



American Sign Language, the language through which the movie *Universal Signs* is communicated, is taken by approximately 125 students per semester at Penn.

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## Signs speak louder than words

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**Posted: 4/4/08**

To Penn students interested in foreign languages, learning a language without words is as foreign as you can get.

But for the approximately 125 students who study American Sign Language each semester or those who are deaf or hard of hearing, there are not many movies that target deaf culture - until now.

Today at 4 p.m. in Annenberg 110 a screening will be held of a new film, *Universal Signs*, which will also be featured in the Philadelphia Film Festival this week.

The silent film is a "first person journey through the deaf experience; therefore, for most of the film, [you] will not hear talking or every day audible noises, such as forks clicking on plates or a telephone ring," explains the movie's Web site.

The film was made with the support of Creative Access, the Philadelphia area's only advocacy, arts service group dedicated to deaf culture.

Following the 100-minute screening, Penn alumnus Anna Calamia, who wrote and directed the film, will deliver a talk entitled "Universal Signs [captioned for the hearing]: Talking on Hollywood's Perception of Cinema While Advocating for a Minority Culture."

She will discuss the experience of making the film as well as her motivation to reach out to the deaf community.

*Universal Signs*, which is told primarily in ASL, follows the story of a young deaf computer technician named Andrew while he is trying to escape the daily routine of his job. He develops a relationship with his co-worker Mary, who also knows how to communicate through signs.

The film claims that while the main character is deaf, the story "is one with which all people can connect -

one of forgiveness, redemption and love."

The movie's unique reversal of communication allows the deaf audience to watch the film in their native language while the non-signing audience members read the captions.

ASL Program Coordinator Jami Fisher, who helped bring the film to Penn, said that the movie "brings performing arts to the deaf community."

She added, "This is probably one of the first films closed captioned for all audiences. Deaf people and hearing people can get equally as much out of it, which is very unique."

All the deaf characters in the film are played by deaf actors, including Anthony Natale from Mr. Holland's Opus and Sabrina Lloyd from Numb3rs.

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