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## The DISC® Personal Profiles of Emerging Sign Language Interpreters

Kim B. Kurz

*Rochester Institute of Technology's National Technical Institute for the Deaf, kbknss@rit.edu*

Kierstin S. Muroski

*Rochester Institute of Technology's National Technical Institute for the Deaf, ksmnss@rit.edu*

Veronika B. Talbott

*Rochester Institute of Technology's National Technical Institute for the Deaf, vbtncd@ntid.rit.edu*

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## The DISC® Personal Profiles of Emerging Sign Language Interpreters

### Cover Page Footnote

The authors would like to thank Robert Peter for his assistance and consultation on this project.

## The DISC® Personal Profiles of Emerging Sign Language Interpreters

**Kim Kurz**

**Kierstin Muroski**

**Veronika Talbott**

Rochester Institute of Technology

### ABSTRACT

Language interpretation is a discipline of choices governed by the unique personality and behavioral traits of individuals involved in an interpreted interaction. Interpreters are communication facilitators for people who do not share languages. Every interpreter has a distinct personality and behavioral traits that influence their communication choices. There are benefits for interpreters to be keenly aware of personality styles and behaviors. This article reports the findings of the personality and behavioral styles using the DISC® Personality Profile Instrument of 242 undergraduate American Sign Language-English Interpreting students over a nine-year period. Specifically, the study explores the four DISC® profiles, Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, and Compliance in relation to a population of emerging ASL-English interpreters. The majority of the emerging interpreters, over 76%, scored highest in either Steadiness or Influence while much fewer, less than 23%, scored highest in either Dominance or Compliance. The authors offer suggestions for working within a field with such unique profiles. Awareness of the differing personality profiles has the potential to improve communication effectiveness and enhance teamwork.

*“In order to understand our relationships with our people, we must first understand ourselves.”*

- Bill J. Bonnstetter, 2010

### INTRODUCTION

No one is 100% liked by everyone and, for most people, first impressions dictate whether or not they like a person within the first two minutes of meeting (Bonnstetter & Suiter, 2018). Individual personality preferences often guide initial impressions. Breakdowns in communication and teamwork are usually due to a lack of awareness and understanding of other people's thought processes and behavioral styles, especially when theirs is different from one's own style. Not everyone communicates or behaves the same way. Approximately 80% of people who are successful at their careers are successful due to their people skills rather than their technical skills (Bonnstetter & Suiter, 2010). As a discipline of communication, the field of

signed language interpreting has a greater opportunity for miscommunication than fields requiring less communication. Even for people who share the same language, daily conversation often reveals communication problems (Gumperz, 1982). Sign language interpreters have a significant and essential role, they are active subjects in interpreted interactions, and they manage the interactions with varying degrees of success (Marks, 2012; Metzger, 1999; Roy, 2000). It is crucial to the success of an interpreter's work for an interpreter to maintain relationships between themselves and those they work with (Wadensjo, 1993). The power dynamics within a team of interpreters must be agreeable to those involved, or the situation does not support the interpretation. It may lead to a negative impact on the communication interaction (Russell & Shaw, 2016). What is important to understand is that interactions between people who work toward effective communication tend to be more clear; to work effectively, people must develop a rapport, but building a rapport takes time and energy (Schofield & Mapson, 2014).

Individuals will vary their behavior and even their way of thinking based on different settings or situations. While variations do occur, people maintain preferred behaviors and ways of thinking and therefore do not develop all behaviors and ways of thinking equally (Wilcox, 1981). To gain success in changing behaviors and thoughts, people must gain an awareness of options and then practice making a change. DISC is a tool that offers awareness regarding natural personality traits that tend to be the most comfortable (and thereby most used) behaviors and ways of thinking. Utilizing the DISC tool can offer communication improvements. In summary, DISC is about better understanding people's behaviors and how to best work with various behavioral traits and personality styles.

A few studies related to personality have been conducted in the field of signed language interpreting (Bontempo et al., 2014; Bontempo & Napier, 2011; Schein, 1974; Seal, 2004), but organizations, institutions, sports teams, and corporations have long used self-assessments and personality inventories to improve recruiting and training efforts and to build teamwork (Costa, 1996; Hough & Schneider, 1996). The interest in personality traits and communication behaviors has fostered the development of assessment tools to improve communication and collegiality (e.g., Big Five, DISC®, Myers-Briggs). Fertig and Milewicz (2016) suggest proper use of personality and behavioral assessments to benefit professors and students in their classes. Data related to pedagogical effectiveness show positive results when using four diagnostic personality and behavioral tools: Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), StrengthsFinder, Big Five Personality Traits, and DISC® assessment, (Fertig & Milewicz, 2016) with "the DISC® [being] identified as the best-suited tool" related to pedagogy (p. 57). Interestingly, a literature review reveals that most data related to DISC® tools and results are published in relation to industry. Still, very few publications focus on the use of DISC in academic contexts. Charlesworth (2007) suggests that DISC® is an effective tool in enhancing cooperative learning. While the publications regarding the use of DISC in an academic setting are limited, the benefits of using the behavioral self-assessment tool are robust. The authors of this paper believe that the utilization of the DISC tool can benefit the field of sign language interpreting in both the settings of interpreter education and within the interpreting workforce.

The field of signed language interpreting has limited literature focused on enhancing teamwork and communication strategies with relation to utilization of personality type awareness. This study aimed to examine the data collected over a nine-year period to calculate the DISC personality profile averages among emerging signed language interpreters. Specifically, we sought to determine whether the DISC results of 242 emerging signed language interpreters are similar to that of the US general population. We hypothesized that the emerging interpreter group would have a higher percentage of the “S” steadiness personality profile due to the type of work required of interpreters. The review of personality profiles within this paper is not intended to screen potential interpreters or interpreting students. The authors of this paper recognize and celebrate the importance of having diversity and acknowledge that each DISC personality type holds unique attributes that lend to the career of interpreting as well as a benefit to the field as a whole.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

A review of the DISC instrument is essential to the goal of this paper. This literature review should serve as an introduction to DISC and is divided into five sections: (1) DISC® 101; (2) DISC® Personality Profile Characteristics; (3) DISC® Communication Recommendations; (4) Understanding DISC® Graphs and Wheel; and (5) DISC® in General Population and Across Other Disciplines.

### **DISC® 101**

The DISC instrument is a behavioral self-assessment tool originally conceived as a theory by Dr. William Moulton Marston and published in his 1928 book “Emotions of Normal People.” In the 80 years since Marston’s theory was first published, several behavioral researchers have modified his work and created the DISC behavioral measurement system (Bonnstetter & Suiter, 2018). In the 1950s, Walter Clarke was the first person to build an instrument based on Marston’s theory (Bonnstetter & Suiter, 2010). In the 1980s, Bill Bonnstetter was the first person to validate a correlation and communication style (Bonnstetter & Suiter, 2010). In 1984, Target Training International became the first to develop and create computerized and personalized reports on the DISC model (Bonnstetter & Suiter, 2010).

