

**ATTEMPTING TO CREATE AN AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE  
CURRICULUM AT SALEM STATE UNIVERSITY**

Honors Thesis

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements**

**For the Degree of Bachelor of Science**

In the College of Arts and Sciences

at Salem State University

by

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Department of Psychology

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The Honors Program

Salem State University

2015

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## **Thesis Proposal**

### **Attempting to Create an American Sign Language Curriculum at Salem State University**

American Sign Language (ASL) is a non-verbal language that is utilized primarily deaf and hard of hearing community. This language contains grammar, morphology and syntax just like any spoken language and is estimated to be the 3<sup>rd</sup> most commonly used non-English language in the United States (ASL 2004). Classmates, neighbors, coworkers, anyone really can be deaf or hard of hearing and many fail to realize just how many people in our local community use ASL as their main means of communication. However, this group of people lives in a world that is at times isolated from everyone else. Due to their inability to vocally communicate, they often find themselves at a loss attempting to communicate with those who are hearing. Simple tasks such as ordering a lunch can become extremely complicated. What is even more concerning is that many people know very little about Deaf Culture and never have the opportunity to learn ASL.

Many liberal art higher education institutions require students enroll in a World Language course as a part of the curriculum. Most colleges and universities offer languages such as Spanish, French, Italian and German. In some cases you may have the opportunity to take a less commonly offered language such as Arabic, Latin or Mandarin Chinese; however, very few universities offer American Sign Language courses. Why is it that even though this is a common language used in the United States, it isn't the least commonly offered language? My goal with my Senior Thesis is to show Salem State University how important American Sign Language is and how it benefits students to be able to learn this language and to encourage them to create and offer an American Sign Language course on

campus by presenting them with statistics regarding the students demand for an American Sign Language class as well as to analyze enrollment in ASL classes at other local Universities.

In 2011, at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), one student took on a similar task. He noticed that many students on campus had a desire to learn ASL and were frustrated that this class was not offered at the time. He went forward to UCLA Administration and presented them with statistics and information, urging them to begin offering ASL Classes on campus that could be taken as a Foreign Language requirement. This student made a very important point, that out of 50 of the language courses offered at his college, “12 were spoken by fewer than 100,000 people” and that “ASL ranked fourth behind Spanish, German and French as the most frequently studied language on U.S. college campuses” (Sullivan 2011). His research and petition proved to administration that there is a demand for American Sign Language, and that students are eager to learn this language not only at UCLA, but across the country. After a successful student interest survey, and a unanimous panel approval, ASL classes started being offered in January 2012. This is similar to what I plan on attempting to do this coming semester.

Some research that has already been done has proven that there are multiple benefits to learning ASL. The most obvious would be that you will be able to communicate with a new group of people you previously could not. If one becomes fluent, knowing ASL also provides the same benefits that being bilingual in any other language does. However, unlike spoken languages, American Sign Language, and learning it, can result in heightened cognitive abilities. One study on cognitive abilities found that fluent hearing signers, “have an enhanced ability to generate relatively complex images and to detect mirror image reversals” (Arnold & Murray 1998). This is the concept of mental rotation. Since seeing someone signing looks differently than when you sign yourself (it is opposite), it means you have to not only understand the meaning of the sign, but also mentally move it around in your head to understand the sign coming from the opposite perspective. Overall, those who are fluent in sign are far better and more accurate at tests of mental rotation. A second experiment by Keehner and Gethercole

(2007) involved hearing adult learners of British Sign Language as compared to hearing adults who did not know any BSL. In a test regarding spatial short term memory, signers performed better at this task over time with greater recall and accuracy scores compared to non-signers. This infers that those who know a signed language can better create cognitive spatial movements and transformations using visuospatial memory. Other tasks were also done and in most cases, the hearing individuals who learned a signed language as an adult had better scores and performance on these cognitive tasks as compared to someone who knew no signed language. This means that with the learning of ASL, a type of signed language, that you not only gain the ability of being bilingual and using a new language, but also may gain more cognitive skills as a result of the visuospatial skills that are required when signing and understanding signs. Other cognitive tasks, such as memory recall of shapes and objects was better in hearing people who could sign as compared to non-signers, according to research done by Cattani, Clibbens and Perfect (2007).

The format of my Thesis will be that of a Service Learning Project. I plan on doing research through online databases as to what the benefits are if young adults learn American Sign Language. I also will reach out to multiple universities that offer American Sign Language classes and gather data about their enrollment to assess the popularity of the courses at their institution. I also seek information and opinions from the Salem State community itself, which I will obtain by sending out a survey to see how many people would actually be interested in bringing Sign Language classes to campus. Next, I will present this information and research to the Administrations at Salem State University and try to persuade them to start offering American Sign Language courses in the coming years. My ultimate goal is to have ASL classes offered on campus for students to take as either an elective or language requirement. I will have to meet with the World Language and Cultures Department on campus to try to see how this class would fit into their core curriculum and if they are interested in supporting the creation of a new language course sequence. I also will create a syllabus and course schedule to be

provided as a supplement to my thesis. Dr. David Gow of the psychology Department will be acting as my Thesis Advisor throughout this project.

