

ISSUE II—the New Standards: Impact on Curriculum in Speech- Language Pathology and Audiology

IMPLICATIONS OF THE NEW STANDARDS FOR CURRICULUM AND EVALUATION IN A DOCTOR OF AUDIOLOGY PROGRAM

Theresa Hnath Chisolm Ph.D.
University of South Florida

The Doctor of Audiology program at the University of South Florida was developed by myself and my colleagues: Patricia Blake-Rahter, Ph.D., Patricia Carr, M.S./Au.D. candidate, Sandra Graham, Ph.D. (Clinic Director), Arthur Guilford, Ph.D. (Chair), Raymond Hurley, Ph.D., Jennifer Lister, Ph.D. Nancy Patterson, Au.D., Karen Richardson, Au.D., and Robert Zelsi, Au.D. The first students were admitted in the Fall of 1999. There were four cohort groups: (1) master's level clinical faculty; (2) current practitioners in the community; (3) students in the M.S. program who transferred to the Au.D. program; and (4) first year Au.D. students.

In planning for the new program, we asked ourselves whether or not the objectives and content of the didactic and clinical sources we had been offering were sufficient to prepare the students to meet the competencies specified (ASHA, 1997). For example, we considered competency “D4: Demonstrates the knowledge and skills of determining the need for cerumen removal.” We had made the assumption that students were learning cerumen management techniques through their clinical experiences. We also knew, however, that some students were participating in a “Cerumen Management” certification program at the VAMC-Bay Pines, Florida. Thus, to insure that *all* students would meet competency D4, we decided to include participation in the certification program as a formal component in second year practica experiences.

Review of the curriculum also revealed that course content was limited in several areas. This resulted from the breadth of knowledge we had attempted to cover in the two year M.S. program. For example, we had one course titled “Advanced Hearing Science.” Topics related to auditory anatomy and physiology as well as psychoacoustics were covered in this course. Clearly, the fields of auditory anatomy and physiology and psychoacoustics could fill several semesters. Thus, we now have separate courses for these areas.

There was also a need to develop several new courses. To achieve many of the competencies it is important for students to demonstrate solid mathematical backgrounds. One of these competencies is “B13: Demonstrates the knowledge of physical characteristics, and measurement of acoustic stimuli.” To assure that students had the appropriate requisite mathematical knowledge we incorporated courseware developed by Diane Kewley-Port and Dave Eddins.

Competency “B20: Demonstrates the knowledge of laws, regulations, policies, and management practices relevant to the profession of Audiology” provides another example of an impetus for new courses. In the M.S. program, these topics were primarily addressed in weekly practica meetings. These topics are also now addressed in two didactic courses: *History and Scope of Audiology* offered in the first semester of the first year and a Business course offered in the second semester of the third year.

The clinical course sequence was also changed as a result of the review process. In the M.S. program, students participated in three semesters of in-house practica and two semesters of externships. With four years to train students, our model was revised. In the first year of the program, students participate in a clinical laboratory class. The intent of this course is to bridge the gap often noted between didactic courses and clinical practice. So, for example, in the first semester students study psychoacoustics in a didactic course and learn to conduct pure tone testing while they read about psychoacoustic

methods, MAP and MAF curves. Similarly, students study middle ear anatomy and physiology in the didactic course and learn how to conduct immittance testing in the laboratory course.

During the second year, students participate in two full days of clinic at the university. Third year experiences are off-campus and require a commitment of three days per week. Finally, the fourth year is considered a fulltime experience over two contiguous semesters.

In addition to practica experiences, all students and faculty attend a bi-weekly Grand Rounds meeting. This meeting is student driven and consists primarily of case presentations or the use of a journal club format. The Grand Rounds mechanism not only provides opportunities for learning but also opportunities for formative assessment.

In designing our formative assessment approach, our first task was to come to a common understanding. First, we agreed that formative assessment is ongoing and periodic. In essence, each assessment provides a single snapshot of information about the student's acquisition of knowledge and skills specific to goals and objectives defined within particular academic courses, laboratory courses, and clinical practica. While the information provided in a single snapshot is important, we also agreed that we needed a "complete photo album" which would contain richer, more complete information. Portfolios serve the purpose of providing varied evidence of students' skills and knowledge acquisition (NEA, 1993).

During the four years of the Au.D. program the student is responsible for maintaining a portfolio. The portfolio is in the form of a large binder. The elements of the portfolio are keyed to the competencies described in the new standards. Currently these elements consist of a biographical sketch, self-rating of development of proficiency in the competencies, representative samples of

work, feedback on performance in clinical experiences, feedback on academic performance, scholarly information, professional data, and student reflections on learning and growth.

The biological sketch provides the student an opportunity to express his or her personal commitment to graduate education. The student is asked to discuss why he or she chose the profession of Audiology. This activity is included to encourage the students in reflective practice and introspection (Smyth, 1992).

Reflection is also required to complete the self-rating of competency proficiency. Students rate their perceived level of proficiency for each competency using a 5-point scale. They do this at the beginning and end of their first semester in the program and then at the end of each academic year. This element also provides the students with an opportunity for self-monitoring of their own learning. After completion of each self-rating, a faculty member meets with the student to discuss areas of strength and weakness. Consensus about self- and other perceived proficiency is obtained.

Students also select examples of tests, papers, and other assignments throughout the year. These are included to provide evidence of making progress in acquisition of the competencies. This also provides another mechanism for self-monitoring of learning. Clinical feedback from supervisors and short-progress reports written by the faculty as a whole are also included. Scholarly information comprises any presentations a student has done at a professional meeting, any publications, and a copy of his or her professional research project (PRP). Professional data include evidence of attendance at conferences, conventions, and a resume.

In summary, the implementation of the new standards resulted in a review of the curriculum with a focus on when and where students were gaining

knowledge and experience to meet the competencies. As a result, courses were added, practica were revised, and new approaches, such as the use of a grand rounds mechanism, were incorporated into the curriculum. Moreover, to meet the new standards, we now regularly evaluate students through faculty discussion and have developed a portfolio mechanism for documenting student progress toward meeting the competencies.

References

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (1997). *Certification standards for Audiology*. Rockville, MD.

National Education Association. (1993). *Student Portfolios*. Washington DC: National Education Association Professional Library.

Smyth, J. (1992). Teacher's work and the politics of reflection. *American Education Research Journal*, 29, 267-300.