



Communication Sciences and Disorders  
West Chester University  
West Chester, PA 19383

Phone: 610-435-3401  
FAX: 610-436-3388  
[www.wcupa.edu](http://www.wcupa.edu)

---

## Essential Functions of Candidates for Admission to and Continuance of the SLP Graduate Program (9.21.22)

WCU's Department of CSD offers three programs: a Bachelor of Arts (BA) program, a Pre-graduate Certification Program (PCP), and a Master of Arts (MA) program. The mission of these programs is to provide students with the academic coursework and clinical practicum experiences required by the American Speech-Language and Hearing Association (ASHA) in fulfillment of the requirements for the Certificate of Clinical Competence (CCC) in Speech-Language Pathology (SLP). The education of a speech-language pathologist requires the acquisition of knowledge and skills, and the development of judgment through client care experience in preparation for independent decision-making practices. Additionally, the current practice of SLP emphasizes interprofessional collaboration with professionals in education, rehabilitation, and medical settings.

### **POLICIES INFLUENCING THE PROGRAM OF STUDY**

WCU's graduate program in SLP is accredited for Speech-Language Pathology by ASHA's Council on Academic Accreditation (CAA) in Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology. Operating within the scope of ASHA standards, the Department has the freedom and ultimate responsibility for (1) selecting students, (2) designing, implementing, and evaluating the curriculum, (3) evaluating student progress, and (4) determining who should be awarded a degree.

CSD Faculty and professional staff also have a responsibility for the welfare of clients tested, treated, or otherwise affected by CSD students. The Department has a responsibility to the public to assure that its graduates can become fully competent SLP professionals, capable of delivering quality services in a timely manner and preserving the wellbeing of the clients they serve. Thus, it is important that the persons admitted, retained, and graduated possess the intelligence, integrity, compassion, humanitarian concern, and physical and emotional capacity necessary to practice SLP.

The Department of CSD, as part of the College of Health Sciences, is committed to the principle of equal opportunity. **The University, College, and Department do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, age, marital status, disability, or disabled veteran of Vietnam era veteran status. When requested, the University will provide reasonable accommodation to otherwise qualified students with a diagnosed disability.** The CSD faculty and professional staff have responsibility for the welfare of students in the Department and for the clients the students treat in the Speech and Hearing Clinic. To meet this responsibility, the Department has established academic standards and minimum essential functions (defined on the following pages) that must be demonstrated by students with or without reasonable accommodations to participate in and to complete the program successfully. Students with conditions that may require accommodations will be referred to the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (OSSD) for a determination of whether the

condition is a disability as defined by applicable laws, and for a determination of reasonable accommodations. The determination will specifically take into consideration whether the requested accommodation might jeopardize the safety of clinic clients or the ability of the student to complete the classroom, laboratory, and clinical work required for the CSD graduate program. The OSSD will make this determination with input from the Department of CSD. Whenever possible, reasonable accommodations will be provided for students with disabilities to enable them to meet these standards and ensure that they are not denied the benefits of, excluded from participation in, or otherwise subjected to discrimination.

## **DESCRIPTION OF ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS**

The Department of CSD selects applicants with evidence of the potential to become highly competent SLP professionals. Admission and retention decisions are based not only on satisfactory prior and ongoing academic achievement but also on non-academic factors that support the candidate's performance of the essential functions of the academic and clinical program required for graduation. **Essential functions**, as distinguished from academic standards, refer to those cognitive, physical, and behavioral abilities that support mastery of the curriculum and of the professional attributes required of all students at graduation. Essential functions are described below in relation to six areas: **physical health, motor, sensory, communication, intellectual/cognitive** (conceptual, integrative, and quantitative abilities for problem solving and diagnosis), **behavioral/emotional**, and the **professional** attributes.

### **1. Physical Health**

With or without reasonable accommodation, a student must possess the physical health and stamina needed to carry out the SLP Program. The student must be able to continuously sit or stand for at least 3 hours at a time.

