American sign language as a foreign language equivalent at James Madison University

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American Sign Language as a Foreign Language Equivalent at James Madison University

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An Honors Program Project Presented to

the Faculty of the Undergraduate

College of Health and Behavioral Studies

James Madison University

____________________________________

by Abigail Elizabeth Compton

May 2016

Accepted by the faculty of the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors Program.

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This work is accepted for presentation, in part or in full, at the annual conference of the Speech-Hearing Association of Virginia on March 18, 2016, at the Southern Regional Honors Conference on April 1, 2016, and at the Honors Symposium on April 15, 2016.
Dedication

For my parents, who instilled in me an early love of language,

And for all my teachers who nurtured that love into a lasting passion.
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Preface

This project began as an in-depth review of Deaf culture in the context of modern, mainstream American culture as an explanation for why American Sign Language should be considered a foreign language at JMU. However, during the research process, I began identifying more and more common elements between sign language and Spanish, particularly within the courses I had taken for both languages. When I learned that sign language did not fulfill the foreign language requirements for the Bachelor of Arts degree, while languages such as Spanish did fulfill the requirements, I added relevant comparisons with Spanish to my project.

I have pulled out four basic elements of language to study: educational standards in the university setting, culture, grammar and syntax, and etymology. Having been a student in courses for both Spanish and American Sign Language, I was able to use my own experience as well as outside research to find parallel elements between a language that is accepted as credit fulfillment and one that is not.

I hope to use these parallels to begin a conversation about allowing sign language to fulfill the foreign language requirement for the Bachelor of Arts degree at JMU, and lay a foundation for more recognition of this language at the University.
Acknowledgments

The author is grateful to the following institutions and people, without whom this project and its presentation would not be possible:

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Abstract

ASL is increasingly gaining acknowledgment as a foreign language in the university setting. At James Madison University, sign language classes have traditionally been housed within the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders. This research makes a case for considering ASL as an equivalent to courses in the Department of Foreign Languages, Literatures, and Cultures and argues that ASL meets the university standards for the study of a foreign language with regard to fulfilling Bachelor of Arts requirements.

Considering the linguistic history of ASL and the language’s accompanying culture, we will demonstrate the standards for teaching ASL are identical to the established educational standards for other languages.

One of the foreign languages offered at JMU is Spanish. Using that as a comparison, we will demonstrate that the cultural and linguistic elements of ASL are equivalent to those currently offered for other languages offered at JMU. This research explores these parallels as well as reinforces the elements of ASL that qualify it as a legitimate language.
According to the study detailed in “ASL Acceptance at the University Level,” by Katrina R. Miller (2008), inclusion of ASL in university foreign language departments is a sensitive subject. Miller found that often, ASL is either not accepted as a university fulfillment of a foreign languages requirement, or else it is under the jurisdiction of a different department, such as “sign language interpreting, communications, and other service programming” (p. 230). Even within those universities that allow sign language to fill a university requirement, there is significant variation among their offerings. For example, Cooper, Reisman, and Watson (2008) surveyed the colleges and universities accepting sign for credit and found that the courses were taught by individuals with varying ranges of ability and status within the institution. The highest percentage of courses, 32%, were taught by instructors, while associate, assistant, and full professors comprised less than half of the teachers (p. 82). Additionally, their survey allowed for multiple types of signed communication to be examined, such as signed English, American Sign Language, and contact or pidgin sign. Results showed that 71% of colleges and universities surveyed were either accepting sign language as a fulfillment of the foreign language requirement or were “considering changes in [the] area” (p. 82).

American Sign Language is not only a method of communication, but a visual representation of history. Carol Padden and Tom Humphries examined this concept more deeply in their book, Deaf in America: Voices from a Culture. As Deaf Americans learned an adapted version of French sign language from Thomas Gallaudet, who had been taught by Laurent Clerc, and modified it to fit their needs, it marked the beginning of deaf education in the United States and thus the spread of what came to be known as American Sign Language. One of the reasons why this language is treasured so much by its community is the link to the history it provides; a
visual reminder of the experiences of the American deaf community and its perseverance to communicate in their chosen way. As Padden and Humphries (1988) explained, “For Deaf people, their sign language is a creation of their history” (p. 9).

Due in large part to this emotional connection to communication, American Sign Language has a legitimate cultural accompaniment—something essential for foreign language study. As Dr. Sherman Wilcox (1991) explained, the validity of ASL as a truly foreign language has been continually challenged. However, although it is defined as being “indigenous to the United States,” it is not excluded from the scope of foreign language study. After all, as Wilcox observed, “at the University of New Mexico…Navajo is taught and accepted in fulfillment of the foreign language requirement, yet it is not used in a foreign country” (p. 1). Dr. Wilcox also defended the fleshing out of American Sign Language as a linguistic structure with elements similar to other foreign languages. “There is a rich body of ASL literature by and about Deaf people,” Wilcox wrote (p.1); “The folk heritage of Deaf people, passed down through generations of ASL users, includes legends, naming practices, tall tales, jokes, word play, games, poetry, customs, rituals, and celebrations” (p. 1). He insisted that the study of these sorts of values and world views is essential to foreign language study.

Thomas Holcomb’s book, Introduction to Deaf Culture (2013), focused on Dr. Wilcox’s arguments from an anthropological standpoint. Instead of arguing for the recognition of Deaf culture, Holcomb’s approach took the assumption that it exists. By discussing Deaf culture’s collectivist nature (so different from the individualistic mainstream American society), and using both research and anecdotal evidence, he painted a picture of a richly layered and close-knit cultural group, with enough facets of Deaf culture to fulfill an entire university course plan. Holcomb related everything discussed back to the historical bedrock of American Sign
Language, alluding to Padden and Humphries’ observation that the language itself is a preserved and ever-evolving history lesson. From the elaborately structured naming and conversational practices to the emotional and masterful art and literature, Holcomb legitimized the “Deaf world” in a way that invites not only appreciation but closer study as well.

While languages like Arabic and Chinese have recently gained popularity in college settings as fulfillments of degree requirements, more commonly-taught languages such as Spanish have moved to the background (Lacorte, 2013, p. 334).