This subject is important to me because I recently took American Sign Language courses through the NECCUM program at North Shore Community College. I have loved every second of that class and I learned so much about the deaf community, culture and history. I was given the chance to learn a beautiful and intriguing language that has allowed me to meet and interact with amazing and kind people. I think that American Sign Language, and learning about the Deaf community and culture is very important and is currently overlooked greatly. More people should have access to classes like this and currently do not have the chance. Despite the fact that NECCUM (North East Consortium of Colleges and Universities in Massachusetts) exists and allows students at 10 Massachusetts state schools to take classes at other institutions at no personal cost, many people do not know about this programs existence, or are unable to take advantage of it due to travel restrictions or course conflicts. This is an issue that keeps many people from being able to cross register to take this course at another institution. Due to my personal experience, as well as the fact that ASL is currently offered at comparable universities to Salem State, and the recent creation of an ASL Club on campus, I believe that offering an introductory American Sign Language course, or preferably, an ASL sequence, would be very popular and beneficial to the student body. My goal is to give others the chance to learn and experience the things that I have been able to.

## **Thesis Essay**

### **Attempting to Create an American Sign Language Curriculum at Salem State University**

Ever since I was in high school, American Sign Language was something that had always fascinated me. I found it so intriguing that people could communicate with one another by using only their body. I always had wanted the opportunity to learn American Sign Language, but was never quite able to; whether it was due to lack of time, lack of money, or because it simply wasn't offered. I was very excited when I chose to attend Salem State University for my undergraduate degree, however, I was disappointed to learn that Salem State, unlike the other school I had applied to, did not offer American Sign Language courses. Again, I just pushed this aside and told myself that the opportunity would present itself at some time, perhaps after I graduate. Sophomore year, I finally got my opportunity. During a meeting with my Honors Advisor, I was discussing potential career paths. At the time I had an interest in Speech and Communication Disorders, but again, Salem State did not offer any courses in this major. This is when I learned about NECCUM (The Northeast Consortium of Colleges and Universities in Massachusetts). This is a program that allows a Salem State Student to take courses at ten other North Shore colleges or universities at no charge in the instance that the home institution doesn't offer a particular course. When I did research about what these other colleges had to offer in regards to Speech Pathology classes, I discovered that North Shore Community College offered American Sign Language. I immediately registered for the following fall.

Overall, my goal in completing this project was to successfully create an Elementary Sign Language course that will be offered at Salem State in the upcoming academic year. This would be the

ideal outcome so that all students have the access to learn a new language and experience a new culture, however I am aware that this is a large task that may not get approved by the school for a number of different reasons. If this is not the outcome, then my hope is that students are able to get more information about the ways that they can take ASL courses outside of Salem State University; such as the Beverly School for the Deaf and through the NECCUM program.

My first real experience with someone who was deaf happened the summer of my sophomore year when I was working at Panera Bread as a cashier. One day during lunch a family came in, I said hello to them and they didn't respond. I was very confused until I saw that they were writing down their order. I then noticed them signing to one another and I realized that they were deaf. I immediately felt awkward. They had written down their order; but as a cashier there are many other questions one must ask such as "Do you want a 99 cent pastry?" or "Would you like bread, chips or an apple for your side?" I didn't want to not ask these people, in case they did want a particular side item, but I also didn't want to waste their time, requiring them to try to understand my question and write down more responses. After this interaction, I became excited knowing that I was learning ASL in the fall, and that perhaps, maybe next time they came in, I would be able to sign with them and speak with them in their own language, rather than them having to write everything down. I wanted to help the family, I felt bad that a task that should be so simple; ordering lunch, was such a struggle for them, and only because they are unable to hear.

When I started my American Sign Language course at North Shore Community College, I was very excited, but also very nervous. I took two languages in middle school and high school, and neither of them really stuck. I loved my ASL class from Day 1, and I was so happy to show my friends all the signs I had learned. As the weeks went on, I became more confident in my abilities and fell more and more in love with the language and the culture. The more I learned, the more I realized that overall, people don't know how to act around deaf people, and that the Deaf Community is largely ignored and have

very few people willing to advocate on their behalf. However, those who are deaf usually face a number of struggles. For example, there are very few schools or universities for the Deaf in the United States and many schools don't offer resources to ensure that students in "mainstream hearing schools" are getting the best education possible. Learning about all of these issues made me want to try to make a difference, and having the chance to interact with some amazing people from the Deaf Community made me want to make others realize why learning American Sign Language and being able to communicate with this group of people is so beneficial.

