-language pathologists, mental health counselors, audiologists, and occupational therapists, are in demand. Social workers and psychologists who know American Sign Language are often employed at schools for the Deaf. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics also shows that a career as an interpreter is growing much faster than average, with 17 percent growth predicted through 2026.

The University has experienced a steady growth in the number of courses offered in Deaf studies, linguistics and interpreting. This growth corresponds to a 2016 survey by the Modern Language Association, which found that American Sign Language is the third most commonly studied language behind French and Spanish. Based on the current list of courses available and growing interest in the study of American Sign Language, interpreting, and Deaf culture, the Department of Linguistics in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences is prepared to offer a Bachelor of Arts in American Sign Language Studies.
Request for New UConn Undergraduate Degree Program

**General Information**

Name of proposed academic degree program: American Sign Language Studies  
Name of sponsoring Department: Linguistics  
Name of sponsoring College: College of Liberal Arts and Sciences  
Campus: Storrs  
Contact person: Linda Pelletier  
Type of Proposal: New Degree  
Type of Degree: BA  
Anticipated Initiation Date: Fall 2020  
Anticipated Date of First Graduation: Spring 2022  
CIP Code: 16.1601

**Background & Description**

Enrollment in American Sign Language (ASL) classes has increased steadily since the linguistic documentation of ASL as a legitimate language beginning around 1960. Today, nearly every state recognizes and accepts ASL as a second or world language (see, NAD list of states) and a growing number of universities now offer ASL in fulfillment of foreign language requirements (see, NAD list of universities).

The University of Connecticut has followed this trend beginning in 1989 with only one ASL course and has grown to include six levels of ASL courses, including an increasing number of courses in Deaf studies, linguistics and interpreting. This growth corresponds with a 2016 survey by the Modern Language Association which found that “ASL has experienced a steady increase of advanced enrollments over an eight-year period” with the second highest number of enrollments in world languages so that it is now the third most commonly studied language behind French and Spanish (see, MLA Report, 2016). Given our current list of courses and the growing interest in the study of ASL, interpreting and Deaf culture, the Department of Linguistics is prepared to offer a Bachelor’s Degree in ASL.

**Reasons for the Proposed Program**

An important reason for this proposed program is to offer students the opportunity to interact within a global society, to communicate and collaborate in another language, within a variety of fields including science, technology, business or healthcare. One of our primary goals is to offer a program where students are able to develop the necessary skills, attitude and knowledge to effectively engage in meaningful conversations with members of a diverse Deaf community. As a result, and as stated above, students will be prepared to work in multiple disciplines and various occupations that reach beyond more traditional roles such as ASL instructors and interpreters. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, medical professionals who know sign language are in demand including speech-language pathologist, mental health counselors, audiologists, and occupational therapists.
Social workers and psychologists who know ASL are employed at schools for the Deaf and public schools that provide educational programs for the vast majority of students who are Deaf or hard of hearing. And, of interest, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics shows a career as an interpreter is growing much faster than average, with 17 percent growth predicted through 2026 (US Bureau of Labor Statistics).

An additional benefit for this proposal is greater opportunities for collaboration and research, locally and abroad. For example, we have been working on a recent initiative and partnership with NEAG in proposing an ASL concentration within their world language teacher certification program. Currently, the state of Connecticut does not offer a certification for teachers of ASL. The resulting growth of ASL courses offered at high schools throughout the state has created the need to establish and offer a teacher preparation program and teacher certification. BA-level studies in ASL will also prepare graduates for work in the growing areas of sign language research.

Our ASL and Deaf studies faculty include professors Simons, Powell and Hanna, all of whom are Deaf and native signers of ASL. They offer immeasurable insight into ASL, Deaf culture and the Deaf community. Professor Pelletier teaches the interpreting courses, is also a native signer of ASL (parents and family members are Deaf) and has been a practitioner of interpreting for more than 25 years. Professor Lillo-Martin is tenured in the Department of Linguistics, and has been conducting research on sign languages for over 30 years.

