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# An investigation of student perception how to better prepare signed language/English interpreters for the real world

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An Investigation of Student Perception How to Better Prepare  
Signed Language/English Interpreters for the Real World

By

DarleneKay (Darlea) Wilbeck

A thesis submitted to

Western Oregon University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of:

Masters of Arts in Interpreting Studies

June 2017

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**WE, THE UNDERSIGNED MEMBERS OF THE GRADUATE FACULTY OF  
WESTERN OREGON UNIVERSITY HAVE EXAMINED THE ENCLOSED**

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- Thesis  
 Field Study  
 Professional Project

Titled: An Investigation into How to Better Prepare Signed Language/English  
Interpreters for the Real World

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*and hereby certify that in our opinion it is worthy of acceptance as partial fulfillment  
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## ABSTRACT

This investigation of current and former interpreting students was conducted to explore students' experiences of the interpreter education program. Discourse analysis of surveys revealed four areas of improvement: practicum/internship, mentorship, curriculum, and peer/community support. The study was based on Dean and Pollard's demand control schema (2013), social-constructivist education (Kiraly, 2000), and phenomenology (Smith, 2013).

A survey was created and disseminated via email and social media. A total of 102 participants responded to the survey. The participants were diverse, and the survey was designed with yes/no, multiple choice, and open-ended questions with no word or character limit.

The project was limited to students and graduates of interpreter education/training programs. The results demonstrated that the respondents were dissatisfied with their curriculum, the number of practicum/internship hours, the lack of mentorship, and they expressed a desire for additional peer and community support.

This study showed that while participants completed 100 to 200 hours of internship/practicum hours they would have preferred up to 400. Ninety-five percent of participants did not have access to post-graduation mentorship, and 90% reported that they could have benefited from it.

Determining best practices, entrance and exit requirements, along with in-program mentorship are all areas for additional research.



## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

My neighbor had no idea of what American Sign Language (ASL)/English interpreting entailed. He told me that while reviewing career options and curriculum requirements from a local community college catalogue with his son, he had encouraged his son to become a sign language interpreter. He knew I was a sign language interpreter and had a few questions. When I said, “Well, I believe it is a passion-based profession because the work is so hard,” he cut me off, declaring, “It cannot be hard, Darlea, it can be mastered in two years. That is why I suggested it to my son—there is no other language that can be taught to interpret in two years so it must be easy.” When I tried to explain the challenges of interpreting, he insisted that it had to be easy or it would not be offered at a community college. This is one of the prevailing misconceptions about American Sign Language/English interpreting. This conversation sparked my interest not only in the perceptions and history of interpreter education but in determining if gaps currently exist in interpreter education programs.

#### **Background**

According to Ball (2013) academic interpreter education has changed. In the 1950s, Stokoe’s formal research helped establish ASL as a distinct language. His groundbreaking work led to the acceptance of the need to teach ASL, and led to the establishment of interpreter education programs in colleges and universities (Ball, 2013).

Before the 1950's, interpreting was perceived as a volunteer community service, not as a profession. Deaf people would express gratitude to the interpreter by offering them small gifts or bartering services (Godfrey, 2010). The first volunteer interpreters were clergy, teachers of the Deaf, or hearing relatives of Deaf family members (Winston & Cokely, 2007). Due to their personal relationship and skills, these interpreters were chosen and trained by the Deaf community to interpret. In contrast, today's interpreters are often students whose first exposure to Deaf people is in an interpreter education program. In the past, the Deaf community provided apprenticeships to young interpreters. Students of interpreting have changed the way in which interpreters are trained, from full immersion in the Deaf community to classroom settings (Godfrey, 2010).

American Sign Language (ASL)/English interpreting, like academic interpreter education, is relatively new as well (Ball, 2013). Interpreting is not easy to master. American Sign Language/English interpreters use ASL signs, fingerspelling, and body language to communicate with Deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing clients (Ball, 2013). To interpret fluently, competency in ASL and English is required. In addition, "interpreters must be good listeners, clear communicators with the ability to mediate between the various cultures in which they work" (Dean & Pollard, 2013, p. 3). Stewart, Schein, and Cartwright (2004) wrote an introductory interpreting textbook, which explains that it takes time and experience to gain the skills to become a qualified ASL/English interpreter.

As the need for interpreters grew, so did the demand for interpreter educators. In 1954, the federal government's passage of the Vocational

Rehabilitation Act Amendment increased the demand for interpreters (Ball, 2013, p. 15). Among its other provisions, this Act increased services to people with disabilities, established funding for colleges and universities to train professional interpreters, and funded research (A Brief History of Legislation, 2016). This dramatic increase in demand for interpreters resulted in a similar need for interpreter educators. As of 1970, there were no national standards for interpreter training programs, curriculum, or qualification standards for interpreter trainers (Ball, 2013).

With the passage of amendments to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 in 1975 (Burch, 2002) formal education for interpreters was established. The National Interpreter Training Consortium was allocated funds to establish interpreter education programs in California, Minnesota, New Orleans and New York (Ball, 2013). This led to more programs being established across the United States, primarily two-year programs offered by community colleges or vocational training centers (Godfrey, 2010).

It was soon apparent that two years was not enough time to prepare interpreting students for real-world work (Humphrey, 2000; Shaw, Collins, & Metzger, 2006). A consensus emerged that interpreters needed an undergraduate degree (Burch, 2002; Dean & Pollard, 2001; Frishberg, 1990; Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2004). The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID), the national certification body, added the requirement of a bachelor's degree. As of December 2012, any candidate sitting for the national interpreting exam needed to hold a bachelor's degree (Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf,

2007). The four-year degree was to be from an accredited institution but not required to be in interpreting.

This change from two- to four-year training was slow (Godfrey, 2010), and this shift from interpreters being chosen and trained by the Deaf community to being formally trained in classrooms has resulted in preparedness gaps (Ball, 2013; Boeh, 2016; Meadows, 2013). These gaps may have already existed but were not quantifiable. We can now measure the gap by seeing how long after graduation it takes students to earn their certification.

Smith, Cancel, and Maroney (2012) conducted research that acknowledged the gap between graduating from an interpreter education program and possessing the skills to perform entry-level interpreting work. Walker and Shaw's (2011) work also demonstrated that interpreter education programs were graduating students who were ill-prepared for interpreting.

Applying a statistical measure to quantify preparation, preparedness, or the readiness-to-work is difficult, if not impossible. One measure that is commonly accepted is the ability to obtain credentials during or post-graduation (Frishberg, 1990; Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2005). For example, interpreter education programs whose graduates generally take a longer time to attain credentials may be measured to have a wider readiness to credential gap, than graduates who take less time to do so (Godfrey, 2010).

Graduating can be an exciting and scary time. Starting a new job is one of the top 20 stressors a person can experience (Zwolinski & Zwolinski, 2012). Meadows (2013) concluded that real-world shock has distinct phases and causes

both emotional and physical stress. There is a natural acclimation process when entering a new work culture. Real-world shock takes place in the transition from the classroom to the professional world, and it is above and beyond the normal phase of adjustment (Meadows, 2013) in a new job or career.

Twenty-seven years ago, Resnick (1990) saw this gap and proposed post-graduation mentorship, internship and extended supervision to prepare students for real-world work. Among other solutions that have been suggested are workshops (Winston, 2006), mentoring (Delk, 2013; RID, 2007) and supervision (Smith et al., 2012).

Since the conversation with my neighbor, I have been researching the history and current practices of interpreter education programs. I selected this topic because I am preparing to enter the interpreter teaching profession, and I want to advance the field. My research on this topic led me to Resnick (1990) and Anderson and Stauffer (1990), who first identified the gap and labeled it as a crisis situation. Four years later, Frishberg (1994), Patrie (1994), Robinson (1994), and Stauffer (1994) wrote response articles, stating that the gap persisted. Time went on, and Winston (2005), Cokley (2005), Maroney and Smith (2010), and Smith et al., (2012) confirmed the familiar issue of work readiness gap. More recently Godfrey (2010) and Meadows (2013) reiterated these earlier findings.

This research will elicit insights from interpreter education students and graduates on what does and does not work and why. Others have focused on mentorship, supervision, interpreter educators and curriculum. Due to the

change in interpreter education from the Deaf community to academia, interpreter education programs (IEP) are the principal producers of interpreters (Godfrey, 2010). The future of interpreting lies in the quality of education offered by these programs. Among the stakeholders impacted by IEPs are interpreter educators, current and future students, Deaf and hearing consumers, hiring entities, certified interpreters, certification bodies, and curriculum development committees. This research focuses on the perspectives of current and former students. Its objectives are:

- To identify if IEP academia's past inclinations have continued, it was asked if students first exposure to interpreting occurred in IEP or prior?
- To explore existing practicum/internship trends, current and former students reported on how many hours they completed, how many they thought should be required, when they thought the process should start in their program and if those hours were their only "hands up/real-world" experiences.
- To explore up-to-date mentorship trends, current and former students reported on their experience with post-graduation mentorship opportunities.
- To identify current trends, two open-ended questions explored what else participants felt could have benefited their IEP experience and what could have better prepared them for the work as an interpreter.

## **Theoretical Bases**

The theoretical bases of this study are Dean and Pollard's (2013) demand control schema, social-constructivist education (Kiraly, 2000), and phenomenology (Smith, 2013). Dean and Pollard's (2013) demand control schema focuses on the environmental, interpersonal, paralinguistic and intrapersonal demands that interpreters face.

To interpret well, students must understand the goal of the environment, specialized terminology, their physical surroundings and clientele, power/authority dynamics, communication styles/goals, emotional tones, cultural dynamics, thought worlds, physical limitations, cognitive restrictions, physical positioning, idiosyncratic signs/speech, volume, pace, accents, personal feelings/thoughts, physiological distractions and psychological responses (Dean & Pollard, 2013, p. 5).

In addition, students must know how to separate demands from controls and practice exploring which controls are available to them. These controls will vary depending on the circumstances but there are boundless demand-control blends (Dean & Pollard, 2013) that students can learn and practice. This takes time and good self-awareness that students, due to limited life experience, may lack.

This process explains the importance and complexity of the interpreting process. To start, students must understand the source message's intent, consider the participants and their schemas, and analyze their own work autonomously and with others to continue to make improvements. This process

demonstrates a challenging task interpreting is not only for seasoned professionals to teach and for students to master.

Lastly, one's schema is impacted by his or her background, education, professional and personal experiences. These together create the identity of a working interpreter.

Kiraly (2000) wrote that the most valuable learning experience students could encounter were authentic ones. He defined authenticity as, "the degree to which the activities undertaken in the classroom are representative of the nature and complexity of activities performed by professional translators in the course of their work" (p. 58). Thus creating realistic real-world work in academia would lead to greater comprehension for students. Post-survey analysis revealed that the students reported the same results, supporting Kiraly's belief. The students requested more real-world application with Deaf instructors and focused on settings they could work in immediately post-graduation.

Kiraly (2000) also explained social-constructivist education as something that is done not in a spirit of competition but of cooperation. This requires educators to create a positive place of learning for their students. The students can then emulate this spirit with their peers, consumers and stakeholders.

