American Deaf Community: Language, Culture, and Society (LING 26030, SIGN 26018)  
Instructor: Prof. Diane Brentari (dbrentari@uchicago.edu)  
TA: Kate Henninger (katehenninger@uchicago.edu)  
Office Hours: by appointment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION  
(No knowledge of ASL is required to take this course.)

The linguistic, cultural, and societal context of the deaf community in America is the focus of this course. Both historical and contemporary aspects of Deaf identity will be included, with an emphasis on the central role that ASL plays in the lives of Deaf individuals. The Deaf community that uses ASL consists of 500,000 individuals, and these individuals come from Deaf families (10%) and hearing families (90%). ASL is the fourth most widely used language in the US. This course will offer a window into a culture that is markedly different from American culture, yet which exists as a diaspora within it.

This course covers issues of culture, history, language and literature within the Deaf community, which uses American Sign Language (ASL). The Deaf community spans all racial groups, yet it is a distinct cultural and linguistic minority. Its members use as their primary language a non-Indo-European language, American Sign Language (ASL), which is structurally and typologically entirely different from English. (ASL should not be confused with gestures or other manual communication systems that represent English words and structure.)

The course will not teach ASL, per se, but it will highlight the differences among signed and spoken languages. (To date, there are approximately 200 attested sign languages, compared with approximately 4,000 spoken languages). Aside from the language differences, the course will cover the Deaf community’s own set of values and norms, as well as its own literary tradition and history. The Deaf community, like most cultural groups, has unique cultural icons and centers of reference.

The literary tradition in the Deaf community is strong, and exists in ASL poems, short stories and prose poems that have their own structural characteristics and themes. These traditions emerge out of the residential schools for the Deaf run by state governments, where children grow and develop within a large and varied community of Deaf peers, teachers, and staff where shared experiences become codified in literary form.

GRADING  
(25%) Participation

1. Discussion participation and leading discussion: Each student is expected to be well prepared to participate in discussions in section and in lecture. This may include leading one or more of the discussions.

2. Discussion Posts: By Monday of each week at midnight (11:59pm), each student should post to the discussion board a response to the readings that: (1) describes an idea you found particularly compelling (or not compelling) from the readings for weeks x-y; (2) formulates a question for one of the authors. The entire response may consist of
approximately 200 words, or more if you wish. You may start your own topic or respond to a student's post. 5 posts are required during the quarter.

(35%) Take-home Midterm 2000-3000 words: Due November 1, 11:59 From a set of 8-10 questions on the topics of the lectures, you will be asked to respond to three questions (approximately 700-1000 words each in each response).

(40%) Final paper: 4000-6000 words: Due December 6, 11:59 Respond to one of these broad topics. The successful paper will draw upon numerous specific examples from material discussed in class.

To what extent do you think that Deaf Community has a unified identify when compared with African American Community, Jewish Community, or LBGTQ Community?

Or

What internal and external factors do you think are most important in allowing minority communities to thrive, with particular attention to the Deaf community? Can we generalize across minority groups?

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

All required readings and videos are available on the Canvas site. In addition,

-- an optional book (Sign Language Phonology) is available in FILES
-- an optional film (The Sound of Metal) is available on Amazon Prime
-- an optional TV series (Deaf U) is available on Netflix.

Week 1: De-constructing (D/d)eafness

Readings:

Videos:
1. Rachel Kolb: Navigating the Hearing World Navigating deafness in a hearing world | Rachel Kolb | TEDxStanford (Links to an external site.)
3. Peter Hauser: Linguisticism Effects of Linguisticism and Audism on the Developing Deaf Person | Peter Hauser | TEDxGallaudet (Links to an external site.)
**Week 2: Language creation/cultural creation: necessity & choices**

**Readings:**
3) Lane, Harlan, Hoffmeister, Robert, and Bahan, Benjamin. 1996. *Journey Into Deaf-World*. (chapter 2,3,5)
4) Veditz, George. The Preservation of Sign Language. (full translation.)

