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Royce Carpenter: Trailblazer

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Royce Carpenter: Trailblazer

Chevon Nicole Ramey

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Abstract

The interpreting field is still a growing profession. When it comes to interpreter education there have been strides made to educate leaders in the field. Educational requirements for interpreters have increased over the years and more and more Associate and Bachelor level programs are becoming available. Interpreter educators have a few options to choose from when it comes to pursuing graduate studies at the Masters level, however there is only one doctoral program currently in Interpreting Studies.

Several graduates who have completed the Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies (MAIS) at Western Oregon University have gone on to do amazing work in the field. In an effort to shine a light on the impact Western is having on the field of interpreting, nationwide and internationally, the MAIS graduating class of 2020 has taken on this case study project. This article highlights Royce Carpenter, M.A., NIC Master.

As a Black interpreter in a field dominated by White women, finding someone to look up to that looks like me has been tough. I graduated from the Interpreter Training Program at San Antonio College in San Antonio, Texas and prior to me graduating, roughly five Black interpreters had successfully graduated from the program. Five! I was fortunate enough to attend a Black Interpreter Summit hosted by Sorenson Communications in Salt Lake City, Utah a few years ago and a common theme we discussed there was representation. How important it is for young Black aspiring professionals to see us in our roles as interpreters, as interpreter educators, to show that WE can do it too. Shortly after attending the summit I decided to take action and put myself in a place to provide that representation I so desperately was looking for as I went through my program.

When our cohort decided to do case studies on graduates of Western Oregon University's MAIS program who are now leaders in the field, I knew I wanted to select one of the graduates who looked like me. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to meet and interview (virtually) Royce Carpenter.

Background

Royce was first introduced to deafness through her grandmother who was employed at the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf in her hometown of Philadelphia. Royce would accompany her grandmother to work and during the weekends and summers some of the Deaf students would come home with her grandmother. At the time, she did not learn the language. She would play with the kids, but her knowledge of the language stopped at the manual alphabet. Fast forward to Royce's adult years; she had relocated to Ohio (her current place of residence) and was working as a business manager at one of the local hospitals. One of her friends' son suffered a severe fever and lost his hearing as a result. Royce remembered her days growing up in Philadelphia and recommended taking a sign language class with her friend so that she could communicate with her child. Taking that one class at Columbus State Community College in support of her friend re-opened the world of deafness to Royce and she learned that she could pursue a career in interpreting. With a husband and three children at home, Royce successfully obtained her first degree, an Associates in Interpreting/Transliteration, at the age of thirty. She got a Bachelors in Organizational Management since there were no programs in her area or online at the time, while working as an interpreter at Columbus State.

Royce got her exposure to teaching five years later when one of her former teachers asked her to team teach a class with her. She stayed on as an adjunct professor for several years. She pursued her Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies at Western Oregon University after looking into other programs. Royce chose Western because of the reputation of the program and the faculty. She knew she made the right choice after sharing her thesis topic with the faculty. As a Black person in the United States, we often experience a lot of resistance and push back when we want to address the racist elephant in the room and pursue change. Royce's thesis, "Let's bridge the gap! Cross-cultural mentoring", addresses these race issues in the field of interpreting and she had full support from the faculty at Western Oregon. The MAIS program also prepared her for the doctorate she is currently pursuing. She would have loved to complete her doctoral studies at Western as well, however, do to the lack of a program she was forced to pursue those studies at a different institution.

Royce is currently a full-time, tenure track faculty member and the first person of color to serve as the coordinator of the Interpreter Education Program at Columbus State.

A Push for Diversity

It is a sad reality that there is a dearth of interpreters of color. According to the most recent statistics from the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, of the 14,284 registered members, only 449 identified as Black, 463 as Hispanic/Latino, 169 as Asian American/Pacific Islander and 114 as American Indian/Alaskan Native. At 1,195 that is a mere 8.4% of the registered interpreters. Less than 9%! This lack of diversity is especially felt in the Black Deaf community, where many of its members do not have access to an interpreter that is familiar with Black culture or familiar with Black ASL (often used by the members of the Black Deaf community).

One of the biggest accomplishments Royce can boast is her determination to not allow those naysayers to distract her from her efforts to push for more education regarding Black culture and more diversity in the field. She is actively conducting workshops and making strides in the profession, paving the way for future Black interpreters. I myself can walk in her footsteps as a Black interpreter and Black interpreter educator. I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to interview her for this project. She is already inspiring this next generation of leaders by simply being in the leadership positions that she is in.

Leadership

In the interview I conducted with Royce, she talks about the need for leaders in general to be cognizant of their words and actions. Words and actions have an impact on not only the person who speaks and does them but on others as well. Royce stated, “What I say, good or bad, is not going to represent just myself.” This idea is a common understanding in the Black community, that we represent the community as a whole with our actions.

Royce also mentions the importance for leaders to be strong in the personal beliefs and values, have tenacity and be willing to fight the fight and see through those things that need to be done. She advises up and coming leaders to have a mentor who is in a position they are striving to attain. Having a mentor will aide in guiding you and showing you different strategies and techniques that will help you achieve the goals you have set out to accomplish. Royce also suggests that you work at the level at which you aim to be. Surround yourself with like-minded positive individuals. Avoid those individuals who simply complain. There is a difference between a fighter and a complainer; sometimes they may look the same but deep down they really are not. A complainer will say something is not right, while the fighter will acknowledge something is not right and then do something to rectify the situation. Royce also is a proponent for continued education. Attend those professional workshops to stay abreast of what is going on in the field of interpreting.

Mentoring

Royce, as mentioned earlier, is well versed in the mentor/mentee relationship. She has and continues to serve in both roles as a professional, and benefits from them both. In the mentor role, Royce loves seeing the growth that happens in her mentees the most. Nurturing the potential that she sees in her mentees that they often do not see for themselves at the outset. In the mentee role, Royce enjoys seeing individuals doing what they love and figuring out their strengths, strategies, and techniques they use and how she can adapt those to her personal journey.

Interpreting Stories

Royce enjoys sharing her interpreting stories with her students, those that show that she is human and still makes mistakes like humans do. It is important to show students that we are not perfect just because we have been doing this for a long time or because we are certified.

Although she does not enjoy sharing them, she still shares those stories we as Black interpreters have regarding racist comments. For example, being rejected because of your skin color without even having the opportunity to lift your hands and show that you are qualified to do the work.

Sharing these tough stories is important, especially for those students of color, who will unfortunately have to face these same experiences once they begin their career. Being aware that it happens and having controls to use when those intrapersonal demands arise will be a great benefit. These stories are also beneficial to White interpreters as well, who want to act as an ally.

Final Thoughts

Royce's success thus far did not come easy. She has had to fight her way to get to where she is. In order to be successful, often comes hard work. Rarely does it come easy. Be ready for the challenge and do not give up.

About the Author

Chevon Nicole Ramey, BEI Advanced and Medical, B.A.A.S Psychology at Texas A&M University – San Antonio. Chevon currently works as an interpreter educator at San Antonio College and has been working as a certified interpreter in Texas since 2011 in the following settings: community, medical, post-secondary, educational, VRS, performance, platform and conference. She obtained her Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences in Psychology from Texas A&M University – San Antonio and is currently pursuing her Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies at Western Oregon University.

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Reference

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