

# 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) services<sup>1</sup>
- Improved pre-service graduate training in AAC has been suggested to better prepare clinicians<sup>2</sup>
- Prior research<sup>3</sup> 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 for<sup>4</sup>

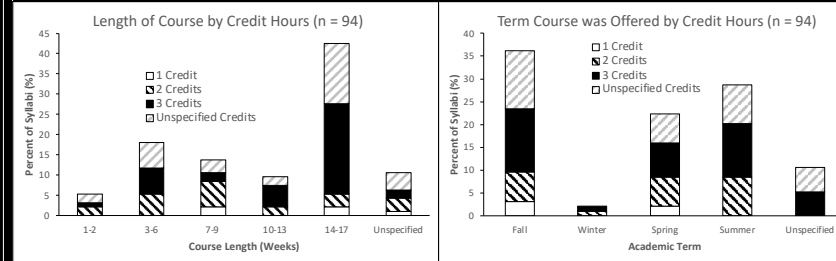
## Purpose

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

## Methods

- Websites from each ASHA-accredited SLP program offering AAC coursework<sup>3</sup> (239) were searched to identify email addresses for:
  - The department chairperson
  - The department graduate advisor
  - A general department contact
- Requests for AAC course syllabi<sup>5</sup> 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 (cont.)



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

## Discussion

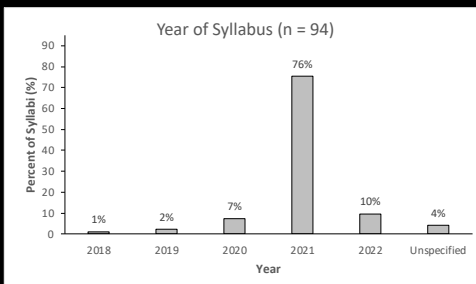
- Variation in course dosage and schedule may impact student learning
  - Course intensity (e.g., 1 week vs 15 weeks) has not been studied
  - Student factors and preferences in course schedule has not been studied
- Due to limited information, unable to determine when AAC was offered in sequence
  - 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

## References

- Costigan, F. A. & Light, J. (2010). A review of preservice training in augmentative and alternative communication for speech-language pathologists, special education teachers, and occupational therapists. *Assistive Technology, 22*(4), 200-212. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10400435.2010.49277>
- Kovacs, T. (2021). A survey of American speech-language pathologists' perspectives on augmentative and alternative communication assessment and intervention across language domains. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology, 30*(3), 1038-1048.
- Pinto, M., Sorenson, E., & Eddy, B. (2021, November). *Investigation of AAC coursework across accredited speech-language pathology graduate programs*. American Speech-Language-Hearing Association Conference, Washington, D.C.
- Sauerwein, A. M. & Burris, M. M. (2022). Augmentative and alternative communication course design and features: A survey of expert faculty and instructors. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology, 31*(1), 221-238. DOI: 10.1044/2021\_AJSLP-20-00070
- Lasker, J. R. (2004). Development of a model AAC syllabus: Exploring new competencies. *Perspectives on Augmentative and Alternative Communication, 13*(2), 25-28.

## Results

- 94 syllabi received from 89 programs (37%)



- Interrater agreement = 94%



**INSTRUCTOR**  
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Pronouns: He, his, him  
beddy@psu.edu - best way to reach me  
Please do not contact the instructor via D2L mail \*email to set-up an appointment

**COURSE and DEPARTMENT INFO**  
SPHR 559 Summer 2021  

- SPHR website: <http://www.pdx.edu/sphr/>
- SPHR Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/pdxsphr/>

NSSLHA: National Student Speech-Language-Hearing Association. To find out more about or join PSU's local NSSLHA chapter, please visit their webpage here: <https://www.pdx.edu/sphr/nsslha-psu-sphr-chapter>

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**  
This course provides learners with an introduction to augmentative and alternative communication terms, with specialized instruction in alternative access, assessment, and intervention. This course is required for graduate students in Speech and Hearing Sciences. Special emphasis will be placed on foundational knowledge necessary for an entry level position providing services to individuals who use AAC throughout the lifespan. Learners are encouraged to engage in additional learning with various media and meeting with AAC company representatives to learn more about different AAC product features and to grasp a complete understanding of implications for clinical use.

**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