



**College of Education and Human Development
Division of Special Education and disAbility Research**

Spring 2024

EDSE 534: Communication and Severe Disabilities

Section: 679; CRN: 23854

3 – Credits

Instructor: Dr. Meghan Betz	Meeting Dates: 1/16/24 – 5/9/24
Phone: https://gmu.zoom.us/j/2440575629	Meeting Day(s): N/A
E-Mail: mbetz1@gmu.edu	Meeting Time(s): N/A
Office Hours: By appointment	Meeting Location: N/A; Online
Office Location: Zoom	Other Phone: N/A

Note: This syllabus may change according to class needs. Teacher Candidates/Students will be advised of any changes immediately through George Mason e-mail and/or through Blackboard.

Prerequisite(s):

None

Co-requisite(s):

None

Course Description

Introduces professionals to augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) for individuals with severe speech and language impairments. Addresses the knowledge and skills needed to assess the potential AAC user, make team decisions, develop and implement instruction, and evaluate the effects of instruction, aimed at motivating, building, and expanding communication, choice-making, and social interaction.

Advising Contact Information

Please make sure that you are being advised on a regular basis as to your status and progress in your program. Students in Special Education and Assistive Technology programs can contact the Special Education Advising Office at 703-993-3670 or speced@gmu.edu for assistance. All other students should refer to their assigned program advisor or the Mason Care Network (703-993-2470).

Advising Tip

Students in graduate programs must maintain a 3.00 GPA (B average), and grades of B- or better are required for all education coursework for licensure.

Course Delivery Method

Learning activities include the following:

1. Class lecture and discussion
2. Application activities
3. Video and other media supports
4. Research and presentation activities
5. Electronic supplements and activities via Blackboard

This course will be delivered online (76% or more) using an asynchronous format via the Blackboard Learning Management system (LMS) housed in the MyMason portal. You will log in to the Blackboard (Bb) course site using your Mason email name (everything before @masonlive.gmu.edu) and email password. The course site will be available on Tuesday, January 16, 2024.

Under no circumstances, may candidates/students participate in online class sessions (either by phone or Internet) while operating motor vehicles. Further, as expected in a face-to-face class meeting, such online participation requires undivided attention to course content and communication.

Technical Requirements

To participate in this course, students will need to satisfy the following technical requirements:

- High-speed Internet access with standard up-to-date browsers. To get a list of Blackboard's supported browsers see: [Browser support \(https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Student/Ultra/Getting_Started/Browser_Support\)](https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Student/Ultra/Getting_Started/Browser_Support)
- Students must maintain consistent and reliable access to their GMU email and Blackboard, as these are the official methods of communication for this course.
- Students may be asked to create logins and passwords on supplemental websites and/or to download trial software to their computer or tablet as part of course requirements.
- The following software plug-ins for PCs and Macs, respectively, are available for free download:
 - [Adobe Acrobat Reader: https://get.adobe.com/reader/](https://get.adobe.com/reader/)
 - [Windows Media Player: https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/help/14209/get-windows-media-player](https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/help/14209/get-windows-media-player)
 - [Apple Quick Time Player: www.apple.com/quicktime/download/](http://www.apple.com/quicktime/download/)

Expectations

- **Course Week:** Because asynchronous courses do not have a “fixed” meeting day, our week will start on Monday and finish on the following Tuesday (i.e., 1 week+1 day).
- **Log-in Frequency:** Students must actively check the course Blackboard site and their GMU email for communications from the instructor at least 3 times per week.
- **Participation:** Students are expected to actively engage in all course activities throughout the semester, which includes viewing all course materials, completing course activities and assignments, and participating in course discussions and group interactions.
- **Technical Competence:** Students are expected to demonstrate competence in the use of all course technology. Students who are struggling with technical components of the course are expected to seek assistance from the instructor and/or College or University technical services.
- **Technical Issues:** Students should anticipate some technical difficulties during the semester and should, therefore, budget their time accordingly. Late work will not be accepted based on individual technical issues.
- **Workload:** Please be aware that this course is not self-paced. Students are expected to meet specific deadlines and due dates listed in the Class Schedule section of this syllabus. It is the student’s responsibility to keep track of the weekly course schedule of topics, readings, activities, and assignments due.
- **Instructor Support:** Students may schedule a one-on-one meeting to discuss course requirements, content, or other course-related issues. Students should email the instructor to schedule a one-on-one session, including suggested dates/times.
- **Netiquette:** The course environment is a collaborative space. Experience shows that even an innocent remark typed in the online environment can be misconstrued. Students must always re-read their responses carefully before posting them so that others do not consider them personal offenses. *Be positive in your approach to others and diplomatic in selecting your words.* Remember that you are not competing with classmates but sharing information and learning from others. All faculty are similarly expected to be respectful in all communications. Emails should be professional in tone.
- **Accommodations:** Online learners who require effective accommodations to ensure accessibility must be registered with their University’s Office of Disability Services.