DISC® is one of many tools developed to share information regarding how individuals can better understand themselves and others. DISC focuses on how people behave, how they approach problems, their preferred pace, their preferences, and how they communicate. The DISC instrument does not measure a person's intellectual intelligence, emotional intelligence, motivation, experience, education, training, or skills (Bonnstetter & Suiter, 2018). People’s behavior refers to how they act, which is often responded to by the reaction most natural to the person reacting; however, behavior should not be the only consideration when communicating with another person. Bonnstetter and Suiter (2018) suggest that behavior is developed from a combination of both nature (inherent) and nurture (our upbringing), which implies that an individual behavioral style does not make a person good or bad; rather, it is important to understand one’s beliefs and motivators to understand their behavior.

“The DISC® assessment is a tool that helps individuals assess which of several behavioral styles describes them most accurately. By learning their DISC® styles, people can

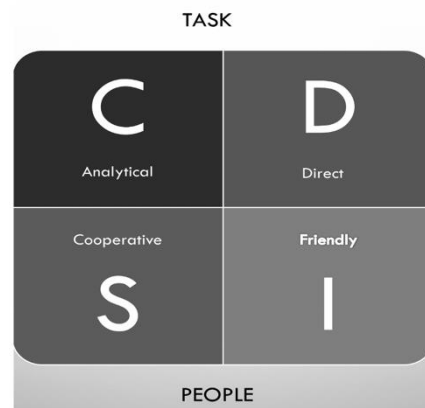
better understand their strengths, challenges, fears, and motivators. More importantly, they can learn how to use DISC® to strengthen their relationships with others, building stronger, better-functioning organizations, one relationship at a time” (Sugerman, 2011, p. 11). Understanding DISC® behavioral traits can serve as a tool in gaining self-awareness and may also lead to a deeper appreciation of the behavioral differences of others.

Importantly, there is no right or wrong nor good or bad concerning DISC® assessment results; there should be no judgment regarding value or alignment with a particular result. The results are presented neutrally to show the individual traits and preferences of the person who took the assessment. DISC® results include tips and suggestions based on the natural preferences of the person who took the assessment. The tips include communicating better, becoming a stronger leader, and being a more effective team member. There is also information specifically focused on improving commitment and cooperation from others and suggestions for preventing and resolving conflicts. DISC results can benefit a variety of environments such as employment settings, classrooms, among friends, and even within family dynamics. For example, an employee might feel in conflict with one of their coworkers who is difficult to work with, yet they feel they have made several attempts to work well together. Taking the time to become aware of one’s behavioral style and silently recognizing other people’s styles can help an employee improve their communication and interpersonal relationships with others. Heightened awareness of the communication preferences of oneself and others allows for a more harmonious work environment.

### DISC® PERSONALITY PROFILE CHARACTERISTICS

The DISC® model includes four basic personality profiles: D, I, S, C, which refer to Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, and Compliance (Bonnstetter and Suiter, 2018). While each profile is unique, there are overlapping preferences within the categories. People with dominance and compliance profiles tend to be task-oriented, but dominance personalities prefer directness, and compliance personalities prefer a more analytical perspective. People with steadiness and influence profiles tend to be more people-oriented. Still, steadiness profiles focus on being cooperative, while influence profiles prefer to focus on being more friendly (see Figure 1). Each personality profile has attributes that can benefit clear communication and support productivity. Learning the preferences of each profile can assist with improving communication and fostering collaborative teamwork.

**Figure 1:** *DISC® Model (copyrighted by Target Training International, Ltd.)*



Bonnstetter & Suiter (2018) provides descriptions of each behavioral style, which is elaborated below:

**Dominance** - People with dominance personality profiles tend to be focused on making progress, pushing for quick results. When it comes to conflicts, they will challenge others by asking if they really want to argue with them as they tend to think that they are always right. Some of the common descriptors in this area include adventuresome, competitive, daring, decisive, direct, innovative, persistent, problem solver, result-oriented, and self-starter. Some of the values that benefit teamwork include bottom-line organization, forward-looking, challenge-oriented, and initiator of activity and innovation. Ideal environments for people with dominance personality profiles include freedom from controls, supervision, and details; an innovative and futuristic-oriented environment; a forum to express ideas and viewpoints; non-routine work; and work with challenge and opportunity. Possible tendencies that appear during stressful times include becoming demanding, nervous, aggressive, and egotistical. Potential limitations of having a dominance personality profile include overuse of position, setting standards too high, a lack of tact and diplomacy, and taking on too much, too soon, and too fast. The notable emotion of this personality is anger. People with dominance personality profiles do not like to have too many meetings; they tend to think that they have too much to do, and they prefer the meetings to be short. Some celebrities with this personality profile include Michael Jordan, a professional basketball player, and Barbara Walters, a TV news anchor.

**Influence** - People with influence personality profiles tend to be focused on ideas, and they are visionary explorers. When it comes to conflicts, they tend to think that they are not at fault as they are fabulous no matter what. Commonly, influence personality profiles include charming, confident, convincing, enthusiastic, inspiring, optimistic, persuasive, popular, sociable, and trusting. Some values that benefit teamwork include general optimism and enthusiasm, creative problem solving, motivating others toward goals; being a team player; and negotiating conflicts. Ideal environments for people with influence personality profiles include working with several people; freedom from control and detail; freedom to move about; within a forum for ideas to be heard; and having a democratic supervisor with whom s/he can associate. Possible tendencies that appear during stressful times include becoming self-promoting, overly optimistic, talkative, and unrealistic. Potential limitations of having an influence personality profile include being inattentive to details, being unrealistic in appraising people, trusting people, and being a situational listener. The notable emotion of this personality is optimism. People with influence personality types tend to be excited about meetings, and they might come up with some icebreaker activities or team-building activities during the meetings. Some celebrities with this personality profile include Robin Williams, actor-comedian, Arnold Palmer, professional golfer, and Former United States (US) President Bill Clinton.

