



February 12, 2009

President Davila:

Hello. I'm Robert Davila, president of Gallaudet University. Welcome to *Bob's Vlog*. My guests today are Dr. Carol Erting, dean of the Graduate School and Professional Programs, and Geoff Whitebread, capstone coordinator for the Honors Program.

In addition to her position as dean, Carol is also a professor in the Department of Education. She arrived at Gallaudet in 1974 and worked at the Linguistics Research Laboratory with William Stokoe. Before that, she taught deaf and hard of hearing children and worked with their families for several years in Chicago, St. Louis, and Atlanta. During her tenure at Gallaudet, Carol has been chairperson of the Education Department, a faculty member in the Department of ASL, Linguistics, and Interpretation, and a research scientist in the Gallaudet Research Institute.

Geoff is an honors graduate of Gallaudet, Class of 2004. Since he was a student, he has been involved with the Honors Program. Upon graduation, the Honors Program published his groundbreaking thesis entitled, "Stuck on the Tip of my Thumb: Stuttering in American Sign

Language," wherein Geoff discussed whether developmental stuttering exists in American Sign Language. Presently, Geoff serves as the Honors capstone coordinator, in charge of the Honors Senior Thesis process, and he is also the student development person for students in the Honors Program.

Welcome to both of you for our program today. You will give our audience some insights into the program that you manage and assist. Carol and Geoff, welcome to *Bob's Vlog*.

Dr. Carol Erting and Mr. Geoff Whitebread:

Thank you.

President Davila:

Last fall, Gallaudet began the "Honors Undergraduate Research Program," which provides top students with their first professional experience in discipline-specific research while they are still undergraduates. This is a critical component of the Honors mission to prepare highly qualified and motivated students to succeed in their honors capstone and/or excel in graduate school later. Each student admitted to the program is paired with a faculty researcher here on campus. During this time of the student's apprenticeship with a faculty member, the student is expected to contribute substantively to

the development of the agreed upon project. Students who participate in the program receive a \$1,000 per semester stipend and course credit. Faculty who participate in this program earn a \$500 professional development grant. The Graduate School is providing the seed money for this research program.

I've invited Carol and Geoff here to tell us more about this successful new program. I'd like to ask you, Geoff, what is the purpose of this undergraduate research program?

Mr. Geoff Whitebread:

The purpose of the program is to provide students with semi-professional apprenticeship in their research field of interest. So, if they are thinking about majoring in linguistics, then we give them a research experience in linguistics. We also want students to experience a variety of research activities including data analysis, data collection, and evaluation of other people's research and applying it to their own.

President Davila:

How is this sort of research different from the research that students do every day?

Mr. Geoff Whitebread:

Every day in the classroom, students are expected to integrate their work by taking other people's conclusions and applying them to their papers. In this research, we move off of that integration of the in-class research activity where faculty and students are surveyed, and move to real research, giving them the experience of getting involved in research that will contribute to their field.

President Davila:

What advantages do students have once they've learned these skills?

Mr. Geoff Whitebread:

There are two. They have a good resume. Universities are in the business of creating knowledge so when students can show university graduate programs that they were involved with one year of research, then graduate programs are more attracted to that student and seeing them as a person who could contribute to the university's function. Secondly, it gives students confidence and that, to me, is one of the greatest advantages of this program. Students are not afraid to have an original idea, to defend those original ideas, and to use the ideas they have to succeed in graduate school and in life.

President Davila:

What goals and outcomes do you have for your program?

Mr. Geoff Whitebread:

We have, obviously, our learning objectives – experience with data analysis, experience with research culture – and also we like to use the program as a tool for students to get a sense of what they like and don't like. If students think they like linguistics research but, then, they get into the program and find they don't, then it's better to learn that early on instead of waiting until graduate school to learn that.

President Davila:

What benefits did the graduate school see in providing the seed money for funding this research program?

Mr. Geoff Whitebread:

Carol?

Dr. Carol Erting:

I'm happy to answer that. I was thrilled when Geoff came to see me about this program. I suspected it was a good fit with graduate school goals. Research is really central to graduate education, and building a culture of inquiry and a culture of academic excellence is what we are all about. So when he came to see me, I said, "Sure, we will work together to develop this program." I had several things in mind: First, to provide young deaf scholars in the honors program opportunities of research, meaning they are on the path to future academic growth, and we hope that they will become researchers. We have a small number of deaf researchers now and we want to grow that. It's an important role for Gallaudet. Secondly, undergraduate students who are a little bit naïve, who don't know the field well, ask questions which stimulate new methods in research, which is a benefit to the research project itself and also to the researcher, the faculty member.

President Davila:

How do the faculty benefit from participating in this program?

Dr. Carol Erting:

Well, it's interesting that in the beginning we didn't know what the reaction would be. We wondered if we would announce it and then

find no one was interested, but it was just the opposite. We had so many faculty, who were enthusiastic, come and learn about the program and offer their suggestions because many faculty have already worked with undergraduate students before. They paid them to participate in projects and things like that. So, we had a lunch and 25 faculty showed up. Even more wanted to come. We had a great response. Obviously, the faculty themselves saw the benefit to the project, to teaming, when you add an undergraduate student. Sometimes one student works with one researcher and sometimes the student joins a research team of graduate students and researchers. The faculty, so far, have been thrilled with the outcome. They get a benefit from the perspective of the student and, at the same time, students are contributing substantially to the research itself. And faculty are teachers, so watching students grow and learn is really exciting for them. Then, we give them, a token really, of \$500 for development so they can add that money to go to conferences or some other professional development. So that is a benefit, but a small one. I don't think it's the main reason for participation.

President Davila:

I think that's a wonderful idea – a great process – but I'd like to ask you, what are your plans for the program in the coming year?

Mr. Geoff Whitebread:

I believe our plans are to get our assessment data, look at it to re-evaluate where we are strong and where we are weak, and then modify the program. Obviously, we don't know what the results are yet because the program is happening this year, but we will use that. I think our eventual goal is to expand the program to include others who are not honors, but top students. But, for now, Honors is kind of the incubator. If we can build a successful program in Honors, then we can expand that to the campus when we're ready.

President Davila:

This is a program which aims to maximize a student's exposure to research. It is a wonderful example of Gallaudet's commitment to preparing students to enter the world of work or continue with graduate studies after college. Gallaudet is ensuring that our students complete their undergraduate work with many skills including an appreciation of research culture, ethics in research, what it means to contribute to the body of knowledge, and a deeper understanding of the various stages of the research plan. I really think it is a wonderful way to prepare young people to think, and plan, and organize their work later on. It doesn't matter whether it is research or something else related to work in graduate school or the world of work, so I really appreciate what the two of you are doing for our students.

I want to thank you both, Dr. Erting and Geoff, for joining me today and giving our audience another view of what we are trying to do and accomplish with our students and the wonderful opportunities they have with us. When paired – the students and faculty working together – both student and teacher benefit from that experience.

Thank you for joining us, and I thank our visitors again for being with us. I will see you again soon. Thank you very much. So long!