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Accreditation

An Important Step in the

Angela Loavenbruck recently completed a term as the Chair of The Accreditation Commission for Audiology Education (ACAE). The ACAE is developing programs to provide the profession of audiology with standards of accreditation by which all audiology programs can be measured. The proposed standards define the expectations of the ACAE with regard to an accredited professional audiology (AuD) degree program and provide a framework for a program's self-study process. Additional information is available at www.acaeaccred.org.

Professions, most often through their professional associations, have a number of critical imperatives as they attempt to balance their responsibilities to the public and society in general and to their practitioners. Through a variety of self-regulatory functions, professions define their scope of practice and the body of specialized knowledge, skills and competencies that must be mastered prior to entry into the profession. In American higher education, accreditation of higher education institutions and specialized programs within those institutions is voluntary. Through voluntary accreditation, society attempts to ensure that the services provided to its citizens by various professions meet self-imposed standards of quality and are delivered with integrity. The self-regulatory process prevalent in North America is unique – in most countries throughout the world, national ministries of education perform this quality assurance function. In this country, while accreditation is voluntary, it often serves as a gatekeeper for federal funds and therefore must be responsible to the public for institutional performance in accredited programs. In the Audiology profession, standard development and accreditation is undergoing an historical change, which places it firmly in the forefront of state of the art changes in the accreditation process.

For the past 20 years, and most certainly over the past 10 years, Audiology has evolved into a distinct and unique profession. In its early development, Audiology was linked academically to speech-language pathology, a profession whose educational model and political agenda had become increasingly mismatched. As this mismatch became more noticeable, audiologists joined together to form two new national organizations that could better serve their needs. The Academy of Dispensing

Audiologists (ADA) was formed to represent the burgeoning interests of those audiologists who were dispensing hearing aids and starting practices. The American Academy of Audiology (AAA) was formed to be a voice of, by and for audiologists alone. Through the leadership of these professional organizations, our educational and training model evolved from one which stressed classroom education and student teaching assignments to educational models that stress integration of classroom and clinical education. Rather than systematically devaluing clinicians, the profession's move to doctoral education with a distinctive designator, the AuD, increases the value placed on clinical education and the practitioners who deliver these services. Our evolution has aligned the AuD degree with the attainment of knowledge, competencies and skills needed to enter the Audiology profession. Our licensure laws are slowly falling into line with the new realities of our profession. All of these developments are steps toward the autonomy of the Audiology profession.

The development of both academic standards for university programs and professional practice standards for audiologists represents the underpinnings of our profession. Our development into a doctoral entry-level profession has meant that these standards had to undergo a critical revision to coincide with the change in entry-level degree requirements. Throughout our history, the process of standard development and the process of accreditation of Audiology programs have been closely tied to ASHA's certification program. ASHA's accreditation standards have demanded that students be prepared for the ASHA certificate and have permitted supervision only from individuals who have also purchased the ASHA certificate.

and the ACAE:

Forward Evolution of the Audiology Profession

Universities have been required, as part of the accreditation process, to list the ASHA membership numbers of all faculty, staff and off-campus audiologists who provide supervision. ASHA's standards structure did not permit input from Audiology professional organizations, nor from audiologists who chose not to purchase the ASHA certificate. In addition, ASHA standards failed to differentiate sufficiently between Masters level preparation and doctoral preparation and were based on practice survey data which had not been updated. Finally, the ASHA accreditation standards included PhD programs designed to prepare researchers rather than specifically recognizing the AuD as the entry-level degree for the practice of Audiology.

As our evolution proceeded, it became clear that our Audiology professional organizations had the responsibility to create and monitor our profession's standards, both for individual practitioners and for the educational institutions that prepared audiologists. If these organizations were truly to represent the profession and its practitioners, they had to develop standard setting and accreditation mechanisms rather than continue to cede these vital functions to other professional organizations.