**Steadiness** - Those with steadiness personality profiles tend to be focused on support and security and they tend to walk along every step with their client. When it comes to conflicts, they tend to avoid arguing with others and get away with it by saying others are right and then pretend to forget about it. Some of the common descriptors of steadiness personality profiles include amiable, friendly, good listener, patient, relaxed, sincere, stable, steady, team player, and understanding. Some values that benefit teamwork include being a dependable team player; working for both a leader and a cause; being patient and empathetic; being a logical, step-wise

thinker; and being service-oriented. Ideal environments for people with steadiness personality profiles include a stable and predictable environment; an environment that allows time for changes; long-term work relationships; very little conflict between people; and freedom from restrictive rules. Possible tendencies that appear during stressful times include being non-demonstrative, appearing unconcerned, behaving with hesitancy, and being inflexible. Potential limitations of having a steadiness personality profile include yielding to avoid controversy, having difficulty establishing priorities, disliking unwarranted change, and having difficulty dealing with diverse situations. The notable emotion of this personality is to appear non-emotional. People with steadiness personality types generally do not know how to say “no” and will respond positively to scheduling a meeting, especially when it includes enough time in the beginning to bond and build relationships with others. Some celebrities with this personality profile include Rodney Rogers, a professional basketball player, and Former First Lady Laura Bush.

**Compliance** - Those with compliance personality profiles tend to focus on the process and provide a detailed “how-to” plan. When it comes to conflicts, they tend to avoid others, and they prefer not to talk right away; they prefer to spend time doing their homework and investigating to prove that others are wrong. Some of the common descriptors of compliance personality profiles include accurate, analytical, conscientious, courteous, diplomatic, fact-finder, high standards, mature, patient, and precise. Some values that benefit teamwork include maintaining high standards, being conscientious and steady, taking time to be definitive and clear, being able to understand information and tests, being objective and realistic, and being a comprehensive problem solver. Ideal environments for people with compliance personality profiles include being placed where critical thinking is needed; technical work or specialized areas; having a close relationship with a small group; a familiar work environment; and having a private office or work area. Possible tendencies that appear during stressful times include being pessimistic, picky, fussy, and overly critical. Potential limitations of having a compliance personality profile include being defensive when criticized, getting bogged down in details, being overly intense for the situation, and appearing somewhat aloof and cool. The notable emotion of this personality is that of fear. People with compliance personality profiles tend to have high hopes for scheduling meetings as they assume they will finally have an opportunity to discuss all expectations, responsibilities, and deadlines. Some celebrities with this personality profile include Former US Vice President Al Gore and Courtney Cox’s character “Monica” on the “Friends.”

## **DISC® COMMUNICATION RECOMMENDATIONS**

Upon completing the DISC® assessment, results include information regarding one’s behavioral style and suggested communication do’s and don’ts for each behavioral style. Regardless of one’s DISC results, there are general tips for communicating with individuals of specific personality types. If you would like to succeed in communicating with a person who has a dominance personality profile, it is recommended that you be very clear, specific, and to the point. It is best to be prepared, stay on task, and remain focused on results and outcomes in communication. They do not want you to ramble, waste time, or focus too much on personal information. Lastly, it is not recommended that you attempt to force a person with a dominance personality profile into a losing argument. Successful communication with a person who has an



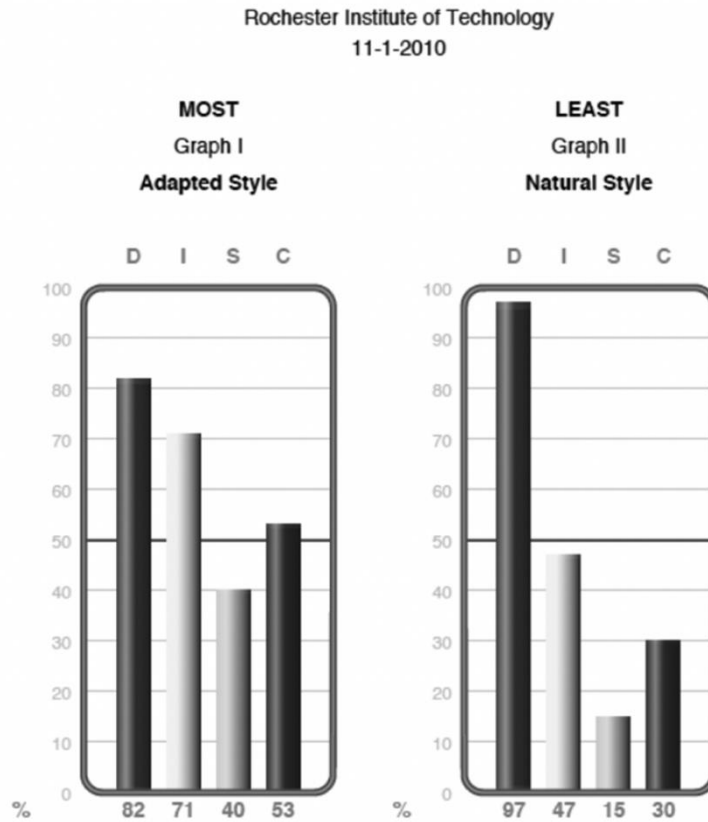
influence personality profile would include relating and socializing with them. They prefer to discuss their goals and will want your opinion but will be cautious of being too task-oriented. They do not like being interrupted, and they do not like feeling as though they are being talked down to. They appreciate being complimented, and it is recommended that you think about being warm as you communicate with them. When communicating with a person who has a steadiness personality profile, to be successful, it is recommended that you break the ice and form a connection with them. They prefer to be sincere, show interest, and be patient when discussing ideas. They do not like being rushed or being forced to make a decision quickly. It is recommended that you do not interrupt them and that you truly listen when they speak. If you would like to succeed in communicating with a person who has a compliance personality profile, it is recommended that you be prepared to discuss all options with them. They prefer all facts and data to be organized. It is best to speak logically and to stick to the agenda. They do not like when people are disorganized or force them into a quick decision. Also, they do not prefer when people are too warm with them; it's best to stick to business. In summary, learning how to communicate to trigger the strengths of others while avoiding unwanted preferences can benefit and enhance communication interactions and improve teamwork.

#### **UNDERSTANDING DISC® GRAPHS AND WHEEL**

Upon completing the online TTI DISC assessment, automatically generated results are sent to the person who took the assessment. The results contain visuals to assist with understanding one's own natural and adapted styles. The visuals include two graphs and a plot wheel, which identify various perspectives of a person's individual profile. The assessment results report contains two graphs that look similar but are, in fact, quite different. The first graph is referred to as "Graph II - Natural," and the second is known as "Graph I - Adapted." According to Bonnstetter and Suiter (2018), Graph II identifies the person's basic and/or natural behavior (one's true self; authentic behavior). Graph II depicts what people are like both when they are under pressure and when they are totally at ease. When a person experiences stress or pressure, their mask comes off; also, when things are going well, and people relax, their mask comes off -- this is when Graph II behaviors are captured (Bonnstetter & Suiter, 2018). Graph II is the least changeable and depicts the person's true self. In comparison, Graph I depicts how people want to be seen and may not show their true behavior. Graph I depicts the behavior that people allow others to see; the behavior a person feels must be exhibited in order to be successful (Bonnstetter & Suiter, 2018). Graph I is the most changeable as behaviors are adapted in response to what the person feels is required by an environment, such as a work environment.

