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### **Alumnus Uses Social Media Platform to Educate and Advocate for Deafblind Community**

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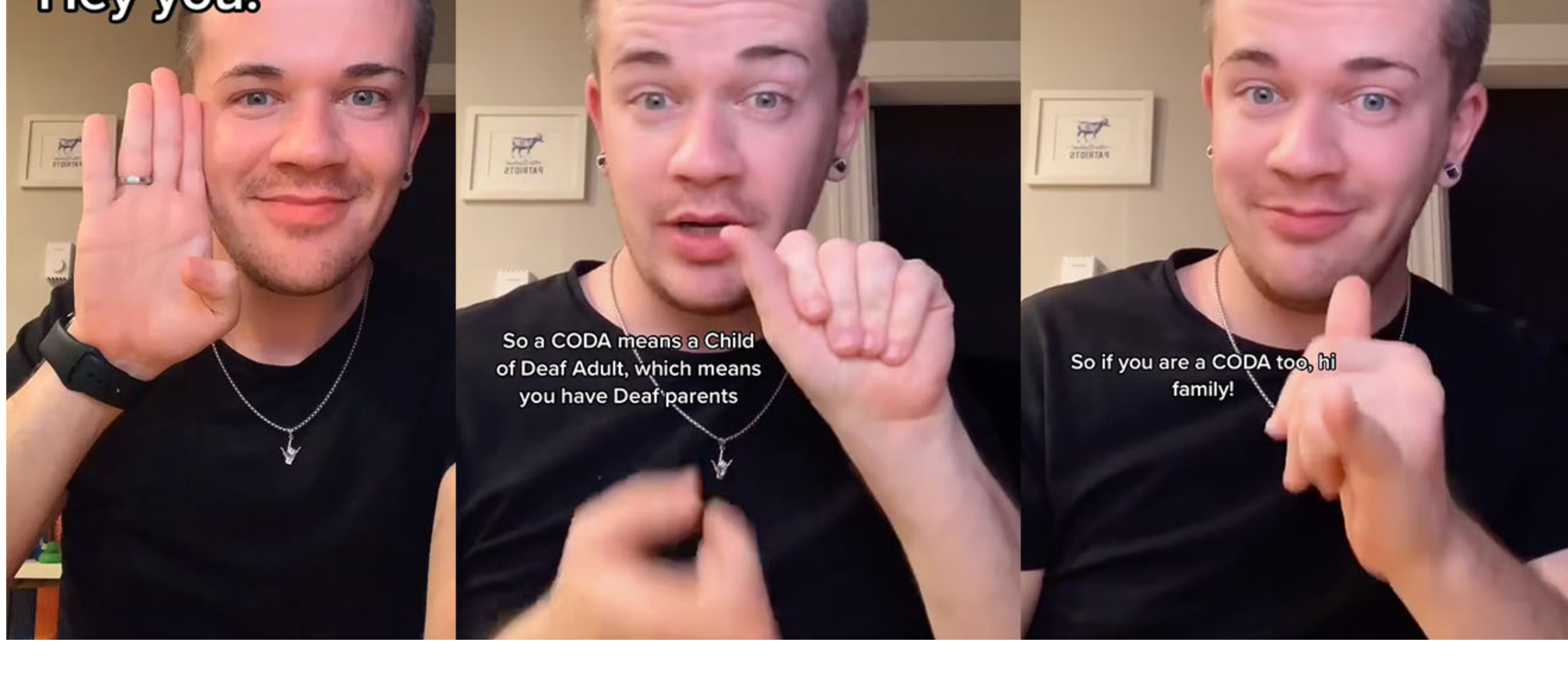
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ALUMNI

# Alumnus Uses Social Media Platform to Educate and Advocate for Deafblind Community

BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON OCTOBER 29, 2020



## Jon Urquhart, '16, is American Sign Language Interpreter and Entrepreneur

When Jon Urquhart, a 2016 alumnus of Gardner-Webb University, meets people for the first time, and he tells them about his Deafblind father, they are naturally intrigued. The question he's usually asked is, "What was it like growing up with a father who is Deafblind?"