During the second semester of my junior year I had to start thinking about my Honors Thesis. I knew that I wanted it to center around American Sign Language, but I was not sure how exactly. Then I started to think about how much I gained from taking American Sign Language at North Shore, and how many students asked me about how they could sign up for the class. I then started to realize that there are probably many other students at Salem State who would love the chance to take an American Sign Language course but were not able to afford to take it outside of SSU, or who did not know anything about the NECCUM program. This is when my thesis was born; I decided that I wanted to attempt to create an American Sign Language course curriculum at Salem State. My goal was to give all Salem State students the opportunity to learn American Sign Language so they could learn about this fantastic group of people and get the opportunity to interact with those from the Deaf community.

The first step of my project was to create a survey. My survey assessed the desire of Salem State students to have American Sign Language courses offered on campus. I asked students if they would take American Sign Language if it was available, if they believed that SSU should offer ASL, what their reasoning would be to take ASL or not, what they believe the advantages or disadvantages would be if SSU offered ASL and if students were aware of what NECCUM was. In my survey, I was able to get 100 respondents who are all part of the SSU community, whether they be alumni, faculty, staff or undergraduate students. Of the respondents, 61% reported they currently or previously know someone

that is Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or uses ASL to communicate. Despite this very high statistic, only 9% of these individuals have taken an American Sign Language course. This shows that although many people do know someone who uses ASL, many people are unable to learn the language and therefore, are unable to effectively communicate with those they know that are part of the deaf community. When asked if they would enroll in an ASL course if it was offered at Salem State, 62 respondents out of 98, or 63.26% of the students polled said that they would take an ASL class if it was offered on campus and another 28 people, 28.57% said that if they had room in their schedule they would register as well. Only 3 respondents (3.06%) said that they have no interest and 5 (5.10) said that they simply have no room available in their class schedule. When asked why they would have an interest in taking an American Sign Language course, the most common responses were to become bilingual (28.57%), learn about Deaf culture (17.35), obtain a career advantage (16.33%) and to communicate with someone they know who uses ASL (15.31%). In an open ended response, I asked respondents to give their opinions about the advantages and disadvantages of having ASL classes at SSU. Some people noted that it would allow them to communicate with deaf people in their future careers, which could be very important. Other factors noted was that it allows students to communicate and learn about a new group as well as offer more options for classes. The only noted disadvantages people noted was that this class would not be potentially offered until after the individual graduated and that one person was concerned that their might not be enough of a demand and that not as many students would be interested compared to more traditional foreign languages. Another important part of my survey was to establish whether or not students were aware of the NECCUM program. In response to the question "Are you aware of what the NECCUM program is and that Salem State is a part of this program", the majority of those surveyed, 80.41% said that they did not know what NECCUM was or that SSU was a part of the program. Only 11.34% of the 100 respondents are aware of what the NECCUM program is and that Salem State was a member of the program. This means that the majority of students are not aware that they have the

ability to take other courses (including, but not limited to American Sign Language) at many other schools at no cost to them.

After I received my survey results, which strongly stated that many Salem State students want the opportunity to take American Sign Language classes, I began to do research about *why* there is a huge, scientific benefit to learning American Sign Language. This information, coupled with the results of my survey provided strong support to the World Language Department as to why they should support my initiative and submit the documentation to have the course sequence reviewed by the University. Some research that has already been done has proven that there are multiple benefits to learning a signed language. Not only will you be able to communicate with a new group of people you previously could not and also provides the same benefits that being bilingual in any other language does. However, unlike spoken languages, American Sign Language, and learning it, can result in heightened cognitive abilities. One study on cognitive abilities found that fluent hearing signers have greater abilities in mental rotation and visualizing complex, mirrored images (Arnold & Murray 1998). This was a skill that even applied to those who learned ASL at a later period, or who were not deaf but knew ASL. A second experiment by Keehner and Gathercole (2007) involved hearing adult learners of British Sign Language as compared to hearing adults who did not know any BSL. In a test regarding spatial short term memory, signers performed better at this task over time with greater recall and accuracy scores compared to non-signers. This implies that those who know a signed language can better create cognitive spatial movements and transformations using visuospatial memory. Other tasks were also done and in most cases, the hearing individuals who learned a signed language as an adult had better scores and performance on these cognitive tasks as compared to someone who knew no signed language. Other cognitive tasks, such as memory recall of shapes and objects was better in hearing people who could sign as compared to non-signers, according to research done by Cattani, Clibbens and Perfect (2007). This means that with the learning of ASL, a type of signed language, that you not only gain the

ability of being bilingual and using a new language, but also may gain more cognitive skills as a result of the visuospatial skills that are required when signing and understanding signs.

