



Essential Functions for Students in the M.S. Program in Speech-Language Pathology

The Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders at West Virginia University is committed to the education of all qualified individuals, including persons with disabilities who, with or without reasonable accommodation, are capable of performing the essential functions required of the professional program in speech-language pathology. It is the policy of West Virginia University to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1973, and all state and local requirements regarding students and applicants with disabilities. Under these laws, no otherwise qualified and competent individual with a disability shall be denied access to or participation in services, programs, and activities solely on the basis of the disability.

In accordance with federal regulations established by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the following standards are described to assist each student or candidate in evaluating his or her prospect for academic and clinical success. When a student's ability to perform is compromised, the student must demonstrate alternative means and/or abilities to perform the essential functions described.

Sensory/Observational Abilities

Students must be capable of acquiring a defined level of required information as presented through educational experiences in both basic arts and sciences and clinical sciences. To achieve the required competencies in the classroom setting, students must perceive, assimilate, and integrate information from a variety of sources. These sources include oral presentation, printed material, visual media, and live demonstrations. Consequently, students must have the potential to demonstrate adequate functional use of visual, tactile, auditory and other sensory and perceptual modalities to enable such observations and information acquisition necessary for academic and clinical performance.

Students must have adequate sensory and observational abilities to recognize disorders of speech fluency; abnormal articulation; abnormal voice, resonance, and respiration characteristics; oral and written language disorders in the areas of semantics, pragmatics, syntax, morphology, and phonology; signs of hearing disorders; signs of cognitive disorders; and signs of abnormal social interaction related to communication disorders. In addition, students need to be able to visualize anatomic structures and discriminate findings on various imaging studies, as well as to discriminate text, numbers, tables, and graphs associated with diagnostic instruments and tests. Furthermore, students should have the potential to develop sufficient sensory (visual and auditory) function and motor coordination to safely and accurately assess and remediate patients using the equipment and materials of the profession.

Communication Abilities

Effective communication is critical for students to build relationships with faculty, advisors, fellow students, coworkers, clients, and their significant others in the student's various roles of learner, colleague, consultant, and leader. Students must be able to gather, comprehend, utilize and disseminate information effectively, efficiently and according to professional standards. Students are required to communicate proficiently in both oral and written English, at a level sufficient to meet curricular and clinical demands. Students must be able to elicit information, gather information, and describe findings verbally and in writing and this communication should be comprehensible by patients, professionals, and lay-persons. In accordance with a technical report developed by ASHA's Joint Subcommittee of the Executive Board on English Language Proficiency (see [Students and Professionals Who Speak English with Accents and Nonstandard Dialects: Issues and Recommendations](#)), students and professionals "who speak a nonstandard dialect or who speak with an accent" should consider, if modeling is

necessary, whether they are able to model the target phoneme, grammatical feature, or other aspect of speech and language that characterizes the client's particular problem.

Students must be able to communicate effectively and sensitively with patients and colleagues, including individuals from different cultural and social backgrounds; this includes, but is not limited to, the ability to establish rapport with patients. Furthermore, students must have the potential to effectively communicate judgments and treatment information and to observe, recognize and understand non-verbal behavior. In accordance with an ethics statement developed by ASHA (see [Issues in Ethics: Cultural and Linguistic Competence](#)), students and professionals must demonstrate “cultural competence” to be able to deliver clinically competent services to individuals with communication disorders.

Motor Abilities

Students must possess the motor functions needed to manipulate testing and treatment materials, manipulate equipment (such as prostheses, devices, or bed controls), or provide general and emergency treatment to clients. The motor capacities usually include the physical strength and coordination to safely handle and move clients; perform general and emergency procedures; or direct clients in various practice settings, according to the needs of professional practice in speech-language pathology.

Intellectual/Cognitive Abilities

Students must demonstrate critical thinking skills so that they can problem-solve creatively, master abstract ideas, and synthesize information presented in academic, laboratory and fieldwork settings. Students must be able to comprehend, retain, integrate, synthesize, and apply information sufficient to meet curricular and clinical demands; identify relevant findings from history, evaluation, and data to formulate a diagnosis, prognosis, and management plan; and solve problems, reason, and make sound clinical judgments in patient assessment, diagnostic planning, and therapeutic planning consistent with the principles of evidence-based practice in speech-language pathology. In some areas, this requires comprehension of three-dimensional relationships and understanding of the spatial relationships of structures. Students must develop and exhibit a sense of medical ethics, and also recognize and apply pertinent legal and ethical standards.

