

Communication Disorders

A department in the School of Public Health and Health Sciences offering the B.S., M.A., and Ph.D.

■ The Review Process

This AQAD was conducted in conjunction with the department's accreditation renewal by the Council on Academic Accreditation of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. Reviewers were:

Margaret Carlin, chair (Council on Academic Accreditation, ASHA)
Colleen McAleer (Clarion University of Pennsylvania)
Barbara Leader (ASHA practitioner trainee)

■ Main Issues

The ASHA accreditation standards addressed all of the topic areas outlined in the AQAD guidelines: mission and goals, faculty, curriculum, evaluation and assessment, and resources. With minor exception (noted below) the ASHA team found that the department met these standards fully.

The ASHA team made note of several strengths of the program. The many opportunities for interdisciplinary research and consultation present on campus and in the Five College community were praised. The department was also recognized for its "productive, high power nationally know faculty," and for the quality of the faculty's clinical supervision. The team also noted that the department has strong administrative support, reflected in commitments for a new faculty line and for a proposed Au.D. clinical doctorate. The team recognized several programmatic innovations, including the Interactive Audiology program for teaching of pre-professional Audiology students.

In a few areas the team identified obstacles that prevented the department from fully demonstrating compliance with ASHA standards:

- Departments are required to conduct "ongoing and systematic assessment of academic and clinical education" and use the results of these assessments to "plan and implement program improvements." The team found that on-campus program assessments were satisfactory, but was unable to verify that feedback from alumni was consistently collected and incorporated into program planning. The team therefore recommended that this aspect of assessment be strengthened and systematized.
- ASHA requires that "the nature, amount, and accessibility of clinical supervision are commensurate with the clinical knowledge and skills of each student." While the team found "good systems in place to evaluate students," documentation of the actual time spent by supervisors with students was found lacking. The team therefore recommended that the department implement a process to document supervisory time.
- While support services were found to be generally adequate, a shortage of dedicated computers available to clinical students for preparing client reports had created a situation in which some clinical materials were being taken home by students so that they could work on their personal computers. The team warned that this practice runs the risk of compromising client confidentiality, and recommended that adequate computers be made available in the clinic.

In addition to these specific issues, several program limitations were identified that provided opportunities for improvement. Notable among these were items related to space and facilities: 1) the absence of a “systematic plan for capital expenditures,” and 2) departmental space, which, “while currently adequate, is old and poorly arranged.”

■ Results of the Review

The department responded to the specific areas of concern identified by the ASHA team, and described plans to address them. In June of 2004, the Council on Academic Accreditation of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association awarded accreditation for an eight year period to the program in speech-language pathology, and for a three year period to the program in audiology. The audiology accreditation was time-limited because of changes in ASHA’s standards for clinical preparation. After December 31, 2006, ASHA will only accredit programs in audiology at the doctoral level, and institutions are now in the process of upgrading Master’s programs that had previously qualified students for certification. The Amherst campus has a proposal for a clinical doctorate in Audiology (Au.D.) in the program approval process.