The social-constructivist approach is not a stale transfer of knowledge but an interactive process. This requires participation and extra effort on the part of the educator and the student. Students should not expect to sit in class and learn simply by silently taking notes and memorizing details. They are responsible for their education and as much as they put into it is as much as they



will get out. As Winston (2005) wrote, students need to learn to assess their own capabilities and proficiencies, construct knowledge, and not simply receive it. This requires them to take accountability for their own learning and nurture lifelong learning habits. Learning is an on-going active process. This requires students to graduate and maintain a thirst for knowledge for the duration of their career, not simply within the confines of academia.

Smith (2013) wrote that phenomenology includes one's bodily awareness, consciousness, desire, embodied action, emotion, imagination, linguistic activity, memory, perception, social activity, and thought. This is a mix of one's experiences with focused consciousness. In this research, current and former students were asked to self-report their perceptions of their experiences. Understanding how they process their experiences will lead to a greater understanding of how they self-report.

Phenomenology can also relate to ethics, which covers a large portion of instruction in interpreting education. Ethics could be related to phenomenology in regards to students first-person knowledge of care for others, happiness, valuing and will (Smith, 2013). How students know, reason, act, and experience are all interwoven and affect their self-reporting.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The scope of this project was limited to students and graduates of interpreter education programs. It also seems that the people who are most likely to respond to the questionnaire are those with not only formal training but also current engagement within the profession.

The survey focused only on current and former students. Additional research needs to be completed to focus on the experiences of educators, consumers and stakeholders. The data compiled will only be generalizable from students' perspectives.

The survey was distributed digitally, so people without access to a computer, Internet, email and/or Facebook were not able to participate. The survey was created in Google Forms. The survey responses were anonymous, so there was no way to tell if the participants were current or former students. While my email was available for participants, I was not there in person to clarify questions or ensure the questions were answered in the manner intended.

The survey allowed participants to reported their own responses. Self-reporting surveys have the advantage of being easy to distribute to a large group (Hoskin, 2012). The drawbacks include poor image management or lack of honesty among participants (Hoskin, 2012). Participation in the survey was voluntary and responses were anonymous to encourage honesty. Nonetheless, some participants might have felt compelled to give socially acceptable answers (Northrup, 1996). Others might have wanted to be honest but were insufficiently introspective (Hoskin, 2012). They inadvertently responded as they wish things were, not as they actually are (Northrup, 1996).

Before distribution, the survey was piloted with colleagues and peers in Google Forms via email. Their feedback was incorporated into the modifications. The pilot survey responses were deleted before official circulation and are not included in the data reported here.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of current and former students in interpreter education programs experiences in search of gaps in their training. If gaps were identified, their correlation to IEP experiences would be investigated.

## Chapter 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

American Sign Language/English interpreting is a relatively new profession (Ball, 2013; Godfrey, 2010). For years, sign language/English interpreters were volunteers (Cokely, 2005). This responsibility for interpreting typically fell to the Deaf client's hearing family members or friends who were fluent in sign language (Cokely, 2005). In other words, the Deaf people handpicked their interpreters.

Sign language interpreters work in business, education, government, medical, mental health, legal, religious, social services, and performing arts settings (Stewart et al., 2004). With the passage of legislation granting equal access for disabled individuals (Cokely, 2005), the demand for interpreters exceeded the supply.

The Deaf community did not have the resources for interpreter education (Ball, 2013), so colleges took over that responsibility. These programs were originally known as Interpreter Training Programs (ITP) (Humphrey & Alcorn, 2007). "Training" implies a trade perspective. In an attempt at professionalization, these programs were renamed, Interpreter Education Programs (IEP) (Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2004).

## **Trade Versus Profession**

While altering the academic name brought vernacular change, the perception of the interpreting profession is still in progress. Advocating for interpreting to be regarded as a profession, Stewart et al. (2004) wrote:

Realization of the difficulties inherent in providing accurate interpreting leads to the conclusion that interpreting should be in the hands of well-prepared, highly skilled individuals. Such a conclusion, in turn, brings one to the realization that interpreting is hardly a trade; it is a profession. It requires formal education, and its practitioners must follow an established code of ethics. For these reasons, interpreters should be compensated at rates mirroring their experience, education, and skills. (p. 41)

Aside from working in a variety of settings with diverse vernaculars and cultures, interpreters must be fluent in two languages. At the most basic level, interpreting is a means of communication. ASL interpreters use American Sign Language signs, fingerspelling, and body language to communicate with Deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing clients (Ball, 2013). Fluency in ASL and English is required. In addition, “interpreters must be good listeners, clear communicators with the ability to mediate between the various cultures in which they work” (Be an American Sign Language Interpreter, 2017). It takes time and experience to gain the skills required to become a qualified ASL/English interpreter.

American Sign Language/English interpreters are in high demand. They also experience demands. These demands occur from a variety of environmental, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and linguistic factors. Cokely (1992)

created a Sociolinguistic Model of the Interpreting Process, which demonstrates why interpreting is so demanding. According to Cokely's (1992) model, while the interpreter is listening to one message, he or she is simultaneously receiving that source message, recognizing its intent, storing that intent in memory, comprehending its intent, interpreting that message into the second language, and then producing the source message into the target message. Later renditions added pre- and post-production monitoring as well. This means that while perceiving, recognizing, chunking, understanding, analyzing, formulating, and producing (Cokely, 1992), an interpreter is also monitoring his or her thought processes and production to ensure it is consistent with the source message. This mental process is a difficult task to break down and explain, which makes it an even more challenging undertaking to teach interpreting students.

Most of this mental aerobic work takes place at a very swift pace (Lee, 2002). Gerver (1969) determined that an average of 95–120 words per minute are interpreted. Considering these demands, an interpreter must possess active listening skills, good memory retention, and be able to mentally transpose and verbalize signs into the target language (Stewart et al., 2004).

With interpreting complexities and the changes from Deaf-led interpreter education to formal education, gaps began to emerge (Boeh, 2016; Meadows, 2013; Smith et al., 2012). Patrie (1994), Frishberg (1990), Witter-Merithew and Johnson (2005) and Maroney and Smith (2010) suggested that it is common practice for interpreter education graduates to be unprepared for employment upon graduation. In 2005, Witter-Merithew and Johnson gathered interpreter and

interpreter educator experts to form the Authority Opinion Group (AOG), to explore this problem. Each of the seven group members saw a proficiency gap between students and the workplace. This demonstrates that awareness of this problem has existed for several years.

Leaders in the field have suggested a range of remedies such as workshops (Winston, 2006), curriculum (Ball 2013; CCIE, 2010), entrance and exit requirements (Winston, 2005), degree changes/requirements (Godfrey, 2010; Winston & Cokely, 2007), and mentoring (Boeh, 2016; Delk, 2013; RID, 2007). To maintain certification, interpreters are required to obtain continuing education units (CEUs) annually. Most certified interpreters fulfill this requirement by attending approved workshops that award CEUs.

### **Curriculum Suggestions**

The Commission on Collegiate Interpreter Education (CCIE) is an accrediting organization that has developed national standards for interpreter education. This group works by

Identifying the knowledge, skills, and perspectives of students need to gain in order to enter the field of professional interpreting. The standards give students, faculty, curriculum developers, administrators, employers, and consumers a common set of expectations about what basic knowledge and competencies interpreting students should acquire. The standards are to be used for the development, evaluation, and self-analysis of post-secondary professional interpreter education programs. They will guide new programs in defining policies on entry requirements,

curricular goals, faculty selection, teaching methods, ongoing assessment, and projected student outcomes. For existing programs, the standards provide benchmarks for assessing and enhancing student outcomes, evaluating and updating faculty, and improving curricula and related practices. (CCIE, 2014, p. 1)

In 2010, the CCIE set curriculum standards:

The curriculum design shall provide the basis for program planning, implementation and evaluation. It shall be based on a course of study that includes a broad foundation of liberal arts, sciences, professional education, research and practicum. The liberal arts and social and behavioral sciences content shall be a prerequisite to, or concurrent with, professional education.

CCIE standards (2010) for interpreter education:

- support the mission of the interpreter training program;
- identify educational goals that are consistent with the program's mission and philosophy statements;
- describe the set of organizing principles that explain the selection of the content, the scope, and the sequencing of coursework;
- establish the view of interpreting as it relates to the world rather than the local isolation;
- represent cultural competence that is not limited to simple recognition and mention of diverse cultures and groups; and
- include the involvement of the local Deaf community.



(CCIE, 2010, p. 1)

Ball (2013) expanded her dissertation into a history of interpreter education in the United States. She explained the history of the interpreter education curriculum, the present standards (CCIE), and suggested more specific curriculum changes that would supersede CCIE's vision:

1. A relevant curriculum model should be developed after program outcomes are clearly explored and delineated. The curriculum should include evaluation strategies that are tied directly to the course objectives and program outcomes. For example, if the ultimate goal of a program is to prepare work-ready students, the curriculum must be designed with employment in mind.
2. Interpreter educators should collaborate to identify program outcomes appropriate to associate, bachelor's, master's and doctoral programs. Curriculum revisions can then be based on the knowledge of what should be expected of students completing those types of programs.
3. Program administrators and instructors should encourage the use of textbooks that are research-based. Numerous materials have been developed that promote evidence-based practice and that provide curricular components that address program outcomes and course objectives.
4. Program administrators and instructors should model ethical behavior. For example, the practice of buying one book or video for a program that will then be used by all students does not give adequate credit to

the creators of such works. Copying books or videos without permission of the copyright owners is illegal and does not demonstrate ethical behavior.

5. Educators should share curricula with other educators. One example of such sharing is the “Share Shop” section in the CIT newsletter for sharing curriculum ideas, teaching tips, and lesson plans. Educators also need to find other ways to meet and discuss curricular issues, to help streamline the teaching process and work towards more effective and standardized programming. (p. 143–144)

Ball’s (2013) vision included backwards design theory for curriculum, clear differentiation between degrees, the use of research-based materials opposed to using materials out of habit or emulating those who had gone before, ethics that should be not only taught but lived by educators, and a transparency of programs with professional peers.

### **Entrance and Exit Requirements Suggestions**

Winston (2005) believed in establishing language fluency requirements. For a program to be successful, the standards for applicants and incoming students have to be raised. Students must enter with language fluency and spend class time concentrating on complex interpreting skills (Humphrey, 2000; Shaw et al., 2006; Swabey, 2005; Winston, 2005; Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2004). This would include applicants to be screened before admission (Shaw et al., 2006; Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2004).

Students who graduate from programs that require language fluency upon entry show an increased interest in developing both their interpreting skills and a theoretical framework (Godfrey, 2010). American Sign Language fluency also leads to faster certification post-graduation (Godfrey, 2010), which is one benchmark of a successful program. Students enrolled in programs with language fluency admission requirements, spend their time becoming proficient in accurate message production (interpreting) rather than in learning American Sign Language (Winston & Cokely, 2007).