The next step of my project, and perhaps the most daunting, was to create a “mock syllabus” for an ASL 101 course, which can be found in the appendix. First, I started by connecting with Universities that offer American Sign Language, and asked if any of the departments or professors would be willing to share a copy of their syllabus. I then found the syllabus guidelines for Salem State, and used my advisor, Dr. Gow’s syllabus outline to create a syllabus for an Elementary American Sign Language course. I obtained sample syllabi from the Signing Naturally Website, Boston University, North Shore Community College, Palomar College, Johnson Community College and Seattle Central Community College. Based on their syllabi, I created a syllabus that incorporates many different aspects that, when combined, will allow for the best possible experience for a student. My syllabus includes course goals and objectives as well as information regarding selected textbook requirements and information regarding specific assignments and classroom policies. To accompany the syllabus, I also created a tentative class schedule based on the dates for the current fall semester.

After having created a syllabus and establishing a desire for an American Sign Language course on campus, I began to do research about what other organizations in the local area offer ASL courses. I, unfortunately, found that the access to American Sign Language classes in the North Shore area can be limited. According to the Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing’s 2008 Resource Directory there are approximately 28 schools and institutions that offer ASL courses, some of them are not accessible. For example, Northern Essex Community College and Boston University, Tufts and Northeastern only have these courses open to students enrolled full-time as undergraduates or if they are within their Interpreter or Deaf Studies programs. Additionally, not all of the schools that affiliated with the NECCUM program offer American Sign Language classes. Out of the ten participating colleges, only one, North Shore Community College, offers ASL classes that any student can take at no cost.

However, this course is only offered after 3pm, and students must find their own way to drive to Lynn, which may not be possible for everyone. This leaves limited options for Salem State students. While some state organizations offer classes to the public, some, like Deaf Inc. in Salem only offer classes to those who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing themselves. This only leaves about 4 other options and while it is possible to take these courses, most of them are organizations located near Boston and the cost is typically a hefty \$150-\$200. The same cost is also found at another local option, the Beverly School of the Deaf. While this may not seem like a great deal of money, for many struggling college students it may not be possible.

Since ASL is considered a language, I met with Dr. Elizabeth Blood, the acting chairperson for the World Languages and Cultures Department here at Salem State. This meeting revealed that there have been multiple attempts to create an American Sign Language course and that the department is aware that there is a strong desire for ASL to be offered. However, the largest issue is primarily that the World Language Department must offer 4 semesters of a language in order to create a new course so that it can fulfill the World Language requirement for any student. Another hurdle is the fact that the World Language Department does not necessarily have the budget to hire a Full Time Faculty member to teach American Sign Language and they also cannot hire more adjunct professors in the department due to a rule stating that no more than 15% of a departments classes can be taught by adjuncts. Despite these issues, Dr. Blood said that she supported my endeavor. She supplied me with a CID document that I had to fill out and submit to the school in order to have a pilot ASL 101 class be created and offered. With Dr. Blood's guidance, I completed this form.

After completing the CID document, Dr. Blood communicated with me that there were obstacles that could prevent my thesis from becoming a reality. Only a department chairperson, with full support of the entire department, can bring a proposal forward to the Salem State Curriculum Committee. Dr. Blood informed me that the Department would have to make many considerations before committing

themselves to supporting this initiative, and that all the Faculty members may not be on board. Another issue would be staffing and budget constraints. The World Language and Culture Department is unable to hire an another adjunct(part-time) professor to teach an American Sign Language course because at this time, the Department is already composed of 15% adjuncts. Per Salem State University policy, the department may not exceed this percentage. This means that they would need to hire a Full Time Faculty member to teach this course, however, the department does not currently have the funding to pay a salary to another full time faculty member. Another concern from some World Language and Culture faculty members would be that introducing American Sign Language could pull students from potentially taking other languages such as Arabic, Madarin and French. They are concerned that, with the already low enrollment in language courses at Salem State that offering another course would further reduce their numbers in their existing language classes. There are also concerns about the possibility that finding a qualified professor to teach American Sign Language and the Department wants to ensure that this ASL course would meets high academic standards similar to those set forth by accredited ASL programs at large institutions such as Boston University and Northeastern.

On December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2015, Dr. Blood invited me to present my findings and advocate for the creation of American Sign Language classes at the monthly Department meeting. I arrived and shared the information that I gathered over the course of the semester with the group. I showed them the statistics and data from the survey I conducted, which showed that many SSU students do have a desire to take American Sign Language courses on campus. I also informed them of the inaccessibility of ASL courses at other institutions. I answered all of the questions that they had, most of which were in regards to how popular they believe upper level courses may or may not be. A few hours later Dr. Blood e-mailed me back informing me that despite some of the concerns they had, the department voted to further explore the possibility of adding American Sign Language to their curriculum. With the support of Dr. Blood, as well as the majority of the World Language Department, the CID will be formally

submitted. Dr. Blood also said that she is going to contact Disability Services as well as Northern Essex Community College to discuss with them the steps to creating an ASL sequence and attempt to find contacts to potentially teach. She also said she would contact the Dean and Provost to gain their potential support for adding new courses to the curriculum. After speaking to the Provost, Dr. David Silva myself, he said that he would love to see Salem State University offer American Sign Language courses as long as there was solid evidence that this course would be highly enrolled and is in demand from the study body. Although the support of the World Language Department does not guarantee that American Sign Language courses will be added to the curriculum, it is certainly a step in the right direction and is a significant hurdle that has been overcome. At this point, the next steps and outcome is out of my hands for the most part. It may take up to a year and a half for Salem State to offer their first American Sign Language course due to the processes that must occur before offering a new class, however, I am hopeful that this will happen in the near future and that the proposal will be approved. If, for some reason this proposal is not approved, I hope that the Navigation Center, as well as the World Languages and Cultures Department, would take the time to learn about the NECCUM program and more widely advertise it so that other students can learn about this program and recognize that it is a viable option as well.

