

**Interpreter Training Program Students and Their Confidence: How Does it Relate to the  
Retention Rate?**

By

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## Table of Contents

|                                                        |    |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----|
| List of Figures .....                                  | 5  |
| Abstract .....                                         | 7  |
| Keyword Definitions .....                              | 7  |
| Chapter 1: Introduction .....                          | 9  |
| Background .....                                       | 9  |
| Statement of the Problem .....                         | 10 |
| Purpose of the Study .....                             | 11 |
| Theoretical Framework .....                            | 11 |
| Limitations of the Research .....                      | 12 |
| Chapter 2: Literature Review .....                     | 15 |
| Improving Confidence Levels .....                      | 15 |
| Contributors to Poor Retention Rates .....             | 20 |
| Improving the Retention Rate .....                     | 23 |
| The Deaf Community's Perspective on Interpreting ..... | 27 |
| Conclusion .....                                       | 30 |
| Chapter 3: Methodology .....                           | 31 |
| Data Collection Protocol .....                         | 31 |
| Population .....                                       | 31 |
| Data Analysis Protocol .....                           | 32 |
| Chapter 4: Results and Discussion .....                | 34 |
| Demographics and Characteristics of Participants ..... | 34 |
| Demographics and Characteristics of ITP Students ..... | 34 |

|                                                                                 |    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Demographics and Characteristics of Graduated ITP Students .....                | 35 |
| ITP Student Confidence Results .....                                            | 39 |
| ITP Students' Confidence Levels Discussion .....                                | 44 |
| ITP Students' Perspective on Improving Readiness to Work .....                  | 45 |
| Graduated ITP Student Confidence Results.....                                   | 46 |
| Graduated ITP Students' Confidence Levels Discussion.....                       | 53 |
| Graduated ITP Students' Perspectives on Improving Confidence Levels .....       | 55 |
| Resigned/Retired Interpreters Reason for Leaving and Confidence Results .....   | 56 |
| Retired/Resigned Interpreters' Reason for Leaving Discussion .....              | 64 |
| Keeping Interpreters in the Field Long Term.....                                | 65 |
| Chapter 5: Conclusion.....                                                      | 68 |
| Main Findings .....                                                             | 68 |
| Recommendations for Future Research .....                                       | 69 |
| References.....                                                                 | 70 |
| Appendix A: Informed Consent and ITP Student/Graduated ITP Student Survey ..... | 75 |
| Appendix B: Informed Consent and Resigned/Retired Interpreters Survey .....     | 84 |

### List of Figures

|                                                                                                                                            |    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Figure 1 2021 RID Report Ethnic Origin Identity by Region (Self-Reported) .....                                                            | 37 |
| Figure 2 2021 RID Report Gender by Region (Self-Reported) .....                                                                            | 39 |
| Figure 3 ITP Student Responses: “On a Scale of 1–10, How Confident Are You to Enter the<br>Workforce?” .....                               | 40 |
| Figure 4 ITP Student Responses: “How Long After Graduation Would You Be Ready to Work?”<br>.....                                           | 41 |
| Figure 5 ITP Student Responses: “If No, What Would Help?” .....                                                                            | 42 |
| Figure 6 ITP Student Responses: “Yes/No, Would You Prefer a Mentor Closer to Your Experience<br>Level (5 Years or Less)?” .....            | 43 |
| Figure 7 ITP Student Responses: “Did You Take Advantage of All Growth Opportunities<br>Provided?” .....                                    | 44 |
| Figure 8 Graduated ITP Student Responses: “On a Scale of 1–10, How Confident Are You to<br>Enter the Workforce?” .....                     | 47 |
| Figure 9 Graduated ITP Student Responses: “When Will You Be Ready for Work?” .....                                                         | 48 |
| Figure 10 Graduated ITP Student Responses: “If 2–3 Years, Why?” .....                                                                      | 49 |
| Figure 11 .....                                                                                                                            | 50 |
| Graduated ITP Student Responses: “Have You Been Adequately Prepared to Work?” .....                                                        | 50 |
| Figure 12 Graduated ITP Student Responses: “If No, How Could That Have Been Improved?” .....                                               | 51 |
| Figure 13 Graduated ITP Student Responses: “Yes/No, Would You Prefer a Mentor Closer to<br>Your Experience Level (5 Years or Less)?” ..... | 52 |
| Figure 14 Graduated ITP Student Responses: “Did You Take Advantage of All Growth<br>Opportunities Provided?” .....                         | 53 |

|                                                                                                                                                        |    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Figure 15 <i>National Association of Interpreters in Education 2023 Minimum EIPA Requirement by State</i> .....                                        | 54 |
| Figure 16 <i>Resigned/Retired Interpreter Responses: “How Many Students Were in Your ITP Cohort?”</i> .....                                            | 57 |
| Figure 17 <i>Resigned/Retired Interpreter Responses: “How Many Are Now Working Interpreters?”</i> .....                                                | 57 |
| Figure 18 <i>Resigned/Retired Interpreter Responses: “How Do You Believe that Offering Mentoring in an ITP Would Have Affected the Outcome?”</i> ..... | 58 |
| Figure 19 <i>Resigned/Retired Interpreter Responses: “If You Were a Working Interpreter, When Did You Stop Working?”</i> .....                         | 59 |
| Figure 20 <i>Resigned/Retired Interpreter Responses: “Why Did You Quit Interpreting?”</i> .....                                                        | 59 |
| Figure 21 <i>Resigned/Retired Interpreter Responses: “What Support Would Have Made You Continue Working as an Interpreter?”</i> .....                  | 60 |
| Figure 22 <i>Resigned/Retired Interpreter Responses: “How Do You Think We Can Change the Retention Rate of Interpreters?”</i> .....                    | 61 |
| Figure 23 <i>Resigned/Retired Interpreter Responses: “If Yes, Why?”</i> .....                                                                          | 62 |
| Figure 24 <i>Resigned/Retired Interpreter Responses: “What Could Be Done to Retain Interpreters Long Term?”</i> .....                                  | 63 |
| Figure 25 <i>Resigned/Retired Interpreter Responses: “How Could ITP Students Be Better Prepared to Enter the Field?”</i> .....                         | 64 |

### **Abstract**

American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters are facing a downward-trending retention rate in the interpreting field, as reported in the article by Van Berkel (2024), which states, “But the pool of interpreters is shrinking in Minnesota and across the nation. A survey of Minnesota interpreters in 2021 found nearly 40% expected to leave the profession within five years” (Van Berkel, 2024, para. 3) finding that there is a staggering imbalance between interpreters and Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing individuals within the community. Language Services Associates (n.d.) states, “According to the National Census of the Deaf Population there are approximately 500,000 Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Americans who use ASL, and a ratio of roughly 50 Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing ASL users to one ASL interpreter” (Language Services Associates, n.d., para. 7). The goal of this thesis is to discover the connections between interpreter training program (ITP) students’ readiness to work upon graduation and the retention rate of interpreters continuing in the job force. I surveyed 15 ITP students, four graduated ITP students who did not continue to become interpreters, and eight resigned/retired interpreters who left the field of interpreting. Along with sharing the results, I discuss the findings that I uncovered and any literature, blogs, or social media postings that relate to and support my findings. In doing so, I hope to be able to provide insight as to why this may be happening and how we can better support new interpreters and ITP students to be better prepared for interpreting, and staying in the field long term.

### **Keyword Definitions**

*American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters* are facilitators of communication between Deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing individuals by interpreting spoken English into ASL and vice versa.

*Interpreter training program (ITP)* is a program to train future interpreters.

*Resigned* in this research refers to previous interpreters who have decided to leave the profession of interpreting.

*Retention rate* is the percentage of employees a business or field retains over a specific period.

*Students* in this research are individuals who are in a training program currently.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Background**

Throughout my experience as an interpreter training program (ITP) student, to becoming a professional interpreter of three years, I have had a plethora of experience with the Deaf community, as well as with ITP students. I worked as an American Sign Language (ASL) and interpreting tutor from 2021–2023. During these two years, I had the pleasure of working with various ITP students who came to me for a variety of reasons, including discussing their work; asking advice about becoming a working interpreter; inquiring about when I felt ready to work; and asking how to interpret a specific text, speech, or lecture. During this time, I recognized a specific confidence level or lack thereof. At that moment, I recognized that I was doing a lot of “confidence boosting” within the system that I used to be a part of.

When I was a student from 2016–2020 in my ITP and 2020–2022 in my Bachelor of Arts (BA) program, I remember being overtaken with the fear that I was not good enough or not ready to work. This was ingrained in me by my own thinking that I was not as good as my classmates. I also recalled hearing the horror stories from my professors about interpreting, and that was a triggering moment for me to think, “Well, that’s scary, I never want to experience that!” I did not even think about becoming an interpreter. However, with the assistance of an entire village, literally one mentor, four working interpreters, and five professors from my ITP and BA program, I went for it and became an interpreter. I applied to a few different agencies, and when I received an offer letter from these agencies I realized that I was good enough to become an interpreter; this was something I was capable of.

However, once I was involved in the community of working interpreters, the reality of the shortage of interpreters set in. I realized that everything that was told to us throughout my

program was right. There was a severe shortage of interpreters, an abundance of work with not enough people to fill those jobs. This shortage has left many Deaf consumers without service and interpreters feeling overworked, underpaid, and burned out.

This is where my passion for ITP students began; I wanted to find out how to improve their confidence and create interpreters who graduate feeling ready to work. Doing so would trickle into the community, also taking the load from interpreters already in the field.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Students in interpreter training programs who aspire to become ASL–English interpreters are graduating at high rates, especially with ASL and interpreting growing in popularity. Edwards (2021) states, “More people have become interested. Since the pandemic began over a year ago, there’s been a rise in interest to learn ASL, stemming from the increased visibility of ASL interpreters during daily press conferences” (Edwards, 2021, para. 5). Edwards is indicating that since the beginning of the pandemic, there has been more coverage of ASL interpreters on TV, causing a surge in popularity of ASL and interpreting. However, what I have been observing is that despite this great graduation rate from these programs, graduates are not going on to pursue careers in interpreting or an affiliated field such as Deaf education, Deaf counseling, teaching assistant at a Deaf school, or even audiology. From my experience, students are leaving these programs feeling unprepared to begin working as professional interpreters, or they are not confident enough to begin working. Due to this, the graduating-to-working ratio is high, and professional interpreters are experiencing a significant amount of stress, burnout, injury, and exhaustion. This lack of graduates entering the field leaves working interpreters to be overworked and become burned out.

This fact is causing a drop in the retention rate of working interpreters. Many professional interpreters are feeling the stress and pressure of not having enough people in the field and are beginning to leave the field altogether. I understand that this could be due to various reasons, such as vicarious trauma, horizontal violence, the work environment, and so on. However, they are leaving, which is impacting the field every day.

### **Purpose of the Study**

My goal for this research is to provide more context and a foundation for future researchers to build upon what I find. I hope that this research will reach educators who are developing curricula for ITPs and consider this research's findings as a guide for boosting their students' confidence levels. Programs should prepare their students to become working interpreters who not only think they can work but believe they can work. I believe that research improving practices in the ITPs can result in an increased retention rate among the community. Such research and results would not only serve the students and interpreters but also the Deaf community, who suffer from the shortage of interpreters in the field. With this research, I foresee a positive domino effect happening: ITP students' confidence may increase, which will create more working interpreters who help those who are overworked in the field right now, which will increase retention and create more readily available access for the Deaf community.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework that I chose to use is an exploratory framework. This is a framework that is used to uncover the reasons that specific behaviors or actions occur. Specifically, looking through the lens of the turnover intention theory, which is an employee's willingness to leave an organization or profession (Ngo-Henha, 2018).

As stated previously, I did not intend to conduct my research and compose my thesis as a way to find an answer, but rather to develop a better understanding of why the retention rate among interpreters is so low, and how better to prepare future interpreters to improve this number. George (2023) explained, “Exploratory research is a methodology approach that investigates research questions that have not previously been studied in depth” (para. 1). There seems to be a gap in the literature; there is little to no research on recent interpreting graduates entering the field. Thus, utilizing the exploratory framework provided me the opportunity to explore this situation rather than find an answer to why this is happening.

### **Limitations of the Research**

The limitations of my research included small sample sizes, limited location of data collection, and self-reported data. Due to the small sample size that I collected, findings are not generalizable to a larger population. In addition, all respondents were from Southern California, except for one respondent who was located in Canada. Lastly, my data collection included self-reported responses, which means that there was a possibility for respondents to overstate or understate their experiences.

This thesis is broken down into five chapters, which show my research question and methods of how to answer the posed question.

Chapter 1 provides the background for me, introducing the grounds on which I have to speak on this topic. Looking at both my educational and professional background, I show my qualifications to discuss my topic. It also provides the breakdown of my thesis, what I planned to research, as well as the purpose that this research holds for the community, explaining the positive domino effect that could take place through this research. This chapter also goes into the

theoretical framework for my research. The limitations of my research and keyword definitions are provided.

Chapter 2 review the literature that is as closely related to my topic as possible. This has proven to be a difficult task due to there not being a lot of scholarly research done on my topic. Nevertheless, articles and journals have been written that correlated somewhat to my research, enough to provide support for my thesis.

Chapter 3 discusses my methodology, meaning this chapter covers in detail how I intended to collect my data. I explain what population is involved in my data and the timeframe protocol for collecting the data. This chapter also explains how I analyzed and interpreted the data collected.

Chapter 4 is where I present the findings that I gathered while engaged in my research. I delve into connections I found between ITP students and the retention rate within the interpreting community. This chapter presents the data gathered.

In Chapter 5, I discuss in greater detail the findings and how they can benefit the community. This chapter is where I debrief about the pros and cons in ITP programs found in my data. I also discuss how I believe this research can be used better in the interpreting field, not only in the field itself, but also all the interconnected parts of the field, such as the ITP students and the Deaf community directly affected by the retention rate seen in the field. This chapter also consists of a summary of my findings on my thesis question. I also discuss the conclusions that can be drawn from what was discovered during my research. This chapter delves into advice that I can provide after single-handedly conducting field research. This advice is directed to those developing ITP curricula and to the interpreting community. In doing so, I believe that the field

can grow not only in terms of the number of individuals pertaining to the retention rate, but wholly as a community.

This thesis also includes references for all the information cited. At the end, appendices provide the consent forms and supplemental materials needed for my research.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

I examined literature on how to improve retention rates across various professions, to discover best practices, on how to improve retention rates. Identifying this connection within the literature would enhance my research by uncovering a common factor that could be applied to ITP students.

### **Improving Confidence Levels**

Du et al. (2021) examined the perseverance of undergraduate students. The authors stated, “Individuals who hold fixed mindsets believe that success depends on talent; they are destined to fail and give up easily in the face of failure or difficulties” (Du et al., 2022, p. 1). They investigated how undergraduate students can begin to change their mindsets or look at role models, including their teachers’ struggle stories, to help them gain confidence. Students were measured on a perseverance scale that included 20 items grouped into four categories: conviction, optimism, controllability, and enlightenment (Du et al., 2022). Their study found that the greatest growth occurs when undergraduate students are shown and read struggle stories. The students were given the same number of stories, but one group received struggle stories. The group that received the struggle stories became more confident compared to the group that did not (Du et al., 2021).

Voisin et al. (2023) looked at the situation differently, stating, “Building a strong, emotionally supportive relationship with students is important in supporting student success” (p. 2). The researchers looked at professors within the college/secondary level and the impact that they can have on students within the classroom. The authors found that when a student in college is nurtured and can have a 1-hour support session, their academic growth can excel in the

classroom. Providing student support can reduce their anxiety and boost their self-confidence (Voisin et al., 2023).

Valtchuk and Class (2021) sought to find how social media, specifically a Facebook group, can benefit interpreting students by boosting collaboration. Boosting collaboration can enable students to grow with one another, boosting each other's self-esteem. The authors studied five students who created a Facebook group chat. They concluded, "Similar to previous findings, the students in this study use Facebook Groups and chats primarily for social purposes, but also for daily activities and to a lesser extent for study-related purposes" (Valtchuk & Class, 2021, p. 13). This study demonstrated that through student collaboration, students can succeed and enhance their confidence in one another. Students are able to build each other's confidence levels together rather than relying so heavily on the professors to improve their skills and their mindsets. Rather, their mindsets can be fortified through colleagues, and the professor can nourish their skill sets.

This idea connects to van der Baan et al.'s (2024) research, which looked at the students' ability to transition from college to the workplace postgraduation. Often, students struggle in the postgraduation environment. They go from their stable learning environment to a working environment that is sometimes chaotic, which can cause a decrease in workers within various professional fields. Van der Baan et al. (2024) noted, "In preparing students for the workplace, higher education institutions are increasingly investing in the development of students' employability (Harvey 2000; Knight and Yorke 2003)" (p. 3). This shows that students need additional in-class job training to be properly prepared for their career path. The research used coaches as an intervention and then surveyed the students afterward to measure their readiness to enter the workplace and the effectiveness of the coaches. The authors found that when a student

is coached in the field that they are trying to enter, they are more likely to succeed and stay in that field. These findings suggest that with the appropriate amount of coaching (or mentoring in the case of interpreting), students can succeed in their program and continue to their field, thus increasing the retention rate within the field.

It is crucial for ITP students to understand diversity and how to incorporate the voices and opinions of everyone within the Deaf community. García-Fernández (2020) showed that DeafBlind, DeafDisabled, Deaf, and hard-of-hearing students are facing marginalization due to not having access. Deaf students of color also face discrimination within the education system, falling behind those of their Deaf White counterparts. García-Fernández responded to a quote from a white interpreter, stating, “When I saw the interpreter’s comment, I immediately thought to myself, *Oh those white tears!*” (p. 16). García-Fernández focused on the benefits of including Deaf-Latinx individuals within higher education and research, showing that the Deaf-Latinx community can benefit the interpreting field and the research field. Having these perspectives as ITP students is crucial to feeling adequately prepared to enter the workforce. Having the basic skill set to collaborate with people and understand the intersectionality that comes from the Deaf community is imperative for student success in the field.

Various methods exist for students to help improve their self-confidence. For instance, staff at Affordable Colleges (2024) wrote an article titled *How to Build Your Academic Confidence in College*. The article went into detail about the various avenues that students can take that make them feel more confident in their educational endeavors. The authors quoted Croskey,

Confident students develop relationships with faculty that can lead to participation in research and other developmental activities. This leads further to possible future

connections, letters of recommendation, internships, future work, or graduate school.

Confident students also mitigate negative consequences of stressful situations like testing or public speaking. They are more likely to participate in extracurricular activities, which can help them increase their emotional intelligence and leadership skills. (Affordable Colleges, 2024, para. 2)

Students in the college system who are more confident tend to find it easier to navigate their courses. The article offered tips for how students can enhance their confidence in academics. These tips include getting feedback, gathering proof, and preparing for class (Affordable Colleges, 2024). This is imperative for students who are developing a new skill, which is a daunting task. However, the strategy that may resonate the most with improving confidence in students is “gathering proof.” When a student is in doubt about their skills or academic achievement, they can collect evidence that they are a successful student. This evidence includes keeping a journal of their various successes; this way, when they are plagued with self-doubt, they have an archive that they can easily look to for reassurance (Affordable Colleges, 2024). This technique is imperative for students and working professionals alike to be able to look back and remember why and how they entered the field.

Building confidence in a student is more than simply improving their test-taking skills. It means being able to improve their individual confidence as well. This aspect was touched on by Cook-Sather and Cott (2024). The authors provide a breakdown of the past 13 years of literature and research related to how students in high school and college have been viewed and how various emphases have changed over the years. Cook-Sather and Cott discussed the ability for educators to cocreate educational plans with a student’s outlook.

In relation to this first theme, co-creation as building and boosting individual confidence, we see students and staff using terms that suggest ways in which partnership fosters three of the forms of wellbeing identified by Nair and colleagues (2018): “subjective wellbeing (high positive affect, low negative affect, high satisfaction with life), psychological wellbeing (self-acceptance, mastery and competence, positive relations and engagement and growth), [and] meaning in life (framework for looking at life and sense of fulfilment).” (Cook-Sather & Cott, 2024, p. 7)

This framework shows that, as educators, it is crucial to collaborate continuously, not only with other educators, but also with the student’s point of view. Collaboration between the educator and student leads to true change within the education system. As Cook-Sather and Cott (2024) stated above, confidence involves self-acceptance, mastery and competence, positive relationships and engagement, and growth. These are crucial psychological characteristics that every student should possess to be a successful student and professional.

This finding is reflected as well in Cuddington et al.’s (2023) opinion piece, which looked at science students who graduate from their programs with a lack of quantitative experience. This lack of experience also equates to a lack of confidence within these young scientists. When discussing self-confidence, Cuddington et al. stated, “The acquisition of new quantitative skills is largely a matter of practice, so greater quantitative self-efficacy could lead to a positive feedback loop between a willingness to exercise those skills, greater mastery, and application” (p. 365). When new scientists are lacking the skills to develop mastery by the time they graduate, their self-confidence is likely to dwindle. The authors also recognized that a variety of instructional supports can enhance a student’s confidence and application of quantitative skills, including mentoring and demonstrating learning from failure. They suggest that some teaching methods

should be avoided, such as one-off workshops, because they prove to be less effective at developing a student's quantitative skills and self-efficacy (Cuddington et al., 2023).

### **Contributors to Poor Retention Rates**

Mayeux (2023) researched the varying factors using surveys to uncover the reasons behind interpreters quitting the kindergarten through Grade 12 (K-12) system. Focusing on Texas, the author found that several self-reported K-12 interpreters who had resigned did so because they were poorly compensated and burned out. Mayeaux found that the three individuals surveyed chose to leave due to inadequate pay and compensation. This appears to be a common problem throughout interpreting communities.

Understanding the perspective of Deaf culture and what members of the Deaf community observe is crucial for the interpreting field when trying to improve retention rates. The fact that the Deaf community has acknowledged the declining retention rates speaks volumes. The National Deaf Center (2022) posted a webpage that discussed how the Deaf community is experiencing the effects of the interpreter shortage in postsecondary settings:

Interpreters have told us that they are choosing not to continue working in postsecondary settings for the following reasons:

- Poor compensation
- Inconsistent scheduling
- Working alone without a team
- Long commutes and difficult parking options
- Lack of technological support during remote interpreting work

On the other hand, interpreters have also told us that they value the challenging nature of the work in postsecondary settings and playing a role in the educational journey of deaf students. (National Deaf Center, 2022, para. 3–4)

These reasons should also be addressed as a community to come to a resolution and find support for the interpreters who are facing this problem. Low retention is a problem that causes a ripple effect, where it affects the professional interpreters, the Deaf community, and the ITP students and educators. The National Deaf Center (2022) identified ways to retain interpreters and work through the shortage that the Deaf community currently faces, including hiring staff interpreters with guaranteed hours, having on-call video remote interpreting, and providing reassurance and validation to the interpreters who are currently working.

Lencioni (2007) discussed the contributors to an unhealthy work environment, which leads to low retention rates. Contributors include lack of engagement, lack of meaning, and unreasonable or vague standards. Lencioni explained that anonymity is a key factor that causes someone to leave a job. Employees may have a lower engagement rate at work when their direct manager does not take an interest in them. Having a cordial relationship is the most important part of maintaining a healthy work environment. Lencioni advised managers, “Take time to sit down with each of them and ask them what’s going on in their lives” (p. 127). Coworkers and supervisors can make an effort to know each other’s lives and what is happening outside of work. The author then described that many employees find themselves pondering the meaning of their work when it is not explicitly discussed. Workers often ask who their work is impacting or how it is helping other people. Another factor that plays into a miserable work environment is when workers are held to standards that are immeasurable or too vague. Lencioni explained, “When they [employees] realize that there is no clear, observable link between their daily job

responsibilities and the metric they are going to be measured against, they lose interest and feel unable to control their own destiny” (p. 132).

The aspect of a poor retention rate affecting a profession was recognized in Sulis et al.’s (2022) article, which looked at the poor retention rate among teachers in Austria and the United Kingdom. The leading causes of attrition among teachers are “excessive workload, high levels of stress, and mismatched expectations” (Sulis et al., 2022, p. 155). The authors indicated that this attrition typically what happens within the first five years of working as an educator. They interviewed educators about their well-being to find the reasons why educators are deciding to leave the profession. They gathered 14 participants, six from Austria and eight from the United Kingdom. The research team conducted semi structured interviews and biodata, measuring both positive and negative emotions. Sulis et al. concluded,

Six main themes emerged from the interview data in relation to the factors affecting well-being that might possibly contribute to retention or attrition in foreign language ECTs in the United Kingdom and Austria. These include perfectionism, self-efficacy, work–life spillover, self-regulation, relationships within the school, and foreign language teacher status. (p. 160)

Similarly, Vicente et al. (2025) analyzed the causes of teacher attrition, recognizing that educators, although highly valuable, are not remaining in the profession for long. Vicente et al. explained, “Studies to date indicate that factors leading to educator turnover in early childhood education centers include economic factors, such as low salaries, benefits, and dissatisfaction with wages” (p. 1468). The authors recognized that educators who hold college degrees are more likely to leave the profession for higher paying jobs. This finding was supported by a previous study by Mayeux (2023), who recognized that many interpreters left the profession due to a lack

of compensation or low wages. When an employee is underpaid and uncompensated, it is the biggest driving factor for the worker's resignation from the field. This is a driving factor within my research as well and is connected through the common factor among these professions. Lack of appropriate pay and recognition leads to a lower retention rate within a workplace. Vicente et al. recognized through their study that multiple driving factors cause turnover in educators, which include, inadequate pay and benefits, high caseloads and paperwork, lack of recognition, "weak onboarding and training practices," and "limited voice and participation in organizational changes" (p. 1472).

### **Improving the Retention Rate**

Understanding the causes of a poor retention rate in a profession is a crucial first step in improving these numbers. In this section, I review literature related to enhance retention rates within a profession. While I focus on improving the retention rate in interpreting, I also explore literature that illustrates how to boost retention rates in any profession.

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Commission (n.d.) discussed ways to improve the retention rate. This article includes seven tips:

1. Demonstrate leadership commitment and accountability.
2. Hire and train the right people.
3. Establish Special Emphasis Programs and collaborate with affinity groups.
4. Include the EEO director in strategic planning.
5. Review agency EEO and personnel data.
6. Improve advancement opportunities.
7. Conduct employee opinion (climate) surveys and 360 degree evaluations. (U.S. EEO Commission, n.d., para. 7–8)

An emphasis within any profession is that an agency must hire and train the right people. When an employer is looking to hire a new employee, they must look at credentials, training, and certifications, especially when looking to hire a professional, like an interpreter. The agency must investigate the skill set and the training background of the new hire, along with the varying certifications they may hold, such as Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment, National Interpreter Certification, or Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) certification. The U.S. EEO Commission (n.d.) stated, “It also is vital for agencies to recognize the value of having supervisors and managers with sufficient knowledge, skills and attitude to establish a model EEO workplace” (para. 3). Improving the retention rate in a job field takes not only educators, who are training the next generation of workers, but also managers and supervisors.

Other ways to improve retention rates in the interpreting field include sharing resources with students, such as Millwood’s (2022) blog post discussing tips on staying motivated as an ASL interpreter. Millwood explored various resources that can help prevent a slump in interpreting, such as reflecting on motivations, which means remembering why one became an interpreter in the first place. Millwood found, “For many sign language interpreters, their inspiration comes from helping those in the deaf community gain accessibility to goods and services, connect with those in the hearing world, and carry out business successfully and securely” (para. 4). This seems to be the biggest motivator for most interpreters. The author also highlighted that many interpreters would benefit from joining a community that is outside of the Deaf community. This will allow for networking and sharing like-minded stories. The author also recommended volunteering with other interpreters to give back to the community. Millwood explained that it is important to put one’s professional life into perspective. This means thinking about how to realign a lifestyle to better one’s professional life. Lastly, the author emphasized

that interpreters should reward themselves, whether that means getting a sweet treat, playing a favorite video game, or reading a favorite book. It is important for individuals to remember what they love to do, so they can unwind and reward themselves for it (Millwood, 2022).

Another blog that would be a wonderful resource for both employers and students is by Omose (2023), who discussed the best practices for hiring inclusively and tips for retaining employees. When hiring an ASL interpreter, employers should be looking for those who can provide high-quality ASL interpretations. When an organization hires an ASL interpreter, they are utilizing best practices for equity, which increases the retention rate at any company. This shows the employee that their employer has an incentive to provide the most equitable working environment for them. Omose stated,

Understanding the role of ASL interpreters, choosing qualified interpreters, providing adequate training and support, being proactive in providing accommodations, and cultivating an inclusive culture are all ways that organizations can effectively provide communication access and demonstrate their commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. (para. 27)

Sorn et al. (2023) examined the hospitality industry and how management should continuously adapt to maintain upward trends in retention rates. Sorn et al. stated, “People quit their jobs for a variety of reasons, including job stress, job satisfaction, job security, work environment, motivation, wages, and rewards” (p. 2). They later delved deeper into the reasons why some of these reasons negatively impact employee retention within the hospitality industry. Compensation is a big pressing point that causes a low retention rate. Compensation includes benefits, retirement plans, base pay, and additional opportunities. When an employee is feeling

underpaid or unappreciated, it tends to cause resentment in the workplace. This was discussed in Lencioni's (2023) work as well.

Sorn et al. (2024) then provided insight into how retention rates can be raised or stabilized:

Therefore, strategies to improve employee retention in call centers could focus on

- 1) Offering competitive compensation packages;
- 2) Providing opportunities for career growth and development;
- 3) Ensuring a positive work environment with high levels of job satisfaction;
- 4) Supporting employees' work-life balance needs;
- 5) Providing effective management support.

Overall, by addressing these key factors through targeted interventions or policies aimed at improving working conditions within the organization can help reduce turnover rates among call center agents. (pp. 4-5)

This theme is present across various careers. Inadequate compensation appears to be the primary factor contributing to poor retention rates in the workforce, including nurses, teachers, and interpreters. The most effective way to ensure employees feel valued is by providing adequate compensation and fostering a positive work environment.

The work of Verlander and Evans (2007) provided insight into how to improve the retention rate within a clinical laboratory. The authors, who work in the field, observed that there are very few qualified clinical laboratory technicians. Verlander and Evans discussed the reasons for low retention rates:

As other authors have pointed out and as our work with clinical laboratories has shown, if laboratory management ignores the retention/turnover issue, they may experience a host of problems, including the following:

- Difficulty in maintaining high-quality professional standards
- Rising costs of recruiting and hiring replacement staff
- People with skills and knowledge leaving to work in other, non-technical areas such as information technology
- Putting intellectual capital at risk
- Decreased employee satisfaction
- Reduced quality, resulting in reporting errors
- Disruption of ongoing customer relationships
- Rising payroll costs due to needed overtime expenses to fill the employment gap. (p. 2)

Verlander and Evans (2007) continued to discuss, using their expertise, the ways that a business can improve the retention rate. These tips include fostering the relationship with colleagues, defining the institution, paying attention to performance management, specifying job standards, and creating a positive climate (Verlander & Evans, 2007). These recommendations mirror those by Lencioni (2007), showing that it is important to develop a relationship between the coworker and supervisor. Creating a positive climate will results in more productive employees (Verlander & Evans, 2007).

### **The Deaf Community's Perspective on Interpreting**

As the ASL–English interpreting field continues to grow and shrink, researchers and practitioners must keep gaining insight from the Deaf community. I consistently hear from Deaf

consumers, “Many interpreters that I meet only care about showing up and getting paid; they don’t seem to really care about the Deaf community” (A. Carlson, personal communication, 2025). It seems that the Deaf community is lacking interpreters with a “Deaf heart.” During my time at California State University, Northridge, one lesson was repeatedly drilled into us: the Deaf community would rather have an interpreter with mediocre skills but a stellar attitude than a highly skilled interpreter with an abysmal attitude.

This sentiment was emphasized in Kushalnagar’s (2019) article, *Sociocognition Issues Affecting the Working Relationship Between the Deaf Professional and the Interpreter*. The author discussed the rise of Deaf individuals holding a higher education degree (bachelor’s or higher). Due to this, the Deaf community is holding interpreters to higher standards. However, the Deaf community is also willing to provide feedback to the interpreter, to ensure Deaf consumers’ needs are met. Kushalnagar stated, “As this feedback is shared, some interpreters may perceive it as appropriate, while this may be simultaneously perceived as offensive, unsupportive, and condescending by other interpreters” (p. 3). Some interpreters view feedback as something that is not acceptable to receive from a consumer, the Deaf client; however, an interpreter’s direct duty is to support and be understanding of the consumer’s preferences and open to any feedback they have to offer. Kushalnagar emphasized that an interpersonal relationship is developed through the Deaf consumer and the interpreter. This relationship is developed through the interpreter being open and willing to accept feedback and adjust their interpreting, sign choice, or behaviors to adjust to the needs of the Deaf consumer.

ITP students must understand that having interpersonal skills, also known as “soft skills,” is just as important as their interpreting skills, whether signed or receptive. ITP students should

understand that Deaf consumers are independent, educated, and fully capable adults whose feedback should be treated with respect.

This sentiment is supported by Napier (2002), who discussed the debate between capital D “Deaf” and lowercase d “deaf” and how these terms are categorized throughout the community. Hearing individuals entering the Deaf community may find it difficult and frustrating that a dependency lingers within the community. Napier stated, “One can still argue that there is a ‘fractious interdependence’ (Napier 2001) between Deaf and hearing people involved in the Deaf community, especially in relation to sign language interpreters” (p. 142). Napier continued to describe that these hearing individuals are integrated, or welcomed, into the Deaf community in three stages: “those who know nothing about the Deaf community and its culture, those who know something but not a lot (e.g., beginner sign language students), and those who are part of the Deaf community (e.g., interpreters)” (p. 145). This signifies and supports the necessity to understand that hearing people who are entering the Deaf community are guests (with the exception of children of a Deaf adult). Interpreters and students must be capable of bringing a level of advocacy, which can be used to bridge the communication and cultural barriers in the interpreting profession.

This need for cultural understanding is highlighted on the National Deaf Center’s (2026) webpage, *Interpreting*. The webpage describes various resources, types of interpreting, and the skills required of a working interpreter. These skills are stated as follows:

Interpreters must:

- know how to assess the communication preferences or language level of the deaf person
- adapt their interpretation to meet these needs

- understand the meanings and intentions expressed in one language and then accurately express those meanings and intentions in the other language
- be able to retain information and manage the flow of the communication, most often in real time (simultaneously)
- understand and manage the cultural nuances of the environment
- follow professional and ethical standards set by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID). (National Deaf Center, 2026, Confidentiality & Effective Communication section, para. 1)

## **Conclusion**

In closing, I have reviewed literature that is related to increasing the retention rate in any profession, not only for the interpreting profession. I also reviewed the literature related to students' confidence levels and their ability to begin working. The review of literature clarified that poor retention rates not only affect the interpreting community but also other professions. Various strategies can be used to assist students to understand the profession they are entering. With such preparation, they are more likely to stay in the field. Interpreters must be rewarded with support and appropriate compensation. They also must be prepared to continuously work on their soft skills and adaptability, to become a more resilient worker. Preparation can thus increase the retention rate in the interpreting community.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The goal of this thesis was to discover the connections between ITP students' readiness to work upon graduation and the connection to the retention rate of interpreters continuing in the job force. The idea was to increase the retention rate in the field; ITP graduates are not entering or staying in the interpreting field.

The method I used for this research was survey based on Bergelson et al.'s (2022) and Demirci's (2024) interview approaches. Bergelson et al. (2022) provided tips and tools on how to interview and minimize the risk of interviewer bias influencing the interviewee's responses. Demirci (2024) also noted the importance of avoiding social desirability bias in interviewee responses, when interviewees offer responses they think the interviewer wants to hear. Demirci observed that insiders in a field may be able to increase trust among interviewees and enable richer conversations.

I structured the survey questions to be as open-ended as possible. I also acknowledged my existing bias about the topic in order to better focus on the responses (Demirci, 2024). I wanted the data collection and analysis to be accurate in terms of what the participants meant rather than what I expected.

#### **Data Collection Protocol**

The data collection protocol that I utilized for my research was composed of two surveys, one for ITP students and one for resigned interpreters (see Appendices A and B, respectively). The instrument was strategically structured to request specific information and collect precise data based on the group from which I was seeking information.

#### **Population**

The population included the following:

- Students in their second-to-last and final semester of their ITP represented a potential population of approximately 47 students to complete surveys; the final sample was 15 current ITP students.
- Previous graduates of an ITP who are now working interpreters were the second group. This also included former ITP students who resigned from their program but continued to interpret professionally. The group was expected to be approximately 15 interpreters to complete questionnaires; the final sample was 4 recently graduated ITP students.
- Former interpreters who have left the field of interpreting were the third group. The sample was eight.

This population provided me with approximately 65 people who were provided a survey. The final sample was 27.

### **Data Analysis Protocol**

The data collected through the surveys were analyzed through qualitative methods. I looked for patterns and signs of unpreparedness or low confidence in the ITP students in their second-to-last semester. I looked for improvements or stagnation when seeing how their confidence level increased or stayed the same by the last semester of their ITP.

Among the interpreter group who completed surveys, I analyzed these data sets with a more quantitative lens, such as differences in the various graduation-to-work ratios among them. I also looked for patterns in their programs. These patterns could include mentoring that was offered (if any), horror story to success story balance in the program, and if their graduating class had anyone who withdrew from the program prior to graduation.

Lastly, I analyzed the qualitative data collected from former interpreters, now resigned. Utilizing their responses to my survey, I looked for themes from these responses might offer some insights into what caused them to withdraw from their career, including horizontal violence, vicarious trauma, under compensation, being overworked, and being overwhelmed.

## **Chapter 4: Results and Discussion**

In total, I had 19 respondents to my survey of ITP students (see Appendix A), four of whom graduated from their ITP but did not become interpreters. There were a total of eight respondents to my survey of resigned/retired interpreters (see Appendix B). All respondents completed the survey and provided answers to each question, even if it was marked as “N/A.” In total, 27 individuals were included in this data set, which is broken down below.

