



An Analysis of American Sign Language Instruction at Public Universities



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Abstract

This study begins with an analysis of descriptive statistics on American Sign Language (ASL) and Deaf Studies programs at public universities in the United States. Data was collected on both the occurrence and format of said programs and course offerings at public state universities around the nation. The University of Alabama currently does not offer ASL courses, despite having several areas of study which would benefit from ASL instruction, including but not limited to: Communicative Disorders, Special Education, Early Childhood Education, Social Work, Modern Languages. The data allows us to make comparisons between others schools with ASL programs and UA. This study concludes with recommendations for building ASL classes as well as evaluating how our specific goals at the University of Alabama could be met with offering this language to students of all disciplines.

Methods

Each public university's website in the United States was searched for a listing of course offerings in American Sign Language, Deaf culture, and related topics. Once courses were found, the scope broadened to record the facilitating program, academic subdivision, and broader academic division. If possible and listed, the number of faculty who taught classes in these subjects were recorded. Undergraduate enrollment numbers were searched for the sake of comparison and finding models that were applicable to the University of Alabama. Finally, schools were denoted if ASL was accepted as a foreign/secondary language for either high school or undergraduate course credit in general education. The websites listing the program or courses for each university have also been saved to return to for further review and reference.

Relevance to UA

- Related Disciplines: Communicative Disorders, Special Education, Modern Languages and Classics, Social Work, Communication Studies, Psychology, Critical Languages Center, Multiple Abilities Program
- Community Connections
 - Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind Regional Center
 - Alabama School for the Deaf (Talladega)
 - Tuscaloosa Deaf Community
- Strategic Planning Council Subcommittee on Diversity and Inclusion

Findings

- Total number of U.S. Public Universities with ASL/Deaf Studies course offerings: **175**
 - Number of flagship universities: **36** out of 50
 - Number of schools with at least 20,000 undergraduate enrollment: **45**
 - Number in U.S. News & World Report Public Schools rankings top 25: **18**
- Regional breakdown of schools based on higher education accreditation councils
 - Higher Learning Commission (AZ, AR, CO, IL, IN, IA, KS, MI, MN, MO, NB, NM, ND, OH, OK, SD, WV, WI, WY): **68**
 - Middle States Commission on Higher Education (DE, D.C., MD, NJ, NY, PA): **28**
 - New England Association of Schools and Colleges (CT, ME, MA, NH, RI, VT): **12**
 - Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (AK, ID, MT, NV, OR, UT, WA): **20**
 - Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (AL, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN, TX, VA): **42**
 - Western Association of Schools and Colleges (CA, HI): **5**

Background

American Sign Language (ASL) is a complete manual language that employs hand movement and relies heavily on facial expressions and body posture. It is the primary language of many deaf/Deaf Americans and Canadians outside of Québec. ASL is not simply signing English words, it is separate and distinct, possessing its own grammar, dialects, and ways of indicating and executing communication functions.

More and more universities have begun offering courses in ASL and Deaf culture through various programs. Many have also started accepting this coursework from high school and at the university level to fulfill secondary language requirements in general education.



Locations of universities with ASL classes. Created with BatchGeo.

| Academic Division | Schools Housing ASL/DS Courses |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Health Professions | 33 |
| Liberal Arts/Arts and Sciences | 67 |
| Education | 43 |
| Languages and Cultures | 5 |
| Other/Combined | 18 |
| Unspecified | 8 |

Next Steps

- Contact schools with recent year founded and/or founder listed for interviews
 - Purdue University
 - Iowa State University
 - Central Michigan University
 - University of Texas-Austin
 - University of Vermont
 - University of Washington
- Survey UA students for interest
- Seek avenue for a pilot class

Sources Consulted

- Darrin Griffin, Ph.D., Communication Studies
- National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders
- Individual University academic websites
- U.S. News and World Report Top Public Schools
- Council of Higher Education Accreditation
- Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities