

## **RECRUITING AND SELECTING STUDENTS FOR ADMISSION TO YOUR GRADUATE PROGRAM**

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This represents a written version of an oral power-point presentation given to the 2002 Annual Conference of the Council of Academic Programs in Communication Sciences and Disorders in Palm Spring, 25-27 April 2002. This version is meant to provide an outline (but not specific details) of a discussion regarding topics important to consider in recruiting and selecting students into graduate program in communication sciences and disorders (including speech-language pathology and audiology).

### **1. Recruitment and Selection Preliminaries:**

Before a program develops, evaluates and/or modifies its recruitment and/or selection processes it is important that it "knows itself." That is, it is important that a graduate program recognizes the kind of student that will "fit" the type of program that it represents. At least the following questions should be addressed:

1a. Do you seek MA and/or PhD/AuD students?

*These three groups of students have very different needs and may respond to different recruitment strategies (and may value different aspects of your program). Traditionally, PhD students are returning MA graduates, but can you recruit MA/PhD students.*

1b. Do you have a stronger science or professional-based program (or are they equal)? And which do you advertise most successfully?

*Answers to these questions will determine the type of recruiting you do (and where you seek students). The same pattern of recruiting (and student selection) may not be equally successful.*

- 1c. Before developing recruitment materials (or even talking with prospective students) you should know the answers to the following questions:

*What are the strengths of your programs and how did you determine these strengths (internal or external reviews, department history, faculty reputation, etc.)?*

*Strength can be considered in terms of at least the following:*

- *Faculty and Clinic Staff reputations (in-state and nationally)*
- *Physical Facilities (Clinic space, office space, research space, student space)*
- *Clinical Practicum Sites (especially external sites)*

*What content areas in the discipline are emphasized and what are de-emphasized? (and how do you cover those important areas that are de-emphasized?)*

*What are your program's weaknesses (and do you tell prospective students of these weaknesses) and can you reasonably expect to reduce or eliminate them in the future?*

*How well articulated are your programs short-term goals? long-term goals? Do they form part of your recruitment strategies and materials?*

*How much support (fiscal, academic, philosophical, etc.) do you have from the University/College administration?*

*Are your faculty and clinic supervisors in agreement (in terms of goals, mission, recruitment aims, etc.)? If not, it is important to understand the source of the disagreements.*

*Does your program have active—and vocal— community support and can it be used in the recruitment process? Does this community support have*

*the potential to provide any type of funding—(and, if so, have you actively pursued it)?*

*Does your program have the support of Undergraduate Advisors? This is important since an important source of graduate applicants for many graduate programs is their own undergraduate program.*

*Can and has your program apply for funds to develop recruitment tools (e.g., brochures)? If not, how do/can your program support an active and energetic recruitment strategy.*

## **2. Considerations in Developing Recruitment Strategies.**

Most programs in communication sciences and disorders can no longer simply open the door and have huge numbers of high-quality graduate students anxious to attend. This is especially true at the PhD level. Given the number of AuD programs that seem to be coming onboard, one might expect that there will soon be even fiercer competition for audiology students as well. Thus it is becoming more important to have a recruitment campaign/strategy active in your Department.

2a. What type of student do you currently target and how well developed is your "target concept"?

*You need to know the characteristics of students (in terms of region, background, etc.) that your program normally and successfully attracts and should have an idea why you have been successful with this group. Are there other groups that you would like to attract but where you have been less successful? Ask yourself if the same things in your program appeal to both groups. If not, then determine if you can make yourself equally attractive to other sets of students.*

2b. What recruitment methods do you use (and are they truly successful)?

*Does your program actually have a recruitment method that it uses and are student attracted to your program as a result of these methods (be honest in evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of your recruitment strategies...an unsuccessful recruitment strategy may simply be a waste of money)? Have you asked your students just what brought them to your program? Were they even aware of your recruitment activities?*

2c. In terms of evaluating and modifying your recruitment methods (and/or developing new ones), know the answers to the following questions:

*Do you seek both in-state or out-of-state students? And are you attractive to both groups?*

*What are your current methods of advertising and how effective and fiscally responsible are any of these methods?*

- *Do you have a well-run advertising campaign with brochures, ads, websites, etc.?*
- *How much reliance do you place on word-of-mouth advertising/support from alumni, current students, community professionals, and/or other departments?*
- *How much do you rely on your undergraduate program to serve as a recruitment base? Is this approach as successful now as in the past?*
- *Active advertising campaign?*
  - *Direct Mailings? Who develops the mailing lists? Are you missing important constituents?*
  - *Newsletters? Who writes them? Who funds them? Who reads them? Are they successful as recruitment tools or fundraising tools?*

— *Email Campaigns (with associated websites)? How do you get email addresses to use? Are your emails read or viewed only as SPAM?*

- *Open Houses (for Departments and/or Clinics) and if so, then*
  - *How organizes it? Do you have formal presentations, tours, luncheons, speakers, etc. A poorly organized Open House may actually be an disincentive to potential applicants.*
  - *Who is invited? and do you provide travel support for attractive applicants, especially applicants from outside your immediate area?*
  - *How is it funded and how elaborate is it?*
  - *Do you seek input or support from student groups (e.g., NSSLHA)?*