### **Demographics and Characteristics of Participants**

Demographic questions were asked of all respondents, such as age, ethnicity, gender, and their graduation year. This was done to get a better understanding of what demographics of people are within the ITP courses, as well as the demographics of people leaving the interpreting field. Demographics are presented by each sample group.

Of the 15 ITP students, 80% were women, 13% were men, and 7% were AFAB/gender neutral. Of the four graduated ITP students, 50% were women, 25% were men, and 25% had no response to the demographic question on gender.

### ***Demographics and Characteristics of ITP Students***

The ethnicity question was a short-answer response, which allowed respondents to identify themselves with whatever best fit them. Of the 15 students, six were Caucasian, one was African-American, four were Hispanic or Latino, and four were interracial. Individuals self-identified in the interracial category included White/Asian, interracial (Mexican/Filipino/White), Black/Puerto Rican, and White/Hispanic.

### ***Expected Graduation Year***

This population was also surveyed on their expected graduation year. The majority expected to graduate in 2026. Along with a few who were graduating in 2027. There were 10

who reported to graduate in 2026, four who graduate in 2027, and one who stated that they were going to graduate in 2028.

### ***Demographics and Characteristics of Graduated ITP Students***

All of the graduated ITP students were in the 25–34 age range. The survey question on ethnicity was open-ended so that respondents could input an ethnicity that they felt best fit them. The interracial response included an individual who self-identified as White/Hispanic. One individual did not respond to this question. All four of the previous ITP students graduated in 2020.

### ***Demographics and Characteristics of Resigned/Retired Interpreters***

Of the eight total resigned/retired interpreters, there were four who were aged 26-35, one was aged 36-45, two were aged 46-55, and one was aged 56-65. These individuals were also surveyed on their ethnicity, offering the responses to be open-ended so respondents could identify in their own words what best fit their identity. Of the eight who responded, four were Caucasian, one was Filipino, one was Hispanic/Latino, one was interracial, and one had no response to the question.

The gender for this group included six who were female, one who was male, and one had no response to the question.

Those who attended an ITP in this group were asked to state what their graduation year was. Ranging from 1999 to 2020 there was one who graduated in 1999, one who graduated in 2010, one who graduated in 2011, one who graduated in 2013, one who graduated in 2017, and two who graduated in 2020. One respondent had no response to this question.

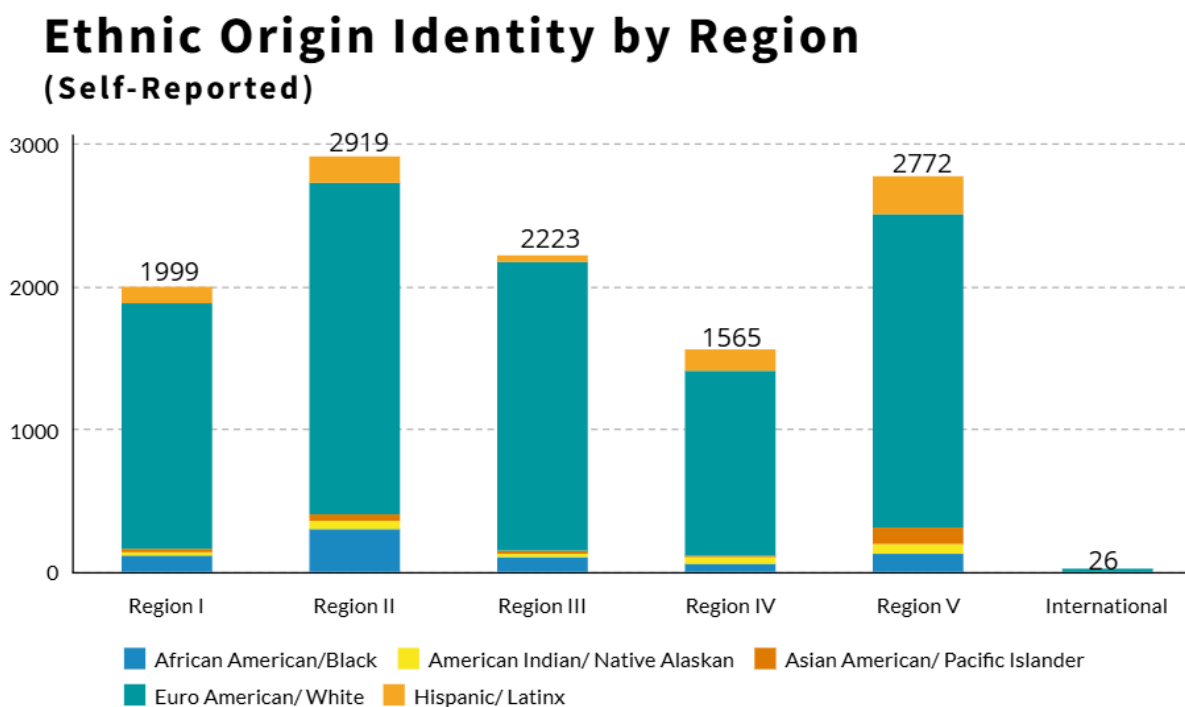
## **Demographics Discussion**

Although I had a smaller population to look at, the respondents who gave self-reported demographics aligned with the RID (2021) Fiscal Year 2021 report. Those within my research population for all sections, ITP students, graduated ITP students, and retired/resigned interpreters, totaled 27 respondents. Of that 27, 16 were Caucasian (59%), six were Hispanic (22%), one was African American (3%), one was Filipino (3%), six were interracial (22%), and one had no response (3%).

The RID (2021) annual report for Region V includes Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington. I am only looking at this region because this was the only region to which my survey was sent out. From the RID report, in Region V, 2,772 individuals self-reported their ethnicity to RID. Of these, according to RID, 267 were Hispanic/Latinx (9%), 2,198 were European American/White (79%), 111 were Asian American/Pacific Islander (4%), 67 were American Indian/Native Alaskan (2%), and 129 were African American/Black (4%). The chart from the study (see Figure 1) shows results from all five regions.

**Figure 1**

*2021 RID Report Ethnic Origin Identity by Region (Self-Reported)*



*Note.* RID = Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf. Reprinted from *RID FY2021 Annual Report, July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021*, by RID, 2021, p. 6

(<https://create.piktochart.com/output/c384585cf7d5-final-ar-fy2021>).

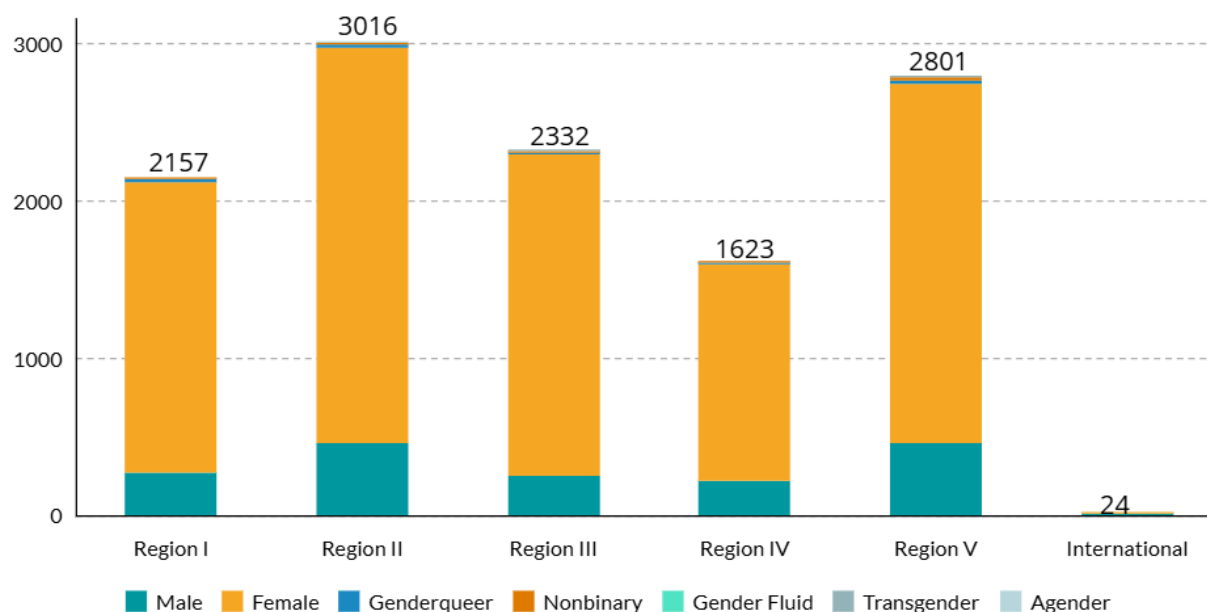
It is apparent from Figure 1 that the interpreting field is majority White. Although my population was small and cannot accurately reflect the generalized population, my population's ethnic demographics somewhat match those of the RID (2021) report, with the only difference being that my population had a total Caucasian response of 59%, whereas RID had 79%, Hispanic response of 22%, whereas RID had 9% for their population. This is not surprising though, considering that I have a significantly smaller population that I am looking at compared to over 2,000.

Looking at gender, as self-reported by my population ( $N = 27$ ), 20 reported as women (74%), six reported as men (22%), one reported to be “assigned female at birth” (3%), and two had no responses. Again, I wanted to see how this small population compared to the greater population of Region V from the RID (2021) report. With a total population of 2,801, once again self-reported, 2,286 were women (81%), 461 were men (16%), six were transgender (0.02%), 16 were nonbinary (0.05%), and 23 were genderqueer (0.08%).

Due to the RID (2021) report having a larger population, they also had more diversity in their responses as opposed to mine. These numbers, however, confirm that interpreting is a predominantly female profession, with 81% of its population being women in Region V (see Figure 2), and 74% of my study population being women.

**Figure 2***2021 RID Report Gender by Region (Self-Reported)*

## Gender (Body/ Identity/ Expression) by Region Self-Reported



*Note.* RID = Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf. Reprinted from *RID FY2021 Annual Report*, July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021, by RID, 2021, p. 6

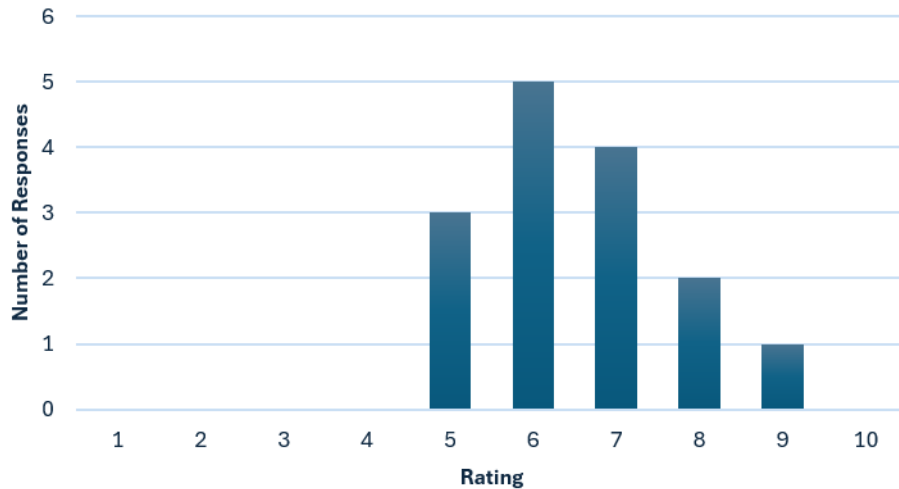
(<https://create.piktochart.com/output/c384585cf7d5-final-ar-fy2021>).

## ITP Student Confidence Results

Survey responses for ITP students related to their confidence are presented in Figures 3–7. They were asked what their confidence level was entering the workforce on a scale of 1–10. They self-identified their score (see Figure 3). Scores ranged from 5–9, indicating some confidence.

**Figure 1**

*ITP Student Responses: “On a Scale of 1–10, How Confident Are You to Enter the Workforce?”*

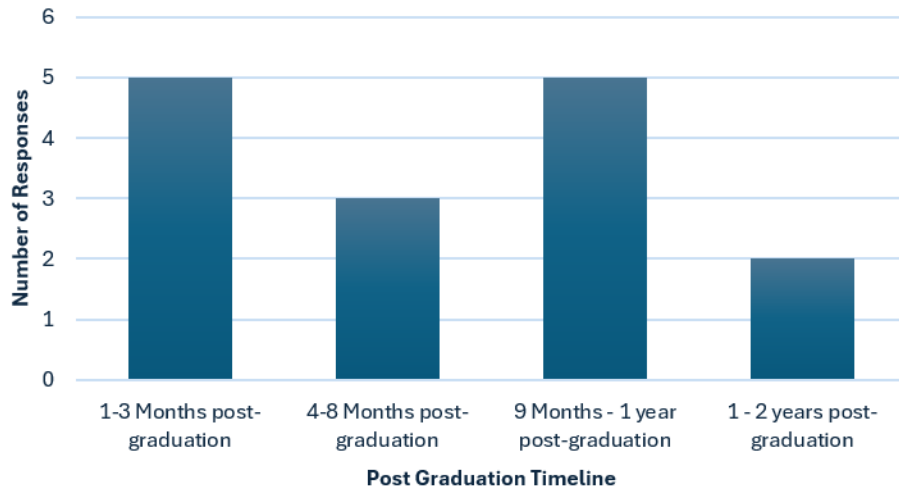


*Note.*  $N = 15$  interpreter training program (ITP) students. The y-axis represents number of students giving each rating (x-axis) from 1–10.