An example of Graph I-Adapted and Graph II-Natural can be seen in Figure 2 below. The graphs both contain vertical axes that range from 0 to 100. At the 50% line, there is a visible blue line, which is known as the Energy Line (Bonnstetter & Suiter, 2010). Profiles that score above the Energy Line represent that the person is strongest in those dimensions, and therefore they have a substantial impact on the way the person thinks and behaves. In contrast, the profiles that score below the Energy Line have less impact on a person's thinking and behavior. While all four dimensions D, I, S, C are included in the makeup of a single person, it is the Energy Line that shows the intensity of influence for each dimension.

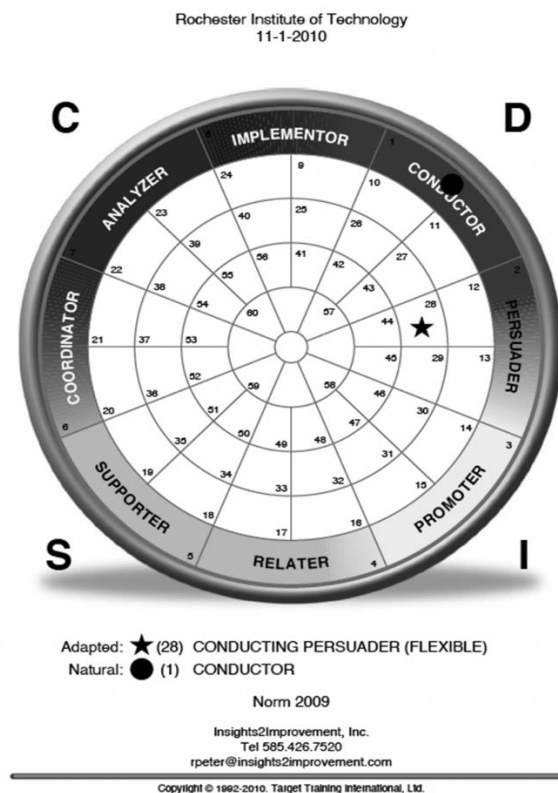
**Figure 2:** Sample of Graph I - Adapted and Graph II - Natural with Energy Line® (With permission from Veronika Talbott)



Also contained within the assessment results is a plot wheel known as the Success Insights Wheel (see Figure 3). The Success Insights Wheel plots both the natural and adapted preferences of the person who took the assessment. The wheel is sorted into eight descriptive categories that describe a combination of behaviors: (1) conductor - direct and results-oriented, (2) persuader - optimistic and flexible, (3) promoter - verbal and trusting, (4) relater - cooperative team player, (5) supporter - accommodating and persistent, (6) coordinator - cautious and self-disciplined, (7) analyzer - precise and detail-oriented, and (8) implementer - creative and indecisive (see Table 1) (Bonnstetter & Suiter, 2018).

**Table 1:** *The Eight Behavior Patterns of the Success Insights Wheel*

Behavior Patterns	Brief Descriptions
Conductor	Direct and results-oriented
Persuader	Optimistic and flexible
Promoter	Verbal and trusting
Relater	Cooperative team player
Supporter	Accommodating and persistent
Coordinator	Cautious and self-disciplined
Analyzer	Precise and detail-oriented
Implementer	Creative and indecisive

**Figure 3:** *Sample of TTI's Success Insights Wheel®* (With permission from Veronika Talbott)

Plotted on the Success Insights Wheel are both a circle and a star. The circle represents a person's natural style, and the star represents a person's adapted style. Both plot points are determined by the individual DISC assessment results. Plots that appear closer to the center of the wheel indicate both higher ease of adaptability and low intensity of the category for which the plot appears. Plots that appear closer to the outside edge of the wheel indicate both a greater intensity of the category for which the plot appears as well as a greater effort required for adaptability. Plots appearing near the outside edge of the wheel indicate having an especially challenging time adapting to the style directly across the wheel. When the circle and star plots appear close to one another, it is an indication that the person is utilizing their behavioral strengths or there is no need for adapting. Understanding how one's own preferences relate to others' preferences is critical for communication success. To communicate effectively, the communication preferences of the other person must be adopted, not one's own preferences.

### **DISC® RESULTS IN USA & USE IN OTHER DISCIPLINES**

As of 2017, TTI DISC assessment has been utilized in over 90 countries, data sets exist in 48 languages, and over 1,735,323 people have completed the assessment globally (Bonnstetter & Bonnstetter, 2017). The country-wide average DISC results of the United States of America are outlined as follows: dominance 18%; influence 34%, steadiness 32%, and compliance 16%; these results are unique to the USA and vary from the 27 other countries where data sets have been collected and analyzed (Bonnstetter & Bonnstetter, 2017). The comparisons of global DISC assessment averages can aid in understanding how cultural groups vary and may assist in the appreciation of diversity.

In an attempt to encourage cultural appreciation, improve communication, and/or foster team relationships, educational institutions, business organizations, and healthcare personnel have used the DISC assessment in their programs (Costa, 1996; Fertig & Milewicz, 2016; Keogh et al., 2019). DISC personality styles have been correlated with attrition rates to examine the potential of student naval officers (Summerlin, 2012). Nursing managers have been given DISC assessments in an attempt to develop behaviors that will foster effective teams (Keogh et al., 2019) and to improve their clinical performance (Park & Ju, 2016). DISC assessments have also become a popular behavioral tool in educational leadership training (Freeman, 2011). A close examination of self-reported leadership styles and DISC assessment results of undergraduate and graduate students majoring in Computer and Information Systems students led their faculty to design successful cooperative learning experiences (Charlesworth, 2007). Lecturers and counselors at a technical school felt challenged to develop lectures and teaching materials to meet the personalities of their students, so they utilized DISC assessments to collect the information needed to produce quality and applicable teaching materials (Agung & Yuniar, 2016). DISC assessments and trainings have even been used in an attempt to improve communication patterns in marital relationships (Crook, 2004). DISC is a tool that has proven effective across disciplines, across languages, and across the globe.