### **Past Degree Suggestions**

Godfrey (2010) investigated the types of degrees interpreting students were obtaining. Her survey found that 60.6% earned associate degrees and 39.4% earned bachelor's degrees. Godfrey's (2010) research demonstrated that graduates from bachelor's programs earn state and national credentials faster than graduates from associate programs do. In the United States, as of 2017, there are 46 bachelor's degree programs, 86 associate degree programs, 25 certificate programs, four master degree programs, and one PhD program (Find an ASL-English interpreting program, 2017). In other words, there are still almost twice as many associate degrees as bachelor's degrees available to students.

Winston and Cokely (2007) found that for most students who complete their associate degree, training to become an ASL/English interpreter take more than 24 months post-graduation to earn their national credentials. Students earning a bachelor's degree take 12 to 18 months. This demonstrates that the gap is greater among shorter programs. Although the desire for change has

been there, American Sign Language/English interpreters are still more aligned with technical training than with a profession.

### **Mentoring Suggestions**

Boeh (2016), Delk (2013), and RID (2007) have recommended mentoring. Delk (2013) proposed that mentoring is a way to improve interpreting services, build a support system among interpreters, and close the gap for new interpreters. Boeh's (2016) research demonstrated that 95% of the participants wanted a mentor. She offered the following outcomes:

1. Professional growth of the novice and seasoned interpreters
2. The betterment of critical thinking skills, linguistic skills, business knowledge, professional knowledge and technical skills by both the novice and seasoned interpreters, and
3. The strengthening of relationships among interpreters for the benefit of the overall profession and the communities that signed language interpreter's service. (p. 70)

She suggested this mentorship be done in a collaborative manner that was satisfying to both mentor and mentee (Boeh, 2016).

The researcher found three academic programs that have mentoring programs; there might be more. A state-funded program in Massachusetts pairs its mentees with certified RID mentors. The mentees spend their time observing, interpreting with supervision, discussing ethics, meaning transfer, and what transpired specific to each situation (Kahle, 2013). The program is a stepping-stone from school to real-world work for aspiring interpreters of color. The

program has been in effect since 1993 and reports to be thriving. It has blossomed from a small local program to a statewide option.

Professional Supervision for Interpreting Practice (PSIP) is a mentoring program at Western Oregon University (Smith et al., 2012). This program has been deemed a success through supervision sessions, which assist mentees to discover and solve problems through critical thinking in a safe environment. A noteworthy aspect of this process is that the mentors are not in a position of authority over the mentees; they are expected to learn from each other. Supervision has been found to be an effective way to transition from school to work.

Troy University offers a mandatory one-year post-graduation mentorship program and a one-year Master Mentor Program (MMP). The MMP is a certificate program provided by the Teaching Interpreters, Educators & Mentors (TIEM) (Master Mentor Program, 2017) preparing professionals to become mentors in the interpreting field. The programs' data have demonstrated that the mentorship results in quicker certification and integration into the interpreting field (TIEM: Master Mentor Program, 2017).

## Chapter 3

### METHODOLOGY

This study is comprised of 28 qualitative open-ended and closed responses. Like Howe (2004), I chose qualitative research to engage the participants and ensure “all voices were heard” (p. 54). Participants shared their stories by answering eight open-ended questions.

This survey included 20 Yes/No and multiple-choice questions regarding their interpreter education experiences. Eight of these questions were followed by a qualitative question where participants could elaborate on their personal journey with no text limit.

Parallel to Howe (2004), this survey was created to allow participants to share their genuine and in-depth academic experiences. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore current and former students’ interpreter education program experiences. Current and former interpreter training students shared their academic successes and challenges. This pool of participants and their experiences lived in all areas of the United States.

The topic of current and former interpreter education students’ experiences is broad and as a result, succinct questions were not possible. The researcher followed themes as they emerged in the data. This information was unknown prior to creating the survey questions.

## **Design of the Investigation**

This qualitative research study was designed to explore current and former students' experiences in an interpreter education program. Research participants were currently attending, had attended or had graduated from an interpreter education program. Before starting the survey, participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity (see Appendix A).

To protect the participants, prior to dissemination the survey was reviewed and approved by Western Oregon University's Institutional Board (IRB). This approval process created accountability and personnel to contact if a participant had any concerns about the survey. No participant was required to complete the survey. Participants could start and cease completion at any time. One participant answered the first question and then exited the survey. All surveys were included, even incomplete ones.

The survey (Appendix B), created in Google Forms, started with the collection of demographic data such as age, gender, specialization, and location. Not every question had to be answered. Participants answered only the questions that were applicable to them. Response questions were yes/no, multiple choice, or open ended.

Open-ended responses allowed participants to express thoughts and opinions that the yes/no, multiple-choice questions did not. These questions generated the richest data in the survey. The research explores trends in interpreter education programs.

## **Population**

The sample consisted of consenting signed language interpreters residing in the United States. The population was comprised of current and former interpreter education students. Aside from being adults, 18 years old and above, they were diverse in age, gender, ethnicity, career, and geographic location. By choosing to participate in the survey, participants self-selected. The survey was disseminated to interpreters via email, Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf email, and social media sites. The survey results comprised 102 responses, and none were excluded from analysis.

## **Data Treatment**

At the top of the survey was the informed consent (see Appendix A). Participating in the survey served as participants' consent. Data was collected through an online survey using Google Forms. The survey was open for 10 days.

While it was not possible to contact every certified sign language interpreter, by distributing the survey via the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) and the Board for Evaluation of Interpreters (BEI) registries and affiliate chapters, many of those interpreters could be reached. The link to the survey was available and shareable so interpreters could distribute the link/survey to colleagues and friends. The researcher posted the survey in Facebook interpreting groups, emailed colleagues and friends who were interpreters, and emailed all the directors/professors of the interpreter education programs in Texas. The researcher resides in Texas and is familiar with its interpreter



education programs and thus those were the programs that were personally contacted to share this survey. These emails included the informed consent form and the request to share and/or forward the shareable link. The Facebook interpreting groups were likewise encouraged to share the link to promote snowball sampling (Hale & Napier, 2014).

Data collected from the survey results were protected. The computer was kept in an office that required a four-digit code to enter. The computer and Google account were password protected. The researcher was prepared to remove any personal identifiers (for example, if a participant included his or her name or contact information in the open-answer text box), but none did.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

After closing the survey, all of the data was reviewed. Using Google Forms, all percentages, multiple choice and open-ended responses were transferred to an Excel spreadsheet.

Following Nicodemus' (2011) suggestion to start coding with the end in mind, I reread all of the open-ended responses. I considered "the end" to be representing the participant's voices.

By using discourse analysis, four prevalent words/themes were identified: practicum, curriculum, support, and mentorship; the last elicited the most responses. The researcher then thematically categorized the open-ended responses. Many of these responses were very similar. The list of open-answer responses was long. To obtain a more comprehensive view of the state of interpreter education today, all data had to be used. After consolidating similar

comments, a substantial compilation of data could be shared in this research. I found the participants' direct quotes carried tremendous weight and made their points known far better than the researcher could. Thus, many of the open-ended responses have been included verbatim. The findings aligned with the researcher's experiences and with past research (Godfrey, 2010).

## Chapter 4

### FINDINGS

There were 102 participants who responded to the survey. One respondent answered only the first question, leaving 101 fully completed surveys. Several contributors answered many of the questions but not all of them. Some of the open-ended questions were skipped.

#### Demographics

The first question regarding demographic data refers to gender. Of the 102 participants, the overwhelming majority (87.1%) were female (Figure 1). Twelve (11.9%) were male, and one (1%) identified as other. A transgender option was available but not used. The gender data was collected and the study results, 87% female, parallels with the general interpreting demographic population (Fiscal Year 2015 Annual Report, 2015).

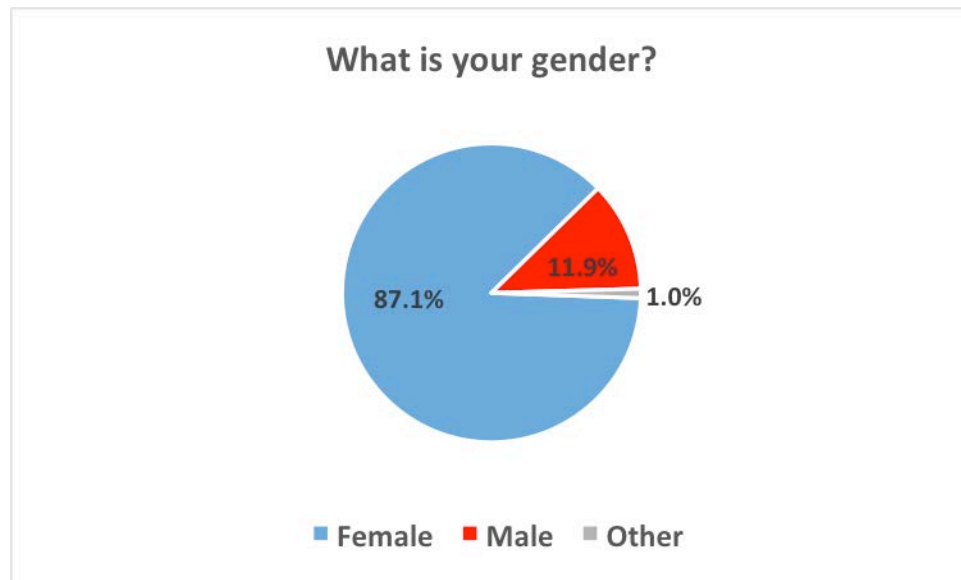
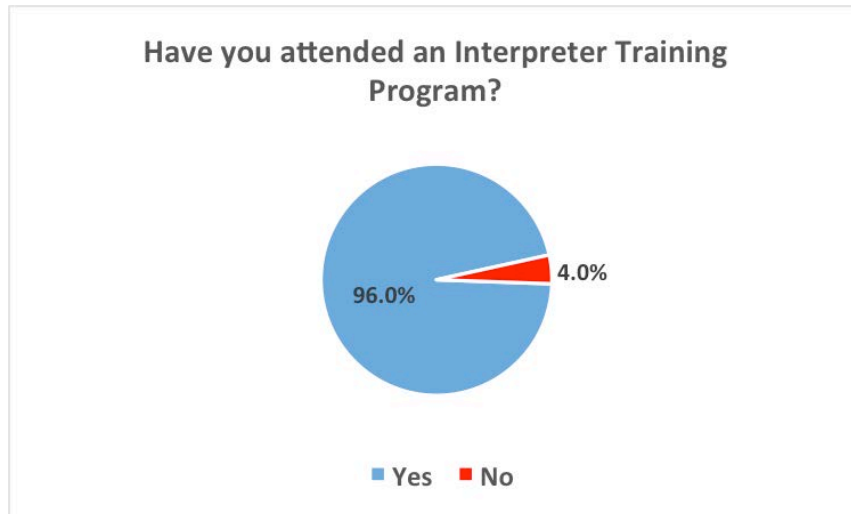


Figure 1. Gender Distribution of Participants

## Interpreter Education Program Attendance

Ninety-six percent of the participants had completed an Interpreter Education Program (IEP). Four percent had not, as shown in Figure 2.