Students then were asked to identify when they would be able to work postgraduation. Their responses were collected and categorized (see Figure 4). Responses ranged from 1–3 months to 1–2 years after graduation. Five students identified that they were ready and going to work 1–3 months postgraduation, whereas ten students identified themselves to be ready to work 4 months to 2 years postgraduation.

**Figure 2**

*ITP Student Responses: “How Long After Graduation Would You Be Ready to Work?”*

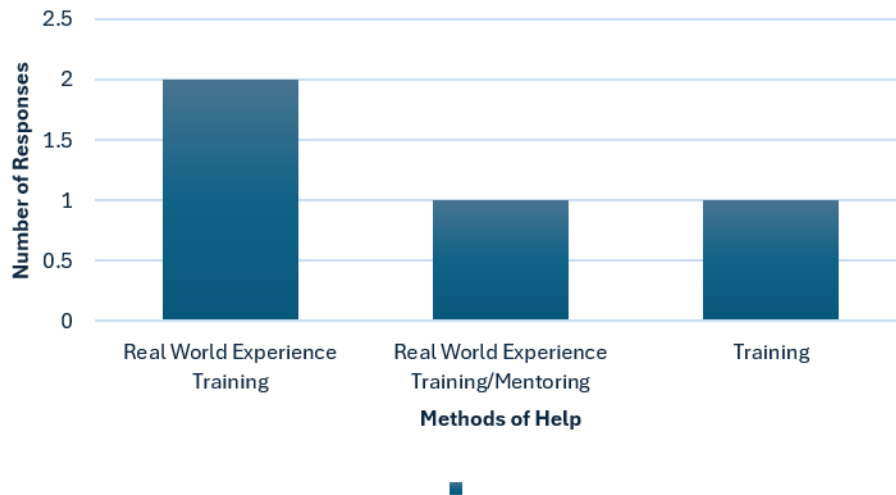


*Note.*  $N = 15$  interpreter training program (ITP) students.

When the students were asked if they were prepared adequately to work, 14 students responded yes, and one said no. However, when asked, “If no, what would have made you feel more prepared?” four students responded to provide their input, including three who had answered “yes” to the previous question (see Figure 5). Responses all included training. Other recommendations were experience and mentoring.

**Figure 3**

*ITP Student Responses: “If No, What Would Help?”*

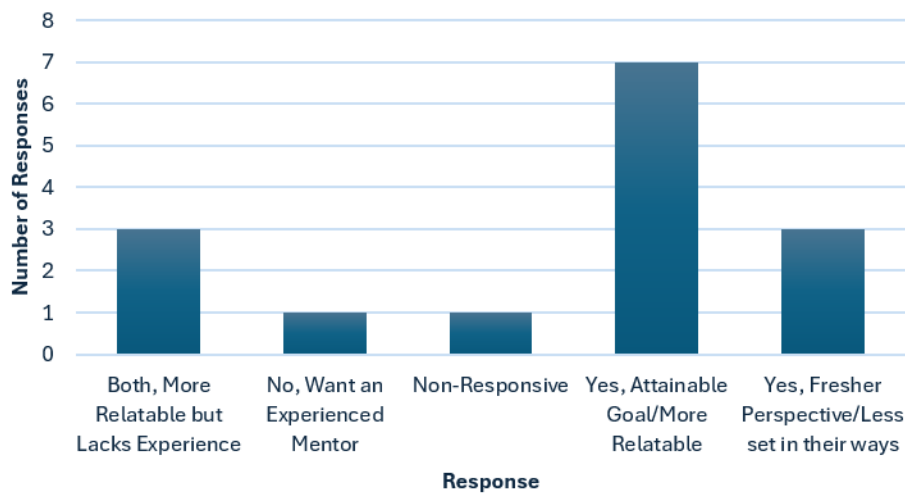


*Note.*  $N = 15$  interpreter training program (ITP) students. Students were asked if they were prepared adequately to work, and if not, what would help them feel more prepared.

ITP students were asked if having a mentor closer to them in experience level (meaning 5 years or less of experience) would have been beneficial for them. 10 respondents stated yes, it would be beneficial to have someone closer in level to them. Three respondents said that it would be beneficial, but they lacked experience. One was nonresponsive, and one expressed that it would not be beneficial at all and that they want a more experienced mentor (see Figure 6).

**Figure 4**

*ITP Student Responses: “Yes/No, Would You Prefer a Mentor Closer to Your Experience Level (5 Years or Less)?”*

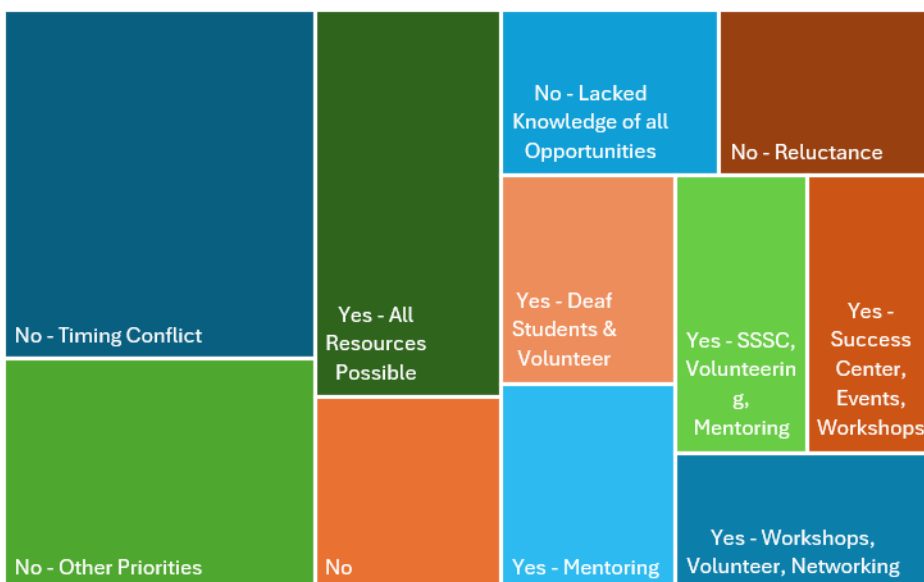


*Note.*  $N = 15$  interpreter training program (ITP) students.

To assess their confidence levels when graduating and then entering the workforce, I asked whether they took advantage of all of the growth opportunities provided to them during their program. Five said no, and six said yes; four were non-responsive. See Figure 7 for the responses.

**Figure 5**

*ITP Student Responses: “Did You Take Advantage of All Growth Opportunities Provided?”*



*Note.*  $N = 15$  interpreter training program (ITP) students.

### ITP Students' Confidence Levels Discussion

ITP students in this study self-reported their readiness to begin working in the field upon graduation. When the 15 students in this population were asked: “On a scale of 1–10, how confident are you to enter the workforce upon graduation?” three reported that they were a 5, five reported that they were a 6, four reported that they were a 7, two reported that they were an 8, and one stated that they were a 9. The median score was 6 and the mean was 6.53. This shows that the majority of students were teetering between being ready and not ready to work. They may be teetering on going into the interpreting field and choosing a different career path altogether due to uncertainty in their confidence and readiness.

Although I did not ask students their reasoning behind why it would take a specific amount of time after graduation to feel ready to work (whether it was 1 month or 3 years),

drawing from my own experience, I did not begin working until 2 years after graduation, which was due to going to school to obtain my bachelor's degree. I wanted to focus on that and improve my skills through deliberate practice before becoming an interpreter.

Another factor to take into account is when the students were asked if they felt ready to work upon graduation, one had no response, nine stated yes, and five answered no or a response along the lines of what I call "yes, but." For example, they answered something like, "Yes, I can work, but not alone," "but not in high-risk situations," or "but not without doing an internship first." Providing conditions on their readiness equated to a no response.

### **ITP Students' Perspective on Improving Readiness to Work**

As stated previously, when asked if they had been adequately prepared to work as an interpreter, 14 students stated yes, and one stated no. Although the next question was phrased, "If no, how could they be improved?" four students provided their input. These suggestions were real-world experience training, real-world experience training with mentoring, and training. Training was the biggest stress point among this population. Training could mean a plethora of things to different people. From my own experience working with ITP students, training could include more deliberate practice with real-life mock scenarios (which include Deaf individuals in the classroom) and more experience with various settings, such as medical, presentations, K-12, postsecondary, job interviews, and warehouse. Training could mean more hours of hands-up interpreting or volunteer hours of interpreting to continue developing the skills that are still brand new to many of them at this stage.

For educators of ITP students, this finding could indicate that a check-in now and then with the students would be beneficial, whether in the form of an anonymous survey or just asking the class for their opinion. This way, instructors can gauge their students' satisfaction with

the development of their skills and gain their insight as to what could be done to further their skills and feel more confident about entering the workforce. This could be done through formative feedback. The Ohio State University Teaching and Learning Resource Center (n.d.) wrote,

Collected during the term, it [formative feedback] offers real-time insight into their experience of your course and teaching. You can receive targeted, actionable suggestions about what is helping or hindering learning for all students—not just the vocal ones—and adapt your course as needed. (para. 10)

This practice allows students to provide their feedback midsemester to see what is effective for them and what could be added or improved.

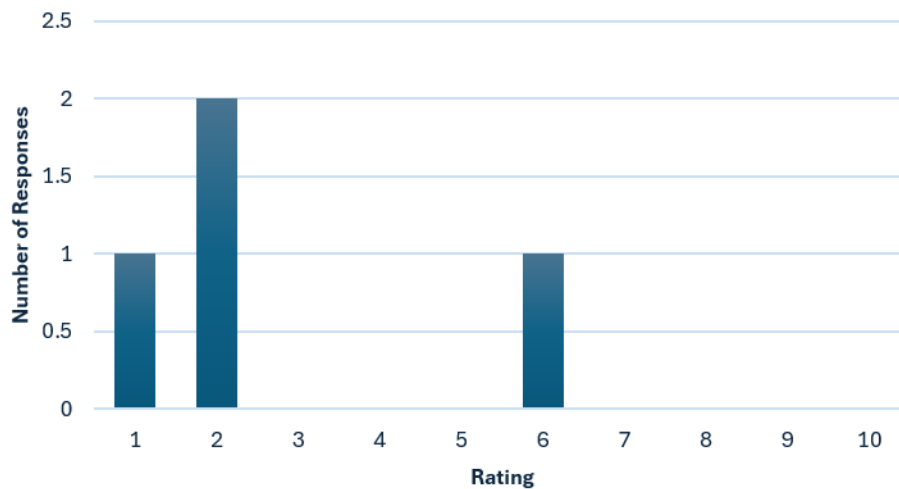
### **Graduated ITP Student Confidence Results**

Individuals who fall into the category of graduated ITP students took the same survey as ITP students to better understand what influenced their decisions not to become interpreters after graduating from their ITP. They took this survey reflecting on their feelings in those moments as an ITP student approaching graduation. All of these respondents graduated in 2020. Responses related to confidence are presented in Figures 8–14.

The four respondents were questioned about their confidence levels when they were approaching graduation (See Figure 8). Two graduated ITP students self-rated 2, one self-rated 1, and one self-rated 6.

**Figure 6**

*Graduated ITP Student Responses: “On a Scale of 1–10, How Confident Are You to Enter the Workforce?”*

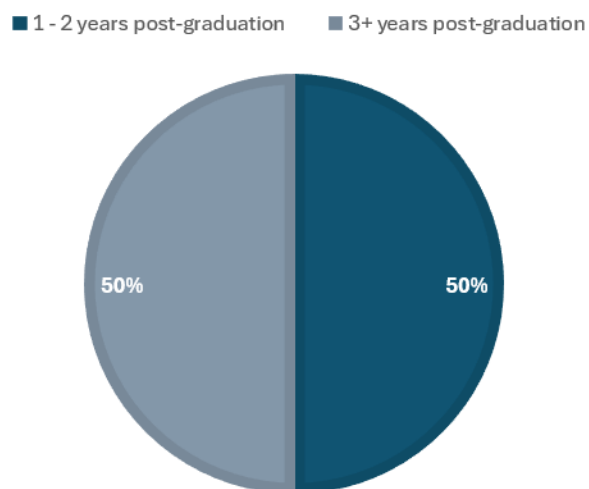


*Note.*  $N = 4$  graduated interpreter training program (ITP) students. The y-axis represents number of students giving each rating from 1–10.

