



# Integrating an American Sign Language and Deaf Culture Student Interest Group into Medical and Graduate Education

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## Purpose:

Although there are known healthcare disparities between hearing patients and those who are d/Deaf and hard of hearing (DHH), the literature related to training future health care professionals about working and communicating with this patient population remains sparse. In addition to communication barriers, the medical profession tends to hold a negative, pathological view of deafness, and may have little knowledge of the positive, cultural view of deafness. To address these issues, an American Sign Language (ASL) and Deaf Culture (DC) Student Interest Group (SIG) was founded at Morehouse School of Medicine (MSM) in 2019.

## ASL/DC SIG Activities

- Monthly Sign and Dine Meetings
  - Practiced fingerspelling, numbers, and greetings
  - Viewed videos on Deaf culture and challenges in healthcare
- Two Deaf Culture and Healthcare Panels
  - December and April
  - Members of Deaf and hard of hearing communities shared about their experiences in medicine and the impact of COVID-19 on the Deaf Community
- One Lecture on Deaf Culture, Language Acquisition, and Language Deprivation
- Surveys were distributed at the end of the year

## Methods:

In preparation for becoming an official SIG, the founding members created the mission of the group, which was “to train future professionals to advance health equity by increasing awareness of ASL and DC while providing an opportunity for interprofessional relationships.” It was determined that membership would be open to students in all programs at MSM, and meetings would be on a monthly basis. Group activities would include learning about Deaf Culture through videos and presentations by members of the D/deaf and hard of hearing communities (DHH), learning basic ASL, attending Deaf Community events, and hosting a Deaf Panel focusing on experiences in health care, which would be open to all students, faculty, and staff at MSM.

## Student Feedback

*“I learned a lot about how they feel about their community and how they want to be treated by healthcare professionals... I want to make sure I do not make some of the mistakes that some medical professionals make when they have deaf patients.”*

*“I was very inclined to [help] mitigate the negative experiences associated with deaf people and doctors.”*

## Results:

The ASL/DC SIG was formally approved, and all members of the student body were invited to join. Student officers were elected at the first meeting. By the third meeting, 50 members had joined across multiple programs.

## Conclusions and Future Directions:

This SIG allowed students to gain perspective about Deaf Culture and an understanding of the cultural perspective of deafness. Students were engaged and learned how to address challenges in healthcare faced by the DHH communities.

In the future, it is anticipated that membership and member participation in monthly Sign & Dine meetings will continue to increase. We also hope to build community within this group by engaging in social events within the Deaf community, where members can apply their skills and knowledge of ASL and Deaf culture.

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