*Do you actively recruit at local/state/national meetings (e.g., ASHA, AAA, ARO, ASA, State Meetings)? Are faculty and/or clinic staff in your Department active participants at these meetings (a subtle recruitment tool)?*

*Do you have a formal connections with any "feeder programs?" (e.g., undergraduate only programs)?*

- *If so, how is it maintained and how successful has it been (and how can you improve its performance)?*
- *If not, how does one create such a connection?*

*Can you provide any type of graduate student support (besides "loans" which most graduate students do not view as "financial aid") such as Fellowships, Graduate Associateships, and Partial or Complete Tuition Remissions?*

*Do you adequately advertise the availability of such financial aid?*

*Do you offer any type of financial support for student research?*

*Do you offer other "perks" to students (e.g., graduate student lounges, computer rooms, easy email and internet access at school, phones, desk space)?*

- 2d How diverse is your program's student body and what steps does your program take toward recruitment of diverse students?

*Given the significant and real demographic changes in the United States (in addition to continuing concerns about equal opportunity and equal access to education for all individuals regarding of race, ethnicity, religious preference, gender, sexual orientation, etc.), it is extremely important for programs to actively seek a diverse graduate student body. Your program should address the following questions in terms of recruiting and successfully admitting diverse students:*

- *How successful is your program in attracting a diverse group of graduate students (be honest in looking at the numbers of both applicants and incoming students)?*
- *Does your program seek to address lack of diversity in a real (i.e., will result in actual changes) and meaningful way? Simply saying that your locale has little racial/ethnic/cultural diversity does nothing toward development a diverse student body.*
- *What specific recruitment strategies has your program been involved in that has, as its goal, the recruitment of a diverse student population? For example:*
  - *Links to student organizations (NBASSLH)*
  - *University-sponsored events (e.g., Ohio State's Minority Visitation Day program)*
  - *Diversity-based Fellowships (however "named")*
  - *Links to UG programs that traditionally have more diverse student bodies*
- *How successful has the program been (compared to the past, compared to the rest of your college or university, compared to the demographics in your state, etc.)?*

### 3. Student Selection Considerations

Given your pool of applicants, how successful have you been with your admission decisions? When all programs were swapped with high-quality students, they were able to choose among the best of the best. It is almost certainly the case that every school has its own tales of wrong choices and mismatches between program and newly matriculated student (that "can't miss" student with the wonderful grades who is an absolute failure when interacting with real people in the clinic). As the pool of applicants grows smaller, the question is often one of whether your program freely admits students that, several years ago, would be seen as "borderline." However, we all also have great success stories of students whose incoming GPA (or GRE scores) were marginal, but who turned out to be outstanding speech-language pathologists or audiologists. How cloudy has your crystal ball for admissions been lately?

- 3a. How accurate have your "standard" sets of admission criteria been in predicting successful performance (in the classroom and in the clinic) and how happy are your faculty and clinical supervisors with recent admissions?

*What data-oriented evaluations have you done? For example, have you compared graduate GPA/measures of academic/clinical performance with the measures your program uses as admission criteria? Honest answers to 3a. will determine whether or not your faculty and clinical staff should examine seriously your current approach to student selection and admissions.*

- 3b. Does your current student body "match" your program's ideal selection profile?

*Answering this question honestly is especially important if your applicant pool has shrunk during the past five years. Are you really applying the admission standards that you have in the past or have your standards "slipped" without realizing it?*

- 3c. What are your baseline admission criteria and why has your program decided to use those criteria in the past? (And should the program revisit them in the future?)

*Programs might benefit from examining the importance your program places on the following criteria in making admission decisions and asking why each criteria is used. Have these been seen to be successful predictors of graduate student performance in your Department (and do you actually have data to backup your answer) or is it simply because of department/college history or because other department in your college utilize them?*

- *GRE scores [which subtest(s) are more important?]*
- *TOEFL and TSE/Speak Test Scores (for students who are not native speakers of English)*
- *Letters of recommendation (how much information do these really provide?)*
- *Undergraduate GPA*
- *Undergraduate major*
- *Size and reputation of the student's Undergraduate School*
- *Undergraduate clinical experience (in school and on a volunteer basis)*
- *Own student versus outside student--some programs prefer to "grow their own," but do you use similar admission criteria for each group?*
- *Personal interviews (time consuming but informative)*
- *Determining and considering the factor "Disposition" (for both academic and clinical work)*

- *For PhD students, are there appropriate faculty mentors and do they have input in the selection process (or veto power over admissions of students who want to work with them)?*
- *Do you have a graduate student on the selection committee?*
- *Do you modify your selection criteria in any way based on the ethnic/cultural/linguistic background of the student to overcome cultural bias (e.g., in testing). If not, why not?*

#### **4. Final Remarks**

It is clearly important that programs in communication sciences and disorders develop better recruitment strategies. The number of applicants to our programs has decreased significantly over the past few years, while many current jobs in the field go unfilled. We also need to increase diversity among our applicants such as increasing cultural/ethnic diversity, and increasing the number of males in our discipline (just what is your program's male/female ratio?). However, even as we recruit more applicants, we need to ensure that our admission decisions are based good, informative, and appropriate information that will provide an accurate prediction of how particular students will fare in your program. There is no single approach to recruitment and admission/selection that will best fit all departments, but I hope that the questions presented here will help your program to better achieve its goals.