

CONSORTIA PROGRAMS AS A SOLUTION TO THE DOCTORAL SHORTAGE

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Introduction

There has been a concern regarding the supply of doctoral faculty in communication disorders for some time. Bruce Tomblin presented data suggesting the advent of this phenomenon in a 1996 address to the Legislative Council of ASHA when he was Chair of the Research and Scientific Affairs Committee. He noted then that the profession was graying and that this situation was less than optimal due to retirements and the loss of research and training opportunities. Oller (2002) gave a sobering presentation to the CAPCSD in which he outlined the growing shortage of PhDs in the profession. The PhD shortage combined with the graying of the current PhD holders results in a plethora of issues, most notably a doubling of unfilled faculty positions over a three year period (which could eventually lead to the closure of programs) and an inability to sustain the research base of the professions. Although the number of PhDs granted in speech-language pathology and audiology has risen in recent years, the situation continues to be alarming. The response from the Council and from ASHA has been encouraging. For example, ASHA has provided funding for doctoral students and for junior faculty. In addition, some attention has been given to ways that promising graduate students might be shepherded into doctoral programs (e.g., Ringel, 2004).

At the close of a session at the 2003 CAPCSD Conference in which the doctoral shortage and increased enrollment at doctoral-granting institutions had been discussed, the authors of this paper turned to each other and asked why master's-granting institutions were not being engaged in this conversation. After all, the majority of institutions in the communication disorders field are master's-granting institutions. What better place, we asked ourselves, to look for promising graduate students to help fill the shortage? Master's level programs often have bright motivated students and research active faculty. Where these exist, models of cooperation would be different than where such factors are absent. In any case, models of cooperation could and should be established between master's and doctoral programs to help alleviate the paucity of PhD graduates, or the profession will not be able to sustain its research base and many programs could face inevitable closures.

In this session, we propose several models of cooperation between master's level and doctoral granting programs that might be useful in this discussion. We review the potential strengths and weaknesses of these models and invite participation and other suggestions for ways to foster cooperation between master's and doctoral level programs. The greatest strength across collaboration types is that of increasing the research base of the professions. The greatest weakness is the erosion and blending of programs such that they may lose their independence in the eyes of university administrators.

Models for Collaboration between Doctoral and Master's Programs

Model #1: Where a Consortium already exists. An example of this model might be one where students are assured of admission into a PhD program upon receipt of

their bachelor's degree and receive their master's degree "on the way" to the PhD.

These are sometimes called bachelor's-to-doctoral programs; however, for purposes of our discussion, we are suggesting that the institution granting the master's degree is not the same one granting the PhD. One instance in which this concept might work is where several institutions are under a single governing board, with some of the member institutions being master's-granting institutions and at least one being a PhD-granting institution.

There are several advantages to this model. The master's thesis could count as the pre-candidacy research project. Faculty from both institutions could serve as chair and/or members of doctoral committees and could be mentors for doctoral students. In many instances, this arrangement could almost double the areas of expertise that students would have to draw upon. Finally, PhD students could gain teaching experience in the master's program.

Some potential disadvantages also exist. One administrative challenge is how to assess faculty workload at the master's-granting institution. Funding issues for such students also exist. Do tuition and fees go to the affiliate (master's) program or to the PhD program? Geographic mobility may be a potential problem depending on location of each program.

Model #2: Where a Consortium does not exist. We would propose that there are two ways to approach this: (a) establish a consortium or (b) not establish a consortium but agree to unofficially share students and/or resources.

The advantages to establishing a formal consortium include easier transfer of students back and forth between institutions and clearer administration of the program.

Disadvantages include the difficulties that might be encountered in establishing “common ground”, funding issues and issues related to headcount. The issues of “who gets to count what for what,” “who gets the money,” and “whose student is it” are not trivial and have likely derailed numerous discussions regarding the establishment of consortia.

The primary advantage of not establishing a consortium but unofficially sharing the students/resources is that there would be no administrators to appease and no paperwork in which to get bogged down, at least initially. Although this may appear attractive, there would also be no “paper trail” on which you could rely at a later time. This might lead to issues with no foundation for resolution (such as, determining how to share credit for research, funding issues, etc.).

No matter which model is adopted, in the end, collaborations between master’s and PhD granting programs depend on individual faculty for their success. Faculty must initiate such collaborations and therefore they must be motivated. What are the possible incentives for the individual faculty member? One motivation would be that such collaborations would result in increased research productivity for all faculty involved. If one of these faculty were a junior member of a master’s only program that individual could receive additional research mentoring from a faculty member in a PhD granting program. Likewise, senior faculty could be encouraged to spend their sabbaticals in the lab of a junior faculty member to both mentor and create a type of “post-doctoral” experience “on the job” as it were. They could assist the junior faculty in setting up a lab, in getting their research program off the ground, and in general provide support to junior faculty at a crucial point in their careers. ASHA could provide additional funding

for the senior faculty member to supplement partial sabbatical salary. Another advantage to the junior faculty could be that critical numbers of students would be attracted to the lab of the junior faculty and a climate could be created whereby PhD students mentor master's students and master's students mentor undergraduates. This could also provide teaching experience for the PhD students and possibly result in a course release for the junior faculty which is so crucial to success in achieving tenure and promotion.

Participants' Discussion

During the course of this roundtable discussion, several participants contributed information related to this topic that deserves mention. Nancy Craighead discussed an ASHA grant to her institution (University of Cincinnati) that was awarded for their proposal of an innovative program to increase the doctoral pool. This program should be monitored for effectiveness over the next few years. Michael Weiss of Westchester University proposed that doctoral programs need to consider ways to bring their program to the places where (interested) people live, whether through distance media or some other means. Amy Wohlert described a cooperative arrangement at the University of New Mexico whereby her program was able to develop a communication sciences and disorders concentration within the PhD program in the linguistics department. The basic focus of this PhD will be child language.

These examples provide evidence that innovations are being used to address the doctoral shortage. There are likely many ways for master's and PhD granting programs to collaborate which could be beneficial for the programs, their faculty and students, and the health of our profession. ASHA and the CAA have been responsive to the current

PhD shortage by providing incentives, grants and scholarships for innovative and creative ideas for addressing the shortage. We continue to believe that masters-granting institutions must be involved in discussions if the doctoral shortage is to be addressed in any meaningful way, and we invite others to share any ways they are currently involved in creating collaborations.

References

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