## METHODS

This study is a modified replication of a study conducted by Wilcox (1981) related to the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator results of sign language students at the University of New Mexico. The concept of studying interpreting student personality profiles and the use of ratios for analyses purposes was taken from Wilcox's work. The purpose of this study was to identify and report the average percentage of each DISC personality style (D-dominance, I-influence, S-steadiness, C-compliance) among emerging interpreters at the National Technical Institute of the Deaf (NTID) on the campus of the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) and compare the results of the emerging interpreters with the results of the general population of the United States of America. NTID is home to 1200 deaf and hard-of-hearing students, and it is a federally funded college established to provide higher education opportunities to deaf and hard-of-hearing students. The ASL-English Interpreting bachelor's level program (ASLIE) at NTID currently has approximately 170 matriculated interpreting students. A convenience sample of fourth-year students enrolled in ASLIE was used for this study. Students' individual DISC profiles were collected over a nine-year period (from 2011 to 2019) and serve as the data for review. The DISC® instrument was given to the emerging interpreters as a means to assess their natural communication, personality, and behavioral styles and to offer them the soft skills training provided through the DISC® instrument package. The ASLIE department faculty and administrators recognized the importance of teamwork and resolving personality conflicts among interpreting students and saw the DISC® instrument as a tool to improve communication and empathy for the differences in the various personalities interpreting students are required to interact with on a daily basis. The authors also recognize the importance of sharing this data so that other IPPs and/or interpreting professional organizations could replicate this study and compare their findings with our results.

## SUBJECTS

The subjects of this study were fourth-year students majoring in ASL-English Interpreting Education (ASLIE) at NTID. The participants included 211 females, 29 males and 2 non-binary subjects. Subjects ranged in age from 20 to 39 years, with a mean of 23.11 (SD = 3.28). Related to ethnicity, subjects self-identified in the following manner: 77.7% (N=188) White; 3.3% (N=8) Asian; 2.1% (N=5) Black; 2.5% (N=6) Hispanic/Latino; 1.7% (N=4) Hispanic and White; .8% (N=2) Black and White; .8% (N=2) American Indian and White; .4% (N=1) American Indian; .4% (N=1) Asian and Black; .4% (N=1) Black and Hispanic; and, .4% (N=1) American Indian and Hispanic. Nearly 10% (N=23) of subjects chose not to disclose their ethnicity or were not asked about it on their self-assessments. The majority of the subjects, 52.1% (N=126), reported to be from the state of New York while the remaining reporting subjects, 21.5% (N=52), reported being from 17 other states; however, 29.2% (N=64) of the subjects chose not to disclose their residency or were not asked about it on their self-assessments.

## INSTRUMENT

The DISC® is a 24-question, forced-choice instrument that requires a response of either "most like me" or "least like me" from groupings of word sets that describe behaviors along the four dimensions of dominance, influence, steadiness, and compliance. The DISC assessment used for

this study was an online student version of the instrument called “Excellence for Learning” and was purchased from Target Training International (TTI) Success Insights company. The instrument is written at a sixth-grade reading level, is self-scoring, and takes approximately fifteen minutes to complete. The cost of the assessment, with a university discount, was approximately \$15 per participant; the ASLIE department covered all costs.

## PROCEDURES

Prior to the initial data collection of DISC profiles in 2011, the academic advisor for the ASLIE department was trained to become a DISC certified assessor and trainer. Said academic advisor has handled every DISC assessment, all follow-up training, and has maintained the collection of results on a locked computer file. Data was collected from a practicum course required of ASLIE students during the fall semester of their senior year. A requirement of the practicum course was for students to take the DISC® assessment as well as participate in a DISC training to learn about the four personality types. On the days the assessment was to be taken, the academic advisor sent students a link to the online DISC® assessment, and they completed it on their own. The online assessment requires subjects to create usernames and passwords to access the instrument. [The online assessment can be found at https://www.ttsi.com](https://www.ttsi.com). Upon completion, the online DISC® assessment automatically assigns a personality style and generates a full report for each participant. ASLIE students did not have access to their results until they were released by the academic advisor. After results were received and reviewed by the ASLIE academic advisor, she attended the practicum class to distribute individual results and reports and to train the students about the DISC personality styles. During the training, potential work scenarios related to communication between varying personality styles were shared along with strategies to improve working with people who have different personality types. Insights were also offered regarding how others might perceive one’s own personality styles.

## ANALYSIS

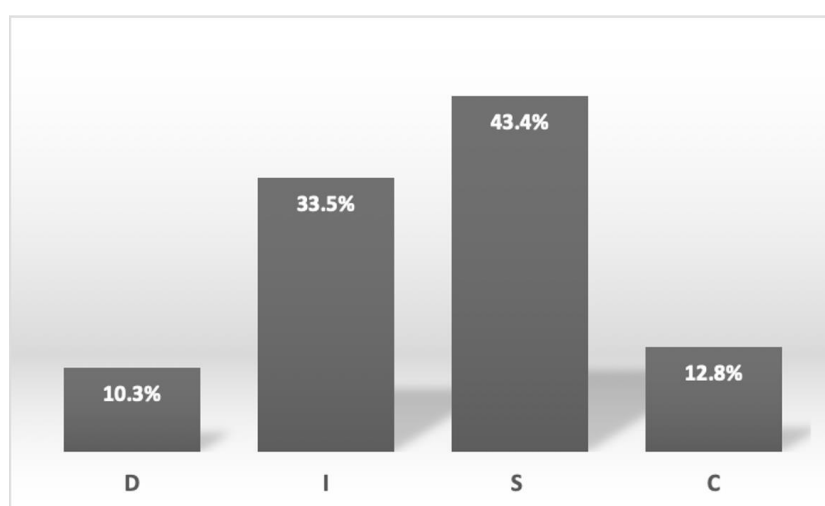
To better understand the distribution of DISC personality types among emerging sign language interpreters, the emerging interpreter sample in this study was compared with and analyzed against the general population DISC sample of the United States of America. SPSS statistics were used to provide descriptive and nonparametric sample tests, including the Chi-Square goodness of fit test and descriptive statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics were analyzed and provided for the frequencies of emerging interpreters’ DISC assessment and wheel results.

Specifically, the ratio between the emerging interpreter group and the USA general population group was assessed for significance. The field of humanities generally considers a p-value of .05 to show “significance.” For this study, ratios higher than 1.00 indicate that a DISC style is more frequently observed in the emerging interpreters’ sample than in the USA general population sample. Ratios lower than 1.00 indicate a DISC style is less frequently occurring in the emerging interpreters’ sample compared to the USA general population sample. The p-value of .05 level of significance was analyzed in the Chi-Square Goodness-of-Fit test.

## RESULTS

Of the 242 individual DISC assessments collected for this study, the vast majority of the subjects (almost 77%) of emerging interpreters were determined to have a main personality type of either Influence or Steadiness (33.5% Influence; 43.4% Steadiness), leaving less than 23% having the main personality type of one of the other two categories of Dominance or Compliance (10.3% Dominance; 12.8% Compliance) (See Figure 4).

