

Bishop State Trains Sign Language Interpreters

Press-Register by Renee Busby

October 12, 2009 – (Press-Register/Mike Kittrell) Bishop State Community College student Molly Reynolds of Irvington, Ala., signs during an American Sign Language (ASL) class with instructor Janice Rogers Thursday, Oct. 1, 2009, in Mobile, Ala. The college is the only institution of higher education in the state that offers an Associate in Science degree in ASL, which is a two-year program.

MOBILE, Ala. – For class assignments, Molly Reynolds has played bingo and dined at restaurants. Sounds easy. Try doing it sign language only.

A student at Bishop State Community College, Reynolds is earning an associate's degree in American Sign Language to become an interpreter for the deaf.

Some colleges offer ASL courses, but Bishop State is the only one in Alabama to grant an associate degree in science in ASL and interpreter training.

Janice Rogers, Bishop's ASL instructor, said that a national shortage of interpreters is fueling the need for ASL graduates.

A former interpreter for the Mobile County schools, Rogers said she is frequently contacted by her former supervisor looking for ASL helpers.

Bishop State has 25 students enrolled in the program.

Rogers not only teaches sign language, she urges students to go outside the classroom to learn about the "deaf culture" and how it is "similar and different from us."

Students attend "silent dinners" with hearing-impaired groups to "get the experience of what it's like," said Rogers. "We turn our voices off and pretend to be deaf."



(Press-Register/Mike Kittrell)A portion of a sign language alphabet chart is shown in the classroom of instructor Janice Rogers during an American Sign Language (ASL) class at Bishop State Community College Thursday, Oct. 1, 2009, in Mobile, Ala. Said Reynolds, "It's overwhelming at first."

A 20-year-old student from Irvington, Reynolds originally took the course as an elective, but eventually decided to make it a career.

Reynolds described her experiences in "dingo" games -- bingo for the hearing-impaired. "They didn't judge me,"

Reynolds said of the other players. "They would correct me and help me."

Another student, Paul Pituk, 22, of Mobile, said that his younger and older brothers are hearing-impaired.

As kids, they communicated in a homemade sign language, but he enrolled in Bishop's program to learn to do it right. He, too, is pursuing a degree as an interpreter.

Even with the skills honed at Bishop, he said he'll occasionally "fall back into old habits" when he's with his brothers.

"We have to remind each other to use the American Sign Language," Pituk said.