*Figure 2. Attendance at an Interpreter Training Program*

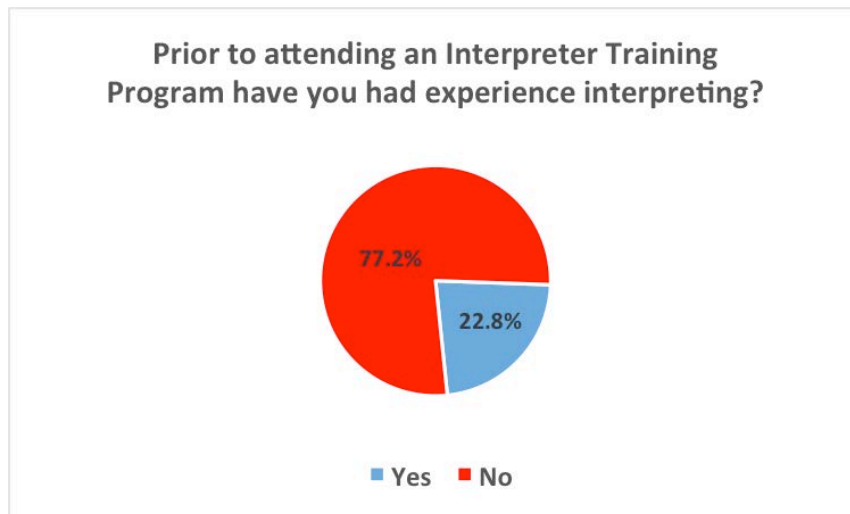
Interpreters mentioned a variety of reasons for not completing an Interpreter Education Program (IEP). This included life happening or the local program offered not being a good fit. One student took linguistic classes to supplement understanding while pursuing a different career until obtaining certification their junior/senior year.

Participants shared their experiences in having attended an IEP. These comments reveal many perspectives including an underlying desire for more in their education and post-graduation. Their comments showed a keen appreciation for the knowledge acquired in their four-year program, that their program only taught them the basics of interpreting. As one participant wrote, “My interpreter training program was essential to developing my skills as an

interpreter but there needs to be a better school to work transition program for ITPs in general.”

### **Prior Interpreting Experience**

In the past, members of the Deaf community handpicked and provided apprenticeship to young interpreters (Ball, 2013). This practice has changed with time and today’s interpreters are students whose first exposure to interpreting and Deaf individuals is in an interpreting program. This question sought to determine whether this trend has changed the way in which interpreters are trained. Figure 3 shows that 22.8% of participants had done some interpreting before attending an IEP. The majority, 77.2%, had their first experience interpreting in their IEP setting. This demonstrates that academia has altered interpreter students’ path.



*Figure 3.* Interpreter Experience Prior to IEP

Participants were invited to elaborate on their prior interpreting experience via an open-ended response. Some of them either had no experience with Deaf people until entering their interpreting program, or had few chances to interpret.

These students realize that they did not know what they needed additional training.

While the open-ended questions were designed for participants to discuss their earlier interpreting experience, one participant expressed an interest in four-year training programs. This response addressed what a complex process interpreting is and the need for in-depth education. The participant wrote:

I have a BS in Sign Language Interpreting...I think it is important to have a 4 year degree because now as an agency owner, I see graduates from a less than 4 year who are expected to have learned the language and then learn the art of interpreting that language in a 2 year AA program. They are shocked to find out they are not prepared. More training would have been valuable for them and it is also a disservice to them to have them think they are prepared after only 2 years.

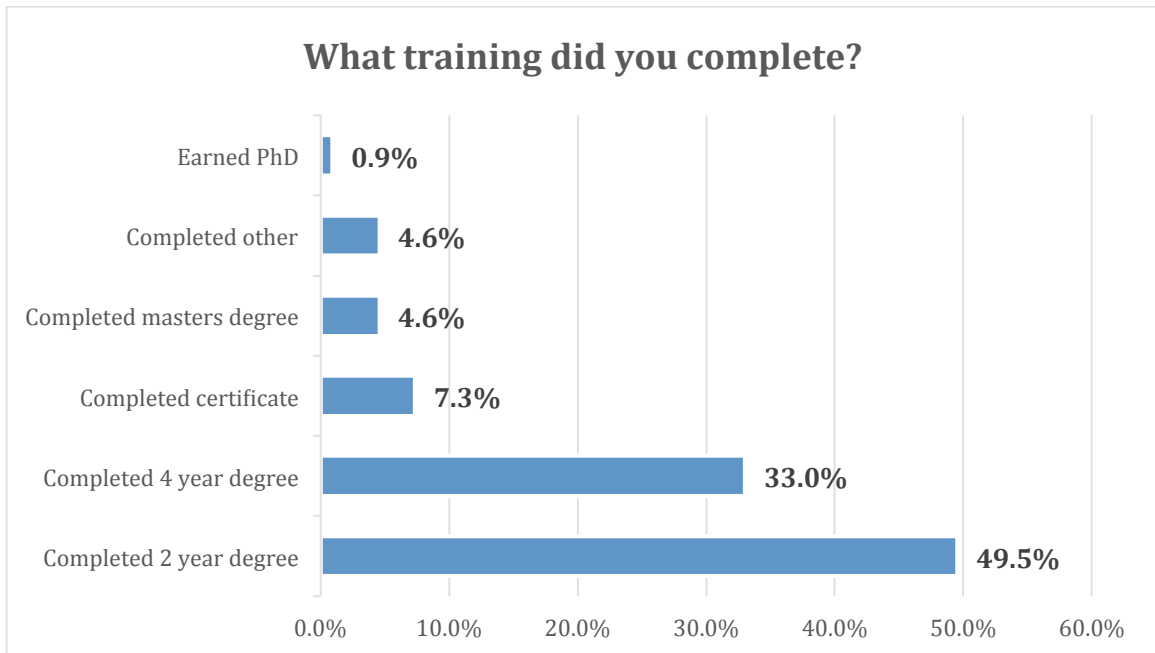
Many participants used the open-ended response opportunities to share what was important to them whether it related to the question or not. Many comments seemed to be off-topic but fell into one of four themes; curriculum, mentorship, internship/practicum and peer support. The participants went out of their way to share their experiences and thus I found it necessary to include them.

## **Degrees**

The education of the majority of participants in this study is commensurate with vocational/technical training (associate degree) rather than a bachelor's degree. Godfrey (2010) inquired about the types of degrees interpreting students

were obtaining. Her survey found that 60.6% earned associate degrees and 39.4% bachelor's degrees. Seven years later, I asked the same question and arrived at very similar results (see Figure 5): 7.3% obtained certificates, 49.5% two-year degrees, 33% four year, 4.6% masters, 0.9% Ph.D., and 4.6% other.

Godfrey's (2010) research demonstrated that graduates from bachelor's programs earn state and national credentials faster than associate-level graduates. In the United States, there are 46 bachelor's degree programs, 86 associate degree programs, 25 certificate programs, four graduate programs, and one PhD program (Find an ASL-English interpreting program, 2017). The fact that seven years after Godfrey's research and suggestion for change there are still almost twice as many associate programs as bachelor's programs (Find an ASL-English interpreting program, 2017) indicates that the majority of students picking a program of study have disregarded her suggestion to enroll in the latter. Figure 5 outlines the level of education of study participants.



*Figure 4. Education levels*

### **Practicum Requirements**

Participants self-reported on how many practicum/internship hours they completed (see Figure 6). Twenty-seven percent, the second-largest group, reported one to 100 hours total. The largest percentage, 31.8%, comprised 101–200 hours. This aligns with the national average of 100–200 practicum hours being completed by interpreter education students (Winston & Cokely, 2007). Eighty-four percent had up to 400 hours internships/practicum experiences, while only 12% had more than 400 hours.

The third largest group, 16.5%, completed 201–300 practicum/internship hours. The remaining student practicum/internship hours experiences are considerably smaller: 8.2% completed 301 – 400 hours, 7.1% finished 401 – 500 hours, 1.2% fulfilled 501 – 600 and 701 – 800 hours each and 2.4% completed



601 – 700 hours, 901 – 1,000 hours and over 1,000 hours. No participants reported having done 801 – 900 hours. Fifteen percent did not remember.

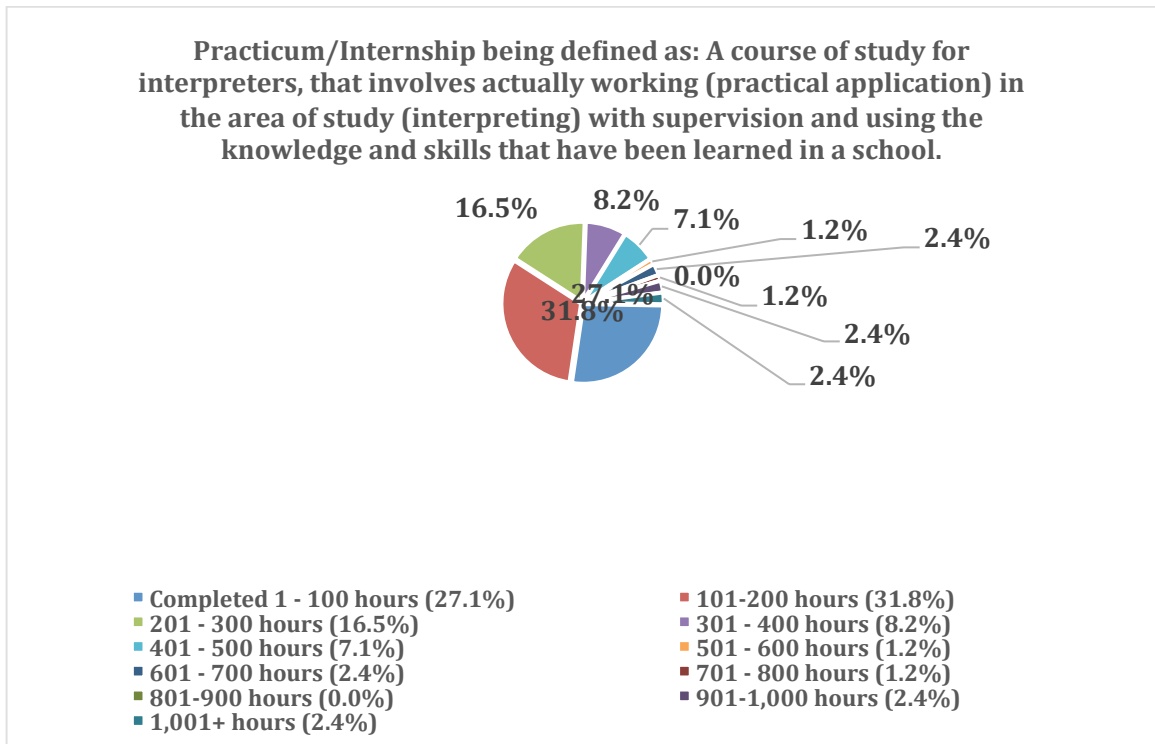


Figure 5. Practicum Hours Completed

### Practicum Requirement Preference

Following the trend of other professions this survey question was designed to offer practicum/internship hours that are typically found in curricula. Rather than offering smaller ranges, such as 1 – 100 hours, in 100-hour increments, this survey question had larger groupings of 0 – 400, 401 – 700, 701 – 1,000 and 1,000 + hours.

