

Code of Ethics

by June Reeves, Barbara Ray Holcomb and Leslie C. Greer

The teacher of ASL/Deaf Studies is responsible for fulfilling obligations to students, to the profession, and to his/her employing institution. The ASLTA has set forth the following principles of ethical behavior and professional teaching practices as general guidelines, ideals, or expectations that need to be taken into account in consideration of a teacher's behavior. The intent of this document is not to provide a list of rules that will automatically apply in all situations, but to provide a context within which the teacher of ASL/Deaf Studies may be guided. This code of ethics applies to all members of the ASLTA and to all persons holding certification awarded by the ASLTA.

Principle #1: Content Competence

A teacher of ASL/Deaf Studies maintains a high level of language/subject matter knowledge and ensures that course content is current, accurate, representative, and appropriate to the level of the course within students program of study.

Guidelines:

This principle means that a teacher of ASL/Deaf Studies is responsible for maintaining subject matter competence not only in areas of personal interest, but in all areas relevant to a course's goals or objectives. The teacher is responsible for teaching content as stated in the course syllabus and for adequately preparing students for subsequent courses.

Failure to fulfill this principle occurs when a teacher (1) deliberately misrepresents his/her or another's professional qualifications, (2) accepts employment/agrees to teach a course for which he/she has inadequate knowledge, (3) misinterprets research evidence to support a theory or social view favored by the instructor, (4) teaches only those topics in the course in which he/she has a personal interest, or (5) does not provide adequate representation of alternate points of view regarding a topic.

Principle #2: Teaching/Pedagogical Competence

A pedagogically competent teacher is knowledgeable regarding alternative instructional methods or strategies, and selects methods of instruction that, according to research evidence (including personal or self-reflective research) are effective in helping students to learn and to achieve the course objectives.

Guidelines:

This principle means that not only do ASL/Deaf Studies teachers have the requisite knowledge and skills in the content area, American Sign Language and/or Deaf Studies, but they also must demonstrate adequate pedagogical skills to be able to select effective instructional methods, provide practice and feedback opportunities and to accommodate student diversity. This principle implies that the teacher recognizes

the differences in teaching a group of interpreting students in a college setting versus teaching parents of deaf students or interested persons in a community setting. In teaching a beginning course in ASL, the teacher provides students with adequate opportunity to practice and receive feedback on their receptive and expressive skills during the course. The teacher is responsible for taking active steps to stay current regarding teaching strategies that will help students learn. This might mean reading literature related to ASL and/or Deaf Studies teaching, attending workshops and conferences, or experimentation with alternative methods of teaching.

Principle #3: Dealing with Alternative Points of View

For topics involving difference of opinion or interpretation, a teacher of ASL/Deaf Studies takes active steps to acknowledge, respect, and place in perspective alternative points of view that are representative of various segments of the Deaf community.

Guidelines:

This principle means that teachers do not deny students access to different points of view regarding topics sensitive to the Deaf community nor points of view which are different than the teacher's own. A teacher of ASL/Deaf Studies takes precaution to distinguish between his/her personal views and those in current practice in the field. The teacher identifies his/her own perspective on a topic and compares it to alternative views/interpretations, thereby providing students with an understanding of the complexity of the issue and the difficulty of achieving a single "objective" conclusion, or a conclusion representative of the entire Deaf community.

Teachers are responsible for sharing information related to Deaf people, their identities, their language choices, and their cultures in an open and professional manner, refraining from making negative remarks about any member of the community, whatever his/her language choices/preferences may be. Within this context, teachers should be aware of the situational specific use of language and model respect and sensitivity for the diversity of language usage within the Deaf community.

Failure to fulfill this principle occurs when a teacher, because he/she disagrees with use of particular signs or means of signing used by some members of the Deaf community, either makes negative remarks/disparages them or causes students to disparage or acquire negative views of those segments of the Deaf community.

Principle #4: Equitable Treatment for all Students

The teacher of ASL/Deaf Studies shall accord equitable treatment for all students.

Guidelines:

The overriding responsibility of the teacher is to contribute to the student's development of competence and skill in the use of ASL and knowledge of Deaf culture and to avoid actions that could detract from student development. This principle means that the teacher must provide instruction that facilitates learning and encourages autonomy and independent thinking in students and treats all students with respect and dignity. The teacher of ASL/Deaf Studies encourages students to be respectful not only of all

segments of the Deaf community, but of one another as well. In order to provide an inclusive and open environment for class discussion, the teacher acknowledges alternative points of view within the classroom, avoids behavior which could be perceived as coercing students to adopt a particular value or point of view, encourages students to express alternative points of view, and models respect for all students even when it is necessary to disagree.

Principle #5: Relationships with Students

A teacher of ASL/Deaf Studies should not engage in a course of conduct that encourages development of any but professional relationships between themselves and students.

