

UC Educator Joins Effort to Build a Global Sign Language Community

The coordinator of UC's Signed Language Interpreting Program is advocating for an underserved community around the world.

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Elizabeth Jean-Baptiste, coordinator of the signed language interpreting program in the University of Cincinnati's College of Education, Criminal Justice, and Human Services (CECH), is one of a handful of experts who will be taking off for the Philippines this month, as part of an initiative to build a global sign language community.

Led by the organization Discovering Deaf Worlds, and supported by funding from the United States Department of State Professional Fellows Division Empower Program, Jean-Baptiste will be part of a delegation – working in partnership with the Philippine Federation of the Deaf – to develop a strategic plan to better serve Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing populations in the Philippines.

[Discovering Deaf Worlds](#) is a nonprofit international organization that is dedicated to empowering Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing populations in developing countries. The organization, highlighting figures from the 2000 Philippine Census, reports at least 121,000 Deaf people live in the Philippines and that this population struggles under soaring unemployment.



Elizabeth Jean-Baptiste

"The collective goal shared by Discovering Deaf Worlds and its partners is to improve the standards of education, communication accessibility, employment opportunities and human rights for Deaf people in developing countries," says Jean-Baptiste.

"I was a Peace Corps volunteer, and this initiative aligns itself in a similar manner in terms of service learning," she says. "We're not going over there to hand out books or to build buildings, but instead, we'll be meeting and working with our Filipino counterparts to support their efforts to build a viable infrastructure."

Jean-Baptiste adds that this work does not involve the use of American Sign Language (ASL). She says the group will be working with interpreters and intermediaries to receive and provide training in Filipino Sign Language. "The Philippines have had a strong American influence, and I've been told that approximately 70 percent of Filipino sign language is rooted in ASL."

Jean-Baptiste is an education and interpreting leader in the delegation, but says other members of the program include a legal advocate for the Deaf, an advocate for Deaf victims of abuse, a youth programs coordinator for the National Association of the Deaf, and an attorney.

Previously, Jean-Baptiste has worked with the Institute for Special Education in Zambia to prepare teachers on how to use sign language in teaching. She also has conducted trainings for sign language interpreters in Kenya and Ethiopia.

The month-long experience in the Philippines will run through mid-December.

UC's Signed Language Interpreting program offers a bachelor's degree in signed language interpreting with an online bachelor's degree completion program option for recent associate degree interpreting program graduates and working interpreters, a Deaf Studies Certificate and ASL courses for foreign language credit.

[U.S. Participants in Discovering Deaf World Philippines initiative](#)

[Filipino Participants in Discovering Deaf World Philippines initiative](#)

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