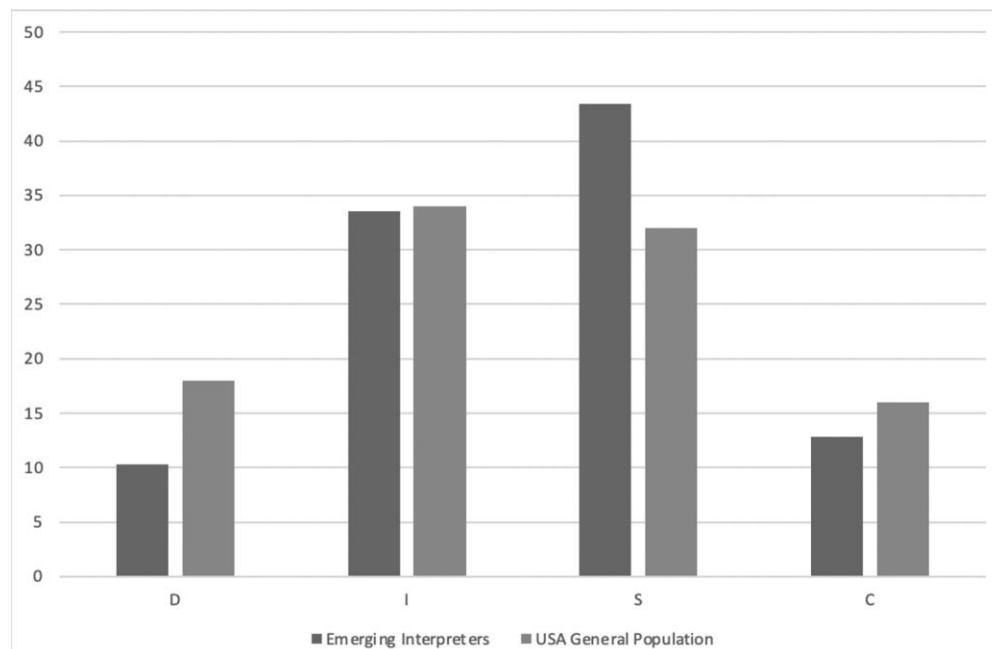
**Figure 4.** *Percentages of Top-Scoring DISC® Assessment Results in the Emerging Interpreter Sample*



When comparing the emerging interpreters' DISC results (dominance 10.3%, influence 33.5%, steadiness 43.4%, and compliance 12.8%) to that of the USA general population (dominance 18%; influence 34%, steadiness 32%, and compliance 16%), there is enough evidence to conclude that the DISC percentages of the interpreter group differ from those of the national group ( $\chi^2=8.00$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p<.05$ ). In the dominance group, the ratio was .57, which indicates that there were several fewer individuals with dominance styles among the emerging interpreters (43% less) compared to the general population. In the steadiness group, the ratio was 1.36, which indicates that there were several more individuals with steadiness styles among emerging interpreters (36% more) compared to the general population. In the compliance group, the ratio was .80, which indicates there were fewer individuals with compliance styles among the emerging interpreters (20% less) compared to the general population. In the influence group, the ratio of .99 shows that the emerging interpreter group and the general population were somewhat more similar compared to the "D," "S," and "C" groups (See Table 2 and Figure 5).

**Table 2:** *Frequency of the DISC® Assessment Results in the Emerging Interpreters Sample*

Style	Frequency (N)	Percentage	Ratio
D	25	10.3%	.57
I	81	33.5%	.99
S	105	43.4%	1.36
C	31	12.8%	.80
Total	242	100%	

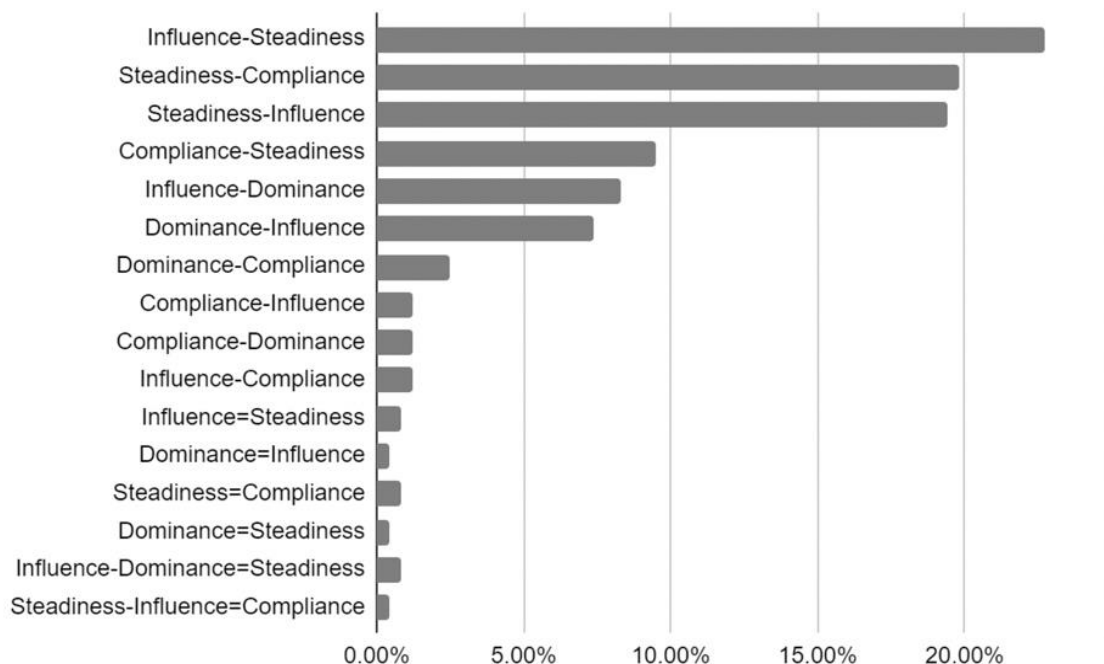
**Figure 5:** *Comparison of Percentages of Emerging Interpreters Sample and the USA General Population*

We furthered our investigation into the personality types of the subjects by examining subjects' two top-ranked personality types as identified by the DISC results (see Figure 6). The results are presented in descending order and are listed with the top-ranked trait followed by the second-