His response stems from equal curiosity, "What is it like growing up with a dad who isn't Deafblind?" Urquhart shared, "Having a Deafblind father was my typical. Growing up, I never understood my dad had a dual sensory disability, that was just the way he was. One misconception is that all CODAs (Child of Deaf Adults) know that they are a CODA and have accepted their identity within the Deaf and hearing communities. However, I didn't realize I was a CODA myself until I entered Gardner-Webb and met other CODAs."

What he did realize, though, as he often interpreted for his father, was that the world is not fully accessible to people with disabilities. "A lot of people in this world don't understand that as hearing-sighted people, we have privileges," Urquhart asserted. "We can go to the doctor without worrying about interpreters. We can buy tickets to shows and concerts without worrying about accessibility. When hearing people apply for a job, the employer focuses on our work experience instead of our disability."



When he began searching for a college with an ASL major, he realized the choices were few. "Luckily, a student from my high school who graduated a year before me went to Gardner-Webb for ASL, that's how I found GWU," he related. "Gardner-Webb was the only college I applied to, because I couldn't afford to send out multiple college applications. I came to Gardner-Webb on blind decision, so you if you can imagine this Bostonian stepping on the grounds of GWU for the first time, I was in awe! The campus is beautiful, the environment is welcoming, and the education is unrivaled."

He remembers the clever storytelling of Bob Moore, instructor in ASL, and the pride Moore took in his work. "Bob really enjoys seeing his students succeed, and during my time at GWU, he always made himself available whenever we had questions," described Urquhart, who minored in interpreting and English. "Dr. (Mary) High and Bob helped us understand that there is only so much we could learn in the classroom, and if we want to achieve our goals, we had to commit to practicing our craft in our spare time."

Urquhart is also grateful for the guidance of Dr. Jennifer Buckner, English department chair and associate professor. "She encouraged me to minor in English and continually supported my work," he noted. "I wouldn't be the person I am today without the education I received from Gardner-Webb, and the friendships I was able to build along the way."

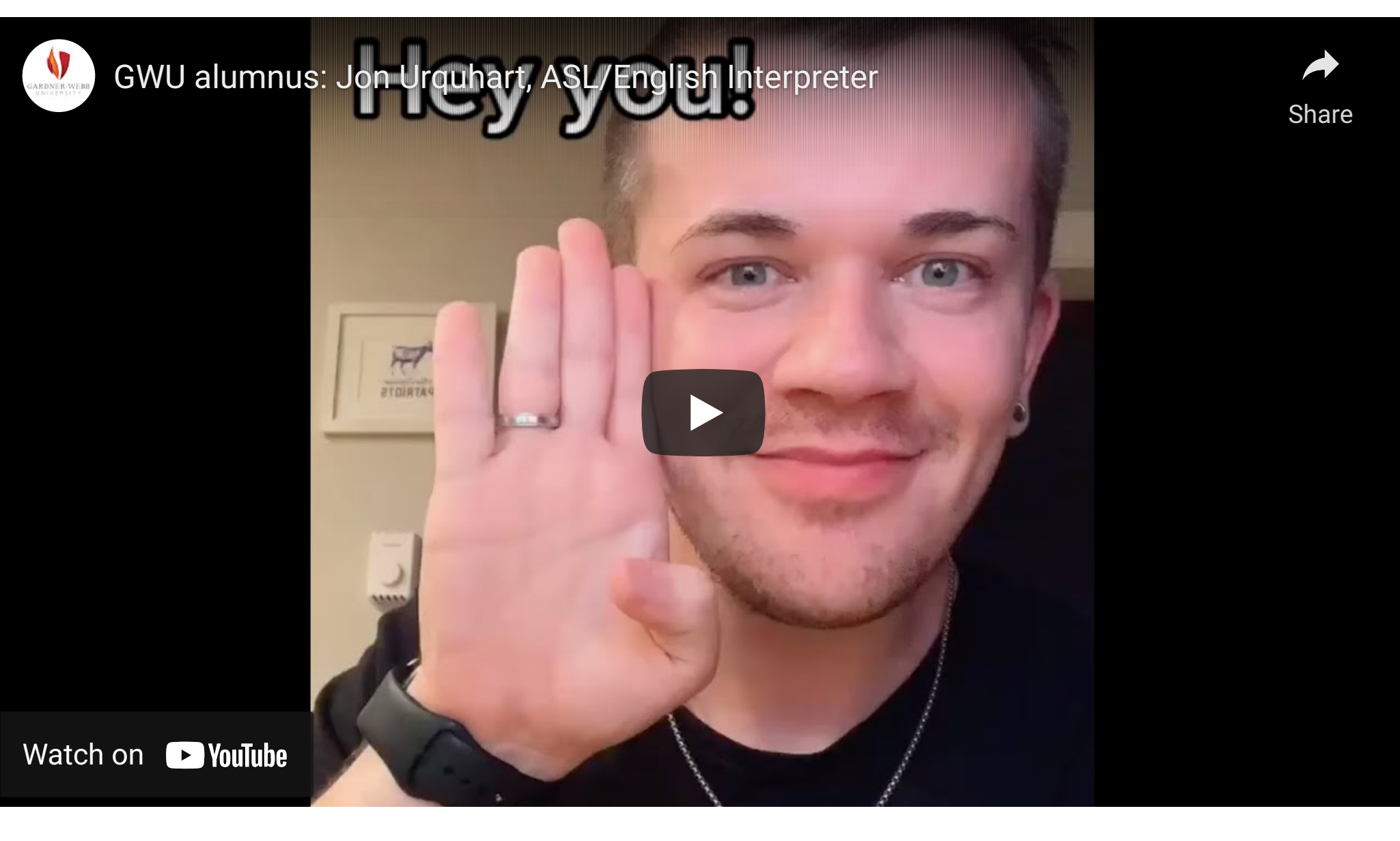
Since graduating from Gardner-Webb, Urquhart has worked as an interpreter in Boston, but also offers ASL lessons on Patreon, a membership platform that provides business tools for content creators to run a subscription service. He also began creating TikTok videos in January that are viewed by thousands of people. Because of his success in these areas, his story was featured on CNBC in Make It's Millennial Money series, which profiles people around the world and details how they earn, spend and save their money.