Learner Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, teacher candidates/students will be able to:

1. Identify characteristics of non-symbolic and symbolic communication
2. Describe and discuss methods for assessment, identification of priorities, and monitoring the progress of individuals with communication impairments.
3. Discuss and evaluate the range of augmentative and alternative communication devices and systems/assistive technology available for individuals with severe disabilities.
4. Implement assessment strategies to improve students' social interaction with peers and others.
5. Implement communication/AAC/AT assessment strategies to develop and implement individual educational planning and group instruction with students with disabilities in an adapted curriculum across the K-12 grade levels.
6. Understand and identify behaviors associated with communication.
7. Describe language development and emergent literacy skills for students who use augmentative and alternative communication devices and systems/assistive technology.
8. Identify and implement strategies and activities that foster an appreciation of a variety of literature and independent reading for students who use augmentative and alternative communication devices and systems/assistive technology.
9. Demonstrate knowledge of best practices and strategies in reading instruction for students with severe disabilities for students who use augmentative and alternative communication devices and systems/assistive technology.

Professional Standards

This course is part of The Virginia Consortium for Teacher Preparation in Special Education Adapted Curriculum, a grant from the Virginia Department of Education that includes George Mason University, Virginia Commonwealth University, Radford University, Norfolk State University, Old Dominion University, and James Madison University. Through the completion of the Adapted Curriculum Consortium program, students are eligible for teacher licensure in the Commonwealth of Virginia in the area of Special Education – Adapted Curriculum K-12. (Council for Exceptional Children [CEC] and the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium [InTASC]). Upon completion of this course, students will have met the following professional standards: CEC Standard 5: Instructional Planning and Strategies (InTASC 7,8).

Required Texts

Mayne, L. E., & Rogers, S. M. (2020). *Augmentative and assistive communication with children: A protocol and intervention plan to support children with complex communication profiles*. Routledge.

Recommended Texts

American Psychological Association. (2020). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed.). <https://doi.org/10.1037/0000165-000>

Additional Readings

Additional readings will be posted on Blackboard within modules and assignments.

Course Performance Evaluation

VIA Performance-Based Assessment Submission Requirement

It is critical for the special education program to collect data on how our students are meeting accreditation standards. Every teacher candidate/student registered for an EDSE course with a required Performance-based Assessment (PBA) is required to upload the PBA to VIA/SLL (regardless of whether a course is an elective, a one-time course or part of an undergraduate minor). A PBA is a specific assignment, presentation, or project that best demonstrates one or more CEC, InTASC or other standard connected to the course. A PBA is evaluated in two ways. The first is for a grade, based on the instructor's grading rubric. The second is for program accreditation purposes. Your instructor will provide directions as to how to upload the PBA to VIA/SLL.

For EDSE 534: No requirement to upload a Performance-based Assessment (PBA) to VIA/SLL.

Assignments and/or Examinations

**Performance-based Assessment
(VIA submission required)**
None

**College-Wide Common Assessment
(VIA submission required)**
None

Course Assignments

1. **Weekly Learning Modules** (14 Modules @ 30 points each, 420 points total)

All modules will open on the specified Monday at 9:00 AM, and all work must be submitted by the following Tuesday by 11:59 pm. Students will be presented with a series of activities within the learning modules. Some activities, such as viewing a video or reading a chapter in the textbook, are categorized as “Read/View.” Other activities, such as taking a quiz, are categorized as “Complete”. All activities identified as “Complete” must be submitted on time and satisfactory to receive full credit. Please note that while “Read/View” activities are not “graded,” access is being tracked through Blackboard, and the content is assessed through additional course assignments.