Giving Salem State students access to American Sign Language courses was my overall goal, and hopefully this will be met in the next year and a half. I loved learning American Sign Language and interacting with those in the Deaf community, and I hope that other students will be able to have the same wonderful experience that I did. I am also very excited at the prospect of being a part of the reason that SSU offers ASL classes and leaving something behind for future students, and also making a positive impact on the University that I have called home for the past three and a half years.

Salem State students certainly have the desire to take American Sign Language courses and if Salem State were to offer it, it would not only be beneficial for the growth of the university, but also

personal advancement of the students and their community as a whole. Salem State could become an institution that empowers their students to become more understanding of different people who live in the local community. I believe that this is something that other students, including myself, feel passionate about. Being able to communicate with members of the Deaf community is not only a learning experience but also a rewarding one. If more people come to learn about this amazing culture and learn their language, it is quite possible that those who are deaf and hard of hearing may not have to continue being left in the dark in many facets of their life, just because they are not able to hear.

## **Bibliography**

### **Attempting to Create an American Sign Language Curriculum at Salem State University**

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Sullivan, M. (2011, December 4). American Sign Language gets hands-down approval. Retrieved May 8, 2015, from <http://newsroom.ucla.edu/stories/american-sign-language-gets-hands-220801>

**Elementary American Sign Language 1 Syllabus**  
**Fall 2016**

**ASL 101 Section 1 (01)** 3.0 Credits

**Time:** To Be Determined

**Location:** To Be Determined

**Instructor:** To Be Determined

**Office:** To Be Determined

**Phone:** To Be Determined

**E-mail:** [ToBeDetermined@salemstate.edu](mailto:ToBeDetermined@salemstate.edu)

**Office Hours:** To Be Determined

**Catalog description:** This course will introduce students to American Sign Language as a second language as well as to educate on the topics of deaf culture and controversies, deaf history and the value of learning American Sign Language. Students will learn basic conversational skills in the language and apply them. This class requires a final group project and attendance of an event in the Deaf community where they will use their acquired ASL skills. Three class hours per week. No prerequisite is required.

**Goals:**

- To understand Deaf culture, controversies and history through readings and experiences
- To be able to construct meaningful and correctly structured sentences in ASL
- To meet and interact with a community of people that were previously unavailable to the student
- Develop basic expressive and receptive skills in ASL

**Objectives:**

- Students will be able to explain how to appropriately interact with those who are deaf
- Students will be able to demonstrate proficiency in constructing and understanding grammatically correct sentences in ASL
- Students will be able to identify cultural values, perspectives, controversies and attitudes of those who are Deaf as compared to other cultures
- Students will be able to explain the origin of American Sign Language and Deaf history

**Required Text(s):** Learning American Sign Language: Tom Humphries and Carol Padden

**Optional Text(s):** American Sign Language Dictionary: Elaine Costello PhD

A Sign of Respect: Strategies for Effective Deaf/Hearing Interactions DVD:  
Holcomb, Mindess

**Cell phones:** Cell phones are expected to be placed on silent/vibrate and are not to be used during class. If there is an emergency please step outside to use the phone.

**Class Attendance:** Attendance for this course is mandatory and important. Material will be covered at a brisk pace and any in class work or review that is missed is up to the individual to complete on time. If you will miss class due to a University related event (performance/field trip/academic commitment or athletic event) please let the professor know prior to the absence. If you miss class for family/medical reasons please discuss this with the professor. After four unexcused absences your grade will drop one letter.

**Final Grade:** Grading will be based on participation, group project work, quizzes, essays, field trips and projects as well as attendance.

Group/Class Work – 10%

Quizzes – 10%

Essays/Reports – 35%

Final/Midterm – 30%

Field Trips – 10%

Attendance – 5%

**Voices Off:** This is expected to be a “Voices Off” classroom. While class is in session, no student is to speak vocally. All communication will be through American Sign Language or written if necessary.

**Late Assignments:** Classwork, papers or any assignments that are turned in late will have a 10 point deduction per day that they are handed in past the due date. After one week, late assignments will not be accepted and will receive a grade of zero.

**Quizzes:** Quizzes will include information given in the previous classes. This includes identifying specific signs and questions about the readings assigned in class.