Interestingly, although ASL is often not considered a viable second language for hearing individuals, Manuel Lacorte (2013) explained that “second language ability is [being] increasingly commodified as a job skill, rather than as a symbol of education and cultural capital” (p. 335). Spanish is increasingly being seen as a service language rather than a culture language, which means that it is regularly integrated into other academic departments and programs as a way to add a job skill to a curriculum without requiring any advanced knowledge or competence with culture and history (Lacorte, 2013, p. 339). This is further supported in Drewelow and Mitchell’s review (2015), examining the 2014 research done by Magnan, Murphy, and Sahakyan, who reported cultural education in Spanish classes to be increasingly disjointed from instruction on grammar, syntax, and conjugations (p. 243). Lacorte (2013) outlined the “usual course of study” for the Spanish language at a four-year college or university as follows.

[It] consists of a two- or three academic year sequence of classes dedicated, almost entirely, to language and/or grammatical skills, followed by a series of courses primarily dealing with the analysis of specific authors or literary periods—usually categorized as Latin American. (p. 339)
Lacorte’s description aligned well with the Spanish program of study at James Madison University, where courses up to a 300-level designation are generally focused on grammar and learning the structure of the language. Courses numbered past 300 have more focus on other aspects of Spanish culture, such as history, literature, and the arts, and the previous course are often prerequisites to this more advanced material (James Madison 2015-2016 Undergraduate Catalog, 2015).

This holistic focus on the language and developing a wider range of competency and understanding is exactly the justification for expanding the American Sign Language curriculum at JMU, and allowing it to fulfill the foreign language requirements for the Bachelor of Arts. American Sign Language provides quite as broad a range of potential course topics as Spanish currently has, including but not limited to cultural studies, linguistic history, and grammatical and syntactical rules.
The Bachelor of Arts Degree

The James Madison 2015-2016 Undergraduate Catalog (2015) describes the criteria for the fulfillment of the Bachelor of Arts degree as follows:

The B.A. is distinguished by its humanistic emphasis. Students who complete a B.A. may satisfy the degree requirements by taking courses that advance their understanding of human culture through analysis of ideas; perception of differences; appreciation of art and creative products through understanding art forms, beauty, and symmetry; knowledge of theories and principles of form, substance, argument and philosophy; understanding of the interaction between language and culture; and achievement of linguistic competency in a second language. (p. 41, emphasis added)

Although the requirements for the university’s Bachelor of Arts degree were readily available through JMU’s course catalog, understanding the rationale behind the requirements proved to be a difficult search. Information on the history of the B.A. degree and an explanation for how its requirements were created was not found through standard research methods.

At James Madison University, the fulfillment of a Bachelor of Arts degree requires the student to complete three credits of Philosophy coursework and achieve “intermediate proficiency” (through course number 232) in a foreign language. This can be done either through taking the foreign language placement test or by completing levels 101-232 over the course of enrollment at JMU.

If we look closely at the requirements for fulfilling this degree, it is clear that traditional completion of foreign language courses through level 232 is currently incompatible with the course numbers offered for American Sign Language, as only two courses are offered. However, the description of competency required for successful completion of the degree does indeed
apply to the available classes. Recipients of the Bachelor of Arts degree at JMU are expected to have had instruction, among other things, in how language and culture interact. They are also expected to achieve a “deeper understanding of human culture,” as well as “appreciation of art and creative products” (James Madison University, 2015, p. 41). Even the two courses in sign language that are currently offered at JMU address these competencies, as Deaf culture and customs are a major part of instruction. Therefore, the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts are aptly represented in the study of American Sign Language, as we will document below.
Educational Standards in the University Setting

Closer study of current instructional methods and textbooks incorporated into instruction is the foundation of creating standards for study resources across all foreign languages. Hamilton and Saladin (2013) conducted a review of all the most common textbooks used in the study of American Sign Language. They evaluated them based on the standards set forth by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). Five basic standards were developed, including “communication, culture, connection, comparison, and communities” (p. 128). These are colloquially known as the “5Cs” of teaching foreign language. Each of these themes included more specific standards such as “Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics” and “Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the culture studied” (Hamilton & Saladin, 2013, p. 131). From the list of textbooks given, JMU currently uses two: Signing Naturally by Cheri Smith, and Talking With Your Hands, Listening With Your Eyes by Gabriel Grayson. Both of these texts scored very well by ACTFL standards and completely met three or more of the “5C” standards (Hamilton & Saladin, 2013, p. 137). By this evidence, JMU uses the best resources available to give students in sign language classes a well-rounded education that includes expressive and receptive language as well as a study of the culture and community using sign language (see Table 1). It is also worth noting that even with the best textbooks and resources available, the learning period for American Sign Language as a second language is still rather extensive; in fact, by some studies it may even be longer than other languages thought to be difficult, such as Arabic and Chinese (Miller, 2008, p. 232).
Table 1. An abbreviated version of Hamilton and Saladin’s “Comparison of Foreign Language Education criteria with popular texts for ASL.” (See Appendix B for complete table.) This is made to reflect an examination of how JMU’s sign language textbooks meet the “5Cs” criteria.

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1: Signing Naturally, by Cheri Smith.
2: Talking With Your Hands, Listening With Your Eyes, by Gabriel Grayson.

The ACTFL “5Cs” also apply to Spanish courses in the university setting. However, interestingly, the textbooks most commonly used in beginner Spanish courses focus less on the “culture” aspect and more on learning the language alone. Drewelow and Mitchell’s review (2015) of Magnan, Murphy, and Sahakyan’s 2014 study found that although globalization and cultural consideration should be at the forefront of curricular consideration, the most common educational strategies in the United States still do not see culture as “the main point of language learning” (p. 243). This causes a disconnect in many upper-level language classes, where understanding the grammar, syntax, and conjugations of a language are prioritized over understanding the history and people that come along with the linguistic structure. It is also important to note that while technology and exchange is instrumental in transforming the world into a “global village,” Drewelow and Mitchell (2015) warned that this leads to students not always being able to appreciate the differences between “local and global cultures” (p. 244).
Having the 5Cs gives teachers a guide for how to integrate culture into their daily instruction, rather than having it as an afterthought. Although ACTFL standards have placed cultural knowledge at the forefront of the curriculum, researchers have found that these standards “have not yet been fully achieved in many university-level language programs” (Drewelow & Mitchell, 2015, p. 244).

