

## **Division of Communication Disorders**

### **Strategic Plan for AP3 (2009-2014)**

#### ***Mission and Aspirations***

The Division of Communication Disorders prepares students to become clinical practitioners, researchers, and instructors in the fields of audiology and speech-language pathology. The Division accomplishes this mission by:

- Providing opportunities to access didactic and clinical learning through on-campus and distance education.
- Providing direct clinical training through operation of a full service audiology and speech-language pathology clinic.
- Conducting scholarly inquiry and research in communication disorders.
- Educating students to develop and maintain the highest ethical standards of quality in the provision of services to culturally diverse populations.
- Participating in the University of Wyoming community through interdisciplinary educational programs.
- Providing audiology and speech-language pathology services to the Wyoming community

The Division aspires to provide excellent education, research and service by:

- Building on strengths in Baccalaureate education in speech, language, and hearing science, with its foundation of biological, physical, social, and mathematical sciences.
- Building on strengths in Master's clinical education in the profession of speech-language pathology.
- Initiating Doctoral research education in communication sciences and disorders.

#### ***Previous Accomplishments***

In the first academic plan (1998-2003), our division identified 13 action items, including expanding our curriculum, increasing sign language instruction, improving distance education, and attracting strong research faculty. In the subsequent five years, we made significant progress on these action items. In the second academic plan (2003-2008), we added two items: an audiology/neuroscience Ph.D. and increasing out-of-state graduate students. The first action item was not achieved due to lack of student interest in this combined research/clinical degree. The second item was achieved: we now have 30-50% out-of-state graduate students.

In addition to the planned changes, with existing resources, we re-structured the curriculum to bring distance and summer courses into the faculty's regular teaching load. This allowed faculty to attend more to their research. That, combined with a determined focus on recruiting faculty with research potential, and college-level external funding for research infrastructure, has led to increased research productivity in our division.

A less positive change was the loss of our graduate audiology program. The profession of audiology now requires a doctorate as the terminal degree. The absence of a doctorate resulted in the closure of the master's degree in audiology in the summer of 2007.

A significant effort on the part of all our faculty over several years has resulted in a learning assessment system for our graduate program. This demanding assessment system required:

- Comprehensive coordinated curricula within and across undergraduate and graduate degrees
- Learning objectives and methods of measuring attainment of these objectives
- Attaining teaching objectives rather than “covering the curriculum” in instruction
- A Plan B oral comprehensive examination that is a final rigorous and fair summative assessment of student learning

Our Wyoming Assessment of Knowledge and Skills is now well-developed and consistently applied. We have begun to assess the acquisition of knowledge and skills in our undergraduate coursework. We are in the process of re-accreditation this year, and feedback to date indicates that these changes, along with the overall program, have been well-received. Our oral examination process has been used as a model by two other departments. We will continue to apply, evaluate, and refine our assessment procedures and associated teaching procedures and learning outcomes in both degree programs.

### ***Relevant Institutional Issues***

Our mission, accomplishments, and current strategic plan fit closely within the broader college and university academic plans.

#### **Motif 1: Building depth rather than adding breadth.**

We are focused on **building the depth of our speech-language pathology program**. With the closure of our audiology graduate degree, we have moved audiology faculty into appropriate teaching and service assignments within speech-language pathology. Our existing audiology instruction and clinical service support our program of speech-language pathology. We are seeking new speech-language pathology faculty with particular expertise areas for courses currently taught by invited lecturers. This will improve the consistency of offerings and integration of these courses in our curriculum and assessment system. Our action items will address several other avenues to improving our program in speech-language pathology.

#### **Motif 2: Supporting areas of distinction.**

This motif intersects with motif 4, fostering excellence. **We support excellence in the areas of distinction of life sciences and educating healthcare providers.** The study of communication disorders is a life science that involves the human organism from the physiological to the social. It deals with impairments of speech, language, hearing, cognition, and swallowing across the lifespan. Researchers study the etiologies, pathologies, manifestations, and treatments of disorders. Within our division, our faculty study characteristics and interventions for craniofacial anomalies, early oral motor development, newborn hearing, speech impairment, reading disabilities, and severe multiple handicaps. In the area of teaching, we provide a quality, comprehensive academic and professional education at the undergraduate and master’s levels. Our service contributes to the betterment of individuals with communication disorders. We contribute significantly in the area of life sciences, and plan to further our contributions by addressing an insufficiency: the lack of access to an appropriate Ph.D. program.

### **Motif 3: Promoting access to higher education.**

Our division is a source of higher education for Wyoming residents and other underserved areas of the country. **Provision of undergraduate and graduate education through on-campus and distance avenues is a priority for our division. The demand for our distance courses is very strong.** Many of our distance students are site-bound individuals with strong academic and career potential who would not have access to higher education without our program. Our undergraduate pre-requisite courses (called leveling) provide a critical avenue for adults with degrees in other fields to move into speech-language pathology. Our program is one of only a few to offer this leveling coursework, so demand is particularly strong.

Our division facilitates student access through financial support. Graduate financial assistance is present through scholarships and honoraria funded by former clients, the state association, and work settings. We provide continuing education opportunities through non-degree registration in graduate coursework and an annual invited speaker seminar offered at no cost to Wyoming speech-language pathologists. Our plans to increase our distance graduate and on-campus classes will further contribute to access to higher education.

### **Motif 4: Fostering excellence.**

We work towards excellence in research, teaching, and service. We attract excellent students and provide a rigorous education that challenges and supports learning. **Our strong academic and research faculty work closely together to provide quality clinical education, which is furthered by our many dedicated externship supervisors** in Wyoming and across the country. **Our assessment of student learning in graduate programs is well developed.** We have close correspondence between program goals, requirements, and outcomes. We track performance in the near-term and follow alumni for several years. Our alumni, as well as our faculty and students, contribute a high level of professional service at university, state, and national levels.

In addition to our focus on quality teaching and service, the Division of Communication Disorders has a strong research component. Our faculty's expertise arises from the intersection of their clinical, teaching, and research achievements. We recognize the importance of having active researchers teach our students. A decade ago, our entire college was given a mandate to improve our research performance and we have done so, both across the college and within our division. **We have moved toward excellence in human capital, facilities, and infrastructure. We have greatly improved our research performance.** Our division now recruits faculty with good research potential. We now have reasonable teaching and service demands, and sufficient research equipment and lab space. The result is that our program has a greater profile in the field of communication disorders. Our senior faculty are productive and widely recognized for their research contributions. Our junior faculty are actively pursuing their emerging research agendas, with a focus on publication and funding. Our students benefit from research experiences such as, EPSCoR projects and master's theses. However, we have one major gap in what we offer: a research Ph.D. To go the next step in improving our research and external funding performance, we have made this Ph.D. program our highest priority.

### **Motif 5: Cultivating leadership.**

**We provide professions critical to the state and region. There is a chronic shortage of speech-language pathologists in educational and medical settings** in Wyoming and across the nation. We recruit students from Wyoming, from across the country, and from western Canada.

We work with Wyoming employers to arrange attractive incentives that will increase the number of graduates choosing to stay in Wyoming. We continue to prepare undergraduate students for audiology careers and provide an externship site for doctoral audiology students from other programs to assist in supplying these needed professionals. We provide clinical service to the local and regional community. We plan to support this area of distinction through increasing the number of students graduating as speech-language pathologists in both our distance and on-campus programs.

**We have cultivated faculty leadership** in our small division. Our new division chair comes from within the ranks, as does the interim associate dean for academic affairs in the College of Health Sciences. Our senior academic faculty serve in demanding positions for national association and research journals. Several of our clinical faculty have provided significant contributions to our state and national associations. Our sign language faculty serve community needs associated with deafness. Our students are encouraged to serve in student organizations, to volunteer for community projects, and to present research at state and national conferences. Our graduates have gone on to be responsible, contributing citizens, who serve as externship supervisors for the following generations of students and serve in our professional organizations. We plan to continue providing and cultivating leaders from our faculty and student body.

### **Action Items**

#### **1. Achieve access to an appropriate interdisciplinary Ph.D. program.**

*Rationale* – We need access to a Ph.D. program. The absence of this negatively affects furthering the research accomplishments of our division. In the last academic plan period, we proposed a Ph.D. in concert with neuroscience. The extensive neuroscience requirements were not suited to our potential students. While we are too small a program to sustain our own Ph.D. program, there are compelling reasons for allowing us access to an interdisciplinary research Ph.D.

*Action* – Our division has been among the key players in developing an interdisciplinary research Ph.D. We need one that encompasses the diversity of research interests in the field of communication disorders. We have offered administrative support and graduate assistantships to the Integrative Biomedical Ph.D. Depending on the direction this Ph.D. program takes, we will continue to work within this proposal or we will seek out other more appropriate avenues.

*Implementation* – Implementation will occur pending approval of the program.