Behavioral and Social Abilities

Students must demonstrate emotional stability and display mature, empathic, and effective interpersonal relationships with students, patients, and health care workers. Students must be able to tolerate physically and emotionally taxing workloads and to function effectively under stress. They must be able to adapt to changing environments, display flexibility, and function in the face of the uncertainties inherent in the clinical setting.

Students must exhibit the ability and commitment to work with individuals in an intense setting to meet the needs of people of diverse cultures, age groups, socioeconomic groups and challenges without bias. These individuals may be severely injured; they may be limited by cognitive, emotional and functional deficits; and their behavior may create at times an aversive reaction. The ability to interact with these individuals without being judgmental or prejudiced is critical in establishing one’s professionalism and therapeutic relationship. Students must be able to manage the use of time effectively and systematize actions to complete professional and technical tasks within realistic time constraints. Students must also be able to accept appropriate suggestions and constructive criticism and, if necessary, respond by modification of behavior. Compassion, integrity, concern for others, interpersonal skills, interest and motivation are all personal qualities that are critical to complete the professional program in speech-language pathology.

Professional Responsibility

Students must have the capacity to meet the challenges of any medical situation that requires a readiness for immediate and appropriate response without interference of personal or medical problems. This may require ancillary training (e.g., CPR, first aid, infection control, evacuation procedures).

It is each student's responsibility to attend and be able to travel to and from classes and clinical assignments on time, and possess the organizational skills and stamina for performing required tasks and assignments within allotted time frames. This involves frequent oral, written, and practical examinations or demonstrations. The student must have the ability to perform problem-solving tasks in a timely manner.

Students must exhibit adherence to policies of the university, their program, and clinical sites. This includes matters ranging from professional dress and behavior, to attending to their program's academic schedule, which may differ from the University's academic calendar and be subject to change at any time. During their academic tenure, students must learn and demonstrate knowledge of and commitment to the code of ethics of their profession and behavior that reflects a sense of right and wrong in the context of care. Students are expected to take initiative to direct their own learning. They are required to work cooperatively and collaboratively with other students on assigned projects, and participate willingly in a supervisory process involving evaluation of abilities and reasoning skills.

As students in the M.S. program in Speech-Language Pathology, they accept and comply with the Department's mission in that they strive to become clinicians who "utilize evidence-based practice; adhere to the highest personal and professional ethical standards; employ critical thinking and self-analysis; recognize the value of advanced and continuing education; demonstrate empathy, altruism, and accountability in their clinical practice; and aspire to provide exceptional quality of service for a diversity of persons of all ages with communication, swallowing, and balance disorders in an equitable and inclusive manner."

NOTE: West Virginia University is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Institution and is committed to social justice. The Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders fully supports that commitment and expects to maintain a positive clinical and learning environment based upon open communication, mutual respect, and nondiscrimination. Our facility does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, disability, veteran status, religion, sexual orientation, color, or national origin. The West Virginia University community is committed to creating and fostering a positive learning and working environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion. Students with a disability who anticipate the need for any type of accommodation in order to participate in class or clinic are encouraged to make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Accessibility Services (304-293-6700). For more information on West Virginia University's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives, please see <http://diversity.wvu.edu>.

The material in this document has been adapted from:

- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (1998). Students and professionals who speak English with accents and nonstandard dialects: Issues and recommendations [Technical Report]. Available from www.asha.org/policy.
- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2017). *Issues in ethics: Cultural and linguistic competence*. Available from www.asha.org/Practice/ethics/Cultural-and-Linguistic-Competence/.
- Hayes, L., et al. (2005). Essential functions checklist. Communication Sciences and Disorders, College of Health Professions, Medical University of South Carolina, Charleston, SC.
- Katz, J. R., Woods, S. L., Cameron, C. A., & Milam, S. (2004). Essential qualifications for nursing students. *Nursing Outlook*, 52, 277-288.
- Seton Hall University (2011). Standards for essential functions. Speech-Language Pathology, School of Health and Medical Sciences, South Orange, NJ. Available at http://www.shu.edu/academics/gradmeded/ms-speech-language-pathology/upload/SLP_Essential_Functions.pdf
- West Virginia University (2013). Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders strategic plan. College of Education and Human Services, Morgantown, WV. Available at <http://spa.wvu.edu/home/spa-mission>