

At this student club, silence never sounded so good

by Grace McMurtrie - Thursday, November 29, 2007

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University of Wisconsin Oshkosh students are giving their lips a rest and letting their hands do the talking.

According to assistant professors Denise Clark and Tom Fischer, UW Oshkosh Sign Language Club advisers, interest in the organization has increased dramatically in its fourth year.

About 80 students attended the first meeting of the semester. In previous years, the average attendance was between 10 and 15 students, Fischer said.

“We were just floored when we saw how many people were at the meeting,” Fischer said. “The only room that was available was a pit classroom — and we filled every seat.”

The mushrooming of attendance encouraged the advisers to split the original club into two groups. Sign Language I meets from 12:40 to 1:40 p.m. every Wednesday in Room 152 of the Nursing Education Building, 845 Algoma Blvd. Sign Language II, a slightly more advanced class, is scheduled from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. that same day in Room 210.

Fischer began the program four years ago in response to student interest in learning basic sign language. According to Fischer, the University once had a “communication disorders department.” When that department disbanded, students were left without an on-campus resource for learning sign language.

Fischer said the students are interested in using sign language in classrooms and with young children, which makes the program especially appealing to students planning to enter the instructional field.

“I joined the sign language club because I’m going into education and I wanted to communicate with as many different people as possible, and I thought sign language would help,” said junior Clifton Sathoff, an education major with a physics emphasis.

Nursing major Rachel Hauman-Novak, a junior, also joined sign language club with her career in mind.

“As a nurse, you never know when you’re going to have someone come in who is hard of hearing,” Hauman-Novak said. “It’s nice to have an alternative way to talk with people.”

Fischer and Clark use films and games to help club members broaden their sign language vocabulary.

“My favorite thing to do at meetings is the telephone game with sign language,” Sathoff said. “It’s fun because I get to interact with people and practice sentence structure.”

For more information on the sign language club, contact Tom Fischer, (920) 424-7237.