**Videos:**
1. **Veditz:** 1917 clip (on course website in FILES).
2. **Deaf U (optional):** [https://www.netflix.com/search?q=Deaf&jby=81035566](https://www.netflix.com/search?q=Deaf&jby=81035566) (Links to an external site.)

**Week 3: Language Structure: Sources, Change & Contemporary Grammars**

**Readings:**

**Videos:**
1. **Joseph Hill:** Black ASL (on course website in FILES)
2. **Julie Hochgesang:** Accents in ASL [Do sign languages have accents?](https://www.yourwebsite.com/sign-languages-have-accents) (Links to an external site.)
3. **Andrew Bottoms:** Understanding Proximalization and Nonmanuals in M2L2 Sign (on course website in FILES)
4. **Ben Bahan:** Ball story (on course website in FILES)

**Week 4: Language Structure: Sources**

**Videos:**
1. **Annelies Kusters:** Ishaare, Gestures and Signs in Mumbai: [https://vimeo.com/142245339](https://vimeo.com/142245339) (Links to an external site.)
2. **Brentari & Goldin-Meadow:** Language emergence (on course website).
4. **Ergin:** Central Taurus Sign Language [https://youtu.be/uQuiF929rcE](https://youtu.be/uQuiF929rcE) (Links to an external site.)
Week 5: Children as Cultural Investment 1
special lecture by Kate Henninger

Readings:

Videos:
1. Joseph Santini: Educational Autonomy
   [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YiptJm48Ghk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YiptJm48Ghk)
2. [https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2015/05/18/406838781/deaf-jam-experiencing-music-through-a-cochlear-implant](https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2015/05/18/406838781/deaf-jam-experiencing-music-through-a-cochlear-implant)
3. [https://www.sciencefriday.com/educational-resources/cochlear-implants-hearing-aids-sound-like](https://www.sciencefriday.com/educational-resources/cochlear-implants-hearing-aids-sound-like)

Week 6: Children as Cultural Investment 2

Videos:
1. Nyle DiMarco: Making Education Accessible [Making Education Accessible to Deaf Children](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YiptJm48Ghk)
2. Drisana Levitzke-Gray: Deaf Children need sign language (Auslan!) [Deaf children need sign language](https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2015/05/18/406838781/deaf-jam-experiencing-music-through-a-cochlear-implant)
3. Danielle Billing: Bilingualism [Thumb of my leg; a humanist approach to bilingual deaf literacy](https://www.sciencefriday.com/educational-resources/cochlear-implants-hearing-aids-sound-like)

Week 7: Micro-ethnicity

Readings:
Videos:
1. **Joseph Hill**: Panel on Diversity film (on course website in FILES)
2. **Signing Black in America**: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oiLItM1tJ9M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oiLItM1tJ9M) (Links to an external site.)
3. **Jelica Nuccio and John Lee Clark** discuss Protactile Linguistics [https://journalofasl.com/protactile-linguistics/](https://journalofasl.com/protactile-linguistics/) (Links to an external site.)

**Week 8: The international perspective**
2) Grenoble, Lenore & Lindsay Whalen. 2006 Saving languages: an introduction to language revitalization. (ch 2; 21-49). CUP

**Video/Film -- Re-consider (and possibly watch again):**
3. **Annelies Kusters**: Ishaare, Gestures and Signs in Mumbai: [https://vimeo.com/142245339](https://vimeo.com/142245339) (Links to an external site.)

**Week 9: Deaf in literature and the visual arts**
**Readings:**

**Videos & Film:**
1. **Melissa Malzkuhn**: Deaf Ideology as Visual Narrative [Creative Advocacy Through Visual Narrative | Melissa Malzkuhn | TEDxGallaudet](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oiLItM1tJ9M) (Links to an external site.)
2. **Judy Lieff**: Deaf Jam [https://uchicago.kanopy.com/video/deaf-jam](https://uchicago.kanopy.com/video/deaf-jam) (Links to an external site.)
3. ASL Translation from Shakespeare: Tempest (Caliban scene) (on course website in FILES)
4. ASL Translation from Eminem: Lose yourself