Graduated ITP students were asked when they would be ready to work after graduation. Unlike the current ITP students, the graduated students expressed being ready over a year after graduation (see Figure 9).

**Figure 7**

*Graduated ITP Student Responses: “When Will You Be Ready for Work?”*

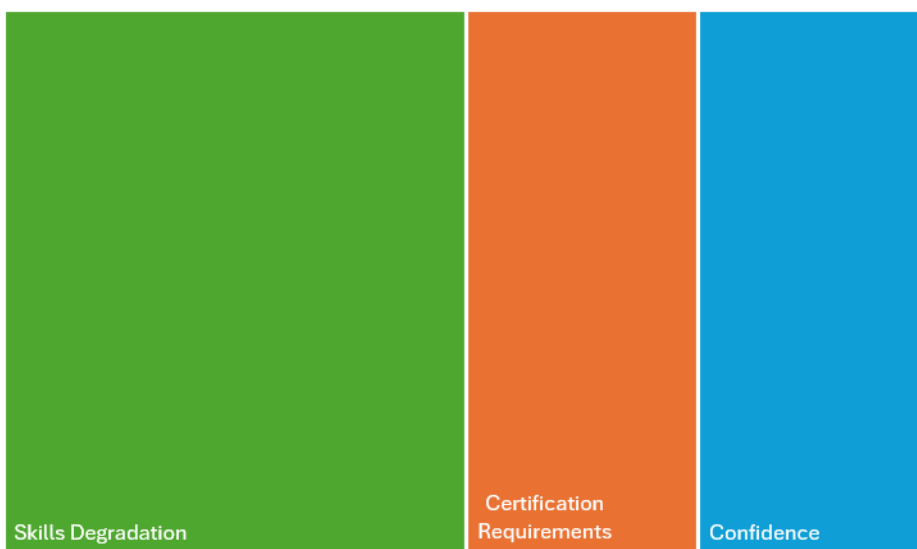


*Note.*  $N = 4$  graduated interpreter training program (ITP) students.

Respondents were asked to give the reason why if they expected not to be ready for 2–3 years. See Figure 10.

**Figure 8**

*Graduated ITP Student Responses: “If 2–3 Years, Why?”*

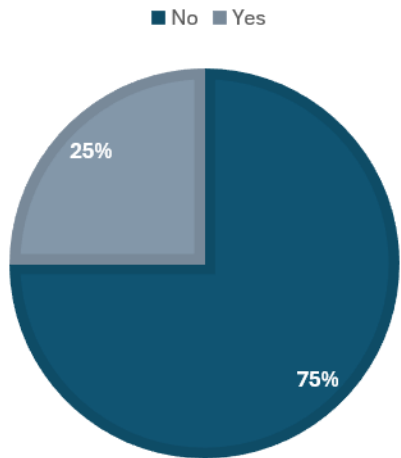


*Note.*  $N = 4$  graduated interpreter training program (ITP) students.

When asked if they had been adequately prepared for work, three of the four graduated ITP students said “no.” See Figure 11.

**Figure 9**

*Graduated ITP Student Responses: “Have You Been Adequately Prepared to Work?”*

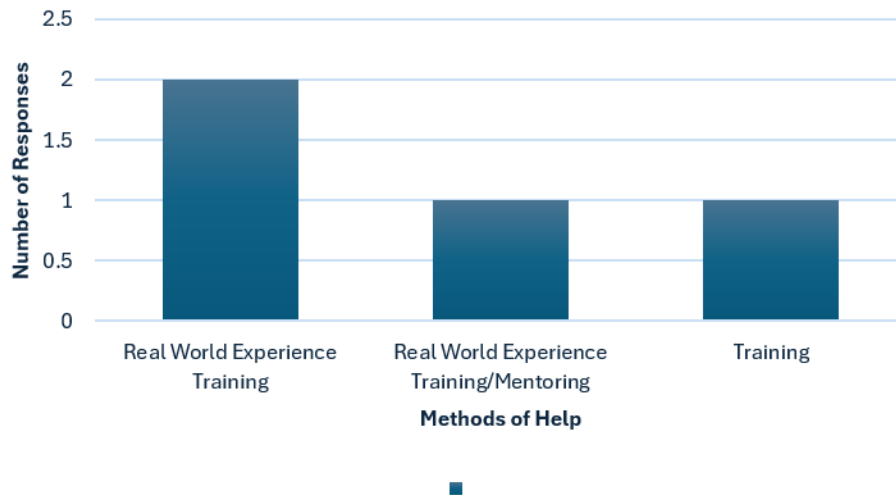


*Note.*  $N = 4$  graduated interpreter training program (ITP) students.

As a follow-up question, graduated ITP students were asked how their preparation could have been improved. Two responded, as shown in Figure 12. Like current ITP students, they indicated experience, training, and mentoring.

**Figure 10**

*Graduated ITP Student Responses: “If No, How Could That Have Been Improved?”*

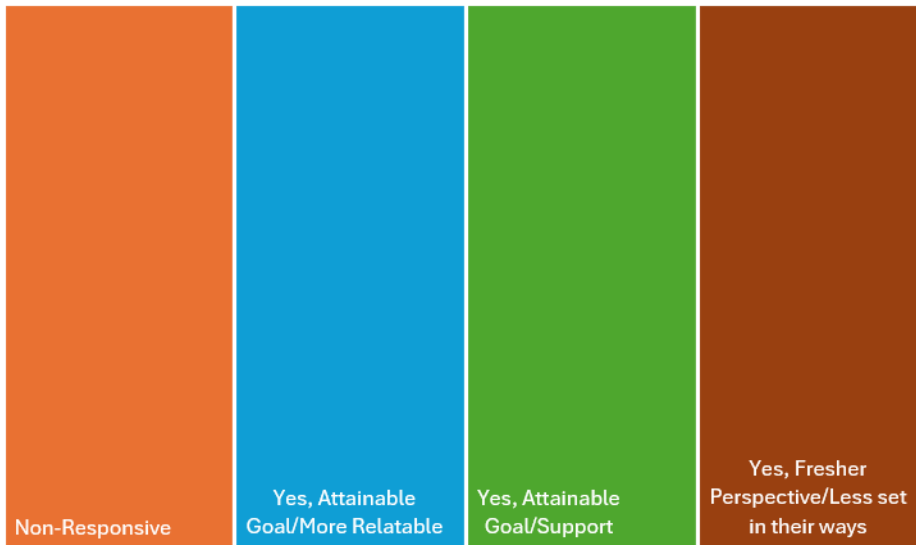


*Note.*  $N = 4$  graduated interpreter training program (ITP) students. Students were asked if they were prepared adequately to work, and if not, what would help them feel more prepared.

Just as with those in the ITP student population, the survey inquired if graduated ITP students believed that having a mentor closer in experience level would have been beneficial for them. This would be a mentor with 5 years or less of experience in the profession. Three individuals stated yes, and one did not respond to the question (see Figure 13).

**Figure 11**

*Graduated ITP Student Responses: “Yes/No, Would You Prefer a Mentor Closer to Your Experience Level (5 Years or Less)?”*



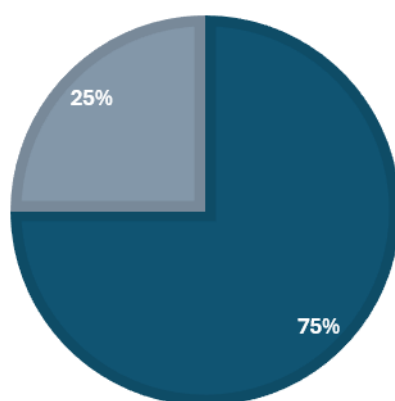
*Note.*  $N = 4$  graduated interpreter training program (ITP) students.

Finally, graduated ITP students were asked whether or not they took advantage of all growth opportunities that were provided in their program (see Figure 14). All four respondents stated that they did take advantage of all growth opportunities.

**Figure 12**

*Graduated ITP Student Responses: “Did You Take Advantage of All Growth Opportunities Provided?”*

■ Yes - All Resources Possible   ■ Yes - Workshops, Volunteer, Networking, Internships



*Note.*  $N = 4$  graduated interpreter training program (ITP) students.

### **Graduated ITP Students' Confidence Levels Discussion**

All four of the graduated ITP students who answered the survey graduated in 2020, like me. This was a large factor for me because it was during the COVID-19 pandemic, and many places were not hiring new interpreters, or the only way to work was from home, which could be daunting for a new interpreter to try to navigate.

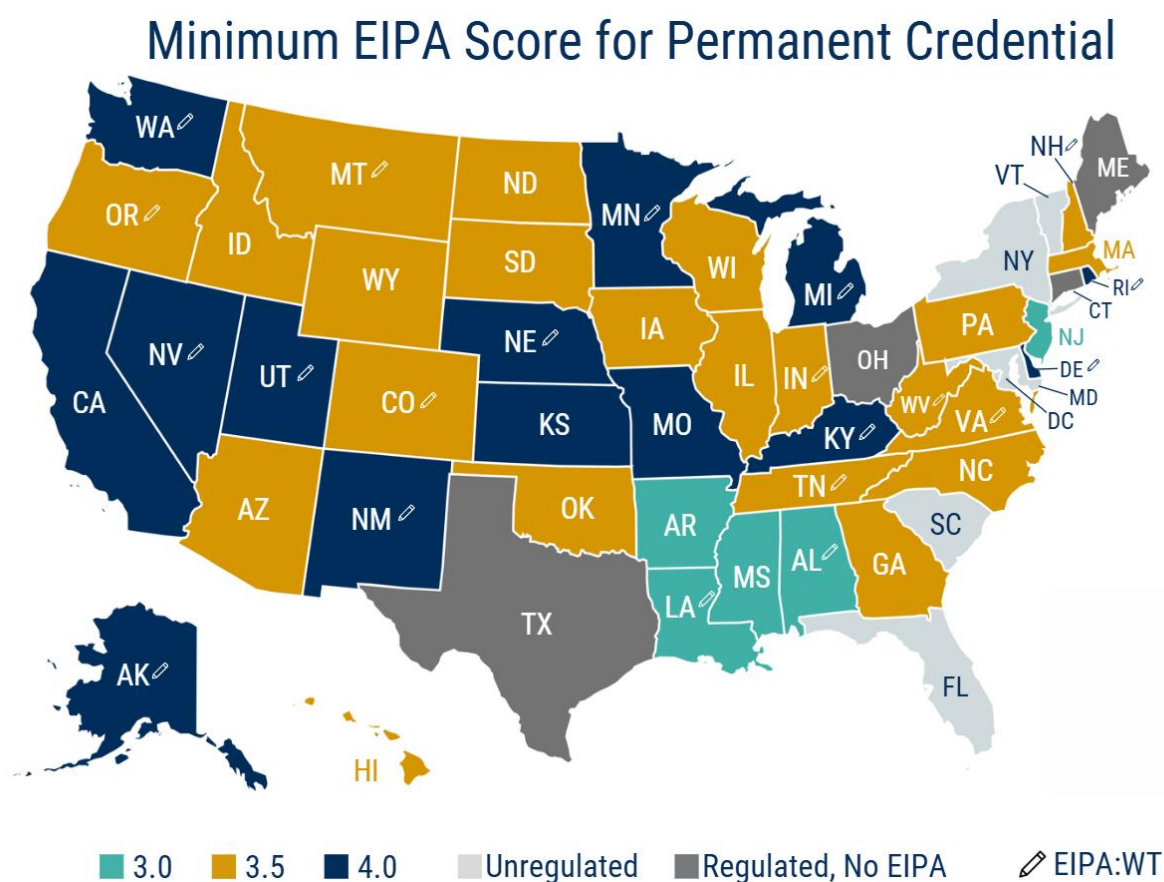
When this population was asked what their confidence level on a scale of 1–10 was as they approached graduation, one reported themselves to be a 1, two reported that they were a 2, and one reported that they were a 6. The median was 2 and the mean was 2.75. These responses do not indicate high confidence.

Among these four individuals, their self-reported reasoning for not continuing to become an interpreter included certification requirements, skill degradation, and lack of confidence.

Many states require interpreters to have certification requirements to work as interpreters in specific fields. For example, to work in a K-12 setting, the requirement for ASL interpreters is a score of 3.0–4.0 on the Educational Interpreters Performance Assessment. The requirement differs from state to state; the National Association of Interpreters in Education (2023) website provides a figure that shows all state requirements to work in the K-12 setting (see Figure 15).

**Figure 15**

*National Association of Interpreters in Education 2023 Minimum EIPA Requirement by State*



*Note.* EIPA = Educational Interpreters Performance Assessment, EIPA:WT = Written EIPA exam.

Reprinted from *State Requirements for Educational Interpreters*, by National Association of Interpreters in Education, 2023 (<https://naiedu.org/state-standards/>).