The study by Magnan, et al. (2014) suggested that language learners develop a conception of culture as “a set of easily identifiable facts and behaviors tied to a specific homogeneous cultural group,” rather than developing an integrated view of culture as it relates to the language they are learning (Drewelow & Mitchell, 2015, p. 244). They further explained that “[the students surveyed] instrumentalized culture as a tool to understand practices…but not really as one that promotes the discovery of alternative viewpoints” (p. 246). In other words, the instructional focus is being placed on the answer to the question “What is culture?” rather than “What does culture do?” Although this is a classroom and curriculum struggle for languages such as Spanish, the focus on culture for American Sign Language is better aligned with the ACTFL standards.
Drawing Cultural Parallels

As Deaf cultures vary from nation to nation, we will focus our attention solely on American Sign Language and Deaf culture as pertaining to the United States, and use the term “Deaf culture” in that manner. Similarly, there are a wide range of ethnicities and nationalities in the world that use the Spanish language as their vehicle for cultural expression. For reasons of brevity and clarity, we will be focusing our examination of culture on the country of Spain, and so will refer to it with the term “Spanish culture.”

Art

Deaf art has existed for over 250 years (Holcomb, 2013, p. 171). However, a particular artistic movement has emerged that is primarily embraced by Deaf artists: Deaf View/Image Art, or “De’VIA.” And while Deaf artists do not have to be part of the De’VIA movement in order to be considered artists, or to be considered culturally Deaf, it is considered the only form of art that is dedicated to portraying the experiences of the disenfranchised Deaf community in the United States (Holcomb, 2013, p. 174).

Attraction to the visual arts is nothing new for Deaf people: coming from a visual language, with their brain primarily receiving information through their sense of vision, it is natural that artwork would be a vehicle to express the culture, history, and language of the Deaf. This has already been done in a number of ways: alphabet and number stories, jokes, folklore, poetry, and storytelling. Visual arts were a natural step in this visual “oral” tradition, “free from linguistic constraints” (Holcomb, 2013, p. 171). Art also allowed a greater degree of accessibility to the Deaf culture; while the Deaf literature scene required an interpreter or the use of captions if one was not fluent in American Sign Language, artwork was a medium that could affect everyone who saw it, regardless of whether they understood sign language. It also helped
preserve more of the Deaf culture message, as literature often lost something in translation or interpretation. As Patricia Durr (2000) stated in her article, *Deconstructing the Forced Assimilation of Deaf People via De’VIA Resistance and Affirmation Art:*

In the case of Deaf people, while many of us are bilingual, visual art can speak to all people on many levels, and for non-signers it does not require translation from one language to another for them to understand. A striking painting featuring a young girl with big sad eyes wearing an oversized body [hearing] aid will trigger emotions in all people whether they be Deaf ASL users, deaf oral people, hard of hearing as well as hearing. (p. 48)

The ability for Deaf artists to use this movement to communicate political and cultural commentary is crucial. As a disenfranchised group, they were not given full access to educational tools or to a platform to speak their opinions. Durr (2000) described the De’VIA movement as a “visual testimony” (p. 48). Like other artistic movements such as the Harlem Renaissance, the Feminist Art Movement, and the Chicano Art Movement, De’VIA art seeks to disseminate the Deaf experience in a striking manner that leaves viewers in no doubt of their history of isolation and contention with the Hearing world.

Oralism, for example, was endorsed by public figures such as Alexander Graham Bell and sought to educate deaf individuals through the use of speech and lipreading, eschewing the signed language that had previously been embraced in the residential schools. Even the son of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, one of the men responsible for bringing signed communication to America, believed that sign language should be used “as little as possible” in the education of Deaf students (Tabak, 2006, p. 90). The oralism movement became widespread during the 1860s, which correlates with the drop in establishment of deaf residential schools (see Fig. 1).
Oralism saw the formal prohibition of instruction in sign language, with punishments for students who continued to use it to communicate, however covertly. This caused a significant impact in the students’ lives. Many examples of De’VIA art, as previously discussed, deal with the effects of the oralism movement on the artists’ lives. For example, the piece *Ameslan Prohibited* (Image 1), by Dr. Betty Miller, a Deaf artist as well as an activist, shows the personal oppression she felt during her time at school when she was discouraged from signing (Durr, 2000, p. 48).

![Image 1. Ameslan Prohibited, by Betty Miller. 1972.](image)

With most disenfranchised groups, typically their art falls into two broad categories. De’VIA is no exception. Resistance art, which describes the domination of a marginalized group by the majority, calls the art piece to act as resistance to oppression itself. Affirmation art, on the other hand, celebrates aspects of the marginalized group or culture, and highlights the positive aspects that set it apart from the mainstream group.

Examining Spanish culture, the arts often intertwined with political and historical statements. Francisco de Goya y Lucientes, a painter and printmaker who lived from 1793 to 1828, was known for his political statements (Wernick, 1989, p. 1).

Interestingly, critiques of Goya’s artwork seem to evoke a response similar to that of De’VIA art: while it may be different responses depending on the level of the viewer’s
understanding, every person interacting with a Goya work of art comes away with some impactful interpretation (Wernick, 1989, p.1).

Goya’s style transformed dramatically as he grew more politically aware and disquieted. As an artist of the Enlightenment, an ilustrado, he embraced the intellectual movement (Wernick, 1989, p. 1). Many of his early works contained complex political statements in support of the Enlightenment, as he tried to finesse his style and express that “elusive visual language” (Symmons, 1998, p. 220) that would capture his imagination.

However, illness also affected Goya’s work. As Rosalind Wholden (2014) noted in her review, his images took a turn for the dark and macabre after he fell ill and became deaf, because “he was doubly isolated from his fellow men; deafness and darkness opened an inner path of images to his imagination” (p. 248).

A feeling of isolation from mainstream society is a common experience between De’VIA artists and Goya; however, Deaf artists did not always turn toward the macabre in their deafness; rather, they wanted to celebrate the community to which they belonged. Often, their darker works are associated with their negative experiences with oralism, residential schools, or being misunderstood and marginalized by the hearing community. In contrast, when Goya lost his hearing and learned to lip-read in relative isolation (Wernick, 1989, p. 2) rather than to sign, that resulted in a darkness that was reflected in his work: he gradually moved from his exploration of dreamlike scenes to an exposé of the darker side of humanity, complete with monsters and goblins, to better express how he was feeling after experiencing what he viewed as a lessened experience of life due to the loss of his hearing. Wernick (1989) wrote:

These figures [the monsters and goblins] are not, as in traditional Christian art, demons who have taken human form. They are human beings who have turned themselves into
monsters by their irrational behavior, their contempt for or fear of the divine light of reason. For Goya they were the enemy, the forces of darkness engulfing Europe. By the ideals of the Enlightenment Goya’s Spain was an appalling place… (p. 3).

