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Examining Factors Used By Students To Select A Major In Communication Sciences And Disorders

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EXAMINING FACTORS USED BY STUDENTS TO
SELECT A MAJOR IN COMMUNICATION
SCIENCES AND DISORDERS

being

A Thesis Presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the Fort Hays State University in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Science

by

Mackenzie McCartney
B.S., Fort Hays State University

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Approved _____
Major Professor

Approved _____
Chair, Graduate Council

ABSTRACT

There is a shortage of practicing speech-language pathologists (SLP) and this is not improving. Within the profession, this shortage is felt mostly in a public school. This study explored factors used by graduate students to decide about their profession and applying the knowledge of these factors to the recruitment process. Specifically, this study looked at the following questions:

1. What are the current factors that influence the selection of communication sciences and disorders as a major?
2. Was there a particular person influencing the decision to major in communication sciences and disorders?
3. What prompted students to enter into their particular graduate program?

Responses were obtained from 151 graduate students currently enrolled in a graduate program, which represents a 57% response rate. The results found that most people decided to pursue the major in college because of the desire to help others, the availability of jobs, and expected salary with the most influential people being working SLPs and parents. Location and tuition cost were the top factors when deciding on a graduate program.

Based on this information, college programs and professionals can utilize more effective recruitment tactics. SLPs, audiologists, students in communication sciences and disorders, and others, should take a more active role regarding communication disorders as a career path to help the younger generation become more aware of the professions at an earlier point in their decision making process regarding a career.

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INTRODUCTION

The field of communication sciences and disorders is comprised of two main professions: audiology and speech-language pathology (SLP). Audiology studies hearing, balance, and their related disorders and requires a clinical doctorate as the entry-level degree. SLP studies how to evaluate and treat people who have speech and language disorders along with other related disorders and requires a master's level degree as the entry-level degree.

Current SLPs and Audiologists

According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association's (ASHA) 2013 Accounts, there were a total of 11,975 certified audiologists and 141,847 certified speech-language pathologists in the United States with the total number of certified members in speech-language pathology increasing from 2012 to 2013. In contrast, the total number of certified members in audiology decreased from 2012 to 2013. Males comprised 16.2% of the audiologists and 3.7% of the SLPs. Of the ASHA members, non-member certificate holders, international affiliates, and associates, 7.6% were of a racial minority, including 1.4% who had identified as multiracial (ASHA, 2013). Additionally, 4.6% had identified their ethnicity as Hispanic or Latino. According to ASHA, the ages among the professions were evenly distributed throughout. Seventy-three and a half percent of the audiologists worked in a health care setting along with 15.6% being employed in an educational setting. As for the SLPs, 55.9% were employed in an educational setting and 38.8% in health-care settings.

Deciding on a Career

Young adults in a professional track are required to make many decisions regarding their career path (Brodsky & Cooke, 2000). Choosing a career path may essentially be one of the most difficult, yet important choices in life. The decisions can be made by researching different career choices, talking to close family or friends, or by using a career service program or survey. Beggs, Bantham, and Taylor (2008) focused on identifying the foundations of the psychological process by which undergraduate students select their academic majors. They found that some influences in choosing a major are: match of interests, course/major attributes, and job characteristics. In addition, they also found that the least likely influence in choosing a major was an information search. The same could also be true in the field of communication sciences and disorders, but there has been little research regarding the various influences related to choosing communication sciences and disorders as a major.

Undecided Majors

Having an undecided major coming into college potentially has an impact on academics and persistence of schooling. Leppel (2001) found that students with an undecided major have both decreased academic performance and low persistence rates. This is true for both men and women. St. John, Hu, Simmons, Carter, and Weber (2004) discovered that students who were undecided about a major field were less likely to continue with college as a result to lower commitment to their education. There were also indications that even if a major was decided, retention rates were explained by differences in the relative magnitudes of goal-commitment, subject-interest, social forces, and self-image effects. The student's persistence rates were also affected by negative

social factors (Leppel, 2001). Therefore, it was very important for incoming college students and young college students to have a decided major that they were willing to commit to and be able to persist in throughout their entire college career.

Influences When Choosing Communication Sciences and Disorders

When deciding on the field of communication sciences and disorders, prospective students must decide whether they want to pursue a career in speech-language pathology, audiology, or speech/hearing science. To date, little research has been conducted on the factors that attract people to the major of communication sciences and disorders (Byrne, 2008). However, Brodsky and Cooke (2000) studied three areas that influence the professional career decision: personal experience, employment opportunities, and educational requirements. Their study consisted of four different participant groups: speech-language pathology students, audiology students, practicing speech-language pathologists, and practicing audiologists. All of the four participant groups in the study rated personal factors as the highest influence when compared to employment and education. The SLPs, students in SLP, and audiology students rated employment second, which leaves education as the least influential. On the other hand, audiology professionals rated education as second. Brodsky and Cooke also conducted a descriptive analysis of the individuals and the three highest ranked influences were: my desire to work in a helping profession, my desire to work with people, and the diversity of professional work settings.

Byrne (2008) conducted a study that consisted of two participant groups: current speech-language pathology students and prospective speech-language pathology students. Byrne looked at the participants' exposure, both socially and therapeutically, to an SLP.

She observed that 47% of the participants who were current students had a friend that was a working speech-language pathologist or a current student, 50% had a friend that had received services for a communication disorder, and 33% had a family member who received services for a speech or language disorder. The prospective students in her study had lower percentages in the previous three categories, with 25% that had a friend who was a working SLP or current student, 34% who had a friend that had received services for a communication disorder, and 21 % who had a family member who received services for a speech or language disorder. That same study, also indicated, that parents and family were the most influential people in career choice. Lastly, Byrne also found that 68% of high school seniors who were prospective communication disorders and sciences students at a career fair indicated they had not known an SLP and 48% did not report any therapeutic exposure to one.

