Mission

Master of Arts, Speech Pathology: The mission of the MA speech pathology program is to educate graduate students to provide exemplary clinical services in speech-language pathology. Our curricula are designed to assure that graduates of our professional programs will meet both national standards and Iowa Licensure requirements.

Doctor of Audiology (AuD): The minimum requirement to practice in audiology has recently changed from an MA degree to a Doctor of Audiology, necessitating a major curriculum change to the AuD degree program (Fall 2003). The goal of this program is to offer develop a post-baccalaureate course of study that meets national accreditation standards and is unique in its preparation of professionals who have the theoretical training and advanced clinical skills needed to function at a high level in all areas of practice.

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD): The goal of the PhD program in Speech and Hearing Sciences is to prepare graduate students for positions of leadership in teaching, research as well as in clinical endeavors. This is accomplished through a program focused on research experience that also includes coursework in basic science and clinical issues related to speech, hearing and language. Background areas considered important for both experimental and theoretical research such as mathematics, engineering, and biology are typically included in a student’s plan of study.

The two clinical graduate programs have several common goals. One is to develop practitioners who have interpersonal, team building, leadership, and counseling skills necessary to function as exemplary professionals in a broad range of practice environments. We also intend to develop clinicians who will act as peer mentors and supervisors of future clinicians. A second goal is to expose students to research, both basic and applied, to assist them in being skilled consumers of research and also to allow them to effectively use evidence-based approaches to clinical practice.

Program Descriptions:

MA Speech Pathology: Time to complete the MA degree is 2 years, including one summer. If a student lacks an undergraduate degree in speech and hearing prior to program entrance, an additional year of background coursework is required. The final semester typically consists of two outplacements in public schools, hospitals, or clinics. As courses and practica are specified across the duration of a student’s program, it is rare that a student does not finish in the 2 or 3-year planned period.

AuD: The AuD program spans 4 years and includes didactic coursework and extensive clinical training in our clinic, other on-campus clinics, and during a 1-year externship typically completed off-campus. While our experience is limited with this relatively new program, no students have had difficulties completing within 4 years, nor do we anticipate any problems.

PhD: The PhD program is typically 2 years of coursework followed by a comprehensive exam. The following years may sometime include additional coursework, but most of that time is dedicated to dissertation research. We typically have a pre-prospectus as well as a prospectus meeting with a dissertation committee to advise the student during the process and to help the student stay on track to ensure completion of the dissertation in a timely manner. Doctoral students, at least initially receive funding as departmental TA/RA’s or through a training grant, providing them opportunities to work in several laboratories and acquire broad research and teaching experience. In later years, some students are funded on individual faculty research grants.
Present enrollment in the 3 programs is typical of recent history: 39 students in the MA SLP program, 27 in the AuD program and 30 in the PhD program.

**Admission Processes and Criteria**

**Student Demand:** Over the past 3 years we have had an average of 132 (MA), 41 (AuD), and 20 (PhD) applicants for the 3 degree programs. Enrollments average 19 (MA), 8 (AuD) and 5 (PhD) over the same period. These numbers are typical of recent history. Demand for graduates is very high; there is particular concern in the field that there will be a severe shortage of PhDs available to teach in university programs in the coming years.

**Criteria for selection:** Criteria for admission include GRE scores (with emphasis on verbal GRE), grade point average, and letters of recommendation. Interviews are highly encouraged and a phone interview is required for foreign applicants. A specific mentor who agrees to supervise the student is required for PhD admission.

**Success in enrolling the highest quality students:** Undergraduate GPA has been fairly constant in accepted students in recent years (3.44-3.72 for across the 3 graduate programs). Based on graduate college figures, the GREs for accepted students are similar to the average of UI Life Sciences and slightly less than the average of UI Biological/Biomedical Sciences.

Student success in the program and subsequent employment also speaks to our ability to enroll high-quality students. Nevertheless, competition among peer institutions for top applicants to clinical programs is very strong. During the past 3 years, we enrolled 3-5 of the top 10 rated students applying to the AuD and MA programs. While we are pleased with those enrollments, we expect that more aggressive recruiting and, especially, more availability of funding will improve enrollments among the top students.

**Success in enrolling a diverse student cohort:** While we have not historically had a high percentage of under-represented minorities, we have been successful in regularly enrolling such students into our graduate programs. In the past 3 years we enrolled an average of 2 (MA), 1 (AuD) and 2 (PhD) students per year. We regularly attempt to take advantage of funding opportunities for such students; 8 of our students qualified for Graduate Merit Fellowships since 2000. We also have been successful in recent years in attracting more male students in a traditionally female-dominated field.

Gaining minority applicants has been a priority in recent years for our PhD program. Former chair Richard Hurtig developed a “Bridges” program with funding from NIDCD and NIGMS that linked our program with Howard University and Our Lady of the Lake University. We successfully transitioned 5 of 23 students who participated in our Bridges program. This 22% MA-to-PhD rate compares favorably with the 14% overall rate in masters programs in communication sciences and disorders (Council of Academic Programs in Communication Sciences & Disorders, Demographic Survey).

