

Early Gallaudet Education Reflected Renaissance Values



Art classroom, c.1890s. Courtesy of the Gallaudet University Archives.

While reading Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning, 1300-1600 by Paul F. Grendler for his “Humanism and the Renaissance” class at George Mason University, Trevor De Rosch noticed a similarity between what was being discussed in the book, and what he had seen during his research for the “Gallaudet at 150 and Beyond” Exhibition in the summer of 2013. From the types of classes offered, to the style of education, to the role of genders, Gallaudet’s early education system was very reminiscent of Renaissance education.

Classes in the Renaissance focused in an emphasis on *viver civil et honesto*, or living civilly and honestly. City governments would hire teachers to prevent the “daily squandering [of] their [children’s] time in the city and its streets where...they acquire bad habits and strong vices.” Three forms of schools were prevalent: communal schools (similar to American public schools) financed by the government, independent schools (tutors) who were paid for by the parents, and ecclesiastical schools run by the clergy (preparing students for a position in the Church). The most common were communal schools, which the National Deaf-Mute College (the original name of Gallaudet University) could also be considered, due to its reliance on Congressional grants.

SYNOPSIS OF COURSE FOR THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS.

	First Term.	Second Term.	Third Term.
Preparatory Year.	Plane Geometry.	Plane Geometry.	Plane Geometry.
	Cæsar.	Cæsar.	Cicero.
	English Comp.(3 hrs.). Ancient Hist. (2 hrs.).	English Comp. (3). Ancient Hist. (2).	English Comp. (3). Ancient Hist. (2).

Also 2 consecutive hours a week in Drawing required of all Students of the Preparatory Class.

Freshman Year.	Advanced Algebra.	Plane Trigonometry.	Mechanics.
	Solid Geometry or Adv. Latin.	Descriptive Geom. or Adv. Latin.	Descriptive Geom. or American Liter.
	English Comp. A(2hrs.). Medieval Hist. (3 hrs.).	English Comp. (2). Medieval Hist. (3).	English Comp. A (2). Modern Hist. (3).

Also 2 hours a week in Business Methods required of all Freshmen.

Sophomore Year.	Physics.	Physics.	Biology A. Botany.
	Chemistry A.	Chemistry A.	Chemistry B. Qualitative Analysis or Spher. Trig. and Surveying.
	English Comp. B(1 hr.). English Liter. A(3 hrs.). Public Speaking (1 hr.).	English Comp. B (1). English Liter. A (3). Public Speaking (1).	English Comp. B (1). Rhetoric (3). Public Speaking (1).

Junior Year.	French.	French.	French.
	Biology B. Physiology.	Biology C. Zoology.	Political History of the U. S.
	Philology or Electricity.	English Literature B. or Electricity.	Ethics and Political Economy.

Senior Year.	German.	German.	German and Esthetics.
	Elements of Law or Adv. French.	Astronomy or Adv. French.	Geology.
	Logic.	Boynton's Civics and Internat. Law.	Psychology.

Gallaudet course catalog from 1912.
Courtesy of the Gallaudet University Archives.

What struck Trevor the most when reading Schooling in Renaissance Italy was the familiarity of the classes Grendler was mentioning. He realized that many of these classes could be found in Gallaudet’s course catalogs, the earliest of which were from the 1910s, which he had reviewed for the “Gallaudet at 150 and Beyond”

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Exhibition in Chapel Hall. Renaissance education, at least for those who could afford it, emphasized many topics. Latin reading and writing skills were strongly emphasized, as the Italians were rediscovering Classic (Greek and Roman) texts, and students needed to be able to read these; likewise, Gallaudet offered numerous courses relating to Latin, including Advanced Latin, Cicero, and Caesar. Renaissance emphasis on reading included studying both ancient and modern writers, such as Cicero, Vergil, Lucan, and Dante. Gallaudet offered numerous classes of equal comparison, including American and English literature classes, Cicero, and reading Latin texts in Advanced Latin.

