

EXPANDING FUNDING OPTIONS FOR YOUR GRADUATE STUDENTS

Jean Blosser, Ed.D., CCC-SLP

Progressus Therapy

Roberta DePompei, Ph.D., CCC-SLP/A

The University of Akron

Funding support for graduate education appears to be decreasing while the cost of tuition and other associated expenses for graduate education are rising. This trend may impact upon students' decisions to pursue graduate degrees in communication sciences and disorders. Declines in enrollment may create even greater personnel shortages in the professions.

This session discussed funding trends, typical funding streams, and innovative funding strategies. Information presented was supported by the results of a survey of communication science and disorders program chairs and graduate directors. Following a brief presentation of survey results, interactive discussion was conducted to provide opportunities for participants to share success stories and recommendations for expanding funding options.

A survey consisting of 18 questions was developed and sent by e-mail to program chairs and graduate directors at 247 universities. The survey explored the demographics of the university, information about enrollment, types of funding support that students access, numbers of students receiving funding, amount of support students receive, trends and changes in funding, funding strategies universities are implementing, and innovative strategies for obtaining funding. The survey questions are presented in Appendix A. Fifty-five responses were returned including 43 state institutions and 12 private institutions. Following is a summary of the survey questions and responses.

The number of students enrolled in the respondents' programs ranged from seven to 130. Most programs reported 20 to 40 students. Approximately 30% of the respondents reported that their 2005-2006 enrollment was greater than in previous years; about 50% reported that it has remained the same, and approximately 20% reported a decrease over

previous years. The majority of students were between ages 21 to 25 years old. Universities with older students generally reported that they had distance education programs or bachelor's to master's level programs that attracted practicing SLPs.

The annual tuition ranged from \$4,000 to \$25,000 while the average annual tuition was approximately \$15,000 including tuition, books, clinical materials and other related expenses.

The following list illustrates the types of funding being accessed by students according to survey respondents. The types of funding sources most frequently listed by respondents are as follows:

- Government funded loans
- University sponsored work-study or assistantships
- Academic scholarships
- Private foundation grants and loans
- Service organization scholarships or grants
- Research grants
- Professional association or foundation funding
- Diversity scholarships or grants
- Training grants
- Loan forgiveness programs
- Paid internships
- International scholarships or grants
- Family support
- Part-time employment
- Clinical contracts

Although respondents were not sure of how to respond to questions on the survey regarding amount of support students receive, they did indicate that approximately 33% of their

students receive 25% of their graduate school expenses, 32% have 75% of their educational expenses, 25% of students receive 50% of their expenses, and 10% receive 100% of their expenses.

When asked if they have observed changes in the amount of funds available for graduate education in the past three years, 61% of the respondents stated that they did not believe that funding opportunities or amounts have changed significantly. Funding trends and changes that they have observed are as follows:

- Increased efforts to secure funding have resulted in increased funding support for students, especially through sources such as faculty grants
- Continued and possibly increased reliance on student loans
- Decreases in state funding
- Fewer budgeted graduate assistantship positions
- More funding opportunities for doctoral students versus master's students
- Increased funding by local service organizations
- Increased number of partnerships with state departments of education. A shift has been observed with education grants replacing rehabilitation grants. Departments of Education and local school systems are offering tuition grants in exchange for commitment to work following graduation
- Slight increases in stipend amounts
- Decreases in practicum sites that provided funding during clinical experiences
- Internal resources declining

Much of the session was spent openly discussing innovative funding strategies reported by the survey respondents as well as those reported by the attendees. Some of the innovative ideas shared are as follows:

- Faculty contribute royalties from books

- Training grants for specific disability populations such as literacy, autism, AAC, oral method, etc.
- Scholarships offered by private companies
- Graduate assistantships with a designated process for distribution
- Clinical contracts and relationships with agencies
- Incorporate student funding in every external grant
- Help students access university funds through competitive application
- Matching funding programs (if students earn some money, department matches)
- Billing agencies for student services and then using funding for student support
- Donations from civic organizations
- Paid internships and contracts with private organizations
- Alumni contributions
- A university managed adult day care programs
- University scholarships
- Obtaining pay for students for respite care
- Work study and internship opportunities
- Annual student self evaluations and summaries of their accomplishments

As a result of the critical shortage of speech-language pathologists, employers are offering funding support for graduate education. Following are some types of employer-based funding opportunities reported by participants.