"I balance all these pursuits with hope and a prayer," Urquhart offered. "I value my full-time employment for the opportunities it provides me, as well as the relationships I've been able to develop within the office. On Patreon, I'm able to provide a large audience of people with access to affordable ASL education taught by Deaf teachers. Finally, I value my Tik Tok because it gives me the opportunity to let my creativity thrive while being able to educate over 275,000 people. I've been able to take ASL, my background as a CODA, and my experience as an interpreter, and expose people to the beauty of the culture that I grew up in and am a part of. I don't create content for fame, I create content for transparency, advocacy, and education, and I've made sure my followers understand that."

As part of his advocacy efforts, Urquhart created an online petition that has been signed by over 9,000 people asking TikTok for auto-generated captions. "TikTok is a spectacular app that millions of people have downloaded within the past year, yet it is still not accessible to everyone," he insisted. "Another way to make your content accessible to everyone is when you add a video or picture, please post an image description for people who are blind or have low-vision. Not everyone can see your photo, but if you add a cute caption and ID (Image Description) like: Jon standing in front of a rock wall outside on a sunny day wearing black jeans and a blue shirt. You can change someone's day for the better, because it lets them know you are aware of their needs and that you're trying."

[Learn more about majoring in American Sign Language.](#)



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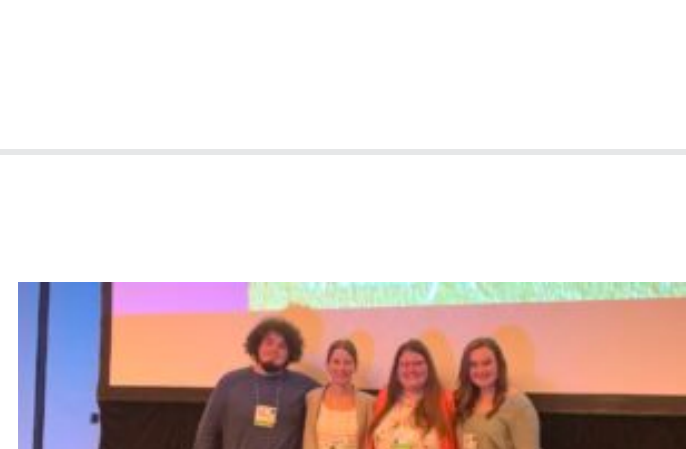


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