Grammar, reading, and writing classes were emphasized in the Renaissance, influenced by the influx of newly rediscovered Latin and Greek texts. During Gallaudet's early time period, numerous classes reflected this; classes in English composition (grammar, writing) and English and American literature (reading) would have taught the same skills using American and English authors. Another prominent category of classes in the Renaissance would today be called Math, including classes in abaco (the use of an abacus), math, geometry, and accounting. Gallaudet offered similar classes, such as Descriptive Geometry, Plane Geometry, Solid Geometry, and Advanced Algebra.

Additionally classes in "exemplary figures of antiquity" in the Renaissance could be compared to Gallaudet's Ethics and Political Economy; history classes in the Renaissance were later reflected in Ancient, Medieval, Modern, and US Political History classes at Gallaudet. Likewise, studying in Greek in the Renaissance, needed to examine newly found ancient sources, can be seen in Gallaudet's emphasis on various languages (such as Latin, French, and others). Lastly, classes in logic in the Renaissance can be seen in Gallaudet's Qualitative Analysis, which involves examining the constituents or elements present in a substance or idea, and analyzing them.

One of the last prominent similarities between Renaissance education and that of the National Deaf-Mute College was the treatment of women. As stated by Grendler, "...most members of the fifteenth-century Renaissance society could not comprehend learned women". In fact, most girls, if their family was wealthy and supportive enough, were home-schooled, normally by tutors of an independent school. The few who

succeeded in education and attempted to use their skills found the male community strongly opposing them. Grendler states the women "had acquired impractical skills for their sex". In the first years of Gallaudet, women were accepted, but most failed to graduate from a full program. In 1871, the college decided to no longer accept female students, primarily due to the lack of successful full-time female graduates, and a history of neglecting women's higher education in general. While Edward Miner Gallaudet later recanted this decision in 1887, the similarities with Renaissance society (lack of public support, lack of practicality in the mind of the men in charge) is surprising, given that these two times are separated by five centuries.



Duck Coeds, c. 1901. Courtesy the Gallaudet University Archives.

The National Deaf-Mute College was founded at a time when classical education was still a central part of education in the Western world. Focus on learning Greek and Latin, despite the shifts away from their use in modern society, clearly echoes Renaissance values. Other classes stem from Renaissance times, in emphasis on ethics, math, etc, though new classes, such as biology and chemistry, were products of later generations. For more information about the classes offered at Gallaudet University in its early years, please visit the Gallaudet Archives, and ask to see the College Catalogs.

If you wish to learn more about Renaissance schooling, the book cited in this article is: [Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning, 1300-1600](#) by Paul F. Grendler (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

Behind the Scenes of the Deaf HERstory Exhibit



From left to right: Jenni Mosiman, Abby McNamara, Meagan Sietsema, Lisa Napoli, Mia Fernandez and Dr. Arlene Blumenthal Kelly.
Photo by Shane Dundas and the Gallaudet Museum.

Next week the Museum Staff opens its newest exhibit, *Deaf HERstory*, focusing on the experience of Deaf Women in American history. It has been a busy year for us here in the office, so let's look back on the process that brought our visitors this exhibit.

The process began on September 29, 2014, when numerous experts on campus had a meeting to discuss the topic of the newest exhibit, including Dr. Arlene Kelly, First Lady Vicki Hurwitz, and Dr. Genie Gertz. Also at the meeting were Provost Carol Erting, Dr. Jane Norman, and Curator Meredith Peruzzi. At the following meeting on October 8th, the details of the process were hammered out. In January of 2015 the Museum began working with interns from the ASL and Deaf Studies Department, under the guidance of Dr. Arlene B. Kelly. In February the interns received training in the use of the Archives, and began putting their plans into action. In March the Museum met with Blair, Inc., an exhibit fabrication company, to review the conceptual designs, while the following month saw the removal of the Deaf Peace Corps Exhibit.