*El Coloso*, or in English *The Colossus*, (Image 2), represents Goya’s movement into the use of both darker themes and darker colors. His surrealist background is still evident, but there is not always a clear political or historical interpretation for the viewer to take away. Like De’VIA art, there are several possible levels for interpretation, and depending on the viewer’s understanding and experience, the piece will mean something different.

![Image 2. *El Coloso*, by Francisco Goya y Lucientes. 1812.](image-url)
Since American Sign Language is a primarily visual language, its body of literature is unique from any spoken language in that it is an unwritten language (Wilcox & Wilcox, 1997, p. 69). However, this does not make it any less legitimate. Deaf literature in America is more about oral history, rather than written work; however, their oral tradition is presented in a visual manner (Holcomb, 2013, p. 135). Due to the visual nature of the work, however, it has been difficult to preserve over time, so much of the evolution of Deaf literature has not been documented. Rather, the literature has been passed down over time, only recently facilitated due to technological advances.

Similar to De’VIA art, literature from American Deaf culture is typically reflective of the experience of a marginalized culture in the context of the larger, mainstream community, with a major recurring theme being the importance of sign language in the face of misunderstanding from the hearing community (Holcomb, 2013, p. 144). The classic “Timber” story, for example, dealt with a lumberjack who shouts “Timber!” as every tree falls, until he arrives at a tree that won’t fall when he yells. He calls the tree doctor, who explains that the tree is Deaf and will not fall until the lumberjack finger-spells T-I-M-B-E-R (BigDRawson, 2012). Although the story is humorous, it reflects the very real and very relatable theme of Deaf individuals being misunderstood by members of a population that has to learn to work with them. Many stories in Deaf literature are like this; in fact, Holcomb (2013) drew a parallel between stories from Deaf culture and stories from other American minorities: a major theme with both is “the attainment of a healthy positive identity as a member of a minority group” (p. 135). As shown in the “Timber” story, the fact that the tree was Deaf had no negative effect on the story. The lumberjack didn’t get fired because he couldn’t chop down the tree; the tree didn’t get angry at
the lumberjack for not understanding. Instead, the lumberjack simply had to learn how to communicate with the tree in a way that it could understand. The story showed a hearing person communicating in sign language because that was what was comfortable for the Deaf figure.

Holcomb (2013) noted that almost all cultural groups have a strong storytelling tradition (p. 153). The Deaf community is no different. Storytelling produces a sense of group identity and belonging; a shared understanding of a common experience. With storytelling, Deaf individuals can “affirm [their] culture and identity” (Holcomb, 2013, p. 153) while sometimes also engaging in ‘zapping’—making fun of hearing people. Humor is an outlet in Deaf literature, but due to the visual nature of many jokes, it is difficult to translate into English—similar to the struggle faced when translating most other languages (Holcomb, 2013, p. 164).

Spanish literature has been a version of historical documentation from the Middle Ages onward. Over the centuries, there have been several persisting themes that have influenced Spanish literature.

In the Middle Ages, the broadest literary themes had to do with religion; primarily Christianity, with influences from Islamic and Jewish cultural elements (Funk & Wagnalls, 2014, p. 1). Literature in prose was first developed during the reign of King Alphonso X, 1252-1284. It was written in Castilian Spanish as per the preference of the King. His push for prose produced El Conde Lucanor, written by Don Juan Manuel. This is considered one of the classic Spanish works, dealing with the moralistic themes of the picaresque novel (Best, 1964, p. 352).

Through the fourteenth century, Spanish literature was primarily influenced by historical events, especially the Moorish conflicts. Recent history, rather than myths and legends, drove literary pursuits. In the fifteenth century, those pursuits became more and more prominent, with a big increase in the production of work. Romanceros, or “collections of short balladlike pieces,”
became popular during this time, when writers combined old epic poems into a single piece and set them to accompanying music (Funk & Wagnalls, 2014, p. 2). Satire also became more popular during this time as well, with rulers Ferdinand and Isabella as influential patrons.

During the Renaissance, Spanish literature followed the larger trends, such as the expansion of humanistic doctrine, along with the historical writings of Erasmus. Poetry also expanded during this era, with a focus on the life and manners of shepherds (Funk & Wagnalls, 2014, p. 2).
American signers tend to use lots of details in their introductions of each other, although speakers of English might not feel as comfortable with that level of detail as an initial impression. However, the cultural implications of this simple act are far-reaching. Due to the relatively small size of the Deaf community, a simple introduction with few details may signal undesirability in companionship. Detailed introductions are used to signify shared experiences and make connections with those being introduced.

Deaf introductions typically consist of giving first and last names, work-related information, the names of any Deaf family members, and where the person is from, usually meaning their school. This much information quickly facilitates finding common ground with a perfect stranger. Interestingly, when a hearing person is being introduced, or introduces themselves, to a Deaf person, much of the same information is still desired, including whether they have any Deaf family. However, hearing people are also expected to disclose their hearing status early in the introduction, where Deaf people do not have to. In addition, they are expected to explain their reason for learning sign language and give any experience they have had regarding sign language classes—and the name of their teacher where applicable.

As in Deaf culture, there is a guide to follow when making introductions in Spanish; however, Spanish culture has a much stricter hierarchy of formal vs. non-formal interactions. Kattán-Ibarra and Poutaín (2003) described the various greetings used in Spanish depending on the level of conversational formality: “Buenos días, buenas tardes, and buenas noches,” which translate to “Good morning, good afternoon/evening, and good evening/night,” respectively, are considered neutral greetings that can be applied to any situation (p. 153).
Formal politeness is initially the norm in Spanish gatherings, but as familiarity develops, formality soon lapses into a more affectionate interaction. As Mary Graff (2008) explained, “Expect a handshake when you are being introduced [for the first time] but do not be surprised if you get kissed on both cheeks when you leave a party or any social gathering.” She also cautioned:

Do not take offence if you are not introduced to all the people in a room or at your table…it may merely be that your name is too difficult to pronounce correctly! In some cases it is quite in order for you to introduce yourself. (p. 30)

Graff went on to describe a ritualized Spanish introduction that, when performed, bears a striking resemblance to Deaf expectations of an introduction; she instructed, “You should introduce yourself in detail, tell [them] who you are, where you come from and what you are doing in Spain” (2008, p. 30). While most mainstream Americans are content to share another person’s name with a group and let them do the rest through conversation, both Deaf and Spanish cultures place a great deal of emphasis on revealing crucial information “up front” before the conversation continues.

