

# ASL lifestyle thrives at UR

BY AMY WEINTRAUB  
CAMPUS TIMES STAFF

Most UR students are aware of our university's unique and impressive American Sign Language department, but I suspect that students are not as well informed about the broad array of activities ASL enthusiasts are involved in both on and off campus.

On one of your countless trips to Wegmans, were you amazed at the sight of two people engaging in a silent conversation? Maybe you were in the airport waiting to return to school and sitting across from you was a group of college-age students, all having a lively and animated conversation without speaking.

This is not merely a coincidence. Rochester happens to have the largest deaf population per capita.

Rochester is also home to the acclaimed National Technical Institute for the Deaf NTID, the world's first and largest technical college for deaf and hard-of-hearing students, located at Rochester Institute of Technology. As a result, students on our campus are able to reap the benefits of living in such a highly populated deaf community.

There are ample opportunities to engage this intricate language — the third most popular in the country — in inventive ways in addition to required academic courses.

Because of the already well established use of sign language in Rochester and the surrounding areas, the city hosts many deaf conventions and programs to which UR students are invited to attend.

One of the events that took place this past semester was the 2005 DeafNation Expo, which attracted a diverse crowd of 2,400 people from across the country. Students who attended the expo were grateful for the opportunity to be a part of a

community previously unknown to them.

"It was great to just be able to be in an environment where everyone was signing — very powerful," Vice-President of the American Sign Language club and sophomore Elise Coco said.

The growing popularity of ASL on campus led to the creation of the ASL club. According to the club's mission statement, members of the group strive "to promote cultural awareness of



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the deaf community in the city of Rochester and beyond, and to create spaces where ASL students at UR can gather and learn from each other, increasing their skills in ASL and their knowledge of deaf culture."

As with any other language, the best way to increase proficiency is to practice, and ideally, realistic situations yield the maximum results. Skill development is the reason that the ASL club works to provide UR students with interesting and valuable opportunities to develop their skills.

One of the more frequently occurring events hosted by the ASL club is the silent coffee nights held at The Common Ground. UR students, as well as those from NTID, are invited to grab a cup of coffee and a pastry and engage in continuous conversation for an hour or so. The relaxed and informal atmosphere is conducive to practicing ASL, and is also a great time for students to ask their peers questions outside of an intimidating classroom setting.

"The silent coffees are really

fun, great practice and a great atmosphere for students who want free tutoring," Coco said.

A special event that the ASL club hosts to promote the bond we share with the local deaf community is the "Sign and Dine." This is a catered dinner attended by students, ASL professors and usually several guests who perform poetry and stories. Last semester, the featured guest was Patrick Gray-

bill, a prominent and well known figure in the deaf community.

"It's a really great opportunity for the ASL students and professors to interact outside of the classroom. ASL club president and junior Lydia Dewey said. In the past we've

had professors and faculty speak about topics ranging from living in Africa to personal experiences as an ASL interpreter." An interpreter is present at this function, making it comprehensible for all students regardless of previous experience with ASL.

Everyday more and more students become interested in ASL. Whether it's taking an introductory course or simply finding yourself in a state of awe when observing people holding a "silent" conversation, the level of involvement is rapidly growing. Despite the demanding workload bestowed upon you by your professors, or your aspirations to become a doctor, the vast resources surrounding us in the field of ASL should not be overlooked.

UR students have the opportunity to be a part of an expanding culture, which is not something that can easily be said about every college campus. I encourage everyone to give ASL a closer look.

Weintraub can be reached at [aweintraub@campustimes.org](mailto:aweintraub@campustimes.org).