After data collection I realized that the wider range does not allow insight into whether the participant was agreeing to zero hours or closer to 400, which is a big spread and indicates different significance.

The largest percentage of participants, 49.5%, shared their preference of 0 – 400 practicum/internship hours being required for students. The second largest margin, 31.3%, found the ideal range to be 401 – 700 hours. Together, 80.8%, this comprises the vast majority of contributors, which preferred 0 – 700 hours. Twelve percent suggested 701 – 1,000 hours for future interpreter students. Lastly, 7.1% recommended that over 1,000 hours should be implemented in curriculum.

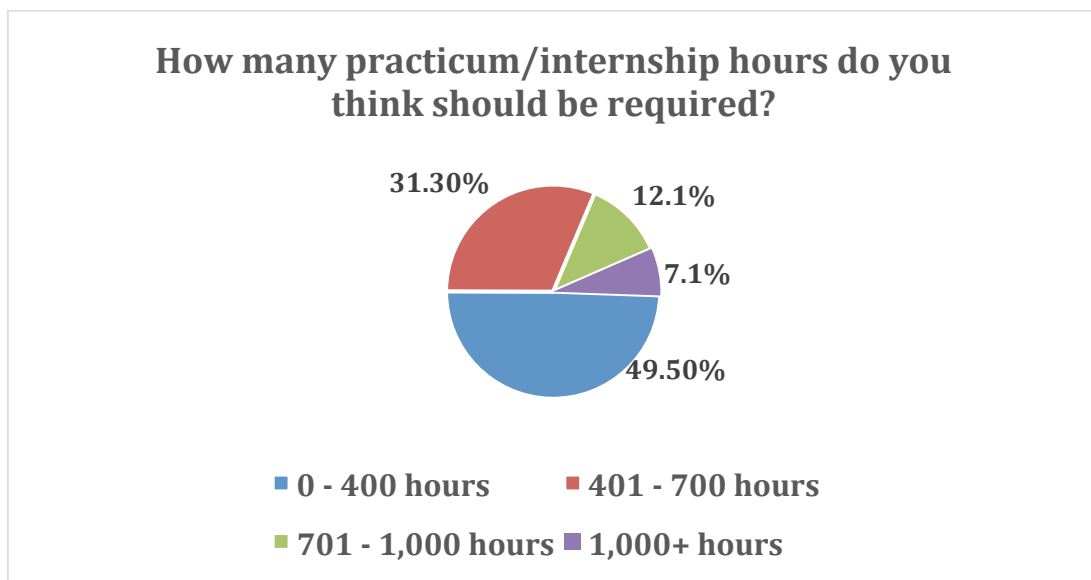


Figure 6. Practicum Hours That Should be Required

### Practicum/Internship Hours

Some participants used this open-ended question opportunity to elaborate on their experiences, thoughts and preferences. From this data a strong theme emerged that current and former students perceived that they could benefit from additional practicum/internship hours. Many of them claimed that the more hours were required, the better to be prepared they would be. Some reported that they

had completed almost twice as many hours as their school required and still were not adequately prepared.

They expressed the desire for the hands-on portion to start earlier in their program. Stating that hands-on field experience is the best way to learn, they claimed that reading books and watching videos was no way to build proficiency. This supports what Kiraly (2000) wrote and suggested about authentic practice.

Others recommended specific practicum/internship numbers. For example, one participant chose 0 to 400 hours be required as a minimum because that is the same minimum hour requirement for counselors and a standard amount in undergraduate programs across multiple practice profession disciplines. Another contributor explained that students need opportunities to develop their skills on-the-job training through supervised internships supervised by a Deaf professional. Interpreting work involves the lives of other people and should not be taken lightly. They suggested 560 hours: 14 weeks of 40-hours a week unpaid practicum.

Lastly, one participant suggested that a yearlong internship teamed with or directly supervised by a mentor. This time should be solely dedicated to internship.

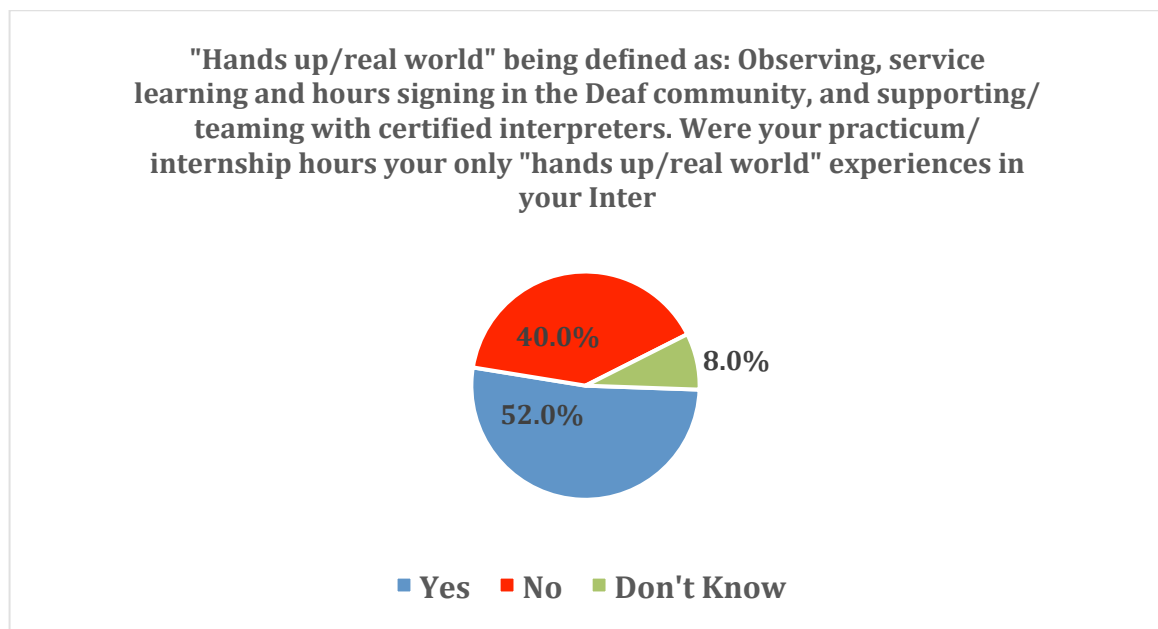
## **Mentoring**

When asking their thoughts on practicum and internship, some participants elaborated on their experiences and expectations of mentoring. These comments demonstrate that the participants value and desire mentorship. They shared that mentoring would be more helpful than practicum/internship

hours. Their perception was that hands-on interpreting with mentors is more beneficial than what they learn in the classroom. Many students wanted and desired mentorship after graduation. Others shared that they believed that internship/practicum should be spread over a longer period of time and encompass mentoring, reflective work in a variety of settings.

### **“Hands Up/Real-world” Experience**

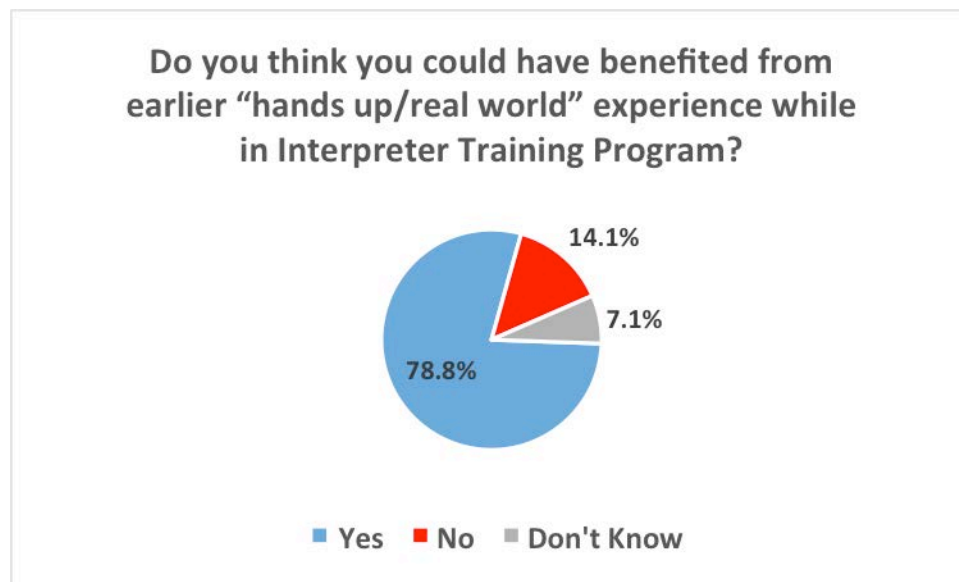
Fifty-two percent of participants expressed that their practicum/internship hours during their IEP were their only “hands up/real-world” practice they experienced (see Figure 8). The majority of participants did not experience interpreting opportunities outside of an academic setting while in school. This supports the finding that academia has changed the way that interpreters are trained. Eight percent did not know if their practicum/internship hours were their only “hands up/real world” experiences.



*Figure 7.* Was “Hands-Up/Real-World” Experience Part of Your Internship?

### **“Hands Up/Real World” Preference**

Seventy-nine percent of participants indicated that they could have benefited from earlier “hands up/real-world” experience while in their IEP (see Figure 9). This demonstrates the participants desire for curriculum changes, which include performance-based experiences earlier in their programs.



*Figure 8.* Would You Have Benefited from “Hands-Up/Real-World” Experience?

### **Other Educational Preferences: Practicum Preferences**

The next question was, “What else could have benefited your education while in IEP?” Participants discussed their desire for a variety of settings during their practicum experience. Specifically they requested additional time be spent in freelance and video relay. Contributors also expressed the need to learn more about the business aspects of freelance interpreting such as managing invoices, taxes, licenses and scheduling.

### **Other Educational Preferences: Mentorship Preferences**

Other participants expressed their desires for mentorship, specifically with members from the Deaf community. They shared the desire for a Deaf mentoring program with a certified Deaf interpreter during their interpreting education, believing that such a program would allow them to understand the overarching goals of interpreting and receive feedback from a native ASL user. Others requested Deaf language models to learn to appropriately code switch based on the consumers' language preference. Some claimed that a mentor would have smoothed their transition to real-world work.

### **Other Educational Preferences: Curriculum Preferences**

Some contributors described their experiences and preferences. Different students were shown to have different weaknesses. Some students requested more supportive professors, more focus on vocabulary practice and training, additional learning of real-world ethical dilemmas and additional practical experience. There was a desire to move past sharing the theories to applying them.

Others wanted more preparation on how to acclimate to the workplace, how to find a good company to work for and how to set their compensation rate. One participant shared,

I think all 4 year BA ITPs should be closed—major in ASL, major in Deaf studies, major in communication, but interpreting should be a two year MA program in either a research or practice track, already fluent in the

language. Learning the language WHILE learning to interpret was a cart before horse problem for me and many students I still see.

