



Why Students and University Programs Should Be Interested in ACAE

By Arun Joshi

Considering the vast amount of responsibility requisite for success in graduate school, it comes as little-to-no surprise that students are not always able to plug into the big-picture issues faced by the profession. In my experience, immediate obligations—such as clinical skill development, academic coursework, and capstone deadlines—have often taken precedence over service to the profession, an obligation that I previously thought to be indirectly related to my future as a practicing audiologist. As I have

become more connected to the profession through service, I have come to realize the power of professional awareness and connection, and the capacity of students to instill great change through advocacy and education efforts.

Since the birth of the Doctor of Audiology degree (AuD) in the early 2000s, audiologists have been advocating for autonomous practice as the preferred hearing health-care provider, with the hopes of obtaining increased job security and financial advantages. Opponents of the

movement have argued that audiologists are demanding an increase in their scope of practice, while others have maintained that audiologists are not qualified to provide the services they are championing. Perhaps most concerning, however, is the way the opposition has cited gaps in and disparities between AuD educational standards as a means to decry the efforts of the profession.

Amidst the rapid changes to the health-care model, audiologists must be viewed as independent, unique providers of integrated diagnosis

and management of hearing loss. They must also protect consumers of hearing health care to ensure their insurance and private dollars are being spent on evidence-based diagnostics and treatment. In pursuit of that goal, we must raise the standards in audiology education. Students play a crucial role, in that they are well versed in the strengths and limitations of their graduate audiology programs.

As ancient Chinese philosophy states, for every yin there is inevitably a yang. In this case, an organization dedicated to excellence in audiology shows promise for addressing the educational standards maintained by graduate programs in audiology. The Accreditation Commission for Audiology Education (ACAE) is a unique accrediting agency committed to promoting quality outcomes in AuD educational programs through high standards and verification processes. Unlike other accrediting bodies, the ACAE focuses solely on standards of graduate audiology programs, and is managed and overseen by nationally recognized experts in audiology, accreditation, and public policy.

In hopes of maximizing a university's opportunity for continuous quality improvement, the ACAE focuses on three key areas of growth—outcome measures, the application process, and the evaluation process. First, it engages in the necessary research and data collection to ensure that the outcomes of didactic teaching strategies and clinical practicum experiences are effective. By doing so, the

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organization establishes education program accreditation standards that accurately reflect outcomes required for excellence in current and future practice. Furthermore, it requires the development of evidence-based outcome measures to match the educational standards. Second, the innovative efforts of the ACAE have led to the construction of a sophisticated, technological, and user-friendly Web-based system. This portal is cost-effective, consistent, and allows for immediate feedback in order to accelerate the improvement of graduate audiology programs. Additionally, the Web-based system maintains data entry to expedite future updates, as well as references national databases for comparative purposes. Finally, a recognizable strength of the ACAE is its interactive, comprehensive, and collaborative evaluation process. Consider, for example, the organization's rigorous application process and site visits, during which ACAE representatives engage with both the faculty and students.

To learn more about the ACAE process and its current and proposed educational standards, visit their Web site at www.acaeaccred.org.

The accreditation of audiology programs is important to both

hearing health-care providers and consumers. The reputation of the profession depends on the competency of its members, which is directly related to the educational foundation provided by graduate programs. To that end, graduates who are educated at the highest level reduce variance of outcomes and have the potential to create

an increased demand for audiology services. As for the consumer, an audiologist's education translates directly into the quality of patient care. Accordingly, the consumer is likely to receive efficient, cost-effective, and high-quality care when audiologists graduate from top-notch programs.

As future leaders of the profession, students play a pivotal role in ensuring that the quality of graduate audiology programs is commensurate with the needs of practicing audiologists and their patients. I now urge you to familiarize yourself with the accreditation standards and engage your faculty and peers in conversation. Are you willing to contribute to the advancement of the profession? You have a crucial role in this process. 

Arun Joshi is a third-year AuD student at the University of North Texas in Denton, Texas, and will complete his studies in May of 2017. He currently serves on the National Student Academy of Audiology (SAA) Board of Directors as the Education Committee chair, secretary, and ACAE liaison.