Modules are graded as a whole and must be completed in their entirety for credit. If a student struggles with a task within the module but has attempted a good faith effort to complete the work, they will receive an opportunity to discuss their questions/concerns and re-do the task for full credit. Please follow the guidelines listed for each task (e.g., bullets, full sentences, length of response).

2. **Communication Board Development, Use, & Reflection** (170 points)

Using the strategies and procedures reviewed in class, students will create a communication board for their own use. Students will participate in a nonspeaking experience while using a communication board. Students will design a core communication board for their personal use, use their board in a setting of their choosing for one hour, and write a reflection on their experiences and impressions. A template and rubric will be provided.

3. **Toolbox** (170 points)

Students will create an AAC toolbox of 10 tools. In their toolbox, students will identify 3 low-tech tools, 3 mid-tech tools, 3 high-tech tools, and 1 informative tool (e.g., communication passport or wallet). For each tool, students will explain how it is made/designed, how it is accessed, how it supports communication, etc. Students will record a video of themselves presenting these tools with supporting slides and post it to Blackboard. For this assignment, more specific directions and a rubric will be provided on Blackboard. Please note tools must be communication tools, not behavior management tools.

4. **Case Study Feature Matching Matrix & Summary** (205 points)

Students will be provided with case studies of children with complex communication needs (CCNs). After choosing a case study, students will identify 5 specific needs for their child (i.e., visual, motor, vocabulary, etc.). They will define and describe these needs based on data they cite from the descriptions and assessments provided in the case studies.

After carefully reviewing and describing their case study child's needs, students will identify 3 possible high-tech AAC tools that could be appropriate for their selected child. Students will complete a feature-matching matrix (detailed chart) to determine how each potential tool meets or does not meet their case-study child's needs.

Once they have completed the *matrix* (chart), students will identify which of the three chosen tools has the *features* that best *match* their case study child's needs.

Once an appropriate tool is selected, students write a summary (in a provided template) explaining the child's needs and how the chosen tool meets their specific needs.

For this assignment, more specific directions, templates, and a rubric will be provided on Blackboard. A list of approved tools and suggested needs to consider will be provided. If you'd like to review a tool not listed, please get prior approval from the instructor.

5. **Research Module** (35 points)

In addition to the 14 weekly modules, students will complete the *Research and Trends in AAC* module. This will follow the same format as the weekly modules and is due by the last day of class.

6. Optional Extra Credit (25 points)

You can earn 25 extra credit points by scheduling a 1:1 Zoom meeting. To schedule a meeting, email Dr. Betz (mbetz1@gmu.edu) and suggest several times that might work for you. During the meeting, you can ask any questions you have about class content or assignments, go over your grades, discuss how to apply what you are learning to your current setting, ask lingering questions you may have, etc. You may earn this extra credit only once, but of course, you are welcome to email to set up a meeting whenever you need support during the semester. All “extra credit” office hours must be *scheduled* before **April 30th**.

Assignment Summary

Assignments	Points
14 modules @ 30 points	420
Communication Board & Reflection	170
10–15-minute Toolbox Video Presentation	170
Feature Matching Matrix & Summary	205
AAC Research & Trends Module	35
TOTAL	1000

Student Evaluations of Teaching:

The student evaluation of teaching, or SET, is an online course survey. You are strongly encouraged to complete this form for each course as this feedback helps instructors and administrators improve your class experiences. Towards the end of the course, you will receive email and Blackboard notifications when the evaluations open. Your anonymous and confidential feedback is only shared with instructors after final grades have been submitted. More information about the SET can be found on The Institute of Effectiveness and Planning website at <https://oiep.gmu.edu/set/>

Course Policies and Expectations

Attendance/Participation

Students are expected to actively engage in all course activities throughout the semester, which include viewing all course materials, completing course activities and assignments, and participating in course discussions and group interactions. Grading for work completed in Learning Modules is specifically outlined in Weekly Learning Modules within the Other Assignments section of the syllabus.

