David Corina, Ph.D.
Meet The Researcher
Visual Language & Visual Learning

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Interview by Selina Agyen, Design by Wei Wang
How did you get started in the field and why did you come to Gallaudet?

At a young age I was dyslexic and had trouble with my reading skills and that when I first became interested in language and communication. Then one summer in high school, I worked as a counselor at a camp for young children with disabilities. While working there I met two deaf brothers who used sign language to communicate. The camp itself was for children with severe learning disabilities as well as additional “handicaps.” I felt the brothers did not belong there because other than using sign language to communicate, they were “normal.” Seeing the brothers use sign language to communicate and becoming friends with them led me to learn about ASL. This experience is what lead to my interest in signed communication. I spent my undergraduate studies at New York University where I took a course in Speech Pathology that focused on language aphasia and dyslexics related to language aphasia. It was through this course that I began to pursue studies in the Psychology of Language.

What made you decide to attend graduate school?

After high school, I didn't go straight to college. I took a year off and got a job, moved into my own apartment, and just took time to see where I wanted to go in life. During that time I gained a thirst for learning and within the year applied and was accepted to New York University (NYU). Once I graduated from NYU, I applied and was accepted to Gallaudet University's Graduate School to study for an MA in Linguistics. After completing my MA, I conducted my practicum at SALK in California where I was involved with research for a year and a half. Once I finished my practicum, I enrolled at the University of California- San Diego in the Ph.D program in both Psychology and Cognitive Science. I had thought I would pass through the programs quickly. But because I was a double major, and that required more course work and such the “pass quickly” took seven years.
What advice do you have for individuals interested in attending graduate school?

My advice would be to try to get as much hands on real-world experience as possible. Talk with your undergraduate advisor and find out about lab work opportunities or other opportunities that have you working one-on-one with the people of your field of interest. Get in contact with and keep in contact with people. If you have an interest in a specific program or school, get in contact with professors with that study. Don’t be afraid to contact people and let them know your name. Research your department of interest. Know professors names and allow them to get to know you. Contact people and if they don’t respond after one email don’t be afraid to contact them again.

What are important assets for getting accepted to graduate school?

Make sure that you have challenged yourself. Instead of taking easy courses that give you a 4.0, make sure to take hard and challenging courses. Professors are more impressed by those who challenge themselves than by grade point averages. My second piece of advice would be to make sure that you have familiarized yourself with the school or program of interest. Be sure to visit the school or get knowledge on the program so you have some proof or showing of why it is the best program/school for you. Also be sure to have specific goals and ideas of what you want to study and what you will do after you have obtained your degree.
How did you get involved with VL2?

I was one of the first researchers to get involved with VL2. I was involved from the very beginning and was even a part of the process of writing the center proposal to NSF. When Tom first got the idea for VL2 he contacted me to be a part of it and there is a bit of a funny story of my involvement. So Tom calls me and explains the idea of VL2 to me and asks me to be a part of it. I am excited and motivated by the whole idea of it. I agree right away and send letter of response of yes to Tom, and then nothing. I hear nothing back from Tom from weeks but then I hear of a VL2 meeting and I am wondering, what is going on? Had the proposal for my involvement been taken back? I called Tom to see what was going on only to find out he was waiting to hear back from me. Tom had lost or misplaced my letter so I while I thought he didn’t want me, he believed I had rejected the offer. Things were cleared up, Tom eventually found the letter and here I am today.

What are your specific research interests and what would you recommend to individuals who are interested in pursing this research?

My main research focuses on how the brain process, understands, and distinguishes language. If someone is interested in the same field of work I recommend that they take a board variety of courses such as psychology, linguistics, and neurology.

How can they get involved?

Try to shadow those who are already involved in the particular research. Become an assistant or intern in a research you are interested in. Volunteer to work in a hospital or clinic and ask to work with patients who have language aphasia. Learn about language aphasia by following patients, questioning doctors and gaining hands on experience. Get to know those already involved with the research you are interested in and pick their brains. Sit them down and let them feed you their knowledge. It’s also a good idea to attend lectures to lean more, read articles, and always keep up to date in your field.