This would require restructuring of current programs and curricula.

### **Post-graduation Mentorship**

Ninety-five percent of participants' IEPs did not offer post-graduation mentorship (Figure 10). While it is not determined who should be responsible for post-graduation mentorship most IEPs are not offering mentorship to their graduates.



*Figure 9. Availability of Post-Graduation Mentorship*

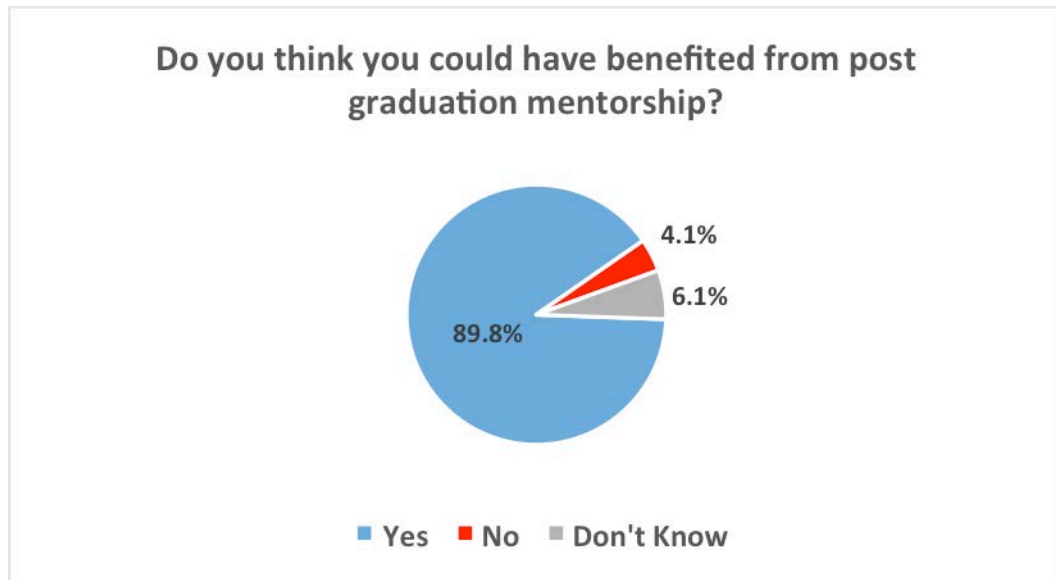
### **Post-graduation Mentorship Preference**

Ninety percent of participants stated that they could have benefited from post-graduation mentorship (see Figure 11). The overwhelming majority of participants desired a post-graduation opportunity that was unavailable to them. This theme elicited a large response pool from contributors. While the rationale for wanting a mentorship varied, the preference is clear.

Some participants expressed the desire for five years of mentorship post-graduation. Others simply wanted weekly check-ins with a mentor. They thought that this would aid in navigating new experiences when working alone and bound by confidentiality. One participant described an IEP as a “driver's permit.” Working with a certified mentor/interpreter post-graduation would help obtain their driver’s license.

Others reported that post-graduation mentorship could bridge the transition from being a student to a confident interpreter. They recalled the feeling of deflation the day after graduation when they realized all of their support was gone and the transition from student to interpreter was a big jump to make alone. Others requested a mentor post-graduation to help “clean up” bad habits picked up when working solo. Some graduates thought that they were qualified to start interpreting but with hindsight now realized they were not; they did not know how much they did not know. They believed that a mentor could have pointed this out to them. Lastly, some participants pinpointed what they sought in a post-graduation: a mentor to team with, post-assignments meetups to discuss sign choices, voicing choices, available controls for demands and to ask questions.





*Figure 10. Would Post-Graduation Mentorship Have Been Beneficial?*

### **General Feedback**

The last question was, “Now that you have completed this survey and had time to reflect upon your experience entering the field, what would have better prepared you for your work as an interpreter?” Again the feedback spanned four themes, practicum, mentorship, curriculum and support.

### **Practicum Feedback**

Participants wanted their practicum/internship to offer more than it did, especially real-world practice in longer apprenticeships. Their definition of apprenticeship was a practicum/internship with mentorship from members of the Deaf community. This would have a dual purpose of creating and fostering authentic relationships in the Deaf community while learning ASL from Deaf language models.

### **Mentorship Feedback**

This topic garnered the richest responses. Participants had different visions and desires' regarding mentorship but a resounding need was reported in this research. Some of their desires touched on what their mentors would look like. There was a preference for one Deaf language model and one Deaf or hearing certified interpreter mentor.

Others focused on the timeframe, requesting mentorship start prior to their last semester of school to ease the post-graduation transition. Some participants did not mention the need for the mentorship to start while in academia but requested their school establish a formal mentorship program that extended one year post-graduation in a variety of settings. Their reasoning included assistance in obtaining certification and adequately serving the Deaf community, which is increasingly diverse.

Some contributors stressed the need for mentorship while still in school. This desire could be met through more Deaf educators and stakeholders in the IEP framework. One participant envisioned:

A four-year bachelor's degree in ASL/deaf studies and a two-year masters degree in interpreting with required supervision after graduation before certification. Similar to how other established professions work with their graduates. How we work with new interpreters now causes untold damage to both the new interpreter and the Deaf community.

This participant not only shared a vision for future IEPs they brought up the essential point of what damage is being done with the current status quo.

### **Curriculum Feedback**

Much of curriculum feedback relates to the participants desire for change. The details, however, vary. Some participants were very precise about their curriculum desires: more challenging language courses, starting to interpret in ASL 3, at least 50% of classroom time being hands-up practice, ample opportunities to practice interpreting, practicum partnerships, evaluating their own work, and more practice with real people or “air guitar” and less work with recordings. They also wanted to spend less time on medical and legal interpreting, as it would not be accessible immediately post-graduation. They wanted to spend more time on assignments that would be manageable post-graduation such as educational and community interpreting.

Others were vague. Some participants expressed a desire for more time in school on “everything else” because interpreting is so much more than interpreting between two languages. (There was no explanation of what “everything else” was.) Others wanted curriculum entrance requirements to be different. They wished that their program had necessitated learning ASL before learning to interpret. Lastly, some suggested giving students a more realistic timeframe of how long it takes to be minimally qualified to do the challenging interpreting work could minimize the Dunning Kruger effect.

### **Associate Degree Versus Bachelor’s Degree Feedback**

The participants did not hold back when sharing their feedback. The data revealed a curriculum sub-theme around the topic of associate versus bachelor’s degrees in interpreter education programs. Many contributors regretted not having earned their bachelor degree before entering the field, or pursuing an

associate degree instead of a bachelor's degree. Many participants opined that all IEPs should be four-year bachelor programs. Some suggesting eliminating all two-year interpreter education associate programs. The rationale was that there was no way to become a competent interpreter in only two years. In the words of one participant,

I was prepared thanks to years of community interaction before I went to school. I do not understand how any ITP/IPP/RID approved training programs thinks a 2-year program is adequate for interpreting in educational or medical settings. Educational: how can I be a language model for students if I only have classroom training? Medical: I took 2 years aka 4 classes of your parents' language. Do you really want me to explain cancer of the esophagus or a colonoscopy? Spoken language interpreters require specific training but RID doesn't? Think about that.

This raises a good question: What requirements for other spoken-language interpreters are sign language interpreters missing out on?

### **Peer/Community Support**

The data reveal the participants' call for additional support from their schools, professional peers, and Deaf community. They requested more networking opportunities before and after graduation.

Post-graduation they wanted more support from fellow interpreters. Many found that interpreters were too critical and not supportive of new interpreters. Others wanted more support from the Deaf and interpreting community as a whole. This support could be manifested through additional mentor/mentee

programs, internships and more degree options for master's students.

Additionally, collaboration and reciprocity with the Deaf community leaders/gatekeepers was identified as missing from IEPs.

## **Discussion**

**Prior Interpreting Experience.** The data showed that 77% of participants had not had interpreting experience before entering an interpreter education/training program. This demonstrates the change in academic interpreting education (Ball, 2013). In the past the Deaf community trained its own young interpreters (Godfrey, 2010). Although academia, demand, and national legislation have altered this validation process of acclimation into the field (Winston & Cokely, 2007), the members of the Deaf community are stakeholders in this development and their collaboration is of paramount importance. Winston and Cokely (2007) and Humphrey (2000) suggested that academic curricula invite Deaf people to work with the students and approve their work as a graduation requirement. For this to occur, interpreter education programs should be based near and collaborate with a large Deaf population (Godfrey, 2010).

**Degrees.** Godfrey (2010) inquired about the types of degrees interpreting students were obtaining. Her survey found that 60.6% earned associate degrees and 39.4% bachelor's degrees. Seven years later, I asked the same question, arrived at nearly identical (Figure 5): 7.3% obtained certificates, 49.5% two-year degrees, 33% four year, 4.6% masters, 0.9% Ph.D., and 4.6% other.

Godfrey's (2010) research demonstrated that graduates from bachelor's programs earn state and national credentials (one of our benchmarks of success and therefore diminishing the gap) faster than associate-level graduates. In the United States, there are 46 bachelor's degree programs, 86 associate degree programs, 25 certificate programs, four graduate programs, and one PhD program (Find an ASL-English interpreting program, 2017). The fact that seven years after Godfrey's research and suggestions for change there are still almost twice as many associate programs as bachelor's programs (Find an ASL-English interpreting program, 2017) indicates that her suggestion to move away from the former and focus on the latter has not been heeded by the majority of students picking a program of study. These data confirmed that more interpreting students are completing associate degrees than bachelor's or advanced degrees. Perhaps this is because more associate degrees are available. It is also more economical to obtain an associate degree.

In 2005, Witter-Merithew and Johnson made 20 recommendations for ideal interpreter education programs (see Appendix C for the complete list). The first is "a baccalaureate degree should be a minimum requirement for entry into the field" (p. 18). Since December 2012, any candidate seeking certification for the national interpreting exam has been required to possess a bachelor's degree (Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, 2012). Since there are no federal regulations and few state regulations monitoring who is working (Burch, 2002; Godfrey, 2010; Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2004), some interpreters are working without credentials.

The survey data demonstrates that participants regretted not obtaining a bachelor's degree or higher prior to interpreting. Many felt that an associate degree did not adequately prepare them to enter the field. Several of these students returned to the classroom to earn a bachelor's degree.

ASL/English interpreters are still more aligned with technical than professional training. The typical student is earning an associate degree and completing 200 hours of internship over two semesters (Dean & Pollard, 2001). Offering associate-level interpreting training programs—aligned with trades—perpetuates the myth that interpreting is easy to learn. “Interpreting is not a simple sign-to-spoken or spoken-to-sign task but good interpreting involves a command of two languages and an understanding of the cultures associated with those languages” (Stewart et al., 2004, p. 42). To interpret effectively, interpreters must have a practical understanding of the content being expressed in the source message. To avoid misinterpretations, they must accurately convey the speaker's or signer's emotions (Stewart et al., 2004). The United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics for Interpreters and Translators states that a “typical entry level education” is a bachelor's degree (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). The expectation is there; reality has to follow.