Please note that while only certain learning elements are assessed through “grades”, the instructor can still assess student involvement and engagement using other measures. *Blackboard enables the instructor to view such data as login dates, duration of time spent online, access to specific content elements, and more.* The instructor will use this data along with course grades to ensure that students are actively engaged in the course. Students struggling to complete work on time or who appear to not be engaging fully with course content will be asked to conference with the instructor. **If you feel that you are having difficulty keeping up, please set up a conference!**

Late Work

Weekly Learning Modules

In fairness to students who make the effort to submit assignments on time, there will be progressive point reduction per day for late work within each learning module. Work that is submitted one day late will receive a 20%-point reduction, work that is submitted two days late will receive a 30%-point reduction, and work that is submitted 3 days late will receive a 50%-point reduction. After three days past due, students will receive a 0 for any missing work within that learning module.

ONE-TIME Extension: The instructor recognizes that unexpected challenges may arise during the semester and, therefore, will **allow students to request a one-time extension that they can apply to one Weekly Learning Module (Modules only; not to any major assignments)**. Students must request the extension by emailing the instructor (mbetz1@gmu.edu) prior to the original due date; requests made after 11:59 pm on the specified due date will not be honored. Students do not need to receive confirmation from the instructor to assume they have received this ONE-TIME extension; it will be automatic if it is the first request. **The deadline for extended work will be Sunday of that week (i.e., 5 days late)**. All extensions will be tracked in the Blackboard gradebook.

***After midnight Sunday, late module work will NOT be accepted.

Major Course Assignments

In fairness to students who submit assignments on time, there will be a 10% - point reduction per day for late papers for up to 5 days. (For example, a 200-point assignment will lose 20 points per day). After 7 days, links to submit the assignment will close and it will no longer be accepted; students will earn a 0 for the missed assignment. If there are extenuating circumstances, please contact the instructor BEFORE the deadline has passed.

ONE-TIME EXTENSIONS ARE FOR MODULES ONLY.

Artificial Intelligence

To be a successful special educator, you need to understand fundamental concepts and apply skills independently. If you use AI tools in your writing, you must cite them. Student work in this course may be analyzed using an originality detection tool focused on Generative AI tools. Please consider saving drafts/ongoing versions of your work and tracking your changes; this helps provide evidence of original work.

Course assignments will be graded against the assignment rubrics. Please be advised that while AI can often summarize information, it often fails in its ability to apply information to unique scenarios. Course assignments are designed so that students are required to show their thought processes and rationales for unique scenarios, something that AI cannot do.

Other Requirements

All assignments should reflect professional/college-level spelling, syntax, and grammar. If you experience difficulties with the writing process, you will need to document your work with your university's writing center during this course to improve your skills. All work must be proofread. There are excellent, free tools like *Grammarly* to check basic grammar and spelling.

Grading

93-100%	= A
90-92%	= A-
85-89%	= B+
80-84%	= B
70-79%	= C
<70	= F

***Note:** The George Mason University Honor Code will be strictly enforced. See [Academic Integrity Site](https://oai.gmu.edu/) (<https://oai.gmu.edu/>) and [Honor Code and System](https://catalog.gmu.edu/policies/honor-code-system/) (<https://catalog.gmu.edu/policies/honor-code-system/>). Students are responsible for reading and understanding the Code. “To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University community and with the desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the student members of the university community, have set forth this honor code: Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work.” Work submitted must be your own new, original work for this course or with proper citations.

Professional Dispositions

Students are expected to exhibit professional behaviors and dispositions at all times. See [Policies and Procedures](https://cehd.gmu.edu/students/policies-procedures/) (<https://cehd.gmu.edu/students/policies-procedures/>). Professional dispositions are an essential function of a special educator's job, indicating that these dispositions are critical to develop and assess in special education licensure programs. In the College of Education and Human Development, dispositions are formally and separately evaluated in at least three points in each student's program – a self-evaluation at the start of their program, a self-evaluation at the mid-point of their program, and a university supervisor's evaluation during internship. In special education graduate licensure programs, the initial self-evaluation is completed in a designated course (EDSE 501), the mid-point self-evaluation is completed in designated courses (EDSE 627, EDSE 661, and EDSE 616), and the internship evaluation is completed by instructors in EDSE 783, EDSE 784, and EDSE 785. In addition to these three designated evaluation times, instructors may complete instructor-rated disposition assessments other times throughout the program. When dispositions are assessed, it is important that for areas where a positive disposition is rated as “not proficient,” the student takes steps to grow as an educator.

Class Schedule

*Note: Faculty reserves the right to alter the schedule as necessary, with notification to students.

