



Deaf Difference + Space Survival

Exhibition Opening & Reception: April 11, 2017, 1:00

Gallaudet University, I. King Jordan Student Academic Center

Weyerhaeuser Family Gallery, Gallaudet University Museum Annex

From 1958 – 1968 a joint research project of the U.S. Naval School of Aviation Medicine and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration studied balance, motion sickness, and weightlessness with the help of test subjects who are deaf. Extreme gravitational forces and motion act on the organs of the inner ear, making even the most experienced pilots sick. To learn more about endurance and functionality in space, researchers turned to Gallaudet University where they found men, aged 25 – 48, immune to motion sickness. All but one became deaf from spinal meningitis. Their ability to withstand intense movement turned a so-called “labyrinthine defect” into a valuable research asset. Spinning in centrifuges, rotating for days in a circular room, or free-floating in zero-gravity flights, they enthusiastically participated, putting body and mind into the study. Their physical difference and skill at communicating what they observed enabled research on how humans might survive and thrive in space.

Gallaudet senior Maggie Kopp, collaborating with five of the men involved in the research – Barron Gulak, Harry Larson, David Myers, Donald Peterson, and John Zakutney, as well as staff from the Drs. John S. & Betty J. Schuchman Deaf Documentary Center and the Gallaudet University Museum, co-curated ***Deaf Difference + Space Survival***. Over 150 photographs, historic footage, documents, several scientific reports, personal letters and filmed interviews helped shape the script. The exhibition shows how Deaf contributions to research on physical, sensory difference was integral to early space exploration.

The opening will be in ASL and spoken English with CART service. For other access requests please contact museum@gallaudet.edu

PHOTO CREDIT LINE: Gallaudet University Archives, Jerald Jordan Collection