**Exams:** There will be a comprehensive midterm, and one final exam. Both of these exams will include a written section that will include questions regarding deaf history and culture as well as the textbook read outside of class. There is also an “oral” section where students will demonstrate their ASL skills in front of the class by telling a short story of 10 original sentences.

**Papers/Assignments:**

- Students will complete one report on a Deaf individual of their choosing that they research and will then present to the class.
- Students will write a reflective report about their field trip experience
- Students will write a short essay on the book “Train Go Sorry”
- Students will prepare 3 original sentences and present them at the start of each class

**Field Trip:** Students are required to attend at least one event in the Deaf Community. This can include attending a Bowling Night or Mall Meetup. Other events that may arise will be announced in class or via e-mail. Students will then write a reflection of their experience.

**Final Exam Policy:** The final exam will be administered in class during the time appointed by the University.

**Academic Integrity:** All students are expected to be familiar with the academic regulations, including those regarding Academic Integrity, for Salem State University as published in the college catalog. Each individual student is expected to complete all their own work and cheating and/or plagiarism will not be tolerated.

**Disability Policy:** "Salem State College is committed to providing equal access to the educational experience for all students in compliance with Section 504 of The Rehabilitation Act and The Americans with Disabilities Act and to providing all reasonable academic accommodations, aids and adjustments. Any student who has a documented disability requiring an accommodation, aid or adjustment should speak with the instructor immediately. Students with Disabilities who have

not previously done so should provide documentation to and schedule an appointment with the Office for Students with Disabilities and obtain appropriate services."

**College Declared Emergency:** In the event of a college declared critical emergency, Salem State University reserves the right to alter this course plan. Students should refer to salemstate.edu for further information and updates. The course attendance policy stays in effect until there is a college declared critical emergency. In the event of an emergency, please refer to the alternative educational plans for this course located at/in [faculty member determines this]. Students should review the plans and gather all required materials before an emergency is declared.

### **Topics to be covered**

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The Manual Alphabet

Learning ASL

Politeness

Descriptions

Requests

Expressing Yourself

Home and Daily Living

Food and Food Shopping

Family and Friends

Offering and Declining

Deaf History

Careers in ASL

### **Additional Resources**

[www.signingsavvy.com](http://www.signingsavvy.com)

[www.lifeprint.com](http://www.lifeprint.com)

Marlee Signs – Phone App

<http://www.asl.ms/> Fingerspelling Receptive Practice

Switched at Birth – TV Show ABC Family

## TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE

For Learning American Sign Language Textbook – Humphries and Padden

<b>DATE</b>	<b>IN CLASS</b>	<b>ASSIGNMENTS DUE</b>
Sept 3, 2015	Syllabus Day/Course Introduction	None
Sept 8, 2015	Unit 1 - Manual Alphabet	None
Sept 10, 2015	Unit 2 – Learning ASL	3 Sentences
Sept 15, 2015	Unit 2 Review	3 Sentences
Sept 17, 2015	Unit 3 - Politeness	3 Sentences
Sept 22, 2015	Unit 3 Review/ <b>QUIZ</b>	3 Sentences
Sept 24, 2015	Deaf History	3 Sentences
Sept 28, 2015	Careers in ASL	3 Sentences
Oct 1, 2015	Unit 4 - Descriptions	3 Sentences
Oct 6, 2015	Unit 4 Review/ <b>Report Presentations</b>	Deaf Person Report Due
Oct 8, 2015	Unit 5 - Requests	3 Sentences
Oct 13, 2015	Unit 5 Review	3 Sentences
Oct 15, 2015	Deaf Culture	3 Sentences
Oct 20, 2015	Movie	3 Sentences
Oct 22, 2015	Unit 6 – Expressing Yourself	Study for Midterm
Oct 27, 2015	Unit 6 Review/ <b>MIDTERM</b>	None
Oct 29, 2015	Unit 7 – More Descriptions	3 Sentences
Nov 3, 2015	Unit 7 Review	First Field Trip Report Due
Nov 5, 2015	Unit 8 – Family and Friends	3 Sentences
Nov 10, 2015	Unit 8 Review	3 Sentences
Nov 12, 2015	Unit 9 – More Descriptions	3 Sentences

Nov 17, 2015	Unit 9 Review/ <b>QUIZ</b>	None
Nov 19, 2015	Unit 10 – Home & Daily Living	Book Report Due
Nov 24, 2015	Unit 10 Review	3 Sentences
Nov 26, 2015	<b>No Class</b> – Thanksgiving Holiday	Practice your ASL skills over break!
Dec 1, 2015	Unit 11 – Food & Shopping	3 Sentences
Dec 3, 2015	Unit 11 Review	3 Sentences
Dec 8, 2015	Unit 12 – Offering & Declining	3 Sentences
Dec 10, 2015	Unit 12 Review/Final Exam Review	Second Field Trip Report Due
Dec 15, 2015	<b>Reading Day</b> – No Class	Study for Final Exam/Presentation
Dec 20, 2015	<b>Final Exam</b> – 11a -1p	All missed/late assignments must be completed and turned in by this date.