### **2. Motor Skills**

With or without reasonable accommodation, a student must have sufficient motor function so that they can (1) access transportation to and within all academic settings and clinical affiliations, (2) process relevant academic and clinical information (e.g., take notes during class and during client interviews, type papers and clinic reports, participate in classroom discussions and client counseling sessions, give oral presentations, model the production of speech, etc.), (3) use a computer keyboard to operate clinical and laboratory equipment, and to (4) execute movements required to provide with acuity, accuracy, facility, a complete speech/language and dysphagia evaluations and to provide therapeutic services to clients of all ages and genders across a full range of clinical and educational contexts.

### **3. Observation Skills**

With or without reasonable accommodation, a student must have sufficient vision and hearing to observe effectively in classroom, laboratory, and clinical settings. Hearing (aided or unaided) must be functional for the speech frequencies. Students must be able to master information presented in course work through lectures, and recorded audio signals, including subtle discriminations involving individual phonemes, phoneme sequences, words, larger language segments, and suprasegmental features of speech. Vision (aided or unaided) must be sufficient

to allow for the processing of written materials, projected video segments, laboratory demonstrations, and demonstrations in the clinical training portion of the program. When performing clinical evaluations and treatments, the student must be able to observe a client sufficiently from a range of 1 to 10 feet to identify nonverbal communication signals (e.g., body orientation, joint attention, facial expressions, conventional gestures, manual signs, proxemics cues). The student must further be able to read a case history and to perform a visual evaluation of various oral, manual, and cranio-facial structures (i.e., ear, throat, oral cavity, skull, etc.) and functions (e.g., individual oral-motor movements, swallow patterns, articulatory gestures, manual gestures, facial expressions, visual gaze patterns, body postures, etc.). The student must have sufficient sensory capability to perform all required evaluations and treatment protocols using instruments and tools necessary for accurate, efficient, and timely completion of such activities, including the ability to interpret video swallow studies.

#### **4. Communication Skills**

With or without reasonable accommodations, a student must demonstrate communication skills sufficient to achieve effective clinical and professional interaction with individuals served. For oral communication, students must demonstrate speech and language skills in English, which, at a minimum, are consistent with ASHA's most current position statement on students and professionals who speak English with accents and nonstandard dialects. For written communication, students must be able to produce and comprehend technical reports, diagnostic and treatment reports, treatment plans, and professional correspondence. Information must be communicated in a succinct yet comprehensive manner and in settings (e.g., hospitals, rehabilitation centers, schools) where time for verbal reporting and/or written documentation may be limited. These skills require the ability to assess and effectively communicate all relevant information, including the significance of nonverbal responses. Also required is the ability to communicate the need for appropriate, well-focused follow-up as appropriate during or immediately following the completion of an assessment. The student must be capable of responsive, empathic listening to establish rapport in a way that promotes openness on issues of concern and sensitivity to potential cultural differences. The student must express their ideas clearly and demonstrate a willingness and ability to give and receive feedback.

#### **5. Cognitive Skills**

With or without reasonable accommodations, the student must have the cognitive abilities necessary to master relevant content in basic science and clinical courses at a level consistent with standards defined in a course syllabus, the Clinic Handbook, or standards defined by an affiliation site. These skills may be described as the ability to comprehend, memorize, integrate, analyze, synthesize, and apply material. They must be able to demonstrate reasoning and decision-making skills needed for problem solving appropriate to the practice of SLP.

#### **6. Behavioral/Emotional Health**

With or without reasonable accommodations, the student must be able to demonstrate progress in analytical, decision-making, and time-management skills needed to complete all tasks involved in the diagnosis and treatment of communication and swallowing disorders. In

addition, they must be able to maintain mature, sensitive, and effective relationships with individuals served, students, faculty, staff, and other professionals under all conditions including highly stressful situations that may be associated with some clinical contexts. The student must have the emotional stability to function effectively under the typical stresses of clinical settings and to adapt to an environment that may change rapidly without warning and/or in unpredictable ways. The student must know if their values, attitudes, beliefs, emotions, and/or experiences affect their perceptions and relationships with others. The student must be willing and able to examine and change their behavior when it interferes with productive individual or team relationships. The student must possess skills and experience necessary for effective and harmonious relationships in diverse learning and working environments.