**Attracting Attention**

In American Sign Language, the normal spoken “Hey!” or “Hello!” or “Excuse me!” will typically fail to attract a Deaf conversational partner’s attention unless they are already maintaining eye contact. Deaf Education figure Dr. Bill Vicars encouraged several alternative methods of getting a Deaf person’s attention:

- Tap him/her on the shoulder
- Step in front of him/her

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1 This is only considered appropriate if the Deaf individual is not already involved in a conversation.
Since Spanish is a spoken language, it follows that attention would be garnered through speech rather than through methods such as flipping lights on and off, or stomping on the floor. However, just as with introductions, there is a formality to attracting someone’s attention, along with social penalties if done rudely.

“Perdón” and “Oiga” (“Excuse me” and “Hey!”, respectively) are model examples of the hierarchy of formality in attention-getting strategies (Kattán-Ibarra & Poutaín, 2003, p. 170). While two of the most common forms, “Perdón” is used primarily in more formal situations, often coupled with the formal “Señor” or “Señora” to further clarify who is needed. It is interesting to note that the relationship between the conversing individuals, as well as the attitude of the speaker, will determine much of how one’s attention is attracted. For instance, a student attempting to get the attention of a professor he or she respects will be perceived differently from two friends, one of whom is angry with the other. “Attitude” in this case means whether the speaker is sympathetic or hostile towards the conversational partner (Kattán-Ibarra & Poutaín, 2003, p. 174).

Graff (2008) also noted that in situations where there is not a prior relationship with the person whose attention is desired (such as a shopkeeper or a waiter, for instance), extra care must be taken not to offend them. She explained that usually a simple “Por favor” (“please”) will be sufficient to attract attention; however, snapping fingers, whistling, waving, or other such activities would be in quite poor taste. Graff cautioned that in some instances, if someone were to

2 If you are a hearing person, doing this is only advisable after you have spent a significant amount of time in Deaf culture or around culturally-Deaf people. Otherwise, it can be considered rude and you may not have mastered when each method of getting attention is appropriate.
behave this way in a shop, the shopkeeper would actually ignore them and continue assisting other customers as a method of punishment for such rudeness (2008, p. 143).

**Taking Leave**

Finally, the ritual of “leave-taking,” or saying goodbye after a conversation or meet-up, is another important facet of Deaf culture distinct from any other social group. While there are some groups that spend more time taking their leave at the end of a conversation, it is not ritualized the way it is in Deaf culture. Leave-taking is based on the history of Deaf interactions in America. Before the advent of text messaging and Internet tools such as social networking sites and Skype to facilitate communication, it was often uncertain when Deaf individuals would meet again. All interactions at that time were face-to-face, or else they did not happen. Additionally, incidental learning—for example, overhearing news on the radio or in someone else’s conversation—is limited in the Deaf community (Holcomb, 2013, p. 201), so the majority of news updates would be delivered in person, and the conversational partners would want to make sure they are saying everything they wanted to say.

Leave-taking is comprised of several steps. First, the conversational partners plan when their next meeting will be: location, time, etc. Often, hugs are exchanged; and, since goodbyes are individual, possible conversational tangents arise, further prolonging the goodbyes (Holcomb, 2013, p. 197).

Although technology has improved communication, leave-taking is still an important social ritual in the Deaf community, and saying goodbye takes a lot longer than in other social groups. Planning a time to meet again was difficult to coordinate, so it was important to say everything one wanted to say before taking one’s leave of the conversation and the other individuals.
In Spanish culture, leave-taking is a ritual, although not quite as stylized or extensive as in Deaf culture. While in the Deaf community, it is quite normal to extensively plan out the next meeting, it is slightly more relaxed in Spain. The term “mañana” is the most widely used, and can mean anything from the literal “tomorrow” to “much later.” It is only certain that “mañana” will not mean “later today” (Graff, 2008, p. 145).

Just as with introductions and greetings, how one says goodbye depends a lot on one’s conversational partners. Common leave-taking expressions include “Hasta luego,” which means “Goodbye” or “until next time,” and “Adios,” which typically means “Goodbye” in the sense that the two speakers will not meet again for some time (Kattán-Ibarra & Poutaín, 2003, p. 159).

When the time finally does come to say goodbye, it is a normal practice to kiss on the cheek or even on both cheeks, said Kattán-Ibarra and Poutaín (2003), “especially if they…will not be meeting for some time” (p. 154).

**Festivals and Celebrations**

Many cultures’ celebrations revolve around a religious tradition; however, in Deaf culture, they often revolve around a school. As Bahan, Hoffmeister, and Lane explain in *A Journey into the Deaf-World* (1996), Deaf citizens fiercely value their schools and prefer to be in that community, isolated from the hearing world, rather than in an institution that may not accommodate or appreciate them in the same way. (p. 125). Alumni networks are extremely strong in the Deaf community, they explain, and after a student leaves school they will be able to experience “tiny reservations of Deaf culture” (p. 127) wherever they go, as alumni maintain community with each other after graduation, establishing Deaf meeting spaces.

Because of the nature of the residential schools and the automatic camaraderie that comes with being culturally Deaf, they are a way of combating Deaf isolation (Bahan, Hoffmeister, &
Lane, p. 127). The relationships built there continue long after graduation in the form of regular alumni reunions and homecomings, which are often the largest celebrations in the Deaf community. Attendees at the 2012 Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf (ENCSD) compared it to a “family reunion” (Neeley, 2012). Similarly, at the New Mexico School for the Deaf, their homecoming celebration revolved around the school’s 125th birthday; a *Santa Fe New Mexican* article covering the event described “three days of campus tours, athletic games, a pep rally, storytelling in American Sign Language, and social events,” and alumni were quoted explaining that “the bottom line for [all of us] is to come home” (Nott, 2010, p. 3).

These celebrations, then, are not only a chance for alumni to reunite, but also to reaffirm the past and present students’ place in the Deaf community. As Bahan, Hoffmeister, and Lane explain, “Deaf ties formed at school are lifelong” (1996, p. 125). Homecoming celebrations and alumni reunions strengthen the culture and community already in place at Deaf residential schools.

