

Deaf Studies Conference Transformations

Message from Conference Co-Chairs

Tawny Holmes Hlibok 

Gallaudet University
tawny.holmes@gallaudet.edu

Matthew Malzkuhn 

Gallaudet University
matthew.malzkuhn@gallaudet.edu

Abstract:

A summary of the *Deaf Studies Conference: Transformations* (DSCT) proceedings is provided by co-host Tawny Holmes Hlibok of the Department of ASL and Deaf Studies at Gallaudet University. Impressions of the DSCT conference along with the purpose of the proceedings as a publication with *Deaf Studies Digital Journal* Issue No. 5 are discussed. The focus of the conference was on theories, applications, and the dissemination of work that has been transformed or drawn out from the traditional framework of Deaf Studies as a transdisciplinary field. Additionally, representations of the diverse elements of the Deaf communities were also addressed, thus furthering the reflection of various research approaches and incorporating new frameworks for upcoming scholarships in Deaf Studies.

Keywords: proceedings, Deaf studies, theories, framework, applications

Presentation Transcript

(Opening Slide)

Hello. I'm Tawny Holmes Hlibok. I served as one of two co-chairs [with Dr. Matthew Malzkuhn] for the Deaf Studies Conference that had the theme of "Transformations." We had several reasons for picking that particular theme. First, it had been 20 years since Gallaudet University last hosted a conference like this. There were several similar conferences hosted around the world and by Utah Valley University, but for Gallaudet specifically, it had been over 20 years—imagine that. So we wanted to explore 20 years' worth of what had taken place in the field of Deaf Studies: have things stayed pretty much the same, or did the field evolve? Did the field gain a multidisciplinary lens? We wanted to explore that. We decided to assign a research theme to each day. For the first day, we solicited and selected presentations focused on discussing theories. On the second day, we focused on presentations related to applications of theories, and on the third day we focused on dissemination. This resulted in our having to frame on each area to explore different ways that helped us to see what changes had already happened or will happen in our field. We saw a variety of backgrounds among both the presenters and the audience, which ranged from educators to researchers, and we had community advocates, too. A

wide range, indeed. We observed that the audience was inquisitive and eager to delve deeper into several areas, which I will discuss in few moments. I think it's valuable to really explore the impact of "transformative thinking" on the field of Deaf Studies, including being multidisciplinary, and acquiring different lenses and new ways of thinking. Conference attendees came from all over, from different places in the world. We had over 300 attendees from 28 countries and 33 states throughout the United States. We gathered for three days in the same room to watch different presentations, both keynotes and regular sessions. We had the opportunity to truly reflect and share the insight on the meaning of Deaf studies and its future.

(Conference logo and info slide)

(Three slides: Map and list of countries and states)

("Takeaways" slide)

To give you examples of how the discussions relevant to the theme of "Transformations" helped us discover takeaways from the conference that have been collected in this issue. One was that we learned from DeafBlind presenters that while they go through life, they do experience a specific type of oppression other than the typical ones we are more familiar with, audism and linguicism. These two have been researched and analyzed to a good depth. But a new type of oppression was brought to our attention: distantism the experience of being separated from others who are reluctant to enter their space and use tactile communication to connect. That was an opportunity for us to understand, support, and partner in acquiring different perspectives to understand their experience and oppression. We must figure out how to dismantle that oppression, together. Another example is that we had an opportunity to discuss different identities, different experiences, different languages, and different cultures in the Deaf community. Is it one community? No, we should say communities. We must intentionally be inclusive; that's important. Also, we discovered that a lot of work has been done on corpus development, including preserving and researching historical sign language usage, including looking for trends and changes that have arose over time, and the fading of some vocabulary, plus different variations, including Black ASL. What does that mean for our field? How can we connect the study of sign languages to Deaf Studies? We must include those aspects which have been around for a long time. That's what I mean by being intentional; we need to cherish and include all different studies in our communities. And also, we realized that by framing "Deaf Studies" as a singular field, we may lack authenticity. It really needs to be multidisciplinary, such as incorporating history, anthropology, sociology, psychology, social work, law, medicine, linguistics, and many others. We will miss out on opportunities to understand ourselves better if we don't look wider and beyond the traditional lens, and we should seek collaborative opportunities to cross over in fields of study. We also need to interact more with local Deaf communities and look at their ways of living, ways of being while also focusing on their daily lives: what do they look like and what their interaction with hearing individuals look like at work, in transportation, in the community, at appointments, and with families. We can seize opportunities to document, study, and collect data from such studies. If we don't, we could miss out on a tremendous amount of data from within our Deaf communities, data that would help us know ourselves better and contribute to the strength of the Deaf Studies field.

(“Concluding Remarks” slide)

With that in mind, there have been many worthwhile findings that are now captured in the issue #5 of the Deaf Studies Digital Journal. We want to thank the DSDJ staff for their wonderful teamwork since day one of our collaboration. They helped us organize details and figure out how to best capture presentations, including through filming and recording. That resulted in a well-planned transition to a format that is accessible globally, including to you. We are thrilled that this issue has been successfully released. We hope that you will enjoy the different articles that captured different presentations and stories from the successful Deaf Studies conference. And we want to thank Gallaudet University as a whole, including administrators, staff, faculty — specifically those from our Department of ASL and Deaf Studies— and of course we must thank our students. All of them put time, energy, thoughts, creativity, and resources together in planning the conference, which is now spectacularly captured into this issue. We thank everyone who contributed time and everything they did for the conference. That really made this conference issue possible. We also want to thank several Deaf companies that provided support with this issue, such as PhenomWorks who filmed presentations during the conferences that translated into footage we used for the issue. We also thank T.S. Writing Services, which helped translate and caption the videos as part of a coordinated effort to ensure the bilingual approach (ASL and English) of this issue. And we want to thank a new student organization, the Yeker Anderson Club. Dr. Anderson was one person who was instrumental in establishing the Department of Deaf Studies here at Gallaudet University. After the conference’s conclusion, the funds made it possible to establish a new student organization, which in turn, gave us some support in publication. For this, we are thankful. We also want to thank everyone who came to the conference and gave support, including the presenters who took the time to share information, which was very powerful and unforgettable, because their presentations truly have contributed to the transformations within the field of Deaf Studies today and beyond.

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PUBLICATION TEAM

Patrick Boudreault, Editor
Tawny Holmes Hlibok, Conference Co-Chair, & Assistant Editor
Matthew Malzkuhn, Conference Co-Chair, Assistant Editor & Video Editor
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Andrew Biskupiak, Production Assistant
Dirksen Bauman, Advisor
T.S. Writing Services, LLC

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