

Excellence in Teaching

Debi Duren

Special Education



About me

I graduated from University of Oregon with a Bachelor's of Science degree in March 1987, and immediately went to work as a teacher's aide/interpreter working with Deaf children in a mainstreaming program in Eugene for a year. Somehow, I was contacted by John Freeburg who was the director of Regional Resource Center on Deafness for an interview to teach a course in American Sign Language (ASL) to participants during the 8-week Rehabilitation Counseling summer session at WOU.

After summer session, I was promptly hired to teach the beginning levels of ASL courses in September 1988 at WOU (formerly OCE & WOSC). Then, since 1988, I have been teaching and implementing ASL 1 through ASL 8 courses, including 3 courses, Comparative Linguistics, ASL 7, and ASL 8 in the Interpretation: ASL/English degree program.

In June 2006 I graduated from Western Oregon University with a Masters degree in Education, with a specialization in Teacher Preparation: Deafness.

About Debi's Teaching

Debi Duren has taught at Western Oregon University for 18 years. She is a delight to observe. Debi is skilled at drawing students out and eliciting ideas from them. Debi does not tell students what or how to do things, rather she makes suggestions and asks questions to get students to elaborate on their own ideas. For example, when she was discussing the final paper with an advanced ASL class (ASL V), she asked students to offer suggestions, then elaborated on these ideas with additional questions. When a student mentioned bicultural education as a potential paper topic, Debi defined the terms and then asked additional questions to clarify the student's ideas. When a student suggested stereotypes as a potential topic, Debi asked the student to provide an example, then repeated and elaborated on the idea, finally asking, "Is that what you meant?" Debi utilizes creative assignments to put language into action. Her advanced ASL V students engaged in storytelling. For this assignment students had to read a children's story in English and perform the story visually in ASL before the class. The class then gave feedback on the performance. This assignment demonstrated several important aspects of ASL storytelling, including the use of classifiers, the importance of detail to enrich stories, the use of gaze and body orientation to convey character and role shifting. The assignment increased student fluency in ASL while at the same time increasing their awareness of the complexity of storytelling.

What students say about Debi:

I think she was as helpful as any professor could be. She was always around if problems or concerns occurred. I wish I had more professors like her in any other classes!!! I would probably learn better. (ASL VI)

She is doing a really great job and has excellent teaching strategies. (ASL III)

Yes, I most definitely recommend her to other students! Debi is thorough – she demands a lot, but is very helpful and understanding. Dynamic! (ASL VI)

Yes, I would recommend her to other students, DD is very good, very helpful and understands any problems we might have. (ASL III)

Debi's Teaching Philosophy

My philosophy in teaching is to view students as lifelong learners and respect their desire to learn as much as they can take in through classes. Teaching American Sign Language (ASL) from beginning to advanced levels is quite a challenge for me to present as a second or foreign language because ASL requires quite a different skill to acquire visually for students. Thus, it motivates me to introduce and teach ASL using a direct approach and interactive activities. It is important to possess the good qualities of an ASL teacher to teach effectively and successfully. Having an ability to teach and understand the process of teaching including learning outcomes is another essential aspect of a teacher's responsibility.



Debi's other interests and activities outside WOU:

For several years I was involved with the Northwest Theater of the Deaf (NWTDD) based in Portland, Oregon. I served as a president of the board of trustees for 2 years, and had acted in a few productions such as "Liliom."

For the last 7 years I have been doing the update news for KGW (Channel 8). I started out as a substitute for a well-known Deaf community leader, Henry Stack. At his death, I was asked to take over. I continue doing the news for the Deaf community and greatly enjoy performing this community service.

Since Fall 2005 I have been doing volunteer work with the middle school age Deaf children at Washington School for the Deaf.

For the past 16 years I have presented various workshops to educational interpreters all over the Pacific Northwest. Mostly, I presented a workshop on "Storytelling Techniques, Using ASL" to interpreters in the Olympia school district area on March 17, 2006.



Students applaud a fellow student's presentation.

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