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Practical Strategies for Recruiting Underrepresented Students into the field of Communication Sciences and Disorders (CSD)

Whitney D. Perkins, M.S., CCC-SLP, EdD
CAPCSD DEIB Committee Member

Recruiting students from underrepresented backgrounds into the field of Communication Sciences and Disorders (CSD) remains a critical challenge. According to data from the most recent 2023-2024 CSD Education Survey, students from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds represent less than 34% of undergraduate students and 29% of graduate students enrolled in CSD programs. This decline between the undergraduate and graduate levels highlights a persistent gap in representation and outlines the need for targeted strategies to recruit students from racial, religious and ethnic minority backgrounds including those students with apparent and non-apparent disabilities.

To address this issue, CSD programs must adopt intentional and practical approaches to recruit and support students from underrepresented groups. To accomplish this goal, CSD programs must assess and define their target audience, integrate social media into academia, thoughtfully, mindful of generational differences, and consider partnerships with schools that have a diverse population.

Assess and Define Target Audiences

It is essential for CSD programs to reflect on their recruitment goals and identify specific audiences they seek to engage. Programs should consider questions such as: *Who are we reaching, and how can we enhance visibility among underrepresented populations?* Programs are encouraged to evaluate whether their names, outreach materials, and public messaging communicate inclusivity and align with the broader mission and vision for the field.

Integrate Social Media into Academia

Social media platforms offer valuable opportunities to connect with prospective students and to highlight the academic and service-oriented aspects of the CSD profession. When used strategically and responsibly, these tools can serve as effective recruitment mechanisms.

- Producing “A Day in the Life of an SLP, AuD, and/or SLPA Student” videos to provide real insight into student experiences.
- Featuring current NSSLHA officers through “Meet the Officer” posts or newsletters, showcasing leadership and representation within the program.
- Joining the trend of social media challenges (e.g. see our spin of the Bodak Yellow challenge at <http://bit.ly/3M92gWi>) by creating an academic adaptive version of the challenge.
- Showcasing community-outreach events

Such efforts not only enhance program visibility but also provide prospective students with an idea of who is in your program to determine if they can relate to their identities and experiences.

Establish Partnerships with Local School Districts

Developing partnerships with local school districts, particularly those serving diverse student populations, can be a highly effective recruitment strategy. Interactive case study sessions allow high school students to explore CSD professions in an engaging, hands-on manner. Case studies can include topics such as fluency, hearing loss, speech sound disorders, language, dysarthria, and/or aphasia. These topics may resonate with students that have a relative who stutters, a sibling that can't produce a specific sound, a teacher who is deaf or hard of hearing, or a grandparent that has had a stroke and can't effectively communicate their wants or needs.

These sessions can be both educational and inspiring, offering students a window into the real-world impact of CSD professionals.

Conclusion

Efforts to recruit underrepresented students into the CSD profession must be intentional, strategic, and sustained. By assessing target audiences, integrating social media as an academic tool, and partnering with local school districts, CSD programs can take meaningful steps toward expanding the profession.

A more inclusive and representative CSD workforce not only enriches the field but also strengthens its ability for patient care.