- Sign on bonus
- Professional/continuing education funds
- Funds for commitment to work in a particular setting or for a specified period of time
- Loan repayment programs
- Housing allowance

- Pay increase after completion of the CF experience

In summary, it appears that graduate programs and their students are accessing a wide range of funding support. Attendees appeared to appreciate the opportunity to exchange ideas with one another and commented that they would be in contact with one another to learn more about various funding options.

APPENDIX A

SURVEY SENT TO PROGRAM DIRECTORS AND GRADUATE DIRECTORS

Funding Opportunities for SLP Graduate Education

1. Name of University
2. Is your institution state funded or private?
 - State Funded
 - Private
3. How many new full time students did you enroll in your SLP master's degree program for the 2005-2006 academic year?
4. How does your 2005-2006 student enrollment compare to your average enrollment in previous years?
 - More than previous years (An average increase of 3 or more students)
 - About the same
 - Less than previous years (An average decrease of 3 or more students)
5. How many students in your 2005-2006 master's level SLP class are in each of the following age categories?
 - 21-25
 - 26-30
 - 31-35
 - 35-40
 - 41-45
 - Over 46
6. What are the average annual academic expenses students incur to attend your SLP master's degree program?
 - Tuition
 - Books and clinical materials
7. For those students who receive supplemental funding support, what types of support are being used? (Check all that apply to your knowledge.)
 - Academic Scholarship
 - Diversity Scholarship or Grant
 - Government Funded Loan
 - International Scholarship or Grant
 - Loan Forgiveness Program

- Paid Internship
 - Private Loan
 - Professional Association or Foundation Funding
 - Research Grant
 - Service Organization Scholarship r Grant
 - Training Grant (Dept. of Education, VA Hospital)
 - University sponsored work-study or assistantship
 - Other, please specify
8. What percentage of your 2005-2006 students are receiving the following categories of support? If students are receiving support from multiple sources, indicate the source that is providing the largest amount of support.
- Academic Scholarship Contract for services with other agencies (clinical, research)
 - Loan
 - Training Grant
 - Research Assistantship
 - Work-Study (non-research)
 - I don't know
9. For the full time students in your 2005-2006 master's SLP program who receive financial support, what percentage of their annual academic expenses are being funded through one or more types of funding programs?
- At least 25% of their annual academic expenses
 - At least 50% of their annual academic expenses
 - At least 75% of their annual academic expenses
 - 100% of their annual academic expenses
10. How many of your 2005-2006 students are receiving partial support and how many are receiving full support?
- Partial support (less than 100%)
 - Full support (100%)
11. What changes have you observed in types of funding opportunities for master's level education in the field of speech-language pathology in the past three years?
- New or different funding options/programs
 - New or different organizations providing funding
 - I haven't observed much change

12. What changes have you observed in the amount of funding available to master's level students in speech-language pathology in the past three years?

- Increased funding
- Decreased funding
- Stayed about the same

13. Briefly describe the funding changes and trends you have observed

14. Please share examples of innovative funding strategies that your faculty, university, or other organizations are using to provide funding support for students pursuing their graduate education.

15. What effect have the changes you noted in Questions 11-14 had on your program?

a. Quality of Students

- Decreased
- No change
- Increased
- I don't know

b. Number of applicants

- Decreased
- No change
- Increased
- I don't know

c. Number of students we could enroll

- Decreased
- No change
- Increased
- I don't know

d. Number of graduates

- Decreased
- No change
- Increased
- I don't know

16. What types of financial rewards or incentives, in addition to salary and typical medical compensation, have students reported being offered when they seek employment?

Check all that apply.

- Sign on bonus

- Additional funds for commitment to work in a particular setting or for a specified period of time
- Loan repayment program
- Professional/continuing education funds
- Housing or auto allowance
- I don't know
- Other, Please Specify

17. May we contact you to explore your answers further in order to gather information that other program directors and faculty will find useful?

- Yes
- No

18. If you agree to be contacted, please provide you name, phone number, and e-mail address.

- Name:
- Phone Number:
- E-mail Address: