

# Gallaudet students want deaf professors

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By Enrique J. Gonzales, The Washington Times, page B1, second edition

Protesting Gallaudet University students, changing their rallying cry of two years ago from "Deaf President Now" to "Deaf Professors Now," plan to boycott what they call unfair English exams today.

According to organizers, only 11 of the 400 students who took the examination to finish English 50, a non-credit remedial English course, passed the test last fall.

The students blamed the low passage rate on the lack of deaf professors and hearing professors who know how to use American Sign Language properly. Others pointed to the test itself.

As many as 400 students are expected to boycott the test today, the last time to take it during the spring semester, according to protesters Carl DuPree and Larry Smith.

"The teachers aren't qualified," Mr. DuPree said through an interpreter. "They can't sign. They don't understand."

Yesterday, about 40 students picketed during a day-long rally, carrying posters with such messages as "End Language Bigotry Now."

"I think the students have the attention of the English Department," said Robert Williams, dean of the university's College of Arts and Sciences. "But things like this cannot be accomplished overnight."

Mr. Williams and Professor Doug Miller questioned the statistics on student failure, saying the rate was much better than that, but failed to produce different figures. "I believe those statistics are out of line," Mr. Miller said in a discussion with students.

Mr. DuPree countered, "I have the evidence. I wouldn't speak out without that."

Mr. DuPree and other organizers said the main rally message was a variation of the cry that put the first deaf person in the university president's office, "Deaf President Now." I. King Jordan has been president since 1988 when a groundswell of student protest brought the school in the 800 block of Florida Avenue NE into the national spotlight.

The cry yesterday was "Deaf Professors Now" because the English Department has only nine deaf members out of a faculty of 37, according to students at the rally.

The lack of deaf professors, they say, has forced many students to retake English 50.

The test to graduate from the class covers remedial English. Many entering freshman students must pass the course to qualify for college-level English classes.

But the students see English as the study of a foreign language, second to their primary language of American Sign Language, Mr. DuPree said.

In many universities, a student who fails foreign language is not forced to give up his or her studies in science, mathematics or other subjects, he said.

A student can pass the English 50 with strong grades but fail the test and still fail the class. A student who fails the test four times is placed on probation or kicked out of the university, students said.

Protesters think too much weight is placed on the end-of-the-year tests and too little on students' overall classwork. The same system, they say, is used for four levels of English classes.

At least one professor who talked to students, Mr. Miller, said he was sympathetic to the student's plight.

"The English Department is sensitive to your boycott," he told students in an informal discussion before walking across campus. "We can't change the English test overnight."

Students in upper-level classes are protesting the practice of holding do-or-die exams, but according to Mr. Smith and Mr. DuPree the students hope first to change the practice in English 50 in order to get it changed for all classes.

Neither the dean of the English Department, Nancy Kensicki, nor Mr. Jordan could be reached for comment yesterday.

Caption: Photo, Gallaudet University students picket for more deaf professors., By Kevin T. Gilbert/The Washington Times