Although religion is not a formal social tradition, as 94% of the Spanish population belongs to the Roman Catholic faith (Graff, 2008, p. 156) many social practices in Spain are influenced by Catholicism. Graff (2008) noted, “Every village has at least one church” (p. 49). Most notable among these social practices are the “fiestas” that take place on a regular basis: *ferias*, bull fights, and parades of *gigantes y cabezudos*, in which performers don costumes and papier-mâché headwear made to resemble the faces of saints or famous figures. Most notably, the *gigantes y cabezudos* are used in a reenactment of a history of “Moors and Normans” before the festival of San Fermín and the “running of the bulls” in which volunteers run ahead of bulls turned loose in the streets of Pamplona (Graff, 2008, p. 26).
Such festivals, while they are thought of by many outsiders as solely traditional celebrations accompanied by alcohol-induced revelry, actually have a large stake in religious observance. Often named for saints, these festivals do a great deal to reaffirm Spanish culture and its connection to the Catholic faith; however, some festivals have their roots in pre-Christian rites and include an element of paganism. These *fallas*, most often seen around the summer solstice on the night of San Juan, involve papier-mâché figures, usually representing politicians or other public figures, displayed in the streets for a week (Graff, 2008, p. 101).

While these festivals are enjoyed by tourists as well as native Spaniards, they are an important part of the unique culture of Spain as influenced by religion. A discussion of Spanish culture would be incomplete if Roman Catholicism were not included.
Etymology

American Sign Language

The language that would later help create American Sign Language began as a teaching method in eighteenth-century France. L’Abbé Charles-Michel de l’Épée used an “indigenous signed language” that was already common with Deaf Parisians to teach his pupils. (Tabak, 2006, p. 9). His teaching approach was unique in that he did not seek to use compensatory strategies to overcome his students’ deafness. Instead, he “[appealed] to their intellects via their sense of vision,” which was already a strength (Tabak, 2006, p. 10). Juan Pablo Bonet, John Wallace, and Jacob Rodriguez Pereire, all previous educators of the deaf, had focused their methods on the weaknesses in speech and hearing, rather than taking advantage of the senses their pupils did use. de l’Épée’s approach recognized not only the strength of sight in his pupils, but the already-existing indigenous signs, and chose to build his education on that rather than create an entirely new language. By using and expanding on what his students already felt comfortable with, he was able to revolutionize French Deaf education and eventually create the language that would come to be known as la langue des signes française, or LSF. As Tabak (2006) said in Significant Gestures:

What separated de l’Épée from his critics was not that he used signs, but rather that he used only signs in his students’ early education. He believed that instruction via signs was the most efficient path to scholarly achievement for the Deaf. (p. 12)

According to linguists Shaw and Delaporte (2010), “the history of signs in ASL is unique in that it necessarily includes the history of LSF—one that developed in a geographically and culturally distant place…eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French culture…” (p. 159).

Although there is little historical documentation available from the eighteenth and nineteenth
centuries, certain French regions offer indication that much of the historical signs have remained unchanged over the years. Shaw and Delaporte (2010) discovered “several sources of ASL signs” in French regions such as Chambéry and Auvergne, which allow for a connection between historical LSF and ASL, although some signs fell out of common use in more densely populated areas such as Paris (p. 160).

LSF, now called Old French Sign Language (Grayson, 2003, p. 3) retains many cultural aspects that were later passed on to ASL users, many of which are retained today in the modern language. For example, the ASL sign for “fine” is an open handshape with the thumb pointing into the chest. This handshape in LSF was used to indicate the lacy ruffles on the front of a gentleman’s shirt (Shaw & Delaporte, 2006, p. 179). This description has been used in American sign textbooks, indicating a confirmed link between the signs. This is just one of many signs that have persisted through the transition and adaptation from LSF into American Sign Language, proving the link between the two.

An adapted version of the French sign language first came to America in 1816, with the return of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, an American, and Laurent Clerc, a Frenchman who had accompanied Gallaudet to America in hopes of starting a school for deaf children. Clerc had come from the National Royal Institute for the Deaf, in Paris, which had been founded by l’Abbé de l’Epée (Grayson, 2003, p.3).

Gallaudet had come to Paris to learn about the method of educating deaf children that the Abbé employed. This push to start a school had come from the father of Alice Cogswell, a deaf child who had learned the word “hat” from Gallaudet (Gannon, 2012, p. xxiv). In Paris, Gallaudet studied under Laurent Clerc and Jean Massieu, both of whom had studied under l’Abbé de l’Epée and Roche Amboise Sicard, de l’Epée’s successor. Clerc warned him that it
would take “six months to learn” the French sign language, and then a year to become proficient enough to teach it to others (Tabak, 2006, p. 23). However, Gallaudet grew tired of staying in Europe, and so offered Clerc a future teaching job in Hartford, Connecticut, at the school for the deaf that he and Cogswell planned to start.

In Connecticut, Laurent Clerc quickly became a fixture at the Hartford school; eventually, it was even his work that convinced then-President James Madison and the United States Congress that the school deserved federal funding (Tabak, 2006, p. 23). On April 15, 1817, the doors opened for the Connecticut Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb (later renamed the American School for the Deaf), in Hartford. Enrolled pupils were required to be at least 9 years of age.

John Tabak (2006) also noted that interestingly, although Thomas Gallaudet “learned most of his signed language from Clerc…Gallaudet was determined to understand [LSF] as…a fully formed language” (p. 24). He saw the potential in the signed language for more scholarly study, recognized that it was a language distinct from English, and worked to find commonalities with other forms of signed communication that he believed were universal among cultures. He believed that signed language was “thought—made visible” (Tabak, 2006, p. 31).

Prior to the establishment of the first school for the deaf, Americans were at a loss for how to educate those who could not hear. While it was acknowledged as an issue, little progress had been made. Any attempts that were made did not consider sign language to be the best method of communication or education. For instance, in 1793, an article published by Dr. William Thornton “called attention of the American press to the educational needs of Deaf people” (Gannon, 2012, p. 1) but emphasized an oral approach. Gallaudet and Clerc’s
contribution were unique because their adapted version of LSF represented the first efforts to bring signed language into the field of education for deaf pupils.

Once the first school for the Deaf was established in 1817, others soon followed in New York, Pennsylvania, and Kentucky, and gradually spread out over the country, with the biggest increase during the years 1838-1858 (Figure 1).