#### **2. Increase numbers in our on-campus programs through student recruitment.**

*Rationale* – There is a shortage of speech-language pathologists in Wyoming and across the nation. Few high school students or those in related majors, such as psychology, are aware of speech-language pathology as a career choice. In addition, relatively few students in other regions are aware of what the University of Wyoming offers. In recent years, there has been some improvement due to securing and developing nationally-recognized well-connected academic and clinical faculty. Canadian student numbers increased after a recruitment trip to western Canada.

*Action.* The main need for the on-campus program is to increase the size and competitiveness of our applicant pool. We plan to further increase awareness and attractiveness, along with increasing applicant quality through actions such as:

- Making further connections with communication disorders programs in American and Canadian universities that have large competitive applicant pools.
- Connecting with Wyoming speech-language pathologists to provide observation opportunities or presentations for high school students
- Contacting students in related university majors, such as psychology and linguistics here and elsewhere, about pursuing graduate study in speech-language pathology in our program
- Reviewing our application and acceptance process to maximize efficiency and identification of students with the best potential for success in education and the profession

*Implementation.* We will increase student numbers incrementally as the applicant pool and our clinical learning opportunities increase. We will carry out and evaluate our student recruitment efforts with data such as: student inquiries, changes in undergraduate major, out-of-state graduate applications, and on-campus class size.

### **3. Increase numbers in our distance graduate program through expanding clinical learning opportunities.**

*Rationale* – We already have a large and growing applicant pool for the distance program. To grow this program, we need to expand the clinical learning opportunities presented in the initial sheltered experiences here on campus. In addition to student learning, the community will benefit from the increased services, and our academic faculty will benefit through increased research access to individuals with communication disorders.

*Action.* To increase the size of the distance class, we will increase the summer clinical learning opportunities through improving the expertise, availability, and profile of the clinic, and the number, diversity, and stability of clients throughout the year. We will investigate multiple avenues, including:

- Investigating how other programs in the region provide clinical education to on-campus and distance students
- Offering periodic specialty clinics with regional advertising for underserved populations with particular communication disorders
- Modifying students' clinical writing demands to maximize efficiency of clinical instruction
- Revising models of clinical service delivery to increase flexibility in client versus graduate student numbers
- Providing clinical service continuity across major breaks in the academic year
- Advertising in a more appealing manner to specific clinical populations
- Increasing the expertise of our clinical supervisors through professional training opportunities
- Involving research faculty who have particular clinical expertise in consultation and mentoring without compromising their other job demands
- Incorporating student clinical learning into faculty research activities

*Implementation* – This action item will be initiated this year. We will review our clinical instruction, starting with interviewing clinical faculty from other programs and obtaining graduate student views on clinical writing. We keep comprehensive client records and will report on changes to clinical services.

#### **4. Recruit audiology doctoral students for clinical externships in our hearing clinic.**

*Rationale* – We have an audiology clinic that serves the learning needs of our bachelor’s and master’s degree students. It provides needed services to the community and contributes revenue for faculty salaries and support expenses. We no longer offer an audiology graduate program to provide audiologists for the state. However, we can offer clinical learning opportunities for doctoral students from other programs. These externships attract non-resident students who are more likely to stay in Wyoming after graduation. We have audiologists who are skilled at teaching students, excellent facilities, honoraria, and supplementary experiences with community audiologists.

*Action 4* – We plan to actively recruit and place audiology students from regional doctoral programs for full-time externships. We will advertise to doctoral audiology programs and make personal contact with individual faculty and students to make them aware of our externship possibilities.

*Implementation* – Audiology clinical faculty have already set up an externship plan, with sufficient clinical resources. Faculty will contact doctoral audiology program faculty and students in the next year. Efforts and outcomes will be documented.

#### **5. Increase collaborative and interdisciplinary learning and research activities.**

*Rationale* – The field of speech-language pathology is inherently interdisciplinary, drawing on the knowledge gained across many disciplines, and the involvement of other healthcare professionals. Even within the field of communication disorders, there is great diversity. We want to increase communication and collaboration within our division and with other healthcare researchers and providers.

*Action 5* – We plan to increase interprofessional learning opportunities through:

- Increasing communication and collaboration among our own faculty
- Taking the lead on an interprofessional stroke support group in the College of Health Sciences
- Offering summer services to the University of Wyoming Early Childcare and Education Center (ECEC)
- Participating in community developmental and health screenings, such as those offered by Laramie’s Child Developmental Center (CDC)
- Developing collaborative activities with the College of Health Sciences Wyoming Institute for Disabilities (WIND).

*Implementation* – We held monthly faculty research meetings last year. We will develop projects that emerged from these discussions. We initiated the stroke support group this past year and gained agreements for ECEC and CDC services. We will evaluate and document our activities.