



## **School of Communication Sciences and Disorders**

### **Essential Functions of Candidates for Speech-Language Pathology Graduate Program Admission and Continuance**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The Master of Science degree in Speech-Language Pathology provides students with the academic coursework and clinical practicum experiences required for clinical certification by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. The education of speech-language pathologists requires assimilation of knowledge, acquisition of skills, and development of judgment in preparation for independent and appropriate decisions required in clinical practice. The starred items (\*), however, are skills that are more inherent and should be present when a student begins the program.

#### **POLICY**

The speech-language pathology graduate program in the School of Communication Sciences and Disorders at Pacific University adheres to the standards of the Council of Academic Accreditation (CAA). Operating within the scope of the CAA Standards, the School of Communication Sciences and Disorders has the freedom and ultimate responsibility for (1) the selection of students, (2) the design, implementation, and evaluation of the curriculum, (3) the evaluation of student progress, and (4) the determination of who should be awarded a degree. Admission and retention decisions are based not only on satisfactory academic achievements, but also on other academic and professional factors which serve to ensure that the candidate can complete the essential function of the program required for graduation.

The School of Communication Sciences and Disorders has a responsibility to the public to assure that graduates become fully competent speech-language pathologists, capable of delivering quality services and preserving the well-being of the clients they serve. Thus, it is important that persons admitted, retained and graduated possess the cognitive skills, integrity, compassion, humanitarian concern, and physical and emotional capacity necessary to practice speech-language pathology.

The School of Communication Sciences and Disorders, as part of the College of Education at Pacific University, is committed to the principle of equal opportunity. It is the policy of Pacific University not to discriminate on the basis of sex, physical or mental disability, race, color, national origin, sexual orientation, age, religious preference or disabled veteran or Vietnam Era status in admission and access to, or treatment in employment, educational programs or activities as required by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Age Discrimination Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, or any other classification protected under state or federal law, or city ordinance.

The Communication Sciences and Disorders faculty and professional staff have responsibility for the welfare of students in the School. To meet this responsibility, the School of Communication Sciences and Disorders has established academic standards and minimal essential functions (defined on the following pages) that must be demonstrated by students with or without reasonable accommodations in order to participate in the program and to complete it successfully. Services and accommodations are available to students covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act. The university requires appropriate documentation of a disability in order to enable students to meet academic standards. Students who require accommodations in any course must contact the Director of Learning Support Services for Students with Disabilities who will meet with the student, review the documentation of the disability and discuss the services Pacific offers and any accommodations required for specific courses. It is extremely important that students begin this process at the beginning of the semester. Students are encouraged to work with faculty proactively in developing strategies for accommodation. Reasonable accommodations will be provided for students with disabilities to enable them to meet these standards and ensure that they are not denied the benefits of, excluded from participation in, or otherwise subjected to discrimination.

### **Essential Functions**

Pacific University's School of Communication Sciences and Disorders endeavors to select applicants who have the ability to become highly competent SLP professionals. Admission and retention decisions are based not only on satisfactory prior and ongoing academic achievement but also on clinical program requirements for graduation. Essential functions, as distinguished from academic standards, refer to those cognitive, physical, and behavioral abilities that are necessary for satisfactory mastery of the curriculum, and the professional attributes required of all students at graduation.

Failure to meet or maintain the Essential Functions may result in action, including, but not limited to dismissal from the program.

Essential functions can be described in relation to five areas: motor, sensory, communication, intellectual/cognitive (conceptual, integrative, and quantitative abilities for problem solving and diagnosis), behavioral/emotional, and the professional aspects of the performance of an SLP profession. Each is described below.

## **A. COMMUNICATION**

A student must possess adequate communication skills to:

1. Communicate proficiently in both oral and written English language.\*
  - Students who do not speak English as their first language will demonstrate proficiency in oral and written language by earning the minimum required official score on the International Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), the PACIFIC UNIVERSITY Institutional TOEFL, or the International English Language testing System (IELTS) exam
  - Students will demonstrate oral language proficiency by passing an oral screening administered as part of the Clinic Orientation
  - Students who do not pass the oral screening will be enrolled in a clinical program to improve oral proficiency
2. Possess reading and writing skills sufficient to meet curricular and clinical demands.
3. Perceive and demonstrate appropriate non-verbal communication for culture and context.
4. Modify communication style to meet the communication needs of clients, caregivers, and other persons served.
5. Communicate professionally and intelligibly with patients, colleagues, other healthcare professionals, and community or professional groups.
6. Communicate professionally and effectively on patient documentation, reports, and scholarly papers required as a part of course work and professional practice.
7. Convey information accurately with relevance and cultural sensitivity.

## **B. MOTOR**

A student must possess adequate motor skills to:

1. Sustain necessary physical activity level in required classroom and clinical activities.
2. Respond quickly to provide a safe environment for clients in emergency situations including fire, choking, etc.
3. Access transportation to clinical and academic placements.
4. Participate in classroom and clinical activities for the defined workday.
5. Efficiently manipulate testing and treatment environment and materials without violation of testing protocol and with best therapeutic practice.
6. Manipulate patient-utilized equipment (e.g. durable medical equipment to include AAC devices, hearing aids, etc) in a safe manner.
7. Access technology for clinical management (i.e. billing, charting, therapy programs, etc.).

## **C. INTELLECTUAL / COGNITIVE**

A student must possess adequate intellectual and cognitive skills to:

1. Comprehend, retain, integrate, synthesize, infer, evaluate and apply written and verbal information sufficient to meet curricular and clinical demands.\*
  - Adequate skills in this area will be determined by review of the student's academic

record as presented in their graduate application through academic transcripts, GRE scores, letters of recommendation, and a written statement

2. Identify significant findings from history, evaluation, and data to formulate a diagnosis and develop a treatment plan.
3. Solve problems, reason, and make sound clinical judgments in patient assessment, diagnostic and therapeutic plan and implementation.
4. Self-evaluate, identify, and communicate limits of one's own knowledge and skill to appropriate professional level and be able to identify and utilize resources in order to increase knowledge.
5. Utilize detailed written and verbal instruction in order to make unique and dependent decisions.

#### **D. SENSORY/OBSERVATIONAL**

A student must possess adequate sensory skills of vision, hearing, and tactile to:

1. Visually and auditorily identify normal and disordered (fluency, articulation, voice, resonance, respiration characteristics, oral and written language in the areas of semantics, pragmatics, syntax, morphology and phonology, hearing and balance disorders, swallowing cognition, social interaction related to communication).
2. Identify the need for alternative modalities of communication.
3. Visualize and identify anatomic structures.
4. Visualize and discriminate imaging findings.
5. Identify and discriminate findings on imaging studies.
6. Discriminate text, numbers, tables, and graphs associated with diagnostic instruments and tests.
7. Recognize when a client's family does or does not understand the clinician's written and or verbal communication.
8. Identify and discriminate a client's spoken responses.
9. Accurately monitor through both visual and auditory modalities, equipment displays and controls, including those of hearing instruments, used for assessment and treatment of patients.

#### **E. BEHAVIORAL/ SOCIAL**

A student must possess adequate behavioral and social attributes to:

1. Display mature, empathetic, and effective professional relationships by exhibiting compassion, integrity, and concern for others.
2. Recognize and show respect for individuals with disabilities and for individuals of different ages, genders, race, religions, sexual orientation, and cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.
3. Conduct oneself in an ethical and legal manner, upholding the ASHA Code of Ethics and university and federal privacy policies.
4. Maintain general good physical and mental health and self-care in order not to jeopardize the health and safety of self and others in the academic and clinical setting.
5. Adapt to changing and demanding environments (which includes maintaining both professional demeanor and emotional health).
6. Manage the use of time effectively to complete professional and technical tasks within realistic time constraints.
7. Accept appropriate suggestions and constructive criticism and respond by modification of

- behaviors.
8. Dress appropriately and professionally.

#### Program Participant Agreement Statement

As a graduate student in the School of Communication Sciences and Disorders at Pacific University, my signature below indicates that I have read all four pages of the Essential Functions document; that I agree with its contents; that I am committed to the policies expressed therein; and that I may be advised to discontinue the program should I fail to demonstrate all of the Essential Functions despite reasonable accommodations (if recommended by the Office of Learning Support Services) and reasonable levels of support from the faculty.

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Participant's Name

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Date

*The Essential Functions Policy is adapted from the following sources:*

Council of Academic Programs in Communicative Sciences and Disorders (2007). *Eligibility Requirements and Essential Functions*. Prepared by Schwartz et al., and retrieved from <http://www.capcsd.org/proceedings/2007/talks/EFChecklist.pdf>

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