

STATEMENT ON LEARNING IN COMD

Adopted by the COMD faculty [March 18, 2015]

Our department's mission is to train the next generation of clinical scientists in the field of speech-language pathology. The scope of this training has been previously described in the COMD 504 Course Syllabus (Fogerty, 2014):

As a speech-language pathologist, you will be faced with challenging clinical cases that you have never encountered before. In order to provide treatment, you must understand the normal processes involved, identify the breakdown that has occurred, and formulate a plan to target that breakdown based upon a theoretical and clinical understanding of the impairment. This requires a high-level analysis of fundamental processes that goes beyond memorizing facts or concepts. It requires developing a scientific framework for approaching clinical cases.

A clinical scientist is a lifelong learner, whose career begins upon entering our program. We expect that students training to become clinical scientists will develop these traits through classroom and clinical experiences:

- **Curiosity:** A clinical scientist is curious and regularly asks questions.
- **Critical thinking:** A clinical scientist is a critical and informed consumer of evidence, who has the skills to find information and judge its value.
- **Evidence-Based Practice:** A clinical scientist integrates the best scientific evidence with clinical experience and client and caregiver values to provide the highest quality services. Therefore, a clinical scientist is not tied to a particular checklist, kit, or program.

In graduate school, learning involves action from both the instructor and the learner. The instructor's responsibility is to facilitate and scaffold learning by providing information (through lectures, readings, supervision, etc.), learning opportunities (e.g., through listening, observing, practicing, reviewing, and testing), and critical feedback on performance. The student's responsibility is to be engaged in learning both in and out of class and clinic and to request feedback and assistance as needed.

Faculty as Instructors

In order to facilitate the development of students as clinical scientists, we have the following expectations for our academic and clinical faculty:

First, instructors must provide students, who are developing clinical scientists, with both the foundational sciences of the profession and the scientific method. These tools help provide a problem-solving framework to guide future clinical decisions and help protect students from

falling prey to non-evidence based clinical gimmicks. It is our responsibility to ensure that students are knowledgeable of theory and research in the field.

Second, instructors must provide students with the most relevant and updated information in the specific content areas of the courses we teach. This content will be provided through lectures, readings, assignments, and projects.

Third, instructors should strive to make connections between academic coursework and application to clinical practice as explicit as possible. We believe that all of the material in all of our courses is applicable to assessment/intervention; however, course content may not always directly apply to planning an assessment or intervention session. Providing high quality clinical services requires much more knowledge and skills than selecting activities for a session; it requires a level of understanding that comes about when students and faculty together identify and strengthen the bridge between the classroom and the clinic.

Fourth, it is the instructor's responsibility to help students develop into the best clinical scientists possible. This means providing genuine feedback, designed to help students optimize their education. Therefore, at times, we provide feedback/comments/grades that may be interpreted as less than positive. Although we strive to encourage a positive and professional learning environment, some interactions may be uncomfortable. However, our goal is always the same: to help our students be the best they can be.

Students as Learners

While the academic and clinical faculty are responsible for facilitating students' development as clinical scientists, learning is ultimately the responsibility of the students themselves. Therefore, we have the following expectations for COMD students as learners:

Students must remain engaged both in and out of class. They should complete assigned readings and come to class prepared to ask questions or discuss topics.

Students should be self-initiators in their learning. Learners may not be aware of what they don't know if they haven't yet evaluated their own knowledge. Therefore, we believe students should be testing themselves as a means of improving learning and retention.

Students should actively request assistance when they don't understand. We encourage students to ask informed questions, which signal that they have already attempted to solve the problem on their own. Informed questions seek clarification, additional information, and/or additional understanding and application.

Developing a deeper understanding of some concepts requires students to "get their hands dirty." Assignments and projects are designed to develop that understanding. Diving into these experiences with the goal of enriching your knowledge, as well as seeking out opportunities beyond the class and the clinic are traits of the developing clinical scientist.

We believe our program should be a rigorous program to provide students the best preparation they can receive to provide clients the best clinical care and to advance the clinical standards of our profession. We are educating students to be cutting edge, the best in the field. So, students will be challenged repeatedly, and instructors will be providing feedback and guidance to rise to those challenges. We expect that going through our curriculum will require students to adapt and learn (i.e., become a clinical scientist), and we strive to recruit to our program students who have a strong desire for lifelong growth. Instructors will tell students when they are doing well, but students also should expect to hear “work on this” or “you can improve in this area” a lot more than “great job” or “that’s exactly right,” especially in the first semesters of the program. We expect students to solicit and embrace such feedback and use it constructively.

Summary

In summary, we believe strongly that the education of cutting-edge clinical scientists requires faculty to be rigorous in our instruction (providing current theoretical, research, and clinical information), and in our expectations. We support our students as they actively engage in that learning process, beginning when they enter our graduate program, and continuing throughout their professional careers.