**Curriculum.** Curriculum needs attention to improve preparedness. Academic transparency is needed. Why do some bachelor's programs produce interpreters who can obtain certification and who maintain healthy relationships in the Deaf community, while others graduate feeling unprepared, unable to obtain

certification and feeling dissatisfied? What are some schools doing that others should emulate or avoid? To provide continuity, programs need to offer similar curriculum instruction.

The survey data suggested that students want less theory-based and more hands-on instruction. Perhaps a national consensus could be reached on what every interpreter education program should include. Each program could take its own route to the same destination, but the foundation would be the same. This could be achieved by applying backward design theory (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005): looking at the goal and at the skills that graduates must possess will reveal what the curriculum needs.

The survey demonstrates the desire for a differentiation between programs. Associate programs, could teach ASL and bachelor's programs could teach interpreting. How can this change be implemented? What funds will be needed? Will this cause some associate programs to close? Are there enough bachelor's programs to meet the demand?

Perhaps like other professions, sign language interpreter education programs could establish entrance and exit requirements. Ideally this would allow any remaining associate-level programs to center on language immersion (not interpreting). Bachelor's programs could then focus on interpreting. These universities could also collaborate with the Deaf communities, especially in relation to exit qualifications, to ensure that students graduate as well-trained interpreters. This cooperation elevates the profession and improves the quality of interpreters.



The survey data clearly demonstrated that many participants wished that they had earned a bachelor's degree prior to interpreting. Others complained that their associate program did not adequately prepare them for real-world interpreting. Several contributors returned to school and earned their bachelor's degree.

In addition, more research needs to be done on interpreter educators. How many educators are full-time faculty and how many are adjunct? Is there a high turnover rate? If so, why? If not, why not? Are all of the educators certified? What degrees do they hold? Are they active in their local Deaf community?

There are no national requirements for how many practicum/internship hours must be completed before graduating from an interpreter education program. Three of the five programs in Godfrey's (2010) research encourage—but do not have—exit requirements. Exit requirements could ensure that students are ready to work independently and at a high standard.

In considering the survey data and what could help improve preparedness, perhaps exit requirements, including a portfolio, could be instated (Humphrey, 2000). The portfolios would contain evidence of proficient interpreting, letters from clients, mentors, teachers, members of the Deaf community, and student journals tracking progress and critical thinking. A member of the Deaf community, full-time faculty member, and a certified interpreter could share the responsibility of assessing the portfolios.

The participants suggested that associate programs are terminal. If associate programs are graduating students who are unprepared to interpret, they are depriving the Deaf community of the services that it needs, thereby perpetuating an environment of mistrust and hurt. This process also has negative implications for hearing consumers who may or may not know the limitations of the interpreters they are hiring and trusting. If these associate-level programs are harming the Deaf community—the community we interpreters spend our resources to serve and stand with as allies—why are they still in existence? How can we move to bachelor interpreter programs with entrance and exit requirements? Associate programs could become American Sign Language immersion. These programs could be intended for students desiring to become certified interpreters to learn American Sign Language and gain an understanding of Deaf culture before starting the more challenging work of interpreting.

**Practicum preference.** While the majority of the participants completed 100–200 hours of practicum/internship hours, they suggested a range between 0 to 400 hours. Godfrey (2010) claimed that the students' practicum experience is the biggest determinant of their success post-graduation. This surveys data had the biggest response around mentoring but practicum was a strong second theme, which elicited many comments.

The participants expressed a desire for more practicum/internship hours in a variety of settings and started earlier in their program. These are fair and attainable requests. Kiraly (2000) shared:

Structures in the mind cannot be imposed from without; knowledge cannot be passed on from those who know to those who do not; it is only through personal experience that individuals can increase their own knowledge (or understanding of the world around them). (p. 196)

Following the lead of numerous other professions, perhaps a nationally agreed upon required number of hours for all programs would be beneficial. To avoid aligning the ASL/English interpreting field with technical training jobs and to elevate the profession, the ASL/English interpreting profession needs to do what other professions have done. Initially, an increase and implementation of a national standard of practicum hours commensurate with other professions may cause challenges for interpreter education programs in more rural areas. However, we live in an age of technology where internship hours could easily be acquired via computer video relay systems. Curriculum designed with the last year comprised of supervised internship in a variety of settings with various language/interpreting models would provide interpreting students with much-needed real-world experience. This could include a mandatory agreed-upon set of hours that must be completed prior to graduation.

**Mentorship.** Mentorship was the topic that elicited the biggest response. It is clear that this is an area that needs improvement. This supports Dean and Pollard's (2001) research that mentorship is revered above a higher salary for recent graduates of training programs. Winston and Cokely (2007) reached the same conclusion where students explicitly stated they wanted more mentoring and test preparation, Deaf instructors, hands-on experience/practicum,

and ethics instruction. The desire has not changed in 10 years, but curriculum designers have failed to respond. The resounding message was that we need more mentorship during education and post-graduation. Glasser wrote,

We Learn

10% of what we read

20% of what we hear

30% of what we see

50% of what we see and hear

70% of what we discuss

80% of what we experience

95% of what we teach to others. (William Glasser quotes, 2016)

I have enrolled my two children in a Montessori school. My four-year old son is in a classroom of three-, four- and five-year olds. This arrangement allows the older children to guide the younger ones. By teaching, children hone their own skills and understanding. Montessori teachers believe that the students must “analyze and rearrange their knowledge before they can pass it on” (McKingley, 2009, p. 1).

This research has proposed that ASL/English interpreters did/do not feel competent when they transition from academia to real-world work. Others have confirmed this gap (Ball, 2013; Boeh, 2016; Humphrey, 2000, Meadows, 2013; Shaw et al., 2006; Smith, Cancel & Maroney, 2012). Interpreters who are less than competence do a disservice to their consumers. Competence breeds

confidence, which in turn leads to a greater sense of responsibility (McKinley, 2009).

Mentorship does not need to be limited to post-graduation, but it can become an integral part of IEPs. In regards to interpreting education, if the third-year students mentored the first-year students and the fourth-year students mentored the second-year students, the more advanced students could help the novices understand what is normal, how to adapt, solve problems, stay involved in the Deaf community, practice meaning transfer, and discuss ethics. This could lighten the faculty's burden while polishing the students' understanding.

**Post-graduation mentorship.** Post-graduation mentorship is equally important. To aid in obtaining certification and closing the gap from what was taught in school and what is required in the real-world, each student could graduate with at least two mentors: one certified interpreter acting as a professional model and one Deaf language model. Mentorship with these two professionals could continue for at least one year after graduation or until certification.

**Support.** Lastly, the appeal for peer and community support was clear. As interpreters, we can do better to support each other, those standing next to us as certified interpreters and those who are pre-certified. The students want Deaf faculty to guide them through their education. How can we increase the number of Deaf educators? How can we promote collaboration among the schools, educators, students, and the Deaf community? These stakeholders share the goal of providing quality-interpreting services and should be working

toward it together. As Witter-Merithew and Johnson (2005) stated, we are all responsible for creating the gap, so we must come together to close it.

## Chapter 5

### CONCLUSION

This qualitative study was designed to explore current and former students' interpreter education program experiences. The purpose of this investigation was to discover whether these student interpreter academia experiences would reveal gaps, and if so, if they correlated to the students IEP experiences. Discourse analysis of surveys revealed four themes: practicum/internship, mentorship, curriculum, and peer/community support. Most of the data came from the open-ended responses regarding mentorship.

The theoretical bases of this study are Dean and Pollard's demand control schema (2013), social-constructivist education (Kiraly, 2000), and phenomenology (Smith, 2013). These three frameworks comprise the complexities of interpreting, collaborative adult learning, and, phenomenology, the interpreters' own experiences, which influence their work.

A survey was created in Google Forms and disseminated via email and social media. A total of 102 participants responded to the survey. No responses were disqualified. Aside from all being adults over 18 years of age the participants were diverse in age, gender, ethnicity, career focus and geographic locations. The survey was designed with yes/no, multiple choice, and open-ended questions with no text limit. Participants could skip questions.

The responses were read and coded into four categories. The results demonstrated that the respondents were dissatisfied with practicum/internship

hours, the lack of mentorship, curriculum and a desire for additional peer and community support.

The majority of participants, 77.2%, had their first interpreting experience in their IEP setting. This demonstrates that academia has altered interpreter students' paths. Gone are the days where Deaf individuals selected and mentored their interpreters. Now students pick interpreting as a career and only after enrolling in the program do they meet and form a connection to the Deaf community members.

To ensure Deaf community members remain gatekeepers of the profession they should be integral parts of creating curriculum, assessing skills and educating interpreting students. Godfrey's (2010) research stated that interpreting students who become involved with their local Deaf community by willingly creating relationships and interacting more than the required hours tend to do much better on their state certification exam. These data and habits should be shared with and encouraged among interpreting students.

The level of education of the majority of participants in this study is commensurate with vocational/technical training (associate degree) versus a bachelor's degree. Almost twice as many associate as bachelor's degrees are available to students. While participants were more likely to complete their associate degree many wished that they had earned a bachelor's degree instead. They stated that they desired the experience a bachelor's degree earned them. They explicitly stated that two-year associate programs had failed to prepare them for the real-world work. These results support the consensus



that a bachelor's degree is vital for interpreters (Burch, 2002; Dean & Pollard, 2001; Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2004) and that two-year programs are not sufficient. Two-year associate programs could be restructured to emphasize sign language immersion. Four-year bachelor's programs could be the standard in interpreter education and the only option for interpreting studies.

The majority of the participants completed 100 to 200 hours of practicum/internship. Nearly half (49.5%) stated that they believed up to 400 hours of practicum/internship hours were preferred. Shaw et al. (2006) and Dean and Pollard (2001) proposed that more structured supervision in practicum experiences for students could result in more effective programs. Godfrey's (2010) research proved that internship/practicum classes are essential to skill growth. Practicum/internship is an area in current interpreting academia that could use a review and update.

Boeh's (2016) research demonstrated that 95% of the participants wanted a mentor post-graduation. Boeh's findings matched this survey where the largest open-ended responses were related to mentorship. The participants expressed that hands-on interpreting with mentors is more beneficial than what they could learn in the classroom. Many students communicated the need and desire for mentorship after graduation. Boeh (2016), Delk (2013), and RID (2007) have recommended mentoring as a solution. Delk (2013) proposed that mentoring should be established to improve interpreting services, build a support system among interpreters, and help prepare new interpreters. A mere 6% of programs,

are integrating mentorship into their curricula, most are not. Mentorship during and post academia needs to be standard practice.

Ninety-five percent of survey participants revealed that their IEP did not offer post-graduation mentorship. This matches the nationwide statistics that out of 46 bachelor's programs, three offer structured post-graduation mentorship. Ninety percent of those participants felt that they could have benefited from post-graduation mentorship. This is clearly an area that students perceive could benefit from restructuring. Who should be responsible for mentorship post-graduation? Should it fall on the shoulders of IEPs, if so, how is that structured and financed? Should the hiring agencies provide their own post-graduation mentorship to ensure interpreting services meet and exceed a national standard? No matter who accepts the responsibility and how it is structured, post-graduation mentorship being the norm and not the exception is the goal. Ninety-five percent of participants did not have access to post-graduation mentorship, and 90% reported that they could have benefited from it. Post-graduation mentorship is common among counselors and other service professionals, and should be with ASL/English interpreters (Godfrey, 2010). Interpreters work closely with their clients and mentorship should not end with graduation.

