Program Overview

Sacred Heart University’s (SHU) graduate program in speech-language pathology (SLP) has been accredited by the Office of Higher Education of the Connecticut State Department of Education. It has also been awarded candidacy, the first stage of accreditation conferred by the Council on Academic Accreditation in Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology (CAA) of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). This status is awarded to new programs that demonstrate compliance with the Standards for Accreditation as outlined in CAA’s Standards Compliance Continuum, for an initial period of five years. It allows the program to matriculate and graduate students who, upon successful completion of the program, will be eligible for national certification and state licensure as speech-language pathologists. The program is also approved for teacher endorsement by the Connecticut Department of Education.

WHAT IS SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGY?

Speech-language pathologists work with the full range of human communication disorders to:

• Evaluate and diagnose speech, language, cognitive-communication and swallowing disorders;

• Treat speech, language, cognitive-communication and swallowing disorders in individuals of all ages, from infants to the elderly.

• Speech-language pathologists often work as part of a team, which may include physical therapists, occupational therapists, teachers, physicians, audiologists, psychologists, social workers, rehabilitation counselors and others.

• Corporate speech-language pathologists work with employees to improve communication with their customers or modify foreign accents of workers to increase their communication potential.

• Some speech-language pathologists work with actors and singers to enhance and preserve their vocal skills.

PROGRAM DESIGN

Our graduate program in speech-language pathology is designed to be completed in five to six full-time semesters, over the course of two calendar years, including one summer. A second summer of optional coursework and fieldwork can lead to a specialty area of practice within speech-language pathology. The graduate program includes 60 to 80 credits of academic coursework in speech-language pathology, following the curriculum mandated by CAA accreditation standards, including work in the clinical assessment and management of disorders of articulation, voice, fluency, language and swallowing in children and adults. The mandated 375 clock hours of supervised clinical practicum are provided in fieldwork settings supervised by highly experienced clinicians, who accompany students on field placements in a variety of work sites, including hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, clinics and schools. Culminating experiences in the graduate program include two intensive externships and a capstone project.

WORK SITES

The practice of speech-language pathologists takes place in a variety of settings, including:

• Public and private schools
• Hospitals
• Rehabilitation centers
• Short- and long-term nursing care facilities
• Community clinics
• Colleges and universities
• Private practice offices
• State and local health departments
• State and federal government agencies
• Home health agencies
• Adult daycare centers
• Centers for persons with developmental disabilities
• Corporate and commercial settings
EMPLOYMENT OUTLOOK

More than 186,000 speech-language pathologists are currently certified by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association; more than 2,500 are licensed in the state of Connecticut. More than 57 percent of certified speech-language pathologists work in educational facilities, 38 percent are employed in healthcare facilities and almost 15 percent are employed in nonresidential healthcare facilities, including home health, private practice offices and speech and hearing centers.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of speech-language pathologists is predicted to grow by 21 percent over the current decade, faster than the average for all occupations.

• As members of the baby boom generation continue to age, the possibility of neurological disorders and associated speech, language, cognitive-communication and swallowing impairments increases.

• Medical advances are improving the survival rate of premature infants and trauma and stroke victims, who then require assessment and, potentially, treatment.

• Employment in educational services will increase with the growth in elementary and secondary school enrollments, including enrollment of students with special educational needs.

• Greater awareness of the importance of early identification and diagnosis of speech and language disorders in young children will increase employment.

• In addition to job growth, a number of job openings in speech-language pathology will result from baby boomers retiring.

• Opportunities should be particularly favorable for those with the ability to speak a second language, such as Spanish.

Speech and Language Pathology is ranked 28 in the 2016 rating of the 100 best jobs by U.S. News and World Report, and yet there is a national shortage of speech-language pathologists, which is increasing annually:

• Shortages were reported in 72 percent of schools in 2008, compared to 68 percent of schools in 2006, 62 percent in 2004 and 51 percent in 2001.

• There has been a 39 percent increase in job openings between 2000 and 2010.

There is a current shortage of speech-language pathologists in Connecticut:

• The Connecticut State Department of Education has named speech-language pathology a “teacher shortage area.”

• The SLP shortage for Connecticut schools is ranked as one of the highest level shortages.

Pay levels for speech-language pathology services are rising nationally. According to data collected by ASHA:

• Salaries for SLP professionals have outpaced inflation for the last 10 years.

• Salaries for full-time speech-language pathologists in schools have increased 45 percent in this time period.

• SLP salaries in health-care settings grew 44.4 percent in the same period.

• The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports median pay is $73,410 per year.

Note: A criminal conviction may affect a student’s ability to attain state licensure and/or obtain a practicum placement. All graduate programs in the speech-language pathology program require the successful completion of practicum experiences. These experiences are offered through off-campus facilities and settings, which may require that the student complete a criminal background check, and/or a drug screening and/or fingerprinting before beginning the practicum. Background checks, fingerprinting and drug screenings are completed at the student’s expense. Students who are denied a practicum because of the results of a background check will be offered a second placement, provided the student consents to share the results of the background check with the second placement site. If the student refuses to share this information or is twice denied a practicum placement based on the results of a background check, the student will be considered ineligible for placement and unable to complete the program.
CURRICULUM DESIGN AND APPROACH TO LEARNING

The SLP program curriculum conforms to all requirements for the Certificate of Clinical Competence in Speech-Language Pathology set out by the Council for Clinical Certification (CFCC) of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) and will result in eligibility for state licensure and national Certification of Clinical Competence in Speech-Language Pathology (CCC-SLP).