Guidelines:

This principle means that it is the responsibility of the teacher to keep relationships with students focused on the instructional goal of developing competence and skills in ASL and/or Deaf Studies. To avoid conflict of interest, a teacher does not enter into dual-role relationships with students that are likely to detract from student development or lead to actual or perceived favoritism on the part of the teacher.

The most obvious example of a dual relationship that is likely to impair teacher objectivity and/or detract from student development is any form of sexual or close personal relationship with a current student. It is the ASL/Deaf Studies teacher's responsibility to be aware of the power differential between themselves and students and to avoid behaving in ways that could exploit that relationship.

Other potentially problematic dual relationships include accepting a teaching (or grading) role with respect to a member's immediate family or a close friend, excessive socializing with individual students outside of class and introducing a course requirement that students participate in a cultural or political movement advocated by the teacher.

Although there are definite benefits to establishing good rapport with students and interacting with students both inside and outside the classroom, there are also risks of exploitation. It is the responsibility of the ASL/Deaf Studies teacher to prevent these risks from materializing into real or perceived conflicts of interest.

Principle #6: Confidentially

Student grades, attendance records, and private communications are treated as confidential materials, and are released only with student consent, or for legitimate academic purposes.

Guidelines:

This principle suggests that students are entitled to the same level confidentiality in their relationships with teachers as would exist in a lawyer-client or doctor-patient relationship. Whatever rules or policies are followed with respect to confidentiality of student records, these should be disclosed in full to students at the beginning of the academic term.

Principle #7: Respect for Colleagues

An ASL/Deaf Studies teacher accords just and equitable treatment for all members of the profession, respects the dignity of colleagues, and works cooperatively with them in the interest of fostering student development and the profession of ASL/Deaf Studies teaching.

Guidelines:

This principle means that in interactions among colleagues with respect to teaching and teaching competence, the over-riding concern is the development of students. An ASL/Deaf Studies teacher should not intentionally make a false or malicious statement about a colleague's professional performance or conduct. Any kind of derogatory statement regarding another's competence in the presence of students is unacceptable. Disagreements between teachers related to teaching are settled privately. If a teacher suspects that a colleague has shown incompetence or ethical violations in teaching, the teacher takes responsibility for investigating the matter thoroughly and consulting privately with the colleague and/or appropriate supervisory personnel.

A specific example of failure to show respect for colleagues occurs when a teacher makes derogatory comments in the classroom about the competence of another teacher or group of teachers. For example, teacher A tells students that information provided to them by teacher B is of no use/incorrect and will be replaced by information from teacher A. Other example of failure to uphold this principle would be for teacher A to discourage students from taking a course from teacher B, who is disliked by teacher A, even though the course would be useful.

Principle #8: Valid Assessment of Students

Teachers of ASL/Deaf Studies are responsible for taking adequate steps to ensure that testing/assessment of students is valid, open, fair, and in agreement with course objectives.

Guidelines:

This principle means that whether the teacher is teaching an ASL/Deaf Studies course to adults in the community or a university course required in an academic program, he/she selects assessment techniques that are consistent with the objectives of the course and at the same time are as reliable and valid as possible. Testing procedures and grading standards should be communicated to students at the beginning of the course and followed throughout. Students should be provided with prompt and accurate feedback on their performance at regular intervals throughout the course with an explanation as to how their work was graded. The teacher should provide students with constructive suggestions as to how to improve their grade.

One example of an inappropriate testing practice would be to grade students on skills that were not part of the announced course objectives and/or were not given adequate practice opportunity during the course. Another violation occurs when teachers teaching two different sections of the same course use drastically different testing procedures or grading standards, such that the same level of student performance earns significantly different final grades in the two sections.

Principle #9: Respect for the Profession of ASL/Deaf Studies Teaching

A teacher of ASL/Deaf Studies should conduct him/herself in such manner as to bring respect to themselves, their students, and the profession and shall strive to maintain high professional standards in compliance with the Code of Ethics.

Guidelines:

A teacher of ASL/Deaf Studies should be knowledgeable regarding fees appropriate to the profession and be informed about the suggested fee schedule of the national organization. There may be circumstances when an instructor elects to provide instruction in a community setting free of charge or for a nominal fee. This should be done with discretion, taking care that the livelihood of other teachers who must charge for their instructional services will be protected.

Principle #10: Respect for Institution

In the interests of student development, a teacher is aware of and respects the educational goals, policies, and standards of the institution or community setting in which he she teaches.

This principle implies that a teacher shares a collective responsibility to work for the good of the employing body as a whole, to uphold its educational goals and standards, and to abide by its policies and regulations.

Bibliography

American Sign Language Teachers Association (ASLTA) informational brochure, Silver Spring, MD.

Code of Ethics, October, 1979. Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc.

"Ethical Principles for College and University Teaching: Canadian professors define their professional responsibilities as teachers". @ 1996, Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. Reprinted in the American Association for Higher Education Bulletin, December, 1996/97.

[NEA-State of Alaska Code of Ethics of the Education Profession](#)