Many graduates cannot get a job within the K-12 setting until they pass with a 4.0 or higher, including California graduates, where most of my survey respondents are from. For many students, that score is not obtainable right after graduation. If K-12 is an area they feel passionate about going into, they would have to work in another area before being able to go into the field of K-12. Some people might not be willing to delay and may choose a different career path instead.

For the two survey respondents who stated that they did not continue to become an interpreter because of skill degradation, that might have been due to the pandemic and the delay in beginning to work until the restrictions were lifted. This might have taken much longer than anticipated and could have caused skill degradation. One respondent stated that they did not become an interpreter after graduation due to a lack of confidence. This was similar to my situation as well. I wanted to focus on obtaining my bachelor's degree, but I also did not want to become an interpreter because I did not feel ready or confident enough.

### **Graduated ITP Students' Perspectives on Improving Confidence Levels**

When the graduated ITP students were asked if they were adequately prepared to work, three self-reported no and one responded yes. When asked how they could have been better prepared to become a working interpreter, two respondents had no response to this question, and two reported that having real-world practice would have benefited them. Additionally, one of those two expressed that having more direct practice to be able to help pass certification exams would have been beneficial. The other respondent stated that having more mentoring would have benefited them.

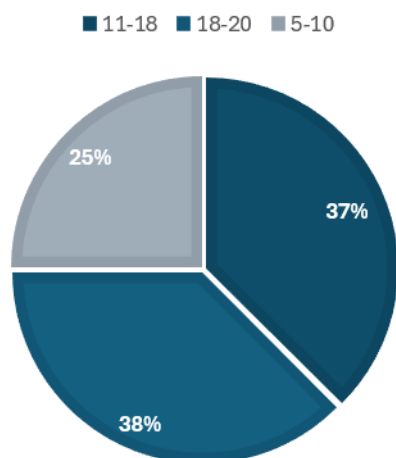
This mirrors how the current ITP interpreters believe that they could have been better prepared for the workforce with more real-world practice, experience, training, and mentoring. Implementing formative feedback among ITP student educators would benefit the students to be able to voice their concerns. Instructors could ask how confident students are about entering the workforce soon and what additional support they would need before graduating from their ITP.

### **Resigned/Retired Interpreters Reason for Leaving and Confidence Results**

Former interpreters were asked a variety of questions about when they left and why they left. This survey also asked them for their opinions on how to better prepare future interpreters to stay in the field of interpreting. One respondent did not graduate from an ITP, but they continued to interpret and left the field later on. Individuals in this section were also asked to identify how many people were in their graduating class, and of that number, how many went on to interpret professionally (see Figures 16 and 17). ITP cohorts ranged from 5–20; the number who were working interpreters ranged from 0–7.

**Figure 16**

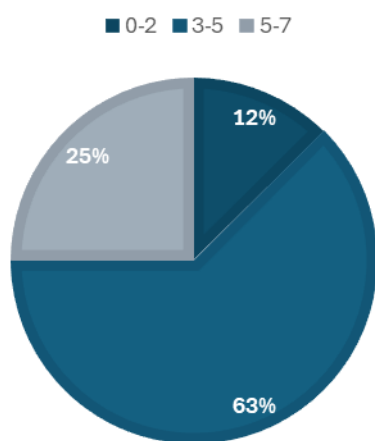
*Resigned/Retired Interpreter Responses: “How Many Students Were in Your ITP Cohort?”*



*Note.*  $N = 8$  resigned/retired interpreters. ITP = interpreter training program.

**Figure 17**

*Resigned/Retired Interpreter Responses: “How Many Are Now Working Interpreters?”*



*Note.*  $N = 8$  resigned/retired interpreters.

These individuals were also asked if they were offered mentoring; 63% said no, and 37% said yes. They were then asked if they believed that being offered mentoring in an ITP would have been beneficial. Their short responses were categorized and displayed (see Figure 18).

**Figure 18**

*Resigned/Retired Interpreter Responses: “How Do You Believe that Offering Mentoring in an ITP Would Have Affected the Outcome?”*

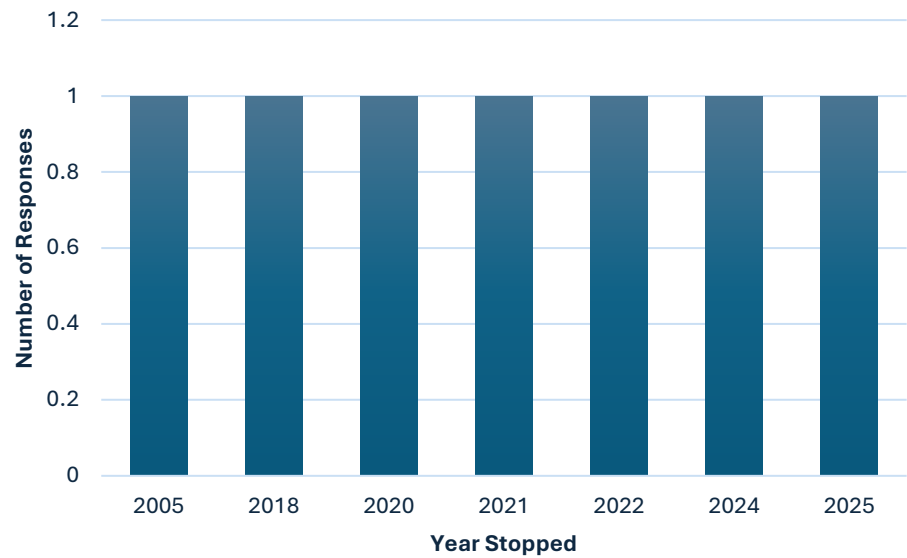


*Note.*  $N = 8$  resigned/retired interpreters. ITP = interpreter training program.

Resigned/retired interpreters who participated in this survey left the field in varied years from 2005 to 2025 (see Figure 19). This population was then asked about their reasons for leaving the field (see Figure 20).

Figure 19

*Resigned/Retired Interpreter Responses: “If You Were a Working Interpreter, When Did You Stop Working?”*



*Note.*  $N = 8$  resigned/retired interpreters.

Figure 20

*Resigned/Retired Interpreter Responses: “Why Did You Quit Interpreting?”*



*Note.*  $N = 8$  resigned/retired interpreters.

One individual expressed that they did not finish their ITP. This individual was asked what type of support they would have needed to continue their ITP. They expressed that it would have been beneficial to receive more one-on-one support, providing feedback and encouragement.

Those who resigned from the field of interpreting were asked what support they would have needed in order to continue being an interpreter. Responses are shown in Figure 22.

**Figure 21**

*Resigned/Retired Interpreter Responses: “What Support Would Have Made You Continue Working as an Interpreter?”*



*Note.*  $N = 8$  resigned/retired interpreters.

This group of individuals was then asked, in their opinion, how to change the retention rate of interpreters to long term. Long term meant keeping interpreters in the field rather than

having them leave within the first 5 years. Two respondents did not have a response, and one stated that they were unsure. Responses are shown in Figure 23.

**Figure 22**

*Resigned/Retired Interpreter Responses: “How Do You Think We Can Change the Retention Rate of Interpreters?”*

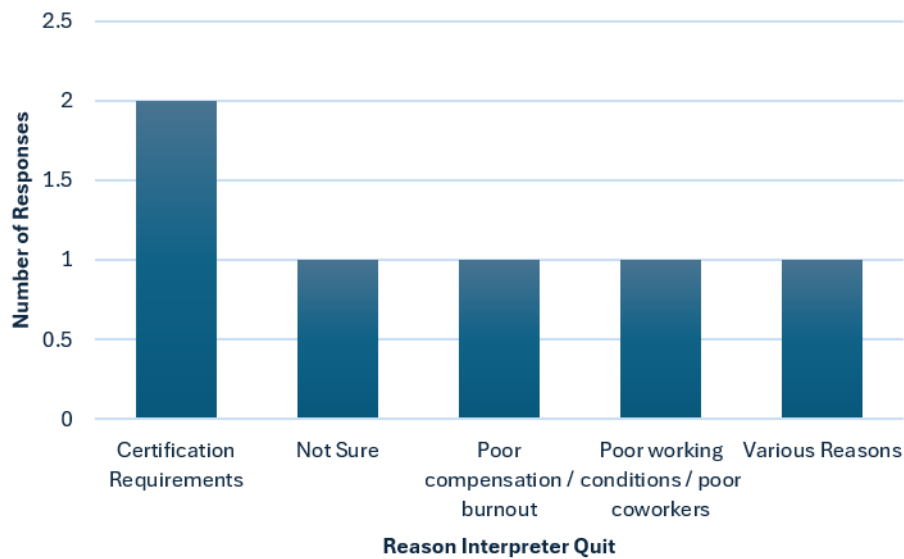


*Note.*  $N = 8$  resigned/retired interpreters.

I then asked if they knew anyone who had left the field of interpreting. Two (25%) of respondents said no, and six (75%) of respondents said yes. They were then asked to provide the reason as to why the person they knew left the field (see Figure 24).

**Figure 23**

*Resigned/Retired Interpreter Responses: “If Yes, Why?”*



*Note.*  $N = 8$  resigned/retired interpreters. Respondents had indicated they know someone who had left the field of interpreting and were asked why.

I then wanted to collect this population’s opinion on what could be done to retain interpreters in the profession. Responses are shown in Figure 25.

**Figure 24**

*Resigned/Retired Interpreter Responses: “What Could Be Done to Retain Interpreters Long Term?”*



*Note.*  $N = 8$  resigned/retired interpreters.

I was also interested in knowing what their opinions were on how to help ITP students be better prepared for the field. This population of resigned/retired interpreters included mostly previous graduates of an ITP (all but one). I wanted to gain some insight into what they believed their ITP could have done to better prepare them for their future as a working interpreter (see Figure 26). Seven respondents provided their opinions on how to help. Responses included experience, realistic expectations of the job, stricter requirements, and mentoring.

**Figure 25**

*Resigned/Retired Interpreter Responses: “How Could ITP Students Be Better Prepared to Enter the Field?”*



*Note.*  $N = 8$  resigned/retired interpreters. ITP = interpreter training program.

### **Retired/Resigned Interpreters’ Reason for Leaving Discussion**

As I indicated previously and as stated by the National Deaf Center (2022), many interpreters are leaving the postsecondary field due to the following:

- Poor compensation
- Inconsistent scheduling
- Working alone without a team
- Long commutes and difficult parking options
- Lack of technological support during remote interpreting work. (The National Deaf Center, 2022, para. 3)

I wanted to see if that aligned with my findings, even though I looked at interpreters who were generalized in their expertise and not limited to postsecondary interpreting.

I found that of my eight resigned/retired respondents, one was a resigned ITP student. For this area, I focus only on the seven resigned/retired interpreters. Seven of the respondents stated why they left the field, all varying for different reasons (see Figure 20). Respondents self-reported that reasons included carpal tunnel syndrome, starting a family and having no support, no support and unqualified coworkers, opening a business, lack of job growth potential and feeling otherized as a hearing person, certification requirements lapsing or expiring, and too much pressure around being an interpreter. Although different from what was stated by the National Deaf Center (2022), many seemed to have left the field due to poor compensation and little to no support from both the agency and their fellow interpreters.

### **Keeping Interpreters in the Field Long Term**

When these seven resigned/retired interpreters were asked what support they would have needed to have stayed in the field long term, one had no response, and six responded with affordable testing and acceptable pass–fail rates for certification, physical therapy for carpal tunnel, being supported to open their own business, support and mentorship, fairness and competent coworkers, and pay and growth opportunities. This finding suggests that many interpreters are feeling unsupported within their role, whether with an agency or district. One response suggested that not all interpreters being hired are skilled at the job, perhaps needing a change at the institutional level, such as stricter certification requirements or screenings. Trainings could teach interpreters what jobs they could or could not take due to their experience and skill level.

For instance, I worked at a college that had interpreters screened before being hired, and after they were screened, they were tested to see which of five levels they would be placed into. A Level 1 interpreter would get the easier classes, such as physical education, fitness classes, sports practices, biology lab with a team, biology class with a more advanced team, and remedial math with a more advanced team. The more advanced interpreters would be assigned to more advanced classes and scenarios, such as calculus, on-campus counseling, academic advisory, and classes of that nature. This scale of being able to move up could provide the advancement and pay increase that many of these interpreters have mentioned that they would have needed to stay in the profession of interpreting.

I asked the retired/resigned interpreters their opinions on how to change the retention rate of interpreters. Their responses varied; two had no response, one stated they were unsure, and five provided their opinions on how to improve the retention rate. Those five suggested better compensation, earlier real-life experience, earlier real life experience combined with better compensation and working conditions, earlier real-life experience and stricter ITP standards, and certification expiration (paid-for continuing education units). The majority of the responses aligned with the thoughts of the ITP students and graduated ITP students. Having real-life training and experience seems to be the main factor for students, former students, and retired/resigned interpreters.

