

Sign Language Studies Department

The mission of the Department of Sign Language Studies is based on the foundational values as set forth by the mission statement of Madonna University as a whole. It is also based on humanistic values as stated in the Undergraduate [Bulletin](#).

The Department of Sign Language Studies (SLS) is dedicated to humanistic values and the preparation of people who fill meaningful roles in society as American Sign Language specialists. Just as we expect our graduates to keep abreast of developments in the field, so must the Department constantly seek to re-evaluate its role within the University and within the field.

The field of Sign language studies is broad and only recently has emerged as a discipline of study or professional practice. Sign language specialists include interpreters, Sign language instructors, linguists, psychologists, semioticians, anthropologists, kinesiologists, social workers, researchers, medical personnel, special education personnel and counselors. The scope of the field is reflected in the diversity of topics discussed at professional conferences and presented in various issues of the "Sign Language Studies" journal. Topics include: linguistic analysis of various Sign languages, the use of Sign language for special populations, neurological reports, sociolinguistic studies, developmental studies, problems in translation and teaching, language origins, non-verbal behavior, animal communication, historical studies, Sign language interpreting, international Sign language studies, visual processing and aesthetics to name a few.

Until now, the Sign Language Department at Madonna University has concerned itself with only a small part of this broad field. The Department has provided communicative Sign language skills for persons who wish to apply those skills in various lines of work or further study and has specifically attempted to educate persons as ASL-English interpreters. In both cases the SLS curriculum is a reflection of the current state of the art, or more accurately, current perceptions of the state of the art.

The field of Sign language is witnessing phenomenal growth in terms of scope and intensity. The influence of technology including the Internet, Web and related computer-enhanced applications, and distance learning programs, both synchronous and asynchronous, only hint at future applications of Sign language research and application. The SLS Department works to be a reflection and catalyst toward this growth. To this end, continued reassessment and revision of the curriculum within the Department is essential. It is important to examine not only the core area of study and the interpreting specialty, but also the possibility of providing expanded educational opportunities in the areas of Sign language teaching, Deaf education Sign language theory and research.

In 1975, when the interpreter training program at Madonna University began, there were two institutions offering bachelor's degrees and 10 institutions offering associate degrees in interpreting. In June 1979, it was reported at a conference on the State of the Art of Interpreting and Interpreter Training that more than 60 institutions were offering interpreter training programs. By the summer of 1985, more than 360 colleges and universities offered at least one class in Sign language or began accepting Sign language for foreign language credits. Currently, more than 500 two-year colleges, four-year universities and graduate programs offer courses and programs that include Sign language as a significant area of study. Madonna University remains the only four-year, private independent liberal arts university to offer a Bachelor of Arts in Sign Language Studies in the United States.

Our position is that a solid, thorough education in American Sign Language (ASL) is fundamental to the preparation of Sign language specialists in any area of study. We also take the position that ASL is a language and must be taught as one. Therefore, the SLS faculty puts a high priority on continuously strengthening the Department's offerings in courses designed to develop facility in the language and understanding of its structure, communicative functions and community. Beyond the core courses, SLS students may elect other courses to meet their career preparation needs.

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The SLS Department recognizes that a sociolinguistic and cultural approach to the instruction of ASL best models the language used in conversation, formally and informally, by the majority of Deaf citizens of the United States. This respect for Sign language as a human right to communicate is a central mission of the SLS Department. This represents the social, linguistic, educational and communicative direction in which respect for the American Deaf culture and its language, ASL, is incorporated into educational components and the instructional philosophy of Madonna University's SLS curriculum.