

Annual Departmental Assessment Report

Department or Program: Communication Disorders and Sciences; Department of Special Education and Clinical Sciences

Academic Year of Report: 2020-2021

Department Contact Person for Assessment: Karen Durany, Director of Undergraduate Studies

Section 1: Learning Objectives Assessed for this Report

For our annual evaluation, we are shifting our focus based on input from the Dean's office and program priorities included in our strategic plan and other initiatives. To that end, we are evaluating the following new objectives:

- Objective 1: Provide comprehensive and accessible advising to CDS students
- Objective 2: Prepare students for their future careers in CDS focused and related fields
- Objective 3: Ensure the success of CDS students in classes through effective curriculum delivery and creation of a supportive departmental climate

In addition, we did collect data from our lower division CDS 201 course on the objectives detailed in in our 2018 assessment plan in order to anticipate any supports students may need as they move into our upper division courses. The objectives were as follows:

- Objective B: Students will understand and analyze the social impact of cognitive-communication disability on affected individuals and family members.
- Objective C: Students will demonstrate the prerequisite speaking and writing skills to pursue graduate study and clinical training., and will access, read, and analyze the utility of research and other relevant information as a precursor to applying evidence to guide clinical practice.

Section 2: Assessment Activities

We gathered data from three primary sources:

- direct measures of student learning from papers completed in CDS 201
- the annual College of Education survey of graduating students from both 2019 and 2020
- other institutional reports of student demographics, persistence, and course performance

For objectives B and C from the 2018 assessment plan, performance on two analysis papers completed by the students were analyzed from the fall 2020 offering of this course. Work was evaluated for competency related to understanding the social impact of communication disorders as well as academic writing. Data revealed the majority of students performed at a high level (capstone or milestone) with only several students (7%) performing below expectations in both areas. It was noted these students performed at a low level overall in the course. The CDS majors overall performed at a higher level than non-major students enrolled in the course. Related to social impact, notably 90% of seniors on the exit survey reported feeling prepared to understand the social impact of communication disorders for individuals and families as they move forward in their careers.

Below are the findings for our newly developed objectives. Data from both the 2019 and 2020 exit surveys are included as the 2020 survey had a low response rate (26% of graduating seniors) compared to 2019 (81% of seniors).

Objective 1: advising

Student perceptions of advising were taken from a number of exit survey questions. In terms of overall satisfaction with advising, 82% in 2019 and 100% in 2020 reported being satisfied with the advising they had received. Notably, in 2019 BIPOC students reported higher satisfaction with advising than the larger group of students overall. Regarding advisor knowledge, 90-100% of students reported being satisfied with knowledge regarding major and university requirements, and applying to graduate school; 88% with knowledge of resources to support diverse students; and 80% with knowledge of future employment opportunities.

Objective 2: career preparation in CDS related fields

The COE exit survey includes 6 questions related to academic preparation and overall feelings of preparation to pursue graduate study. Overall, a large majority of students feel well prepared in the core competency areas of the program, and more than half report acceptance to graduate school for the next year (this number does vary from year to year, however). In addition, 95% report no unnecessary or redundant content overlap between courses, pointing to the focus and depth offered in the major curriculum.

Objective 3: Ensure success in classes

For this objective, we first evaluated the perceived support indicated by students in the exit survey. Data revealed positive overall perceptions of the program by students. Notably, 100% of students agreed or strongly agreed with the following statements:

- I feel welcome and comfortable in my classes and in my general college interactions
- the program encourages students to have a public voice and share their ideas openly
- I feel welcome and supported by CDS faculty in the program

Most students also agreed or strongly agreed with statements regarding the program's long-standing commitment to diversity and our promotion of appreciation for cultural differences.

For this objective, we next evaluated data regarding student outcomes in individual classes, examining rates of poor performance as indicated by grades below a C- in major courses. Overall, students in the major perform well and most make timely progress toward their bachelor's degree. However, university level data point to greater rates of below passing grades for students from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups and those who are first generation students, and this is apparent to some degree in our data, as well. Looking specifically to BIPOC students, exit survey data reveal some may feel less empowered to learn in our program. It appears that these students may be more likely to struggle in upper division major courses and earn grades below C-. This is a primary concern for our program.

Section 3: Actions Taken Based on Assessment Analysis

Regarding academic writing from above, individual supports were offered to students in the CDS 201 course as well as feedback throughout the term on both small and large stakes assignments. The instructor reached out to poorly performing students to offer help and met with students on an individual basis. In addition to providing suggestions specific to the course assignments, referrals to the Academic Engagement Center were also offered as appropriate.

Several years ago, we developed a comprehensive plan of support to be implemented across instructors for the undergraduate courses. This included tracking student performance within and across classes, reaching out to students, and providing additional help and referrals as described in the above example with CDS 201. We found it harder to get students respond since the move to online learning but will continue with these efforts. When lack of participation and communication with the instructor become concerning, we also contact the Dean of Students office for outreach on occasion.

Section 4: Other Efforts to Improve the Student Educational Experience

The pandemic and required online course delivery, coupled with the social justice issues and political upheaval in our communities, have made the past year uniquely challenging. The CDS program has worked to provide supportive messaging and recognition of these challenges for our students, recognizing BIPOC students as being particularly impacted. We have worked to be as flexible as possible, provided additional supports to students for whom mental health concerns have appeared or increased, and altered course delivery and assignment elements to provide some relief to student loads without altering the course integrity.

Section 5: Plans for Next Year

We intend to continue monitoring these objectives through the same measures as a way of evaluating overall program and student performance. The faculty will be discussing these results and formulating priorities for the academic year, and we will brainstorm new ways to support students in our fall retreat.

The student data above point to our need to 1) provide more career related information, which we will increase both on our CDS major Canvas site and through advising avenues, and 2) continue providing early identification and academic support for students struggling in courses. In addition, we have a clear objective for next year to provide specialized supports and mentoring for students from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups. Not only do we want to support these students, but we also have a national imperative to increase diversity within the field of speech language pathology. To that end, Karen Durany (undergraduate director) has submitted a proposal for an American Speech Language Hearing Association multicultural grant to create a comprehensive mentoring and support program for BIPOC students in their junior and senior years. Should it be funded, it would allow us to provide direct monetary supports for graduate school applications and professional development (e.g., conference attendance) in addition to a program of mentoring and peer support. We will still implement elements of this program in the event we are not funded.