## Course Information Document

### ASL 101 – Elementary American Sign Language

#### Catalog description:

This course will introduce students to American Sign Language and allow them to develop skills in performing and understanding signs and sentences in ASL. Students will learn about deaf culture and controversies, deaf history and what careers are available to those who are fluent in American Sign Language. This class requires a final group project and attendance of an event in the Deaf community where they will use their acquired ASL skills. Three class hours per week. No prerequisite is required.

#### Course Narrative:

This course aims to develop students' knowledge of American Sign Language and Deaf culture. Students must be aware of the culture and mannerisms of those from the Deaf Community, and how they are different from our own in order to appropriately interact with them. Through readings, discussions and direct interactions with deaf individuals, students will learn these skills. By gaining knowledge of the development and history behind American Sign Language, students can appreciate the current and past controversies, achievements and battles that the Deaf community has experienced. This will also be achieved through readings, the text and in class discussions as well as completion of an individual or group project. Students must also come to understand that American Sign Language is as legitimate as any spoken language by learning the correct grammar, syntax and vocabulary that comes with knowing ASL. Students will learn to have basic conversations by covering the first 6 chapter of the textbook. Students will develop their ASL expressive and receptive skills by presenting in front of their class as well as through interaction directly within the Deaf community by attending a meetup or event in the local Deaf Community. Students will also gain the opportunity to identify careers related to ASL by learning about local interpretation programs when there are class presenters.

#### Course Goals:

- G1: To understand Deaf culture, controversies and history through readings and experiences
- G2: To be able to construct meaningful and correctly structured sentences in ASL

G3: To meet and interact with a community of people that were previously unavailable to the student

G4: Develop basic expressive and receptive skills in ASL

**Course Outcomes:**

Students participating in this course will be able to:

O1: Students will be able to explain how to appropriately interact with those who are deaf

O2: Students will be able to demonstrate proficiency in constructing and understanding grammatically correct sentences in ASL

O3: Students will be able to identify cultural values, perspectives, controversies and attitudes of those who are Deaf as compared to other cultures

O4: Students will be able to explain the origin of American Sign Language and Deaf history

**Topics:**

The Manual Alphabet

Learning ASL

Politeness

Descriptions

Requests

Expressing Yourself

Home and Daily Living

Food and Food Shopping

Family and Friends

Offering and Declining

Deaf History

Careers in ASL

**Student Experiences:**

**1. Midterm/Final/Quizzes** – Midterms, Final Exams and quizzes will cover the material that is discussed in class. This will measure the student's ability to recognize signs, construct grammatically correct sentences as well as information regarding culture and history of the Deaf culture.

**2. Homework and Participation** – Homework includes creating 3 original sentences that will be presented each class and will ensure that students get practice in forming correctly structured sentences using new vocabulary. Students will be graded on their participation in class discussions on the topics of history, culture and careers in American Sign Language.

**3. Historical Person Presentation** – Either individually or as a group, students will chose one Deaf individual from history and do independent research on this individual. They will compile their information regarding the person’s person life, impact to the deaf community as well as other facts that will be presented to the class.

**4. Train Go Sorry Book Review** - Students will read the book, “Train Go Sorry” and write a min 2 page review on the text. This can cover any topics of the students choosing including deaf history, culture, controversies or education.

**5. Field Trip** – Students will get the opportunity to interact face to face with individuals from the Deaf community by attending 2 local events in the Deaf Community. Students will write a minimum 1 page reflection on each field trip experience regarding what value they gained from attending.

**Student Experiences by Course matrix:**

student outcome / experience (e.g. presentations, tests, lab reports, writing projects, discussions, performances, etc.)	O1	O2	O3	O4
Homework – 3 Sentences per class		x		
Class Participation/Discussions	x		x	x
Historical Person Presentation				x
Field Trip	x	x	x	
Book Review			x	x
Midterm/Final Exam/Quizzes	x	x	x	x

### Sample Bibliography:

Arnold, P., & Murray, C. (1998). Memory for faces and objects by deaf and hearing signers and hearing nonsigners. *Journal Of Psycholinguistic Research*, 27(4), 481-497.

Calton, C. J. (2014). Teaching respect: Language, identity, and ideology in american sign language classes in the united states. *Disseratation Abstracts International Section A*, 75.

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Miller, K. R. (2008). American sign language: Acceptance at the university level. *Language, Culture And Curriculum*, 21(3), 226-234.

Keehner, M., & Gathercole, S. E. (2007). Cognitive adaptations arising from nonnative experience of a sign language in hearing adults. *Memory & Cognition*, 35(4), 752-761.

Rosen, R. S. (2010). American sign language curricula: A review. *Sign Language Studies*, 10(3), 348-381.

