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Augmentative and Alternative Communication Course Design and Features: An Analysis of Course Syllabi and Calendars

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Investigation of Augmentative and Alternative Communication Course Syllabi Across Accredited Speech-Language Pathology Programs

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Background

- Speech-language pathologists often report lack of preparedness for augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) services¹
- Improved pre-service graduate training in AAC has been suggested to better prepare clinicians²
- Prior research³ demonstrated:
- 78.8% of graduate programs offered at least one dedicated AAC course
- Average AAC instruction hours: 37.6 (±9.8 hours, range = 10 to 60 hours)
- Course design features (e.g., schedule)
 were unable to be assessed
- Literature suggests course design features vary across programs, though credit hours were not accounted for⁴

Purpose

To investigate AAC course design features while accounting for the number of credit hours dedicated to the topic



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Upon successful completion of this course, learners should be able to: 1. Describe and apply assessment models with consideration to populations with complex communication needs

Methods

- Websites from each ASHA-accredited SLP program offering AAC coursework³ (239) were searched to identify email addresses for:
- The department chairperson
- The department graduate advisor
- A general department contact

Requests for AAC course syllabi⁵ were made between 10/8/2021 and 2/3/2022:

- One follow-up email was sent to each address
 If no response, one follow-up phone call to the
- general department line was completed
- Two research assistants analyzed the syllabi
- Randomly assigned 50% each
- 38% of the syllabi were randomly assigned to be completed by both research assistants for interrater agreement
- Course syllabi were initially reviewed for:
- Year of syllabus
- Course credit hours
- Course length (weeks)
- Class duration (minutes per class)
- Required or elective course
- Course term

Results

94 syllabi received from 89 programs (37%)



Interrater agreement = 94%



- Length of course interrater agreement: 95%
- Course term was offered interrater agreement: 86%
- Number of credits interrater agreement: 95%

Discussion

- · Variation in course dosage and schedule may impact student learning
- · Course intensity (e.g., 1 week vs 15 weeks) has not been studied
- Student factors and preferences in course schedule has not been studied
- Due to limited information, unable to determine when AAC was offered in sequence
- Students frequently are matched with externships in spring of their first year; limited exposure to AAC may reduce interest in AAC-focused placements
- Integrated data collection methods (survey and syllabus) should be considered in the future
- Syllabi often lacked or provided vague information regarding course features
- Online or hybrid course formats may limit information provided
 Study completed in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic

Standardized language use on syllabi may facilitate future research

- Improved accessibility of websites may better inform prospective students and research
- Additional course design features will be evaluated in the future with expert content reviewers

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