The vast majority, 79%, of participants reported that they felt they could have benefited from earlier "hands up/ real-world" experience in their IEP. Creating the distinction of sign language immersion for associate degrees and interpreting bachelor degrees can best manifest this desire. There is no time to incorporate "hands up" opportunities into a two-year associate program.

Bachelor's programs would not suffer from this time constraint and since they emphasize interpreting "hands up" practice could begin on the first day of class.

While participants reported that they completed 100 to 200 hours of internship/practicum hours, they would have preferred closer to double or triple that number. Ninety-five percent of participants did not have access to post-graduation mentorship, and 90% thought they could have benefited from it.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The data results demonstrate that the students want more Deaf faculty working with them during their academic journey. We need to conduct additional research to determine how to implement this change. Robinson (1994), Johnson and Witter-Merithew (2004), and Winston (2005) all wrote that integrating Deaf and hearing mentors in interpreting programs is an excellent way to assist students in elevating their skills and navigating the profession. This may require interpreting programs to be geographically located near large Deaf communities. Other research needs to be conducted to determine how to promote Deaf educators and curriculum participation.

How does the profession make the change from almost twice as many associate-interpreting programs to associate programs being only sign language immersion studies with twice as many bachelor's interpreting programs? Are schools receptive to this change? How would this change impact government funding?

Although the participants expressed a desire for supplementary practicum hours, researchers need to investigate what this would accomplish. How many

hours are ideal? Where did students accrue their practicum/internship hours? Did students specialize or did they have a variety of experiences? Furthermore, it is essential to note the timeframe that these hours were captured. Were the practicum hours satisfied in one or two semesters or over an academic year's time? Did the school create these opportunities or were the students responsible for finding them? Determining best practices, entrance and exit requirements, along with in-program mentorship would all benefit from additional research.

One participant stated: "My first ITP (AAS) started with 25 students and two years later, four of us graduated. It was very strict and intense. My second ITP (BS) was online and very different." This data aligns with my experience where fewer than 10% of the participants who started the ITP graduated. Although this data is consistent with my experience, it is important to determine if this is a national trend. This survey was limited to people who had attended an IEP.

Further research needs to be conducted to determine how during academia and post-graduation mentorship can be achieved and implemented nationwide. Would grants be needed to pay these mentors? Would the school assign them or would the students obtain them independently? How can accountability be factored into the mentorship contract to determine the mentors and mentees are making the best use of their time together? Additional research on best practices and implementation is encouraged. Current and former students have expectations, experiences, and opinions that could improve the outcomes of interpreter education programs.

## **Recommendations**

To match other professional standards and the students' direct wishes this researcher proposes that practicum/internship hours increase from an average of 100 to 200 hours (Dean & Pollard, 2001) to at least 500 - 600 hours. Mentorship should be implemented as a standard practice during academia. Post-graduation mentorship should continue whether offered by IEPs or hiring agencies. Curriculum changes could include entrance and exit requirements. Associate programs could be used for sign language immersion and bachelor's programs should be the standard in interpreter education. Peer and community support could be manifested by a clear collaboration between academia and the Deaf community.

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## Appendix A: CONSENT

Dear Colleague,

I am a master's degree student at Western Oregon University in the College of Education under the supervision of Dr. Elisa Maroney. I am conducting a research study seeking to understand how interpreter-training programs can diminish real-world preparedness gaps in their graduates. Western Oregon University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved this research project.

You are invited to be in a research study on how interpreter-training programs can diminish real-world preparedness gaps in their graduates. You were selected as a possible participant because you have attended or graduated from an interpreter-training program.

I am inviting your participation, which will involve taking an online survey that can be accessed directly through this link: <https://goo.gl/forms/QcVwUUf2hqM2YWSw1>. Participation in the survey will serve as your consent. The survey will take approximately 15 minutes.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose to not participate or to withdraw from the study, all data collected from you will be destroyed through deletion of files. You must be 18 or older to participate in this study.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation.

The benefits of your participation in this survey may include becoming more aware of your personal training experience in regard to hands up/real world experiences. The research will reveal trends in hands up/real world experiences across programs, as well as provide recommendations for curriculum modifications for best practices in real world preparedness.

Your responses will be anonymous. I will remove any personal identifiers (for example, if someone includes their name and contact information in the open answer text boxes) after coding is completed in order to maintain anonymity. The results of this study will be used in my master's thesis, and may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but no personal identifiers will be known/used.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact DarleneKay (Darlea) Wilbeck by phone at 512-538-8466 or via email at: [dwilbeck15@wou.edu](mailto:dwilbeck15@wou.edu) or my thesis advisor, Dr. Elisa Maroney, [maronee@wou.edu](mailto:maronee@wou.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Institutional Review Board at (503) 838-9200 or [irb@wou.edu](mailto:irb@wou.edu).

Thank you,

DarleneKay (Darlea) Wilbeck  
Master's student, College of Education  
Western Oregon University

## Appendix B: SURVEY QUESTIONS

Q 1: What is your age?

A: 18-25 26-35 36-45 46-55 56-65 66-above

Q 2: What is your gender?

A: Male Female Transgender Other

Q 3: Ethnicity?

A: African American/Black Asian Caucasian Hispanic  
Native American Pacific Islander Other Prefer not to  
answer

Q 4: Where do you reside?

A: Newfoundland (GMT) Puerto Rico (AST) Pacific Standard Time (PST)  
Mountain Standard Time (MST) Central Standard Time (CST)  
Eastern Standard Time (EST) Alaska (AKST)  
Hawaii (HST) Other

Q 5: How long have you been interpreting in a professional capacity?

A: 0 years 1-5 years 6-10 years 11-15 years 16-20 years over 20 years

Q 6: Have you attended an Interpreter Training Program?

A: Yes No

Q 7: Would you like to comment on whether you attended an ITP or not?

A: (open answer)

Q 8: Prior to attending an Interpreter Training Program have you had experience interpreting?

A: (open answer)

Q 9: Would you like to comment on your experience interpreting prior to attending an Interpreter Training Program?

A: (open answer)

Q 10: Did you graduate from an Interpreter Training Program?

A: Yes No

Q 11: Would you like to elaborate on whether you graduated from an Interpreter Training Program or not?

A: (open answer)

Q 12: If yes, what training did you complete?

A: Two-year Four-year Masters PhD Certificate Other

Q13: Would you like to comment on your professional development plan regarding interpreting?

A: (open answer)

Practicum/internship being defined as: A course of study for interpreters, that involves actually working (practical application) in the area of study (interpreting) with supervision and using the knowledge and skills that have been learned in a school.

Q 14: How many hours of practicum/internship have you completed?

A: 0 1-100 hours 101-200 hours 201-300 hours  
301-400 hours 401-500 hours 501-600 hours  
601-700 hours 701-800 hours 801-900 hours  
901-1000 hours over 1000 hours Do not remember

Q 15: How many hours of practicum/internship do you think should be required?

A: 0-400 401-700 701-1000 1000-above

Q 16: Why do you feel that number of practicum/internship hours should be required?

A: (Open Answer)

Q17: "Hands up/real world" being defined as: Observing, service learning and hours signing in the Deaf community, and supporting/teaming with certified interpreters. Were your practicum/internship hours your only "hands up/real-world" experiences in your Interpreter Training Program?

A: (Open Answer)

Q 18: Do you think you could have benefited from earlier "hands on/real-world" experience while in Interpreter Training Program?

A: Yes No Don't Know

Q 19: As a new interpreter post-graduation did you perceive more challenges in meaning transfer or the professional practice aspects of interpreting?



A: Meaning transfer (interpreting) Professional Practice

Q 20: What else could have benefited your education while in an Interpreter Training Program?

A: (Open Answer)

Q 21: How many years post-graduation did you obtain certification?

A: 0 years 1-2 years 3-4 years More than 5 years Other  
Obtained certification while student

Q 22: What certification(s) do you possess?

A: CSC CI/CT NIC BEI  
ED: K-12 None Other

Q23: Did you feel qualified to start interpreting post-graduation?

A: Yes No Don't Know

Q 24: Did your Interpreter Training Program offer post-graduation mentorship?

A: Yes No

Q 25: Do you think you could have benefited from post-graduation mentorship?

A: Yes No Don't Know

Q 26: Why do you think you could or could not have benefited from post-graduation mentorship?

A: (Open Answer)

Q 27: In what setting do you primarily work in now?

A: Community Education K - 12 Legal Medical  
Post-Secondary Other

Q 28: Now that you have completed this survey and had time to reflect upon your experience entering the field, what would have better prepared you for your work as an interpreter?

A: (Open Answer)

## Appendix C: RECOMMENDED INTERPRETER EDUCATION PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS

According to Witter-Merithew and Johnson (2005), ideal IEPs share the following 20 characteristics.

1. A baccalaureate degree should be the minimum requirement for entry into the field.
2. A national curriculum for interpreter education needs to be developed that is research based.
3. The curriculum should adhere to the CIT and ASLTA standards.
4. The study of interpretation must be an interdisciplinary, liberal arts education that requires fluency in ASL and English, as well as broad “real-world” knowledge base, without specializing in areas like educational or medical interpreting until after the baccalaureate degree is successfully completed.
5. There is a need to establish multiple exit points (e.g., two-year program, four-year program) with mandatory requirements that must be assessed.
6. Outcomes/job expectations for associate, bachelor’s and master’s degree graduates must be defined and clearly stated.
7. The ideal program needs to design a “model recruitment plan” for student populations that includes scholarship opportunities, and ensures an adequate number of scholarships are available for qualified applicants.
8. The ideal preparation program should have a way to screen and terminate seriously dysfunctional or inept applicants (e.g., identity issues, mental health issues, distracting physical deformities).

9. Students must demonstrate bilingual and bi cultural (English/ASL) competence prior to acceptance in an IEP.
10. Diversity education should be an integrated part of the curriculum, including appropriate resources.
11. Critical/analytical thinking must be integrated into the curriculum and assessed as one of the expected outcomes.
12. The program must educate interpreters to make better decisions, including context-demands and deaf-centric sensitivity.
13. Knowledge of ASL and English discourse styles, both in classroom application and real-world experiences must be incorporated early in the program.
14. English proficiency with the ability to deliver formal speeches is requisite.
15. Requiring intrapersonal thinking is critical to prepare individuals to be self-reflective practitioners.
16. Courses on Deaf Culture and Literacy must be required within the interpreting program.
17. The curriculum should adequately address the politics and power issues in society, the Deaf Community, and the Interpreting Community.
18. The program should include an intercultural component, second/third language, and liberal arts/interdisciplinary framework.
19. At the baccalaureate level, students must graduate as an ASL-English bilingual.
20. IPP graduates should be able to pass a national certification.