Throughout its history, AAA has called for the development of independent standard setting bodies which were supported by all Audiology professional organizations, rather than being controlled by a single organization. In a 1994 letter to Kenneth Moll, Chair of an ASHA "Joint Committee on Accreditation", then AAA president Lu Beck recommended that "joint" committees should indeed have representation and voting rights for all interested parties, that accreditation should be carried out by an entity which was separate from any single organization and that accreditation of Audiology education should be administered by an accrediting body



Members of the Accreditation Commission for Audiology Education shown above include (from left) Angela Loavenbruck (past- chairperson), Ian Windmill (Chairperson), Doris Gordon (Executive Director), Catherine Palmer, Linda Seestedt-Stanford, Lisa Hunter, George Osborne and Cynthia Ellison. Not shown are members James McDonald (Sec-Treas), Ted Wendel, and Donna Burns-Phillips (Public Member).

which is separate from one addressing speech-language pathology issues.

In the years since then, AAA has initiated many efforts to form an independent accrediting body.

In 2003, the development of a new accreditation body, the

Accreditation Commission for Audiology Education (ACAIE), was accomplished jointly by AAA and ADA. Funding has been provided by both of these membership organizations along with some initial funding from the Audiology Foundation of America. The Accreditation board is made up of practitioners and academics, and a unique web-based accreditation program has been developed specifically for AuD programs. ACAIE is an independent non-profit organization whose accreditation mission is to recognize, reinforce and promote high quality performance specifically in AuD educational programs through a rigorous verification process. In 2004, ACAIE engaged the services of Liaison International, Inc/Academic Management Systems to begin work on the development of an interactive, web-based accreditation system that would allow educational programs seeking accreditation from ACAIE to complete virtually all aspects of the accreditation process online. In addition to the enormous time savings of this innovative process, programs would easily be able to retrieve important national data about applications, enrollments, graduation rates, student achievement, and other data important to academic programs. Programs would also be able to share generic data with their Deans, Provosts and Presidents, as needed.

There are two major components of the ACAIE Computerized Accreditation Program (CAP). The first component is an automated online accreditation process consisting of four parts:

- 1) an accreditation home web site for standards, policies and procedures;
- 2) a program management database;
- 3) electronic surveys which form a data warehouse and data retrieval system for each program;
- 4) an ACAIE self-study website to be used by each program as it proceeds through the accreditation process and a post-visit assessment web site.

The second component consists of competency assessment metrics that will be offered to AuD programs for their use with student and program evaluation. The metrics will be used to assess student learning outcomes at several stages throughout their education, defined in terms of particular levels of knowledge, skills, abilities and competencies that a student has attained during the AuD program.

The ACAIE Board of Directors began the process of writing the educational standards for accreditation in early 2003, with review and comment requested from

innumerable experts from external agencies and organizations. After 18 months, a draft set of Standards and request for comment was distributed to 16,000 audiologists via web sites (AAA, ADA, AFA and ACAIE) and hard copies were also sent to each academic program and to numerous external groups. After review of comments, the standards were adopted by ACAIE in March 2005. Simultaneously, ACAIE began the process of obtaining recognition as a new accrediting body for AuD programs from the United States Department of Education.

Two AuD programs (CID-Washington University and Central Michigan University) volunteered to serve as Beta sites to test the CAP system before launching it to other academic programs. The beta sites have greatly assisted ACAIE in streamlining the web-based process. Both programs have completed the first phase of CAP, the completion of eight surveys, and have begun the self-study process. In addition, ACAIE held its first site visitor training session in April 2006. Ten additional programs have expressed strong interest in the ACAIE accreditation process.

As might be expected, the development of a new accreditation body has created controversy. Audiology programs that exist within Speech-Language Pathology departments are concerned about the need to undergo two different accreditation processes. Others are concerned about the ability of the Audiology profession to fund a new accrediting body. Funding is of course an issue. Accreditation is an expensive process. At this time, funding from the Academy and ADA continues. The ACAIE Board and Executive Director, Doris Gordon, are actively pursuing foundation donors for this critical effort.

The Academy has also created an Education Committee charged with developing professional practice standards for entering audiologists. In addition, ABA has begun the process of creating a new national exam to replace the Praxis exam currently used by all licensure boards. As an Accreditation body, ACAIE's function is to be informed by the profession's definition of the knowledge, skills and competencies which define an audiologist, and to use this definition in its academic standards. This three pronged effort by ACAIE, Academy's Education Committee, and ABA finally put the Audiology profession in control of the essential components of its autonomy. For more information about these efforts, visit the following web sites: www.acae.org, www.audiology.org, www.AmericanBoardofAudiology.org.