When asked for their opinion how to keep interpreters in the field long term, seven respondents suggested a more consistent work culture (consistent hours and work), better compensation and mentorship, a change in certification requirements, counseling to connect Deaf with hearing individuals, mentoring, test prep assistance, and revamping certification requirements. A common theme among interpreter culture is not enough compensation or strict

certification requirements. A few individuals expressed that there is a disconnect with those who have no relation to the Deaf community, meaning they are not a child or sibling of a Deaf adult. When these individuals begin working as an interpreter, they are not connected or do not feel that connection to the community, which can lead to feeling disheartened, as if they are a stranger to those they work with every day, the Deaf community.

Lastly, I wanted to get input from the resigned interpreters on what they believed the field could do to better prepare ITP students for the real-world work of interpreting to keep them in the field long term. Seven offered suggestions, including that the best thing for ITP students to know to stay in the field long term is to inform them about the tough and negative aspects of interpreting, provide real-life experience, impose stricter requirements for passing, and have teams when going through internship and mentoring. Again, responses aligned with the input from the ITP students and the graduated ITP students, which was having a better understanding of what is involved in interpreting and obtaining more real-world hands-on deliberate practice. These two major points were consistently suggested as strategies for helping students feel better prepared and be able to stay in the field long term.

This support or change could be obtained through various ways of adding more requirements to those going through their ITP and sharing all of the good the bad and the ugly about interpreting work. This way, the students know what to expect when they enter the field. Combined with training and experience, retention could increase among interpreters.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

As I stated previously, I was not aiming to find a cure or an answer to how to fix the poor retention rate in the interpreting field. For every one interpreter, there are 50 Deaf people (Language Services Associates, n.d., para. 4). Rather, I wanted to open the discussion and create a building block for future researchers to pursue. I did not have much research to build on when I found this topic. That was something I wanted to change. I already knew there was a discussion on this topic in the community; no one had written about it. So, I wanted to be the one who started this conversation in the literary and academic field.

In doing so, I also wanted to find in my research how this problem could be addressed before individuals became interpreters. So, I included a self-report survey to test the confidence levels of soon-to-graduate ITP students to see if they felt ready to work upon graduation. I also gained input from retired/resigned interpreters and individuals who graduated from their ITP but did not continue to work as interpreters. I hoped to determine how to better prepare ITP students to feel confident and ready to work upon graduation.

### **Main Findings**

The main consensus between all populations, ITP students, graduates, and resigned/retired interpreters, is that to gain more confidence and to feel ready to work and stay in the field postgraduation, ITP students need additional support in skill development. The key aspect that was emphasized and seen the most among respondents was “real-world” application of skills and mentoring. Students and former interpreters alike described needing additional practice, along with support. This could come in a variety of forums, such as deliberate practice with a live Deaf consumer rather than a recording, and additional volunteer hours connected with a mentor for feedback to improve skills while in the ITP program. Working with a live Deaf

individual will provide students with a better understanding of how real-time interpreting works. This could be an opportunity for them to experience a mock difficult consumer (Deaf or Hearing) experience. This training would cover the aspect that the resigned interpreters mentioned would be beneficial, which is knowing and experiencing the “dark sides” of interpreting that many students are not prepared to expect.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Recommendations for future research include asking more follow-up questions or planning interviews for most participants. Interviews could develop a deeper understanding of the reasons behind the responses in this survey research. Finding a larger population of resigned and retired interpreters would also be valuable, as it would add more voices and perspectives to the study. My research was limited to California and one individual I knew from Canada, whereas if I had branched out to all parts of the United States, I could have collected a larger sample, making this study more applicable to the larger general population.

I would also inquire more about why students are choosing to wait a specific amount of time after graduation to start working. The current survey only asked for an explanation if respondents indicated they would not feel ready until 2 or more years after graduation. More research about ITP student confidence and delays in working is important.

My hopes for the future are that professors developing curricula are able to use this to adjust and assist their students in improving their confidence levels. I also hope to see future research to include the perspectives of the Deaf community in this conversation, considering that they are the ones directly involved and impacted. And any other iterations of this study, I hope to see it continue to evolve over the next few years, as the topic grows more popular within our community.

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**Appendix A: Informed Consent and ITP Student/Graduated ITP Student Survey****1. What is the purpose of this study?**

The purpose of this study is to collect your honest opinion on your confidence as an interpreter training program (ITP) student who is about to graduate. Readiness in this context relates to one's ability to begin working at least 1-year post-graduation, as a working interpreter or something adjacent (Deaf Education, ASL Education, and/or interpreter education). By definition, you fall under this category as someone currently enrolled in an interpreter training program within an accredited institution, aspiring to become a working interpreter.

**Who is eligible to participate?**

ITP Students who are 18 years of age or older in their last semester/quarter or last year of their ITP.

**What will happen with the findings from this research?**

Once I have collected the data, I will analyze the answers and compare them to the results of a survey of working and resigned/retired interpreters' levels of confidence. In doing so, I intend to study the relationship between ITP students' perception of readiness and the retention rate in the interpreting field.

**How participants are recruited:**

Participants will be recruited based on purposive and snowball sampling. They will include ITP students in California colleges who attend the interpreter training program at Mt. San Antonio College, Riverside City College, Golden West College, and/or any other colleges in the U.S. [Other colleges may be identified using the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf interpreter education [training] program list.]

**What will participants be asked to do? When will they be asked to complete these tasks?**

If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to:

- 1) Complete the survey provided by the researcher via the Google Form link.
- 2) When the participant starts the survey, they will be prompted with a “Do you agree to move forth with the survey and consent to participate in this procedure?” followed by a Yes or No button.
- 3) Have the survey completed within 3 weeks of receiving the link.

**Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?**

Any risks are minimal. Participation may result in discomfort, having to analyze yourself, and question whether you are, in fact, ready to work.

**What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?**

If you experience discomfort, you are advised to utilize counseling services, or you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you withdraw from the study, all data related to you will be deleted.

**Will I benefit from being in this research?**

There are no direct benefits. However, potential benefits to participants include feelings of relief by discussing their experiences with others, and feelings of self-satisfaction/fulfillment, contributing to research to benefit the profession.

**Who do I contact with any questions regarding the survey questions or clarification?**

At the beginning of the survey, if you have any immediate questions or need assistance, please contact me at my email *[redacted]* or by phone *[redacted]*.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. Even if you begin the study, you may withdraw from the interview at any time without penalty. This is reinstated at the beginning of the survey once participation has been consented to.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**

You may contact the Principal Investigator, Elisa M. Maroney, Principal Investigator *[redacted]*.

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Western Oregon University Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the WOU Institutional Review Board at any time regarding the study at 503-838-9200 or [irb@wou.edu](mailto:irb@wou.edu).

After reading the above information/consent form, do you consent to take part in this survey?

*Mark only one oval.*

☐ Yes

☐ No

#### Demographic

2. What is your age?

*Mark only one oval.*

☐ 18-24

☐ 25-34

☐ 35-44

☐ 45-54

☐ 55-64

☐ 65+

3. What is your ethnicity?

4. What is your gender?

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## Survey Questions

Please answer honestly and to the best of your ability.

5. Please email: [redacted] for any questions or concerns. \*

*Mark only one oval.*



I understand.

6. What year will you graduate?

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7. How confident do you feel in yourself that you are ready to enter the workforce as a working interpreter?

Mark only one oval.

1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10

**Not**

☐ I am ready to work after graduation.

8. When do you believe you will be ready for work?

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ 1-3 Months post-graduation
- ☐ 4-8 Months post-graduation
- ☐ 9months - 1 year post-graduation
- ☐ 1 - 2 years post-graduation
- ☐ 3+ years post-graduation

9. If 2-3+ years, why?

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10. Do you feel prepared to work?

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Other:  
\_\_\_\_\_

11. Have you been adequately prepared to work? (received adequate mentoring, workshops, deliberate practice, etc.) *Mark only one oval.*

☐ Yes

☐ No

12. If no, how could they be improved?

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13. Are you nervous about entering the field of interpreting?

*Mark only one oval.*

☐ Yes

☐ No

14. Have you heard a lot of horror stories from interpreters/educators?

*Mark only one oval.*

☐ Yes

☐

No

15. Did you find the horror stories to be beneficial? Or did you feel that they swayed you from the profession? Please explain.

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16. Would more mentoring from someone closer in experience level, as you (5 or fewer years of experience), have been more helpful in preparing you for the workforce? Why or why not?

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17. Did you take advantage of all the growth opportunities offered during your ITP? Please explain.

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## **Appendix B: Informed Consent and Resigned/Retired Interpreters Survey**

### **1. What is the purpose of this study?**

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The purpose of this study is to collect your opinion on why you decided to leave the field of interpreting, along with your best memory of how confident you were to enter the workforce of interpreting after your interpreter training/education program (ITP/IEP), if applicable. Your answers/results will be collected, analyzed, and compared to the responses of current ITP/IEP students. By definition, you fall under this category as someone who was a working interpreter but decided to resign from/exit the field.

### **Who is eligible to participate?**

Individuals who completed an ITP/IEP, who are 18 years of age or older, and who used to be interpreters and quit.

### **What will happen with the findings from this research?**

Once I have collected the data, I will analyze the answers and compare them to the results of a survey of current ITP/IEP students. In doing so, I will compare how the readiness/confidence levels of ITP/IEP students compare to the low retention rate within the field of interpreting.

### **How participants are recruited:**

Participants will be recruited based on purposive and snowball sampling. I will also contact members of my previous ITP who I know used to be interpreters but decided that

it was not the best fit for them. Recruitment will also include former interpreters who have resigned from their position, changed career fields, or for any other reason.

Participants will be asked to forward the survey to other eligible individuals.

**What will participants be asked to do? When will they be asked to complete these tasks?**

If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to:

1. Complete the survey provided by the researcher via the Google Form link.
2. When the participant starts the survey, they will be prompted with a “Do you agree to move forth with the survey and consent to participate in this procedure?” followed by a Yes or No button.
3. Have the survey completed within 3 weeks of receiving the link.

**Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?**

Any risks are minimal. Participation may result in discomfort, having to analyze yourself, and why you left the field of interpreting. If you feel any discomfort, you may skip the question or withdraw from the survey by closing your browser. There will be not penalty for withdrawal.

**What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?**

If you experience discomfort, you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you withdraw from the study, all data related to you will be deleted.

**Will I benefit from being in this research?**

There are no direct benefits. However, potential benefits to participants include feelings of relief by discussing their experiences with others, and feelings of selfsatisfaction/fulfillment for contributing to research to benefit the profession.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. Even if you begin the study, you may withdraw from the interview at any time without penalty. This is reinstated at the beginning of the survey once participation has been consented to.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**

You may contact the Principal Investigator, Amber Cunning, at my email [redacted] or by phone – [redacted] , or my faculty supervisor, **Professor** Elisa M. Maroney, [redacted] or [redacted] .

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Western Oregon University Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any questions about your rights as a

participant, you may contact the WOU Institutional Review Board at any time regarding the study at 503-838-9200 or [irb@wou.edu](mailto:irb@wou.edu).

I have read and agree to participate in this survey. I am 18 years of age or older *Mark only one oval.*

☐ Yes

☐ No

### Demographic

collecting the age demographic of participants

2. What is your age?

*Mark only one oval.*

☐ 18-25

☐ 26-35

☐ 36-45

☐ 46-55

☐ 56-65

☐ 66+

3. What is your ethnicity?

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4. What is your gender?

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Questions - Please answer to the best of your ability.

5. Did you graduate from your ITP? (not an exact date, but at least the year)

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6. If you did not graduate, when did you resign from your ITP?

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7. Why did you decide to leave your ITP?

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8. When did you leave the role of a working interpreter? (Just a year is fine, but if you know an exact date, feel free to share.)

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9. Why did you decide to leave the profession of interpreting?

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10. What support would you have needed to continue your ITP?

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11. What support would you have needed to continue your career as a working interpreter?

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12. How many students were in your cohort (Class) in your ITP?

*Mark only one oval.*

☐ 5-10

☐ 11-18

☐ 18-20

☐ 21+

13. How many are now working interpreters or affiliated (DeafEd, Deaf Counseling, etc.)

*Mark only one oval.*

☐ 0-2

☐ 3-5

☐ 5-7

☐ 8+

14. Were you offered mentoring throughout your ITP?

*Mark only one oval.*

☐ Yes

☐ No

15. How do you believe offering mentoring would have changed the outcome of interpreters/Deaf educators?

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16. How do you think we could change the retention rate of interpreters? (graduating, then working, and continuing to work)

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17. Do you know any interpreters who left the interpreting field?

*Mark only one oval.*

☐ Yes

☐ No

18. If yes, what was the reason, if you know?

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19. What do you believe we could do to help keep interpreters in the field long-term?

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20. In your opinion, how could we better prepare ITP students for entering the workforce of interpreting?

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21. If you have any other thoughts, opinions, or feelings you would like to share, please feel free to do so here.

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