Module Start Date (Mondays)	Week	Topic	Module End Date/ Work Due (Tuesdays**)
January 15* (Tuesday)	1	Course Overview Introduction to AAC & AAC Assumptions	
January 22	2	WHAT we Communicate & HOW we Communicate	January 30 Modules 1 and 2*
January 29	3	Vocabulary	February 6 Module 3
February 5	4	Communicator Characteristics	February 13 Module 4
February 12	5	Emergent AAC Strategies	February 20 Module 5 and Assignment: Communication Board Reflection
February 19	6	Symbolic AAC Strategies	February 27 Module 6
February 26	7	Alternative Access	March 5 Module 7
March 4	8	Low & Mid Tech Tools <i>** Choose the tools you would like to include in your video presentation due 11/14</i>	March 19 Module 8
March 11	9	High Tech Tools <i>** Choose the tools you would like to include in your video presentation due on 11/14</i>	March 19 Modules 8 and 9
March 18	10	Language Development & Literacy	March 26 Module 10
March 25	11	Assessment & Feature Matching	April 2 Module 11

April 1	12	Literacy Tools	April 9 Module 12 Assignment: <i>Toolbox Video</i> <i>Presentation</i>
April 8	13	User Perspectives	April 16 Module 13
April 15	14	AAC Frequently Asked Questions	April 23 Module 14
April 22		No new work ALL WORK FOR THE SEMESTER IS DUE BY MIDNIGHT on TUESDAY APRIL 30th	April 30 Assignments: <i>Research and Trends</i> <i>Module</i> <i>Feature Matching Matrix</i>

Core Values Commitment

The College of Education and Human Development is committed to collaboration, ethical leadership, innovation, research-based practice, and social justice. Students are expected to adhere to these principles: See [Core Values](http://cehd.gmu.edu/values/) (<http://cehd.gmu.edu/values/>).

GMU Policies and Resources for Students

Policies

- Students must adhere to the guidelines of the Mason Honor Code. See [Honor Code and System](https://catalog.gmu.edu/policies/honor-code-system/) (<https://catalog.gmu.edu/policies/honor-code-system/>).
- Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing. See [Responsible Use of Computing](http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/responsible-use-of-computing/) (<http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/responsible-use-of-computing/>).
- Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their Mason email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students solely through their Mason email account.
- Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with George Mason University Disability Services. Approved accommodations will begin at the time the written letter from Disability Services is received by the instructor. See [Disability Services](https://ds.gmu.edu/) (<https://ds.gmu.edu/>).
- Students must silence all sound emitting devices during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.

Campus Resources

- Support for submission of assignments to VIA should be directed to viahelp@gmu.edu or <https://cehd.gmu.edu/aero/assessments>.
- Questions or concerns regarding use of Blackboard should be directed to [Blackboard Instructional Technology Support for Students](https://its.gmu.edu/knowledge-base/blackboard-instructional-technology-support-for-students/) (<https://its.gmu.edu/knowledge-base/blackboard-instructional-technology-support-for-students/>).
- [Learning Services](mailto:learningservices@gmu.edu) (learningservices@gmu.edu) - Provides a variety of experience-based learning opportunities through which students explore a wide range of academic concerns. Services include support to students with learning differences, individual study strategy coaching, individualized programs of study, and referrals to tutoring resources. Presentations on a variety of academic topics such as time management, reading, and note taking are available to the university community. The programs are open to all George Mason University students free of charge.

Notice of mandatory reporting of sexual assault, sexual harassment, interpersonal violence, and stalking:

As a faculty member, I am designated as a “Non-Confidential Employee,” and must report all disclosures of sexual assault, sexual harassment, interpersonal violence, and stalking to Mason’s Title IX Coordinator per [University Policy 1202](#). If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact one of Mason’s confidential resources, such as the [Student Support and Advocacy Center \(SSAC\)](#) at 703-380-1434 or [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#) at 703-993-2380. You may also seek assistance or support measures from Mason’s Title IX Coordinator by calling 703-993-8730, or emailing titleix@gmu.edu.

For additional information on the College of Education and Human Development, please visit our website [College of Education and Human Development \(http://cehd.gmu.edu/\)](http://cehd.gmu.edu/).

Appendix

Assessment Rubric(s)

All assignment rubrics are posted in Blackboard with the directions for the assignment.