



## **Essential Functions Admission, Retention and Graduation Standards**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The graduate degree in Speech and Hearing Sciences is recognized as a broad degree requiring the acquisition of general knowledge and basic skills in all applicable domains of speech and hearing sciences. The education of speech-language pathologists requires assimilation of knowledge, acquisition of skills and development of judgment through patient care experience in preparation for independent and appropriate decisions required in practice. The current practices of speech-language pathology emphasize collaboration among speech-language pathologists, audiologists, other health care and education professionals, the patient/client, and the patient/client's family.

### **POLICY**

**As an accredited speech and hearing sciences program, the University of New Mexico curriculum in Speech and Hearing Sciences adheres to the standards and guidelines of the Council on Academic Accreditation in Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology. Within these guidelines, the University of New Mexico Department of Speech and Hearing Sciences has the responsibility for selecting and evaluating its students; designing, implementing, and evaluating its curriculum; and determining who should be awarded a degree. Admission and retention decisions are based not only on satisfactory academic achievement, but also on other factors that serve to ensure that the candidate can complete the essential functions of the program required for graduation.**

### **ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS**

In order to acquire the knowledge and skills requisite to the practice of speech-language pathology to function in a broad variety of clinical situations, and to render a wide spectrum of patient care, individuals must have essential skills and attributes in five areas: communication, motor, intellectual-cognitive, sensory-observational, and behavioral-social. These skills enable a student to meet graduate and professional requirements as measured by state and national credentialing agencies. Many of these skills can be learned and developed during the course of the graduate program through coursework and clinical experience. Failure to meet or maintain the Essential Functions may result in action against the student, including, but not limited to, dismissal from the program. **The starred items (\*) are skills that are more inherent and should be present when a student begins the program.**

## **A. COMMUNICATION**

A student must possess adequate communication skills to:

- Communicate proficiently in both oral and written English language.\*
- Possess reading and writing skills sufficient to meet curricular and clinical demands.\*
- Perceive and demonstrate appropriate non-verbal communication for culture and context.\*
- Modify communication style to meet the communication needs of clients, caregivers, and other persons served.\*
- Communicate professionally and intelligibly with patients, colleagues, other healthcare professionals, and community or professional groups.
- Communicate professionally, effectively, and legibly on patient documentation, reports, and scholarly papers required as a part of course work and professional practice.
- Convey information accurately with relevance and cultural sensitivity.

## **B. MOTOR**

A student must possess adequate motor skills to:

- Sustain necessary physical activity level in required classroom and clinical activities.\*
- Respond quickly to provide a safe environment for clients in emergency situations including fire, choking, etc.\*
- Access transportation to clinical and academic placements.\*
- Participate in classroom and clinical activities for the defined workday.\*
- Efficiently manipulate testing and treatment environment and materials without violation of testing protocol and with best therapeutic practice.
- Manipulate patient-utilized equipment (e.g. durable medical equipment to include AAC devices, hearing aids, etc) in a safe manner.
- Access technology for clinical management (i.e. billing, charting, therapy programs, etc.).

## **C. INTELLECTUAL / COGNITIVE**

A student must possess adequate intellectual and cognitive skills to:

- Comprehend, retain, integrate, synthesize, infer, evaluate and apply written and verbal information sufficient to meet curricular and clinical demands.\*
- Identify significant findings from history, evaluation, and data to formulate a diagnosis and develop a treatment plan.

- Solve problems, reason, and make sound clinical judgments in patient assessment, diagnostic and therapeutic plan and implementation.
- Self-evaluate, identify, and communicate limits of one's own knowledge and skill to appropriate professional level and be able to identify and utilize resources in order to increase knowledge.
- Utilize detailed written and verbal instruction in order to make unique and independent decisions.

#### **D. SENSORY/OBSERVATIONAL**

A student must possess adequate sensory skills of vision, hearing, tactile, and smell to:

- Visually and auditorily identify normal and disordered communication (fluency, articulation, voice, resonance, respiration characteristics, oral and written language in the areas of semantics, pragmatics, syntax, morphology and phonology, hearing and balance disorders, swallowing cognition, social interaction related to communication).
- Identify the need for augmentative and alternative modalities of communication.
- Visualize and identify anatomic structures.
- Visualize and discriminate imaging findings.
- Identify and discriminate findings on imaging studies.
- Discriminate text, numbers, tables, and graphs associated with diagnostic instruments and tests.
- Recognize and adjust when a client and/or client's family does or does not understand the clinician's written and or verbal communication.
- Identify and discriminate a client's spoken responses.
- Accurately monitor through both visual and auditory modalities, equipment displays and controls, including those of hearing instruments, used for assessment and treatment of patients.

#### **E. BEHAVIORAL/ SOCIAL**

A student must possess adequate behavioral and social attributes to:

- Display mature, empathetic and effective professional relationships by exhibiting compassion, integrity, and concern for others.\*
- Recognize and show respect for individuals with disabilities and for individuals of different ages, genders, race, religions, sexual orientation, and cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.\*
- Conduct oneself in an ethical and legal manner, upholding the ASHA Code of Ethics and university and federal privacy policies.\*
- Maintain general good physical and mental health and self care in order not to jeopardize the health and safety of self and others in the academic and clinical setting.\*

- Adapt to changing and demanding environments (which includes maintaining both professional demeanor and emotional health).
- Manage the use of time effectively to complete professional and technical tasks within realistic time constraints.
- Accept appropriate suggestions and constructive criticism and respond by modification of behaviors.
- Dress appropriately and professionally.

The University of New Mexico is committed to providing access, equal opportunity, and reasonable accommodation in its services, programs, activities, education, and employment for individuals with disabilities. Enrolled students who believe they have a disability for which they seek accommodation should request disability accommodation from Accessibility Resource Center (ARC) at (505) 277-3506 (Voice), (505) 277-3750 (FAX), or <http://as2.unm.edu>. ARC is located at Mesa Vista Hall room 2021 at the University of New Mexico.

**By signing this, I certify that I have read and understand the “Essential Functions of Speech and Hearing Sciences Education”; 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 and reasonable levels of support from the faculty.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

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Date

Return this document to:  
Erika Elwell  
Department Administrator  
UNM Department of Speech and Hearing Sciences  
1700 Lomas Blvd. NE, Ste. 1300  
Albuquerque, NM 87106

*Reference: Adapted from the Council of Academic Programs in Communication Sciences and Disorders (2007)*