**Financial Aid Commitments:** Students in all 3 programs are considered for TA/RA funding based on rankings during the admissions process. Funding for PhD students generally has higher priority, although we attempt to use funds to offer support to top MA and AuD candidates. Applicants for the MA program are generally offered 2 years of support (1/4 time). AuD applicants are offered 3 years of funding (1/4 time). Applicants for the PhD are offered 4 years of funding (1/2 time). All are required to demonstrate acceptable progress.
Program Outcomes

Degree completion: Most students who are accepted and enrolled are successful in completing the program. In the last 3 years, 6 out of 58 MA students entering the program did not complete the program in the expected 2 or 3 year period. In the same period 2 of 29 entering AuD students did not complete the 4-year program. Students who drop out of the program typically do so in the first year. Out of 119 students enrolled in the three programs during the past five years, 17 dropped out. Data supplied by the graduate college for PhD students entering 1996-1998 shows a 79% completion rate for students in Speech and Hearing Science. This rate is significantly higher than CLAS average of Biological/Biomedical Sciences (46%). While these numbers of students dropping out is relatively small, improvement in selection criteria and/or support for students could reduce such cases.

Time to degree: For students remaining in the MA SLP program, it is rare that they do not complete the program within 2-3 years (depending on their background). We expect that AuD students will also finish in the planned period. PhD program length is variable, averaging 5.8 years (median: 5.0) by Graduate College figures. We note that these numbers include time spent at UI earning an MA degree in many cases. The MA degree in speech pathology or audiology includes significant time in clinical training, not specifically in preparation for the PhD degree.

Student Honors: Our students compete effectively for honors on a national level. Recent examples include a JSLHR editor’s Award (2004), a student scholarship to the International Hearing Aid Conference, an American Auditory Society mentored student award, a travel award to the Symposium for Research in Child Language, an award for outstanding research from the Council of Academic Programs in Communication Sciences and Disorders Award.

Student Placement: The fields of speech pathology and audiology are facing a critical shortage; consequently our graduates are in high demand. We regularly conduct a survey of students after graduation. Of the respondents, only 3 were not employed in speech pathology or audiology or progressed to a graduate program. The most common placements were in elementary schools, hospitals or private practice. We recently tabulated positions of the 29 former doctoral students who completed their degrees since 1997. Of these, 19 had academic faculty positions and 9 had primarily research positions in academics or industry. Others are continuing training in either postdoctoral position or, in one case, a research residency program in otolaryngology. Thus, most of our graduates go into faculty or research positions after finishing their degree and continue involvement in research and/or teaching in university positions for several years. We attribute this success in part to the need for faculty members in speech pathology and audiology programs as well as the recognized skills of our faculty in training high quality researchers and teachers.

Comparison to other programs:

Graduate programs in the department have consistently been rated nationally as 1st or 2nd in the US News ratings. The recent ratings based on faculty productivity (published in Chronicle) rated the department 1st in speech and hearing science.

Strengths and Weaknesses

We view the primary strengths of our graduate program to be the productivity of the faculty and students. That productivity eventually results in successful graduates, many of whom have gone on to successful careers and have become leaders in the field. We are also generally satisfied with the structure of the clinical programs and the quality of the student training. Employers of our students have expressed strong satisfaction with their training. That success helps us in recruitment of students into the clinical
programs where we regularly have more than adequate numbers of excellent applicants. These factors all contribute to the high reputation of the department graduate programs.

Finally, there is clearly a need for graduates of all three programs, based on both national surveys and our own data on placements. There is a critical need for speech pathologists in public schools in Iowa. We have been working with state Department of Education to help to relieve that shortage. We are presently the only program in the state training audiologists (AuD). That increases the need for our graduates in that area. Finally, the need for PhD graduates in the field of Speech and Hearing has been documented recently (Council of Graduate Programs) and remains critical. As a leading program in the field, our graduates tend to fill important teaching positions.

One particular concern in recent years has been the effect of requiring a doctorate degree (AuD) to practice audiology. Many students recruited into graduate programs in past years had a MA in audiology and decided that they wished to pursue a career in research/teaching. With the advent of the AuD requirement, there is widespread concern in the field that individuals would not return after a longer clinical doctorate program, and would thus accelerate the already short supply of PhDs in audiology. We addressed this issue by incorporating a combined AuD/PhD option into our program and also improved our efforts to recruit PhD applicants in this area. One important effort was the funding of an NIH T32 training grant. A second was the funding of several slots for such recruitment through SIF proposal to the graduate college. These efforts have proved very successful in that we presently have 6 students who are in the PhD (after completing the AuD) or in the joint program. We also have 4 students in the process of applying to the joint degree program.

**Opportunities for growth/reorganization**

Further expansion of the PhD programs could have two important effects. The first would be to expand the supply of highly qualified teachers and researchers in our field. The second effect would be to increase the students cohort, allowing more interaction among doctoral students with similar research areas and also allowing for more courses to be offered, meeting the college minimum enrollments. Faculty size and faculty research activity is such that we can train more PhD students. The limiting factor has been student funding. While we try to take advantage of local opportunities, it is clearly important for the department to increase other student funding opportunities, particularly through using training grants to increase PhD enrollments these in poor economic conditions.

Finally, continued improvement of the two clinical programs is essential to serve our missions as well as the needs of the state. One concern we have had over the last few years is the dependence of funding of clinical instructors on the external research support generated by tenure-track faculty. In the past few years we have arranged different funding for clinical instruction and have therefore freed up other sources for doctoral student support. One important challenge that we face is trying to expand our clinical experience for students in areas such as neurogenetics of speech language, augmentative communication and autism, which represent expanding areas of clinical practice. These areas represent important needs identified by our faculty as well as by our former students in recent surveys. Developing appropriate training in these areas is essential to maintain the quality and reputation of our clinical graduate programs.