

## Signs of Change—Campus Community Eyes Multicultural, Bilingual Goals

by Vickie Walter, *Preview*, Fall 1990, pp. 7-10

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The entire Gallaudet community—faculty, staff, students, and administrators at the University and Pre-College Programs—took a day-long break from regular day-to-day activities in April to focus on important issues related to communication.

The retreat day, called "Signs of Change," featured discussions, presentations, exhibits, and activities about signing, evaluation systems, and how the institution can grow as a bilingual and multicultural community.

Far from being an end in itself, the day, according to organizers, was the continuation of an effort to improve communication on campus. Various activities were designed to help participants take a giant step toward mutual understanding by looking at the variety of options that are in the word "communication."

Communication came to the fore as a major issue at the University just over a year ago when the Gallaudet Research Institute (GRI) published a scholarly paper called "[Unlocking the Curriculum: Principles for Achieving Access in Deaf Education](#)" [...]. The papers authors—Dr. Robert E. Johnson, Dr. Scott Liddell, and Dr. Carol Erting—are all faculty members in Gallaudet's Department of Linguistics and Interpreting. Johnson is chairman of that department and Erting is also director of the GRI's Culture and Communication Studies Program. In the paper, the authors maintained that the low academic achievement levels of most deaf students is a consequence of the communication practices of teachers, and they advocated the use of American Sign Language in teaching deaf students.

During the past academic year, the discussion and controversy generated by "Unlocking the Curriculum" has grown beyond the GRI to reach all levels of the campus community.

In December, an open letter was distributed on campus by Johnson, Liddell, Erting, Dr. Ceil Lucas, and Clayton Valli of Linguistics and Interpreting, and Carlene Thumann-Prezioso, a research associate with the Culture and Communication Studies Program. They proposed a guiding principle toward establishing a Gallaudet language policy: "Teaching, learning, and administrative activities at Gallaudet will take place by means of language accessible to the deaf students it was established to serve."

The authors of the letter noted, "The blame for the failure to achieve at levels equivalent to hearing students must lie with the way they are being educated." They said that Gallaudet students often interpret for each other because they cannot understand their teachers.

In response to this open letter, other letters began circulating around campus from Gallaudet faculty members, many of them deaf, disagreeing with the open letter and questioning its premises.

Around the same time, an ad hoc committee of the Gallaudet Faculty Senate, the governing body of faculty at both the University and Pre-College Programs levels, was charged with studying the University's New Faculty Orientation (NFO) summer program. The committee reported that there was mounting criticism that new faculty do not communicate effectively when classes begin in the fall. Interviews with new faculty revealed their views that the Department of Sign Communication was placing a high emphasis on American Sign Language and de-emphasizing simultaneous communication and fingerspelling.

The senate later asked the committee on faculty-student affairs to appoint a task force to make recommendations on the NFO program.

In his "State of the University" address to the campus community on Feb. 28 [1990], President I. King Jordan addressed the subject of communication, which he said will continue to be "an overriding priority" at the University. "All of us, I think, would agree that what is most notable since DPN is the more open and inclusive nature of the dialogue," he said. "So many voices coming from so many different perspectives guarantee that change will take place."

Jordan announced that [the \[1990\] Strategic Plan](#) (mission and goals statement) of the University, recently adopted by the Board of Trustees, recognizes that "Gallaudet is a bilingual and multicultural community where both languages, American Sign Language and English, must be integrated into all aspects of University life."

During the celebration of the second anniversary of the [Deaf President Now](#) movement on campus March 1 [1990], a large rally, composed primarily of students, expressed two goals: that Gallaudet recognize ASL and English as equal languages, and that ASL and English be used in the classroom. Speakers from various areas of the institution, including faculty and staff, lent their support to these goals.

In a March 26 memorandum announcing the institutional priorities for Fiscal Year 1991 and 1992, President Jordan re-emphasized that "creation of a barrier-free communication environment at Gallaudet will be the pre-eminent priority for Fiscal Year 1991 and Fiscal Year 1992." A 19-member University Priorities Committee has

proposed that components of a plan to be implemented this fall, focusing on establishing clear communication—primarily sign communication—should include "increased and more effective communication training and evaluation for Gallaudet faculty, staff, and students; recognition and rewards for those who achieve communication excellence; increased research on American Sign Language and other sign communication processes; and expansion of networks with off-campus groups in order to disseminate information on effective communication processes."

The Gallaudet Faculty Senate, after discussing several changes, finally adopted recommended changes that would give greater emphasis to American Sign Language, along with English. The resulting policy states, in part: "The University Faculty is now committed to a working model of a bilingual (English and American Sign Language) multicultural community where deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing people can learn and work together without communication barriers."

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*"Preview," was the name of a newsletter published by the Pre-College National Mission Programs (PCNMP) at Gallaudet University in the early 1990s. The PCNMP was renamed to the "Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center" (LCC) in honor of [Laurent Clerc](#) in 1999. The LCC is an administrative division of Gallaudet University.*

LINK TO ORIGINAL ARTICLE (including photos):

[http://gallyprotest.org/signs\\_of\\_change\\_scanned\\_version.pdf](http://gallyprotest.org/signs_of_change_scanned_version.pdf)