Curriculum & Program Outline

The curriculum and program outline for this major will require students to satisfy the minimum graduation requirements including the completion of 120 credits, 45 of which must be numbers 2000 or higher, including 24 credits in the major and 12 credits in related courses; meet the CLAS general education and concentration requirements, and have an overall grade point average of at least 2.0. Students shall submit their plan of study with an ASL advisor and request approval from the Registrar by the end of the 4th week of the semester in which they expect to graduate. Students completing a double major must file a plan of study for each major. ASL 1101-1104 are prerequisites and the credits do not count towards the major. Students must satisfy courses within the following three sections:

1. Students must complete the following 15 credits:

   ASLN 3305   Advanced American Sign Language I 3
   ASLN 3306W  Advanced American Sign Language II 3
   ASLN/LING 3800  Structure of ASL 3
   LING 2850  Intro to Sociolinguistics of the Deaf Community 3
   LING 3850  Cultural and Linguistic Variation in the Deaf Comm. 3

2. Students must complete one of two concentrations: Deaf Studies or Interpreting ASL and English.
a. **Deaf Studies Concentration:** Students must complete a minimum of 9 credits, of which, a minimum of 6 credits must be from group A. All 9 credits may be satisfied from Group A.

**GROUP A:**
- ASLN 3266 Methods of Teaching American Sign Language 3
- ASLN/WGSS 3254 Women and Gender in the Deaf World 3
- ASLN 3650 Deaf Writers and ASL Literature 3
- ASLN 3360 Deaf Art and Artists 3

**GROUP B:**
- ASLN 3193 Foreign Study 3
- ASLN 3290 Field Study 3
- ASLN 3292 Experiential Learning Up to 3
- ASLN 3295 Special Topics 3
- ASLN 3298 Variable Topics 3
- ASLN 3299 Independent Study 3

b. **Interpreting ASL and English Concentration:** Students must complete courses in Group A (12 credits) with an additional 3 credits from Group B.

**GROUP A:**
- ASLN 2500 Introduction to Professional Interpreting 3
- ASLN 2600 Process of Interpreting 3
- ASLN 2700 Interpreting in Educational and Other Settings 3
- ASLN 2800 Consecutive Interpreting 3

**GROUP B:**
- ASLN 3193 Foreign Study 3
- ASLN 3290 Field Study 3
- ASLN 3292 Experiential Learning Up to 3
- ASLN 3295 Special Topics 3
- ASLN 3298 Variable Topics 3
- ASLN 3299 Independent Study 3

3. **Related Courses:** Students must also complete 12 additional credits required in 2000, 3000 and 4000-level related courses other their chosen concentration. Courses can include:

- Courses in any modern or classical language.
- Any English, Linguistics, Psychology or Philosophy course.
- Any course that is directly related to second language acquisition.
- Any Human Rights courses or any courses covering disability related topics.
• Any History, Political Science, Art History, Anthropology, Sociology, Economics or Geography course that focuses on Deaf culture or people who are Deaf.
• Any course that does not meet these specific requirements should be approved by the advisor.

Information Literacy

Courses offered in the proposed ASL Major already incorporate varying levels of information literacy skills applied for the purpose of conducting research in Deaf culture, the study of ASL, interpreting ASL and English and ASL literature. Instruction in research methods as well as where and how to access relevant information, including primary and secondary sources in American Sign Language such as video libraries and data bases, are discussed. Students are actively engaged in academic inquiry and use multiple strategies for revising and enhancing their searches, applying evaluation criteria to an information source, as well as, setting ethical standards in gathering, use, and dissemination of information. Information literacy skills are further developed by way of academic composition of ASL embedded in the required, in the major W course, ASLN 3306W, Advanced American Sign Language II. Research and information skills appropriate to the discipline will be developed in the process of teaching academic composition of ASL. The following courses include assignments that incorporate information literacy skills:

ASLN 3650, Deaf Writers and American Sign Language Literature
ASLN 3298, Deaf Art and Artists
ASLN/LING 3800 Structure of American Sign Language
LING 2850 Introduction to Sociolinguistics of the Deaf Community
LING 3850 Cultural and Linguistic Variation in the Deaf Community
ASLN 3266 Methods of Teaching American Sign Language
ASLN 3306W Advanced American Sign Language II

ASLN 3306W verifies advanced information literacy exit expectations. In addition, students will be required to take both literature and Deaf culture courses that also address this competency.

Writing in the Major

To satisfy the writing in the major, all students must take ASLN 3306W.

Pass/Fail

Pass/Fail grading option may not be applied to any ASL, Deaf studies or interpreting courses.

Study or Work Abroad
Participation in a study or work abroad program in a language rich environment is allowed for ASL majors. With the advisor's consent, any of the above courses may be replaced by ASLN 3293 Foreign Studies. Up to 9 credits taken in study abroad programs in an American Sign Language rich environment may count toward the major. Students can enroll in either a UConn-sponsored or non-UConn sponsored program. In either case, students must consult with the advisor to determine which courses will receive credit.

Declaring a Major

After meeting with an ASL advisor, majors can be declared electronically at the following website: http://ppc.uconn.edu/ . They are entered by CLAS and once on a student’s record, confirmation email will be sent. From there, student may submit a final plan of study.

Declaring a Double Major

Please click the following link: Declaring Double Major

Additional Applicable Rules:

- A minimum of 15 of the major credits must consist of American Sign Language courses taken in residence. Up to 9 credits may be met by ASLN 3293.
- Only up to 6 credits may be transfer credits.
- AP credits may not be used toward the major.
- A single course cannot satisfy more than one requirement.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the BA in American Sign Language, students will be able to:

- Communicate in ASL at an advanced level and in culturally appropriate ways.
- Demonstrate sensitivity and understanding of Deaf culture and Deaf history from a global perspective.
- Develop strong background knowledge and skills suitable for pursuing careers in research, education, social services, or graduate work and lifelong learning of ASL and Deaf culture.
- Develop foundational skills in interpreting ASL and English within various cultural contexts and settings.
- Explain the dynamics of social, cultural and linguistic inequalities as well as the importance of improving intercultural communication.
Enrollment & Graduation Projections

Since 2008, fifteen students have satisfied an Interdisciplinary Major in ASL, interpreting or Deaf studies with two additional students projected to graduate within the next two years. Enrollment in our ASL courses, especially our introductory ASL courses continues to grow, necessitating additional sections of ASL as well as adjunct faculty. In addition, in 2017, we included a winter session introductory course to meet the growing need. For 2018-2019, 476 students enrolled in our ASL and related courses. We project accepting between 5-10 students per year for this major.

Financial Resources

Given that all the courses for this proposal currently exist, the Department of Linguistics will be able to fund the program with its own resources. No new hires or resources are required.

Facilities//Equipment/Library/Special Resources

Not applicable.

Program Administration

No new administrative support is required.

Faculty

Joan Hanna
Diane Lillo-Martin
Linda Pelletier
Sherry Powell
Doreen Simons

Similar Programs in Connecticut or Region

UConn will serve as the first and only institution in the state to offer a BA in American Sign Language. Yale University, Southern Connecticut State University and Central Connecticut State University offer ASL classes, which can be used to satisfy world language graduation requirements.

In the region, Northeastern University in Boston offers a unique combination of majors with ASL including interpreting ASL and English (NU ASL Majors). The University of Rochester offers a BA in ASL (UR BA in ASL) and the Department of Linguistics at the University of Southern Maine offers a BA in Linguistics with a concentration in ASL as well as a concentration in interpreting ASL and English (USM BA ASL Concentration). The University of New Hampshire offers an intensive study of ASL through their BS program in
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ASL/English Interpreting (UNH BS ASL Interpreting). And finally, Framingham State University in Framingham Massachusetts offers a BA in American Sign Language in the Department of World Languages (FSU BA in ASL).

Outside the region, our program can be compared with programs listed below, some of which offer a BA/BS in ASL or Deaf studies and/or offer intensive ASL instruction towards a major in interpreting ASL:

California State University, Long Beach, CA
Gallaudet University, Washington, DC
Goshen College, Goshen, IN
Idaho State University, Pocatello, ID
Kent State University, Kent, OH
Keuka College, Keuka Park, NY
Lamar University, Beaumont, TX
Madonna University, Livonia, MI
Maryville College, Maryville, TN
Nevada State College, Henderson, NV
North Central University, Minneapolis, MN
Piedmont International University, Winston Salem, NC
Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN
Sacramento State University, Sacramento, CA
St. Catherine University, Saint Paul, MN
University of Houston, Houston, TX
University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA
University of Minnesota, Duluth, MN
University of Northern Colorado, Greely, CO
Utah Valley University, Orem, UT
Vincennes University, Vincennes, IN
Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, KY
Western Nevada College, Carson City, NV
William Woods University, Fulton, MO