## **7. Professional Skills**

With or without reasonable accommodations, a student's emotional health must be sufficient to perform the above tasks, including the use of good judgment and behavior that is professional, reliable, mature, and responsible. The student must effectively manage the use of time and be able to systematize actions to complete professional and technical tasks with realistic constraints. The student must be adaptable, possessing sufficient flexibility to function in new and stressful environments. They must be able to critically evaluate their own performance, be forthright about errors, accept constructive criticism, and look for ways to improve their performance in the classroom and clinic. The student must show respect for individuals of different age, ethnic background, religion, sexual orientation, and disabilities across the diverse spectrum of communicative disorders. The student must exhibit professional behavior by conforming to appropriate standards of dress, appearance, language, and public behavior. The student must uphold the Code of Ethics of the American Speech-Language and Hearing Association and WCU's standards of academic honesty. **It is expected that the development of essential professional skills will grow over the course of the program with the support of faculty through a combination of direct instruction, modeling, and constructive performance feedback.**

Every student's progress is reviewed twice during the academic year by the entire faculty: once in the fall and once in spring semesters, respectively. This is known as the "**MA Review**" involving the consideration of (1) progress in the completion of prerequisite skills, (2) grades earned in academic and clinical courses and (3) progress toward the acquisition of knowledge and skills addressed in each course as documented on the web-based, FERPA-compliant, password protected system called Clinical Assessment of Learning Inventory of Performance Streamlined Office Operations (CALIPSO). The knowledge and skills standards are established by ASHA's Council for Clinical Certification (CFCC) as prerequisite for the Clinical Fellowship (CF), and the CF is a requirement for earning the Certificate of Clinical Competence in Speech-Language Pathology (CCC-SLP). Knowledge and skill standards are addressed in courses across the curriculum, and each course syllabus lists the knowledge or skills standards for that course. If a student fails to meet a knowledge and skill standard, the course instructor develops a remediation plan. If the student does not meet the criterion on a remediation (with or without reasonable accommodations determined by OSSD in collaboration with the Department), the student will be advised to either write a paper, re-enroll in the course, or discontinue the MA program. Students who do not meet the KASA standards will not be eligible for the post-graduate Clinical Fellowship, or for the

ASHA Certificate of Clinical Competence (CCC), which is the entry-level credential for SLPs as determined by ASHA.

Academic standards are defined in *WCU's Graduate Catalog*. All students must maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.0. If a student's GPA falls below this standard despite reasonable accommodations if needed (as determined by the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities), they will be placed on probation and required to bring their GPA up to at least a 3.0 in the following semester. Students who fail to bring their cumulative GPA up to at least a 3.0 will be dismissed from the university.

### **PROGRAM PARTICIPANT AGREEMENT STATEMENT**

As a matriculated student in the West Chester University's Speech-Language Pathology MA program, my signature below indicates that I have read all 4 pages of the Essential Functions document; that I agree with its contents; that I am committed to the policies expressed therein; and that I may be advised to discontinue the program should I fail to demonstrate all of the Essential Functions despite reasonable accommodations (if recommended by OSSD) and reasonable levels of support from the faculty.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

---

#### **The Essential Functions Policy is adapted from the following sources:**

- ASHA (2005). Background Information and Standards and Implementation for the Certificate of Clinical Competence in Speech Language Pathology. [http://www.asha.org/about/membership-certification/handbooks/slp/slp\\_standards\\_new.htm](http://www.asha.org/about/membership-certification/handbooks/slp/slp_standards_new.htm)
- Council of Academic Programs in Communicative Sciences and Disorders (2007). *Eligibility Requirements and Essential Functions*. Prepared by Schwartz et al., and retrieved from <http://www.capcsd.org/proceedings/2007/talks/EFChecklist.pdf>
- Essential Functions Committee (2007). Disability Law in Higher Education. Council of Academic Programs in Communicative Sciences and Disorders. Retrieved from the internet on 5/8/09 at <http://www.capcsd.org/proceedings/2007/talks/EFslides.pdf>