

QUANTITATIVE BACKGROUND ON THE SHORTAGE OF RESEARCH DOCTORATES IN COMMUNICATION SCIENCES AND DISORDERS

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This paper addresses the well-known problem of shortage in faculty and failure of recruitment in Communication Sciences and Disorders. The paper is intended to be read in conjunction with and as an executive summary for the PowerPoint presentation that I made at the Council of Academic Programs in Communication Sciences and Disorders conference in Palm Springs. The slides are posted on the Council website: <http://www.capcsd.org/proceedings/2002/ppts/Oller-CAPCSD2002.htm>

Most searches for tenure-line faculty positions in Communication Sciences and Disorders are difficult to complete. The recent Omnibus survey by ASHA indicates there are only 2.3 applicants per open tenure-line position. It is widely recognized that many positions remain unfilled yearly. Programs are in jeopardy, sometimes for survival, because of difficulties in recruitment of tenure-line faculty.

The most recent of the Council's biennial surveys included a new question that provides the most direct evidence we have had to date on the magnitude of the shortage and its progression. Program directors were asked to indicate the number of Ph.D. positions that were searched for in the three years prior to the survey, and how many of these searches were filled. The data make it possible to estimate empirically that there were 50 unfilled tenure-line positions in the field in 1998 and nearly twice as many, 98, in 2000. The data suggest that the long-feared rapid growth in the shortage has already begun. The shortage has already reached a point where it represents over 5% of the positions in the field.

Based on an analysis of the ASHA Constituent Database, Bruce Tomblin and Sarah Slater provided data on the age of Ph.D. holders in the ASHA membership. The

data suggested a median age of 51.6. This represented the first attempt to investigate the graying of the profession empirically. I have reanalyzed the Database with Slater's help to show ages just for Ph.D. faculty (including chairs) in 1996, and found a median age of 49.7. Indeed the faculty in the field are graying, although the ASHA Constituent Database is not currently updated every year with regard to the faculty roles of members. The Joint Ad Hoc Committee on the Shortage of Ph.D. Students and Faculty in Communication Sciences and Disorders, partly in order to provide more reliable data on age of faculty, conducted a survey in 2002 of doctoral programs only. The data indicated that the median age of Ph.D. faculty was 49.5, and although the results represent faculty in Ph.D. programs only and thus only in about a third of the graduate programs in the field, it is the most reliable evidence currently available on age of the professorate. It is thus clear that nearly half the Ph.D. faculty in the field are over 50. Perhaps even more importantly, the data indicated a sharp drop in the number of faculty after age 65, thus providing the first clear evidence regarding age of retirement in the field. It is of great concern that over the next fifteen years, about half the faculty in the field can be expected to retire based on these data. The incoming supply of new potential faculty is thus of considerable concern.

If we consider the production rate for new Ph.D. scholars in Communication Sciences and Disorders, we find the following: Up to 1999 there was no important increase in the production rate of new Ph.D.s based on data from the National Opinion Research Center. Through 1998 the same is true of the Council survey, no significant increase. The 2000-2001 data from the Council and the NORC suggest there may have been a significant upturn, but there are reasons to be skeptical of its meaning. It is notable that the upturn applies to Speech-Language Pathology doctorates granted, but in Audiology, there has been a severe decline in new Ph.D.'s since the late 1980s. Further, the upturn in Speech-Language Pathology may have been due to a short-term increase in enrollment in the mid 1990s, a pattern that has been reversed in the most recent data on enrollment. Data on enrolled Ph.D. students from the Council survey suggest a pattern that has not changed significantly since the mid 1980s, with the

exception of a highpoint in 1996, perhaps the reason for the upturn in Ph.D.s granted in 2000-2001.

The number of programs offering the Ph.D. in Speech-Language Pathology has increased over the past 20 years (from 52 to 62) but the number of programs offering the Ph.D. in Audiology has fallen from a high of 52 to 39 in the year 2000. The number of programs offering the Ph.D. in speech and hearing science has fallen even more dramatically, from a high of 39 to 25 in the year 2000.

The challenge to our field is multifaceted:

- We need to be proactive: the field is going to be restructured whether we take action or not, but if we work to ensure a well-prepared Ph.D. faculty for the future, we will surely have a better outcome than if we remain passive.
- The leaders of the field need to organize an academically significant plan for the future, and that plan needs to indicate an administrative structure to manage the effort with continuity – for some time there has existed strong sentiment in favor of developing a standing committee to monitor and help coordinate strategies to combat the shortage, as indicated for example in the recommendation by Fox, Minifie, Smit, and Hochberg in the *Report of the working group on doctoral and postdoctoral education, 1997 (Council Proceedings)*.
- The forces that will affect our faculty composition will change, and if the Council and ASHA do not act, the field will change very unpredictably.
- The question is how to maintain the academic foundations of the field in a time of enormous change.
- Further, we must address how we can govern our programs with an appropriate balance of academic and clinical activities.