Academic courses will employ case studies, problem-based learning approaches, cooperative learning and laboratory experiences. Clinical education, designed to meet CCC-SLP requirements for 375 clock hours of supervised clinical practicum, will consist of interactions with expert clinical supervisors working in field placements for all aspects of SLP practice. Students will also participate in two intensive externships and a capstone clinical research experience. An optional certification for specialty practice in autism spectrum disorders, medical SLP, or English-language learner’s literacy are available through elective coursework in addition to the basic requirements for the M.S. in SLP.

Sacred Heart is one of the few universities, and the only one in Connecticut, that offers SLP, occupational therapy, physical therapy and education degrees. This creates the unique opportunity for students to work with colleagues in allied professions prior to graduation.

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

The development of Sacred Heart University’s SLP program is led by Rhea Paul, Ph.D., CCC-SLP. Dr. Paul has more than 30 years of experience as a professor in speech-language pathology. Most recently, she was a professor and clinical scholar at the Yale Child Study Center, where she conducted research on autism spectrum disorders. Dr. Paul is the author of more than 100 articles in scientific journals, over 50 book chapters and nine books. Her textbook on child language disorders is the most widely used resource in the field, adopted by 65 percent of speech-language pathology programs in the U.S., as well as in Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand. She is the recipient of the Editor’s Award from the American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology, the Ritvo/Sliifka Award for Innovative Clinical Research in Autism from the International Society of Autism Research. She is the recipient of the Honors of the American Speech-Language & Hearing Association.

TRACKS

Two tracks are available for the graduate SLP program, depending on whether the applicant has completed prerequisite coursework. A part-time alternative for students who have a Bachelor’s degree in another field is the SLP Online Prerequisite Series (www.sacredheart.edu/slipops), which does not guarantee admission to the graduate program.

The two-year track is designed for students with all required undergraduate coursework completed. Applicants to the two-year track of the master’s degree in speech-language pathology will be required to submit GRE scores, two letters of recommendation from academic sources and a personal statement. Applicants must have a cumulative undergraduate GPA of at least 3.0 and have successfully completed either a major or minor in communication disorders or speech-language pathology, to include the following prerequisite courses or their equivalents, with an average GPA of 3.3 or better in the prerequisite courses with no single course grade below C and no more than one repeated SLP course:

- 3 credits of Biology (e.g., BI 103, BI 111)
- 3 credits of Physical Science (e.g., PY 103)
- 3 credits of Statistics (e.g., MA 131)
- 6 credits of Social Science (e.g., PS 110, One class must be PS 252: Child Development Psychology)

Introduction to Communication Disorders
Phonetics
Anatomy and Physiology of Speech and Swallowing
Speech Science
Development of Language
Introduction to Clinical Methods and Observation
Introduction to Audiology and Hearing Science
Neurological Bases of Communication and Swallowing

Strongly recommended to complete prior to entering the program:

- Education in the U.S.
- Education of Children with Special Needs
- Child Psychology

The three-year track is designed for applicants who do NOT have ANY undergraduate coursework in speech-language pathology or communication disorders. Applicants to the three-year track of the master’s degree in speech-language pathology will be required to submit GRE scores, two letters of recommendation from academic sources and a personal statement. Students applying for the three-year track must not have taken more than six credits of speech-language pathology or communication disorders coursework prior to applying, and if accepted, must complete all courses that are part of the three-year track in the on-ground courses provided at SHU; online courses cannot be part of the three-year track program. Applicants must have a cumulative undergraduate GPA of at least 3.0 and have successfully completed the coursework listed below, with an average GPA of 3.3 or better with no single course grade below C (2.0).

- 3 credits of Biology (e.g., BI 103, BI 111)
- 3 credits of Physical Science (e.g., PY 103)
- 3 credits of Statistics (e.g., MA 131)
- 6 credits of Social Science (e.g., PS 110, One class must be PS 252: Child Development Psychology)

Once accepted, three-year track students must maintain a GPA of at least 3.3 within the three-year track courses, with no grade lower than B- in order to progress within the graduate program.
Admissions Criteria

The most competitive applicants will possess at a minimum:

• SLP prerequisite coursework GPA of 3.3 or higher with no grade lower than a C
• Overall undergraduate GPA of 3.0 or higher
• Two strong letters of recommendation from academic sources
• Twenty-five observation hours of certified speech-language pathology practice documented on SHU’s form (two-year applicants only)
• Successful interview with the speech-language pathology admissions committee upon invitation only

Admissions Requirements

• Complete an application for graduate study
• Two-year program applicants can complete the national application online at: https://portal.csdcas.org

Supply the following:

• Application fee
• Recommendation letters from academic sources
• GRE scores
• Official transcripts from all colleges and universities attended
• Admissions essay as requested in the online application
• Documentation of 25 observation hours on SHU’s specific observation form (two-year applicants only)

Deadline

The final deadline for receipt of completed applications and materials is January 15, but you are encouraged to complete your application much sooner as it takes time to process.

Interviews

Invitations to interview will be sent to selected applicants after completed applications are reviewed.

The final class will typically be set by April 15 and will include approximately 40 students in the two-year track and 10 in the three-year track.

Financial Assistance

A limited number of research and staff assistantships will be available to full-time graduate students on a competitive basis.

Student loans, deferred payment plans and a variety of other programs are available through the Office of Student Financial Assistance at 203-371-7980.

The Center for Healthcare Education

The new Center for Healthcare Education is designed to offer students with aspirations in any healthcare profession the best possible learning environment to ensure that they are prepared to succeed in the booming healthcare industry.

The state-of-the-art facility will include:

• An audiology suite
• Interprofessional education practice
• Pediatrics clinic