SchorNSTein, R. A. (2005). Teaching ASL in the University: One Teacher's Journey. *Sign Language Studies*, 5(4), 398-414.

Shively, M. (1991). College student knowledge of and interest in American Sign Language. *Journal Of College Student Development*, 32(1), 89-91.

## **Thesis Reflection**

### **Attempting to Create an American Sign Language Curriculum at Salem State University**

This project has certainly taken a great deal of time and effort. After selecting my thesis project topic, I worked diligently over the summer to collect survey data and begin research on what ASL course sequences looked like at other Universities. By the start of the Fall semester, I had already created a rough draft syllabus and analyzed my survey results. Creating a syllabus was something that was certainly a challenge. As a psychology major, I have never before created course objectives or outlined an entire semester of a course. However, thanks to Dr. Gow providing an outline of his own course syllabi, and to Dr. Blood for her revisions, I was able to create a solid foundation and well put together ASL 101 syllabus. I was able to create this based on my own experiences in an ASL course as well as by what other Universities' syllabi looked like.

When I first met with Dr. Blood and discussed with her the potential of creating an American Sign Language curriculum on campus, she shared her support of my endeavors but was also very blunt about all obstacles that stood in the way. I was very upset to hear that there was not enough money to hire someone full time, and that they also could not hire another adjunct. I was very disappointed and believed that this simply meant that I had hit a dead end and that this would ultimately not be possible. However, Dr. Blood suggested that I fill out a Course Information Document (CID). This was an outline regarding the objectives, research, goals and other important information regarding the proposed course. This document is submitted to the University Curriculum Committee and it is this document that helps them determine if this course should be offered on campus. This was a very daunting and difficult task. I had no idea what this document was, and it required even more research on my part. However, after many edits and much guidance from Dr. Blood, I was able to complete this form. I was happy that I

successfully finished this form, but was still disappointed to know that it would not be submitted after all.

A few weeks later, Dr. Blood e-mailed me asking for me to present at the December World Language and Cultures Department Meeting. I was very excited but very nervous. When I presented I did my best to inform the faculty about how high the demand was on campus for ASL classes, and how inaccessible they were. They asked me many challenging questions, which I did my best to answer. They asked many questions regarding the ASL/Interpreter programs at Boston University and Northern Essex Community College as well as North Shore. They were curious what the enrollment was in the upper level ASL courses, such as ASL III and ASL IV. This was something that I was unsure of, and could have been more prepared to answer. I left this meeting happy to have been given the chance to present to the Department, but not very confident in the outcome. I was not sure that I had been able to convince all of the faculty members due to the concerns they had.

Luckily, I was wrong, and shortly received word from Dr. Blood that the Department had voted to support my initiative and push it forward themselves. I could not have been happier. At first, I thought that this was something that was out of my reach and I genuinely hope that even if it takes time, that in the near future, Salem State University is able to offer American Sign Language on campus. This would benefit the entire Salem community as well as Salem State students who go on to begin careers in nursing, social work and education; all fields where knowing ASL is invaluable. Despite the fact that I am graduating, I hope to continue being present and involved with this project until it is completely seen through.

In the future, I hope that another student may pick up where I left off. I know that another Honors Student, Jacquelyn Saunders, is also a lover of American Sign Language and has expressed interest in continuing my project. Next year, she may be able to gather even more information regarding

the demand for ASL, and meet personally herself with the Provost and attend meetings. More data and more research regarding this topic will only provide more reason as to why Salem State should offer American Sign Language courses. If the proposal ends up being rejected, and ASL courses are not instilled, I would hope that this topic continues to be brought up and that students continue to advocate on the behalf of this amazing language. I strongly believe that if it was offered, it would be a class that would be extremely popular and beneficial. If the addition to another language to the World Language and Culture Department is not financially feasible, then I hope that perhaps the NECCUM program becomes more widely advertised and known about. This program gives students the opportunity to take American Sign Language courses (and many other courses) at other local institutions. This is also a beneficial program that is not widely recognized.

Despite the challenges that I have faced in completing my thesis, I have enjoyed being able to do all of this work. I am thrilled to know that the hard work I have completed may eventually make a difference in the lives of many students who, one day, may be able to enroll in an ASL class here at Salem State. I want to help leave a lasting impression on this campus, as it has left a lasting impression on myself personally. I also want to educate hearing students about ASL and deaf culture, and I think that having an ASL class available is a big step toward this goal.

This project also taught me a great deal about the politics regarding Higher Education and University and administrative policies. I never before realized how many hurdles must be jumped in order to do something that seems so simple. This is something that I never considered before beginning this project, but that I am grateful I came to realize since I will be working in the Higher Education field in my future career. However, I was also able to learn that with passion and hard work, a goal that seems large and impossible can be achieved. I am so thankful for all the help and guidance that Dr. Blood, Dr. Gow and Dr. Gonsalves have given me throughout the course of my thesis project. Without them I am sure that I would not have gotten such positive results.