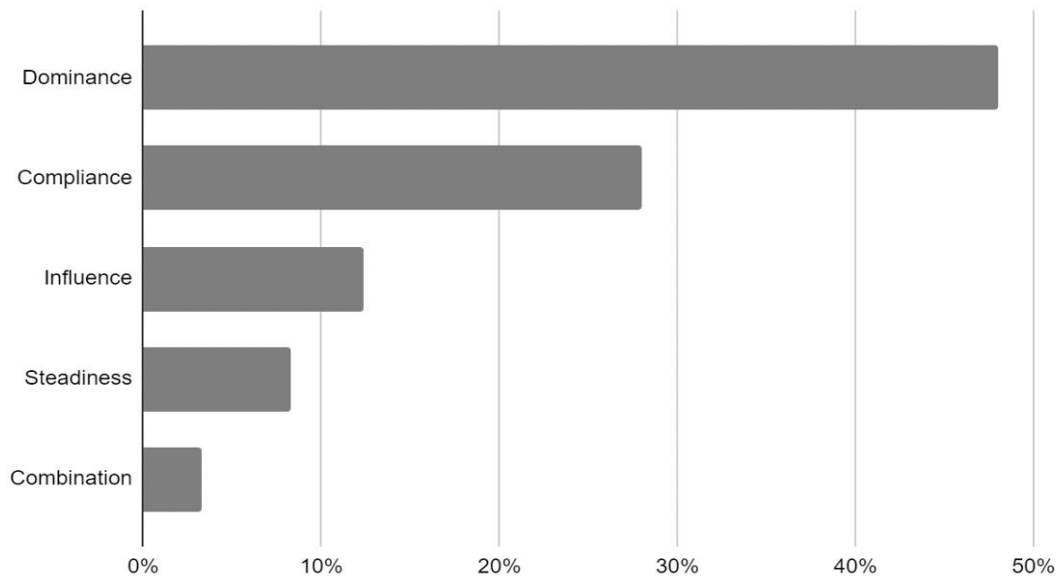
ranked trait: 22.7% (N=55) Influence-Steadiness; 19.8% (N=48) Steadiness-Compliance; 19.4% (N=47) Steadiness-Influence; 9.5% (N=23) Compliance-Steadiness; 8.3% (N=20) Influence-Dominance; 7.4% (N=18) Dominance-Influence; 2.5% (N=6) Dominance-Compliance; 1.2% (N=3) Compliance-Influence; 1.2% (N=3) Compliance-Dominance; and 1.2% (N=3) Influence-Compliance. The remaining subjects 3.7% (N=9) showed results representing a combination of personality traits. Equal top-ranked personality traits appeared as .83% (N=2) Influence=Steadiness; .41% (N=1) Dominance=Influence; .83% (N=2) Steadiness=Compliance; .41% (N=1) Dominance=Steadiness; and lastly, there were a few subjects who showed equal second-ranked traits: .83% (N=2) Influence-Dominance=Steadiness; and .41% (N=1) Steadiness-Influence=Compliance.

**Figure 6:** Percentages of Top-Two Scoring DISC® Assessment Results in the Emerging Interpreter Sample



Upon review of the subject's lowest-ranked DISC personality type (see Figure 7), it was identified that the overall greatest instance of lowest-ranked personality type was "D-dominance" 48% (N=116). Moving up the scale to the second greatest instance of the lowest-ranked personality type of subjects is that of "C-compliance" 28% (N=67). The third-largest group of lowest-ranked personality type is "I-influence" 12.4% (N=30). The smallest number of the lowest-ranked personality type of subjects in the study is "S-steadiness" 8.3% (N=20). The remaining subjects, 3.3% (N=8), had combination results of two personality types equal to one another (S=C, S=C, I=C, I=C, D=I, D=I, D=C, D=S).

**Figure 7:** Percentages of Bottom Scoring DISC® Assessment Results in the Emerging Interpreter Sample



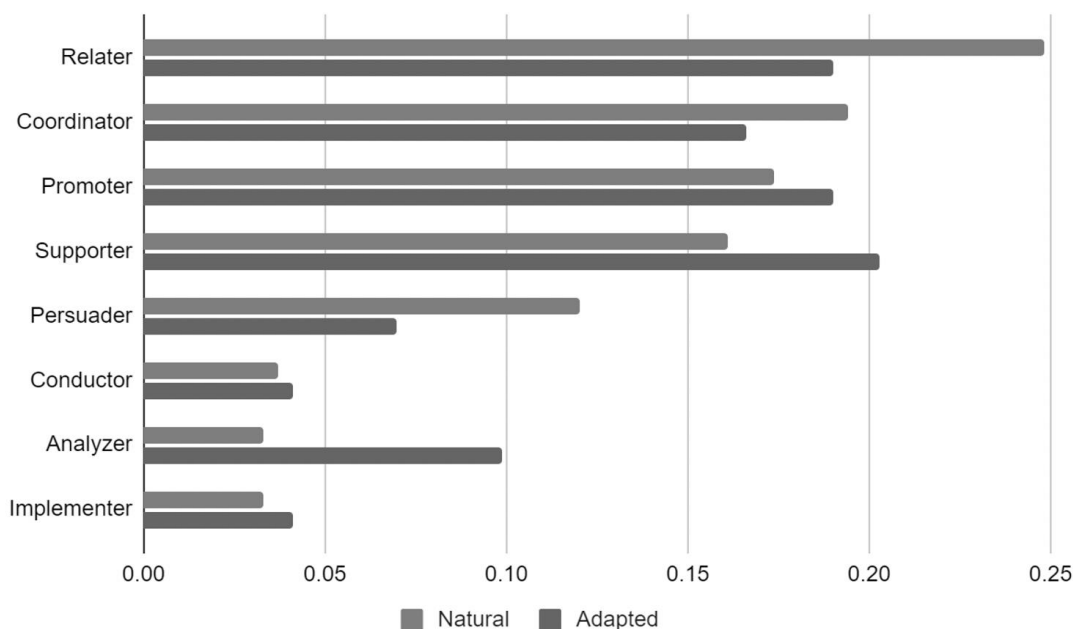
Using the Success Insights Wheel, data from the emerging interpreter group was collected to reflect both the natural and adapted plots. The natural plots indicate the true personality traits that tend to be the most comfortable (and thereby most used) behaviors and ways of thinking. The adapted plots depict the behavior that people allow others to see; the behavior a person feels must be exhibited in order to be successful. While there are eight categories on the wheel, the vast majority of the emerging interpreter group consumed five of the categories (relater, coordinator, promotor, supporter, and persuader), leaving very few of the emerging interpreters having a strong inclination toward the remaining three categories (conductor, analyzer, implementer) (see Table 3). When looking at just the natural frequency (not the adapted), 24.8% (N=60) of the plots were in the “Relater” group indicating a natural tendency toward being a cooperative team player; 19.4% (N=47) were in the “Coordinator” group, which indicates being cautious and self-disciplined; 17.4% (N=42) were in the “Promoter” group, showing a natural inclination to being verbal and trusting; 16.1% (N=39) were in the “Supporter” group which means they are accommodating and persistent, and 12% (N=29) were in the “Persuader” group which shows a tendency toward being optimistic and flexible. The remaining three groups were each plotted among below 5% of the sample and do not represent a strong presence within the group: 3.7% (N=9) were in the “Conductor” group who tend to be direct and results-oriented; 3.3% (N=8) were in the “Analyzer” group who tend to be precise and detail-oriented, and 3.3% (N=8) were in the “Implementer” group who tend to be creative and indecisive.

