

Tulane linguistics students stage virtual American Sign Language focus group

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In the spring semester, a Tulane linguistics class explored American Sign Language (ASL) interpreting as a profession and also staged a virtual focus group for ASL interpreters. (Shutterstock photo)

Students in the Service Learning cohort of Linguistics 3811 — “Introduction to Interpretation” — were concerned that their spring focus group, “Road to Certification,” would have to be canceled during the state's "stay-at-home" order for COVID-19. Using their considerable enthusiasm and some assistance from their community partner Lighthouse Louisiana, the students recently rallied to host the

focus group online.

This semester the class explored American Sign Language (ASL) interpreting as a profession, including a data collection project that sought to analyze the gap between education completion and certification, so as to ease the nationwide shortage of qualified interpreters.

“We were incredibly challenged by the migration to online learning, but the dedication this service learning cohort demonstrated to the project and to the Deaf community turned it into a remarkable success,” said Denise Crochet, who is a Tulane alumna and an adjunct professor in the School of Liberal Arts’ linguistics program.

The Road to Certification virtual focus group attracted more than 50 participants from around the country. Working ASL interpreters were guided through a series of discussion questions, moderated by Tulane students Jonathan Gutmann and Sarah Goldberg, via the Zoom platform. Lighthouse Louisiana was a sponsor of the event and of the continuing education units that the interpreters earned for attending.

“For this type of project, it was so important to the team that we involve as many participants as possible in order to look at multiple perspectives and backgrounds,” said Goldberg, a public health major with a psychology minor. “The virtual focus group turned out to be a big success and would not have been possible without the passion and dedication of my fellow classmates.”

Other “Introduction to Interpretation” students gathered input from the participants that will be incorporated into the final report to complete their Service Learning component.

Throughout the semester, the students participated in case studies as well as presented at the February meeting of the Louisiana Commission of the Deaf (LCD) in

Baton Rouge.

LCD is responsible for guiding programs for services and activities for Louisiana's Deaf, Deaf/Blind and hard of hearing communities. The "Introduction to Interpretation" students will include input from LCD in their research project.

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