

Executive Summary Of 2017-2023 Strategic Plan for the Department of Communication Disorders


The end of the 2017-2023 Strategic Planning Cycle is nearing and a new planning cycle is starting. The department had five initiatives on its last strategic plan, all of which were tied to the goals of the College of Health Professions and the University. These were (1) to increase faculty salaries to compete with today's market in an effort to retain highly qualified academic and clinical faculty, (2) to increase the number of staff to support faculty work in graduate admissions and research/grant efforts, (3) to establish "Centers of Excellence" incorporating research, academics and clinical services in several areas (e.g. school-age language, bilingualism, fluency, telepractice, autism, literacy), (4) to create new clinical training/research programs in aphasia, feeding/swallowing, hearing, voice and (5) to complete a feasibility study and proposal for the development of a Doctorate of Audiology program. These goals focused on improving the department so that we can provide the most effective and current training programs for our students, support the needs of individuals in the community with communication disorders, and aid in moving the profession forward.

The beginning of the cycle progressed well. We expanded clinical services and established programs for individuals with Parkinson's Disease and laryngectomies. We extended our reach beyond central Texas by adding research opportunities and clinical services with professionals and clients in El Salvador to an already strong bilingual concentration. Research in the development of tonal production of Mandarin Chinese was just beginning. The previously established research/clinical tracks for fluency, literacy, and autism were growing and we were starting to explore telepractice through work done in the fluency and bilingual concentrations. As the faculty increased their research and grant production, we hoped to establish a need for the internal infrastructure of admissions coordinators and grant/research support personnel. We completed a feasibility study for developing an AuD program, which showed a lack of practicality at this time due to many factors, one being the high expense for a relatively small number of graduate students.

Then, in a matter of weeks in the spring of 2020, we had new pressing issues that took our focus away from the Strategic Plan of 2017-2023. COVID-19 moved from our televisions and our computers to inside our homes and classrooms. The impact of this virus cannot be overstated. We went from thinking about collecting data and Student Learning Outcomes to worrying about the health and safety of ourselves, our families, our co-workers, our students, and our clients in one week's time. This continued for almost two years.

COVID forced us to return to our primary mission of educating students. We learned how to deliver classes, therapy, and conduct routine departmental business online. Everyone's world became singular and digital which was a polar opposite of our world prior to March 2020. We had to rely on the foundations that made this department and program excellent and through everyone's creativity, hard and tireless work for almost two years, we were able to graduate two graduate classes within the published two-year timeframe, meeting all academic and clinical competencies and hours requirements while achieving a 100% PRAXIS pass rate.

Although not all of the goals on the 2017-2023 Strategic Plan were met, we are poised to develop a new plan using past lessons to move us forward.



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