*Figure 1.*

![Establishment of Deaf Residential Schools in the United States](image)

Naturally, these schools wanted Deaf teachers, until the pure oral movement became dominant in schools, and deaf teachers became “undesirable” (Gannon, 2012, p. 3).
Spanish

For reasons of brevity and clarity, our examination of the origins of the modern Spanish language will be focused mostly on its development in Europe; particularly, the Iberian Peninsula.

In 1200, the Iberian Peninsula was divided into five autonomous kingdoms, each with their own language. The territories’ languages mirrored the names of their regions: Castile, Galicia, Valencia, Catalonia, Navarre. These regions coexisted peacefully, resembling a kind of pluralistic society, until around the year 1700, when the Bourbon dynasty arrived and proceeded to spread the ideas of enlightenment, unification, and nationalism—all of the newest ideals from France (Moreno-Fernández, 2007, p. 8).

Castilian, as the language with the greatest degree of development in all three major norms—orthography, grammar, and lexical—had been the preferred language of ruler Alphonse X, who in the year 1250 used it in his philosophical and scientific treatises (Moreno-Fernández, 2007, p. 9). It expanded even more in the midst of the Black Plague, where Castile had the greatest population density: 3-4 million inhabitants compared to the 800,000-1 million average of the other kingdoms (Moreno-Fernández, 2007, p. 9). The success of Castilian was also due in part to the gradual increase in exploration and trade. As Castile was on a coastline, commerce was easily brought about, which allowed for plenty of cultural and linguistic exchange among Seville and North Africa. After the commercialization of boats, more explorers were able to sail to the Canary Islands and the west coast of Africa, which facilitated more exchange of language, particularly with the Canary Islands (Moreno-Fernández, 2007, p. 9).

All of these factors led Castilian to be declared the “prestigious official language” (Moreno-Fernández, 2007, p. 9) of the Iberian Peninsula under the Bourbon dynasty, implying
the gradual erasure of the other kingdoms’ languages from the landscape. During this time, the other kingdoms were resting in the idea of multilingual government and living, choosing not to centralize and consolidate. Despite this, the French handed down the Nueva Planta Decrees, which were intended to reconfigure Spain into a unified nation, with one official language: Castilian. The decrees also opened up inter-kingdom trade and abandoned customs, which allowed for greater exchange and expansion of language into remote rural areas (Moreno-Fernández, 2007, p. 11).

At this time, Castilian was growing increasingly in government preference. One decree even singled out Catalonia, which held the Royal Courts of Barcelona, and demanded that all court cases be heard in Castilian, without making this same insistence for the courts of the other kingdoms. Moves like this nudged Castilian, and later Spanish as we know it, toward becoming the official language of Spain. Another warrant in 1768 established Castilian as the official “teaching” language, excluding the Latin that had been used for so long by the upper classes. The official reasoning for this was to promote national harmony, but in reality it was one more move towards France’s ultimate goal of total unification (Moreno-Fernández, 2007, p. 12).

1770 and 1772 saw the addition of mandated Castilian in the Philippines and Spanish America and the establishment of Castilian as the official language of business transactions: the first time Spain had publicly advocated for monolingualism. Eventually the Castilian language created a kind of stratified society across Spain: the upper classes spoke a more elaborate, refined type of Spanish while the rural and lower classes used mainly the dialect of whichever region they happened to inhabit (Moreno-Fernández, 2007, p. 14). This gradually pushed out the other languages, positioning Castilian to supplant them in more areas of life (Moreno-Fernández,
2007, p. 12). Castilian Spanish currently comprises over 70% of the languages spoken in Spain (Graff, 2008, p. 156).
Grammar & Syntax

William Stokoe, a professor at Gallaudet University, was responsible for breaking down the “phonology” of American Sign Language. He was able to distinguish three separate aspects of a single sign that contributed to communication: the position, or tabula, of a sign relative to the signer (for example, at chest level, waist level, or face level), the handshape, or designator, of the sign itself, and any motion, or signation, that the sign required (Tabak, 2006, p. 119). This was important for several reasons. First, it supported the idea that American Sign Language was a legitimate language as it followed rules of phonology and morphology. It also opened up the language to formal linguistic study, which was previously overlooked due to the lack of actual vocalization in the language.

In English, as well as other voiced languages, phonemes are the individual sounds that make up a word. The International Phonetic Alphabet, or IPA, is a way for every oral language to transcribe its utterances into phonemes that can then be understood and pronounced by someone acquainted with IPA, even if they do not speak the language.

The analogous structure in American Sign Language is the chereme. In the 1960s, Dr. Stokoe identified distinct cheremes for each dimension of a sign: tabula, designator, and signator. From these cheremes, he created a code similar to the IPA, in which each symbol in his code corresponded to a sign and its dimensions to create a written form of sign language (Tabak, 2006, p. 119).

The syntactical structure of American Sign Language is often referred to as the “topic-comment” structure. While English uses the subject-verb-object rule (example: “She went to the office”), American Sign Language is more likely to organize the sentence by object-subject-verb structure (“Office, she-go”) (Holcomb, 2013, p. 124). There are several reasons for this. First,
American Sign Language places a larger focus on topicalization than does English, meaning it prioritizes the specifics of a statement over the generalities. English, on the other hand, favors a pattern of discourse that works from the general information up to the specifics.

For a visual comparison (see Figure 2), American Sign Language discourse has been described as having a “diamond” structure, where conversational partners check in frequently to ensure mutual understanding before moving on in their discussion. English, on the other hand, is described as a “funnel” discourse structure, moving as discussed from the general to the specific.

*Figure 2. Discourse Structure: ASL vs. English.*

*Left: the “diamond” structure of ASL, where mutual understanding is constantly reinforced before moving on to another general topic of discussion.*

*Right: the “funnel” structure of English, moving from general information to more specific details.*

One example of the parallel richness of both signed and spoken languages is the implementation of *interrogatives*—words that ask questions. The most common are “Who?”, “What?”, “When?”, “Where?”, “Why?”, and “How?”. In English, questions are typically denoted by a change in *intonation*—the speaker’s voice rising in pitch toward the end of the utterance. As American Sign Language deals primarily with Deaf or hard-of-hearing individuals, this way of distinguishing questions from statements is highly ineffective. Instead, American Sign Language employs facial cues and body language to denote a question. When asking a question, the signer will typically lean forward slightly, with brow furrowed or eyebrows raised,
and hold the last sign out a little longer than the rest (Grayson, 2003, p. 20). Learning to identify these cues and how to use them in conversation is a large part of sign language courses; the “question” cues are as important as the signs with which to ask the questions.