**Table 3:** *Natural and Adapted Frequency of the Emerging Interpreters' Success Insights Wheel Results*

Behavior Patterns	Brief Descriptions	Natural Frequency & Percentage	Adapted Frequency & Percentage
Relater	Cooperative team player	60 (24.8%)	46 (19%)
Coordinator	Cautious and self-disciplined	47 (19.4%)	40 (16.6%)
Promoter	Verbal and trusting	42 (17.4%)	46 (19%)
Supporter	Accommodating and persistent	39 (16.1%)	49 (20.3%)
Persuader	Optimistic and flexible	29 (12%)	17 (7.0%)
Conductor	Direct and results-oriented	9 (3.7%)	10 (4.1%)
Analyzer	Precise and detail-oriented	8 (3.3%)	24 (9.9%)
Implementer	Creative and indecisive	8 (3.3%)	10 (4.1%)

A comparison between the natural and adapted style of the emerging interpreters found that while they tend to be natural relaters, coordinators, promoters, and supporters, they are not generally natural conductors, implementers, and analyzers. The emerging interpreters show the ability to adapt well to the needs of a situation as it relates to being precise and detail-oriented; this is seen in the natural frequency (3.3%) of the behavior pattern “analyzer” being tripled in the adapted frequency (9.9%). A tendency toward adaptability is also seen among the emerging interpreter group in the categories of promoter, supporter, conductor, and implementer (see Figure 8).

**Figure 8.** Frequency of The Wheel Results in the Emerging Interpreters Sample Natural vs. Adapted



The majority of the emerging interpreters who participated in this study scored highest in the personality types of either steadiness or influence, with much fewer scoring as either the dominance or compliance type. Compared to the general population, the emerging interpreter group had a higher population of the personality type of steadiness and a much lower instance of the personality type of dominance. The emerging interpreters scored highest in the behavioral patterns of relater, coordinator, supporter, and promoter; and showed a higher tendency toward adaptability in the behavioral patterns of promoter, supporter, conductor, analyzer, and implementer.

## DISCUSSION

In this paper, we have described the DISC as a potential tool in improving teamwork and effective communication for emerging (as well as professional) interpreters. In professions where communication is paramount, such as language interpretation, information gained regarding communication can serve both the individual practitioner and the profession as a whole. As Wilcox (1981) suggested, studying the various psychological types of interpreting students and interpreters (both certified and non-certified) could inform us more about the profession of signed language interpretation. Completing the DISC assessment and training annually in the interpreter education program at NTID has offered an opportunity for emerging interpreters to better understand their personality type and communication preferences and gain insight into how others (such as future coworkers) might view a situation and prefer to communicate. Collecting and publishing the individual personality type results of a large population of emerging interpreters offers a glimpse into our colleagues' predominant personality types and

specific communication preferences and adds a norming lens for which one may see where they fall in the group. Offering a glimpse of our fellow professionals' natural strengths and gaining an awareness of where effort might be needed to adapt another person's preferred communication style can lend to a successful communication interaction.

Findings indicate that most of the emerging interpreters in this study have a DISC personality profile of "S" steadiness, which means they are people-tasked. They are the highest personality behavior on The Success Insights Wheel in the "relater" group, which means they build relationships with others, and their strength is focusing on their relationships with others. However, this does not mean that they know how to communicate effectively, especially with others who might have different personality traits and behavioral styles than their own.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

The emotional climate within the field of signed language interpreting in the United States has been fraught with challenges, often seeming to stem from misunderstandings, communication breakdowns, and personality tensions. According to Bonnstetter & Suiter (2010), two frequent reasons people offer for feeling mistreated are (1) a lack of awareness of their behavior and (2) having an awareness of their behavior, but choosing to act on their own set of beliefs without regard for reconciliation or rebuilding relationships. Work-related tension can lead to stress and anxiety, which can cause a host of additional problems. Improving working relationships by understanding one's own and others' personality types and communication styles could lead to a less stressful work environment. Interpreters, by the sheer nature of their work, undergo constant communication adjustments. Utilizing the knowledge gained through DISC training can allow people the flexibility to show kindness to their colleagues by altering their communication style to meet the preferences of others. The DISC training encourages people to take the assessment and share their results with others; it also warns against labeling another person who hasn't taken the assessment for themselves.

## **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

Limitations of this study include the sample being from only one bachelor's level interpreter education program. It is possible that the DISC results might be different if a larger pool of emerging interpreters is collected from various Interpreter Education Programs. Another limitation is that the subjects of this study took the most basic version of the DISC assessment due to the expense of the more advanced DISC assessment versions, which provide further insights into their results.

Future research directions could include correlating DISC results to attrition within the field of interpreting. In the future, the ASLIE program at NTID could offer the DISC® personality assessment earlier in the program, during students' first or second year, to be able to measure the attrition rates and to see if there is any correlation between the personality styles and attrition rates or a correlation with leadership roles. DISC results could also be correlated with work settings of interpreters and then triangulated with satisfaction surveys to see if interpreters are working in a setting that matches the DISC profile for employment suitability. Furthering the work suitability study, a retrospective view of prior DISC training could inform the impact of job placement decisions of interpreters. An additional recommendation is to review DISC profiles to

include an increased number of subjects who are not primarily white. Collecting DISC results from across the field of signed language interpreting and then categorizing the data by work setting (e.g., legal, healthcare, community, business, education, etc.) could offer insight into potential unique subgroups of DISC results. Additionally, DISC training could be given to a group of interpreters working at a short term event such as a conference.

In contrast, another group of interpreters does not get the training. After the conference, the interpreters could report on the impact the DISC training had on the teamwork experiences throughout the job. Ideally, DISC research will continue, and the field of signed language interpreting will benefit from the knowledge gained through research results.

### CONCLUSION

The DISC® assessment and training offered an opportunity for the ASLIE department at NTID to educate a large body of emerging interpreters regarding their personality type and communication styles and the personality type and communication preferences of others. Bonnstetter & Suiter, 2018 have briefly summarized the benefits of DISC: by understanding the language of DISC, individuals will know their behavioral style, recognize the behavioral style of others, and be able to adapt and blend their style for greater, more effective communication and relationships. The overarching goal of this project is to encourage interpreters to open their “behavioral eyes” to understand better how others naturally behave and communicate. By better understanding one another, the effectiveness of interpersonal communications for the profession of language interpretation is sure to improve. In closing, we would like to share a quote by Bonnstetter, who passed away in 2016, “It’s not what style you are; it’s what you do with what you are” (Bonnstetter & Suiter, 2018, p. 9).

### CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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