

Deaf History Month History and Advocacy

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Representation is critical to inclusion and there are key historical events that have paved the way for representation for the deaf and hard of hearing community. One of the main examples of these initiatives is National Deaf History Month, a month to highlight the contributions that deaf and hard of hearing individuals have made to the world.

There are three major events that are celebrated as foundational to this community. On April 15, 1817, the first public school for deaf children in the United States was founded by Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet. It is now called The American School for the Deaf and is located in West Hartford, Connecticut. Decades later, April 8, 1864, marked the opening of the first higher education institution for the deaf and hard of hearing, Gallaudet University. To this day, it is still the only higher education institution dedicated exclusively to accommodating deaf and hard of hearing students.

The third impactful event took place on March 13, 1988, with the first deaf president at Gallaudet University, I. King Jordan, hired. This monumental effort, took place after students protested on campus to have a deaf person as their president, signaling a movement for inclusion and representation, from those with lived experiences.

According to the Hearing Loss Association of America, “48 million Americans have some degree of hearing loss” ([hearlingloss.org](https://www.hearingloss.org)). Deaf and hard of hearing individuals in this country face inequity regarding educational access, employment and health care at a heightened level.

It is important that we amplify the voices of our deaf and hard of hearing peers and create awareness and advocacy around this topic. The National Association of the Deaf is a great resource to learn more about education and policies around deaf inclusion. ([nad.org](https://www.nad.org))

In our immediate environment, we need to work together to make sure the OU community is inclusive in all classrooms, programs and events!

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