Going from the “topic-comment” structure that we discussed, it must be emphasized that interrogative words follow this pattern. Although in English, the interrogative is generally placed in the beginning of a sentence (following the general-to-specific “funnel” structure), the interrogative will usually be the last word of a question in American Sign Language. For example, if one were to ask, “Where is the bathroom?” in sign language, it would be structured thus:

\[ \text{BATHROOM-WHERE} \]

While ASL has the “topic-comment” structure, so different from English, Spanish syntax can seem like familiar ground and can be perceived as identical to English. However, according to Kattán-Ibarra and Poutain (2003), Spanish syntax actually tends to follow a similar pattern to ASL. The language, while not a concrete rule, usually places the topic of conversation first in the sentence, and then follows it up with the new information (what can be thought of as the “comment”) (p. 145).

Similar to English, Spanish questions can be identified by changes in the speaker’s intonation, or voice pitch, rising towards the end of the sentence. In contrast to American Sign Language, however, the word order of the sentence in Spanish does not usually change. If the question was “Where is the bathroom?”, for instance:

\[ \text{ASL: BATHROOM-WHERE} \]

\[ \text{Spanish: ¿Dónde está el baño?} \]
It has also been observed in Spanish grammar and syntax that the level of confidence an asker has in the answer to his or her question can inform how the question itself is structured. If the speaker is reasonably sure of the answer to the question, the subject (especially in the case of a question regarding a specific person) will be placed before the verb. For example, the question “¿Louise habla español?” (Kattán-Ibarra and Poutaín, 2003, p. 186) would indicate by its structure that the speaker was reasonably sure that Louise did in fact speak Spanish. In contrast, a speaker less certain about whether or not the train has arrived yet would ask, “¿Ha llegado el tren?” (Kattán-Ibarra and Poutaín, 2003, p. 185) Therefore I am calling this the “conditional topic-comment structure,” dependent on external factors.
Conclusion

After examining both American Sign Language and Spanish in the context of their courses at James Madison University, it is clear they share many parallel elements. As discussed, both languages are held accountable to the same national board of educational standards in the university setting, with a focus on integrating communication and culture in instruction. In this vein, we have also seen that they also represent two distinct cultures, with accompanying history, art, literature, and social expectations that differ from mainstream American culture. The historical background is continued in the discussion of Spanish and ASL etymological development, detailing how the languages evolved into their modern forms. Finally, American Sign Language and Spanish have shown to follow their own grammar and syntax rules distinct from English.

If we follow these parallel elements from Spanish across to American Sign Language, it is clear that they have equal footing as legitimate languages. However, closer examination is necessary when it comes to how these two languages are treated in the university. All of the elements of Spanish discussed in this work have been present in courses taught at the university, reflecting the idea that communication and culture go hand in hand in postsecondary language instruction. If this is true, it stands to reason that these same elements present in American Sign Language would also be integrated into the course offerings at James Madison University.

Why, then, should only one of these languages be recognized as fulfillment of the foreign language requirement for the Bachelor of Arts degree? We have established that the educational standards for both are equal. We have drawn equivalent curriculum components between the two and found both American Sign Language and Spanish to be rich in educational potential for university study. However, currently only the potential for Spanish is acknowledged as potential
fulfillment of the B.A. requirements. It is our hope that this argument begins a closer examination of the rationale behind the foreign language requirements, and a movement to include American Sign Language in those languages acknowledged as appropriate for completing the B.A. degree.
Appendix A

Academic Terms and Definitions

Degree Requirements
A degree is an academic title conferred on students who complete a unified program of study. Degrees vary according to the major program. JMU offers eight undergraduate degrees that incorporate course requirements unique to the degree and major discipline. Majors culminating in Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science degrees share common sets of course requirements appropriate to the degree with specific distinctions.

Bachelor of Arts degree — The B.A. is distinguished by its humanistic emphasis. Students who complete a B.A. may satisfy the degree requirements by taking courses that advance their understanding of human culture through analysis of ideas; perception of differences; appreciation of art and creative products through understanding art forms, beauty, and symmetry; knowledge of theories and principles of form, substance, argument and philosophy; understanding of the interaction between language and culture; and achievement of linguistic competency in a second language.

on the transcript of record. The concentration will be noted on the transcript only after the student graduates.

Cognate — A set of courses outside the major that is designed to complement other components of the student’s course of study and to support selected professional goals. A cognate is not a required component of a program. A student does not have to formally declare a cognate and it will not appear on the transcript of record.

Core — A defined group of courses within a particular major or minor that is required of all students completing that major or minor.

Track — A prescribed set of courses within a concentration. A track is not a required component of all concentrations. A student does not have to formally declare a track and it will not appear on the transcript of record.

Pre-professional Program — A defined set of courses or course options and requirements that serve as prerequisites to upper or graduate-level professional program components or courses. A pre-professional program may coincide with a major, minor or concentration, or it may be comprised by courses from two or more disciplines and concentrations.
Appendix B

In the complete table from Hamilton and Saladin, the two textbooks used in JMU sign language courses are numbers 6 and 7. A more detailed account of the criteria used by Hamilton and Saladin for evaluating each of the 5Cs can be found in Appendix C.
Appendix C

Glossary

audism—a term coined by Tom Humphries to describe “the notion that one is superior based on one’s ability to hear or behave in the manner of one who hears”

culture—the history, experiences, knowledge, traditions, visual representations, and expectations of a group that share a common dialect or language

deaf—used to refer to the medical condition of having no sense of hearing

Deaf—used to reference the culture of deafness in America, as well as any person belonging to that culture

De’VIA—an art movement that some Deaf artists have embraced as a way to represent their experience of being Deaf

foreign—a language or culture other than one’s native experience

monolingualism—the idea that a country or territory should be united under a common language

morphology—the study of the internal structure of words; examining grammatical markers and the process of forming different words from the same base word

oralism—a movement that began in America in the 1860s, advocating for Deaf education focused on speech and lipreading rather than sign language

residential school—dormitory-style education and living for deaf children; during the rise of oralism signing was not permitted in the schools

syntax—the arrangement of words and phrases to form sentences; it is unique to each language
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