Toward the end of April, the Weyerhaeuser Gallery was repainted to accommodate the new exhibit. After another meeting with Blair in May, the installation of the Deaf HERstory exhibit began at the end of June. In the time since then, the Museum staff has been working hard to ensure that everything is ready for the official opening of the Deaf HERstory Exhibit on September 29th, including acquiring artifacts, reserving equipment, and working with the Facilities Department to ensure everything is ready. See you soon!



The Museum met with Blair, Inc., to review the conceptual designs.
Photo by Shane Dundas and the Gallaudet Museum.



**Deaf
HERstory
EXHIBITION**

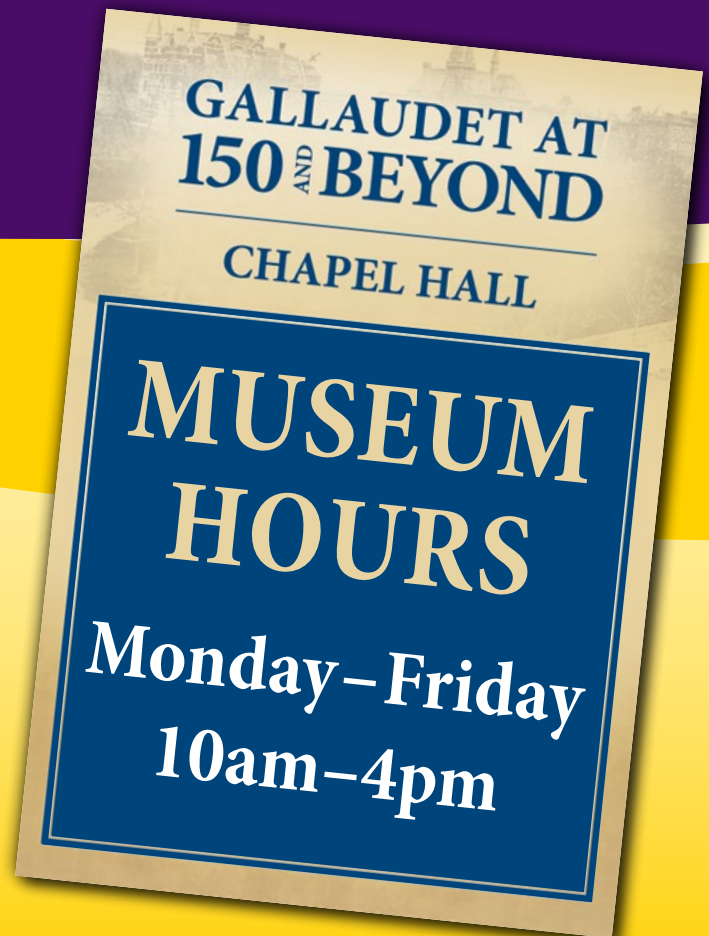
**GRAND
OPENING**

*September 29, 2015
12:30 pm*

*Museum Annex - Weyerhaeuser Gallery
I. King Jordan Student Academic Center*

For DeafBlind accessibility needs, contact museum@gallaudet.edu

**GALLAUDET
UNIVERSITY**
MUSEUM



**GALLAUDET AT
150 AND BEYOND**

CHAPEL HALL

**MUSEUM
HOURS**

**Monday - Friday
10am - 4pm**

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Connect with us to keep up with the latest events of the Gallaudet University Museum through our Facebook page and Twitter account. While the newsletter and website represent highlights of our work, Facebook and Twitter allow us to quickly share our small, everyday events in the life of the Museum through photos, photo albums, and other immediate announcements.

For those new to Facebook and Twitter, you can set up your own account and then “like” our page if you are using Facebook, or “follow” our page if you are using Twitter.

We look forward to staying connected with you.

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The Gallaudet University Museum publishes the Our Story newsletter bi-monthly. We welcome photographs and stories of historical significance relating to Gallaudet University and Deaf History.

In between newsletter issues, please visit our website for more information: www.gallaudet.edu/museum.html. We update the website frequently.

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