Oney and Stewart (1997) conducted a survey targeting students' knowledge and attitudes about the profession of communication disorders in order to determine the scope, methods, and content of future recruitment in the profession. From the 55 surveys that were completed, they found that 33% of the participants became aware of communication sciences and disorders in college with a majority of the respondents learning about the profession through personal experience. Sixty-two percent of the respondents said that they decided to pursue this profession in college whereas 18% had decided in high school. The primary reason or influences that led to the decisions of communication disorders were: desire to help others (84%), availability of jobs (67%), and expected salary (36%).

Shortage of Clinicians

Shortages of clinicians are primarily found in the educational setting even though it is the primary employer of practicing speech-language pathologists. The shortage was not improving much as Edgar and Rosa-Lugo (2007) indicated that there was a high turnover rate in the public school setting. Some factors that impacted the shortage of clinicians were: improved technology leading to earlier diagnosis, changes in intervention strategies, and changing demographics (Edgar & Rosa-Lugo, 2007). New inventions and cures to unknown diseases have started to evolve. This new technology, in turn, helps doctors and other professionals to diagnose disorders earlier, even as early as in the womb. Since these early diagnoses have been taking place, the demand for speech-language pathologists, audiologists, and other professionals increase because the number of clientele with a diagnosis increased.

Many different intervention approaches are surfacing and are becoming popular. Response to Intervention (RTI) is becoming increasingly common as a means for identifying students with reading and learning disabilities while providing differentiated high-quality instruction to children (Gillam & Justice, 2010). RTI is used to help in early-intervention and to help determine whether or not a child needs special education services based on their performance. RTI, therefore, leads to a larger client base and can present an overwhelming caseload. One element that may attract a student in choosing communication disorders, may be the dire need for speech-language pathologists, thus, leading to a sense of job security.

Summary of Literature

Based off the previous literature review, professionals in the communication sciences and disorders major are in high demand. Factors that lead students to choose the major vary from the desire to help others to the availability of employment as well as the diversity of work settings. Professionals are able to work in medical settings, educational settings, or long-term care settings. A common way of deciding on the field came from having exposure to speech-language pathology through personal experience of having therapy or knowing someone who was an SLP, with most students deciding to pursue the profession in college. Although previous studies (Brodsky & Cooke, 2000; Byrne, 2008; Oney & Stewart, 1997; Rockwood & Madison, 1993) have looked at the factors, there is a need for current research in this research.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the current influences when choosing communication sciences and disorders as a major as well as when choosing a particular graduate program; and once knowing those influences, how they can help recruitment to the field. The following research questions were investigated:

1. What are the current factors that influenced the selection of communication sciences and disorder as a major?
2. Was there a particular person influencing the decision to major in communication sciences and disorders?
3. What prompted students to enter into their particular graduate program?

METHODOLOGY

In order to examine the influences when choosing communication disorders as a major and a graduate program, a survey design was used to gather data for this study.

Approval Process

This study was submitted to the Fort Hays State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval. Approval was granted through an exempt review prior to any gathering of data. A copy of the IRB approval letter may be found in Appendix A.

Participants

Current graduate students over the age of 18 from nine accredited university communication disorders graduate programs were recruited for this study. Ethnicity, race, and gender did not exclude any participant. The nine universities that were recruited to be in the study were: Fort Hays State University (KS), Wichita State University (KS), University of Kansas, Idaho State University, Georgia State University, Eastern Illinois University, Edinboro University (PA), Marshall University (WV), and Temple University (PA). Utilizing a convenience sampling method, these universities were selected through personal contacts at each institution. Student outcome benchmarks were required to be publicly displayed for accreditation in accordance to the Department of Education (Table 1). As noted in Table 1, completion rates for the nine schools ranged from 86-100% with 97-100% of graduated being employed. The number of graduates that completed studies ranged from 19-34 with the mean being approximately 25 students.

Table 1.

Student Outcome Measures

University	Annual Program Completion Rates	Annual Praxis Pass Rates	Annual Employment Rates
Fort Hays State University (N=28)	20/20 (100%)	20/20 (100%)	20/20 (100%)
Wichita State University (N=20)	23/23 (100%)	23/23 (100%)	23/23 (100%)
University of Kansas (N=7)	31/31 (100%)	28/29 (97%)	31/31 (100%)
Idaho State University (2 campuses) (N=20)	32/34 (94%)	19/19 (100%)	32/32 (100%)
Edinboro University (N=9)	20/20 (100%)	20/20 (100%)	19/20 (95%)
Eastern Illinois University (N=19)	28/30 (93%)	28/28 (100%)	28/28 (100%)
Georgia State University (N=6)	19/22 (86%)	22/22 (100%)	22/22 (100%)
Marshall University (N=24)	19/19 (100%)	19/19 (100%)	30/30 (100%)
Temple University (N=18)	22/24 (92%)	19/19 (100%)	31/31 (100%)
Mean	24.77 (96.11%)	(99.67%)	(99.44%)
Range	19-34	19-29	19-32

Respondents

There were 267 questionnaires sent to the selected university communication sciences and disorders graduate programs. The following demographics were gathered for the group of respondents.

Response rate. Of the 267 questionnaires that were sent out, 151 questionnaires were completed and returned resulting in a 57% response rating. The completed questionnaires were returned from programs from varied geographical regions of the United States (Figure 1).

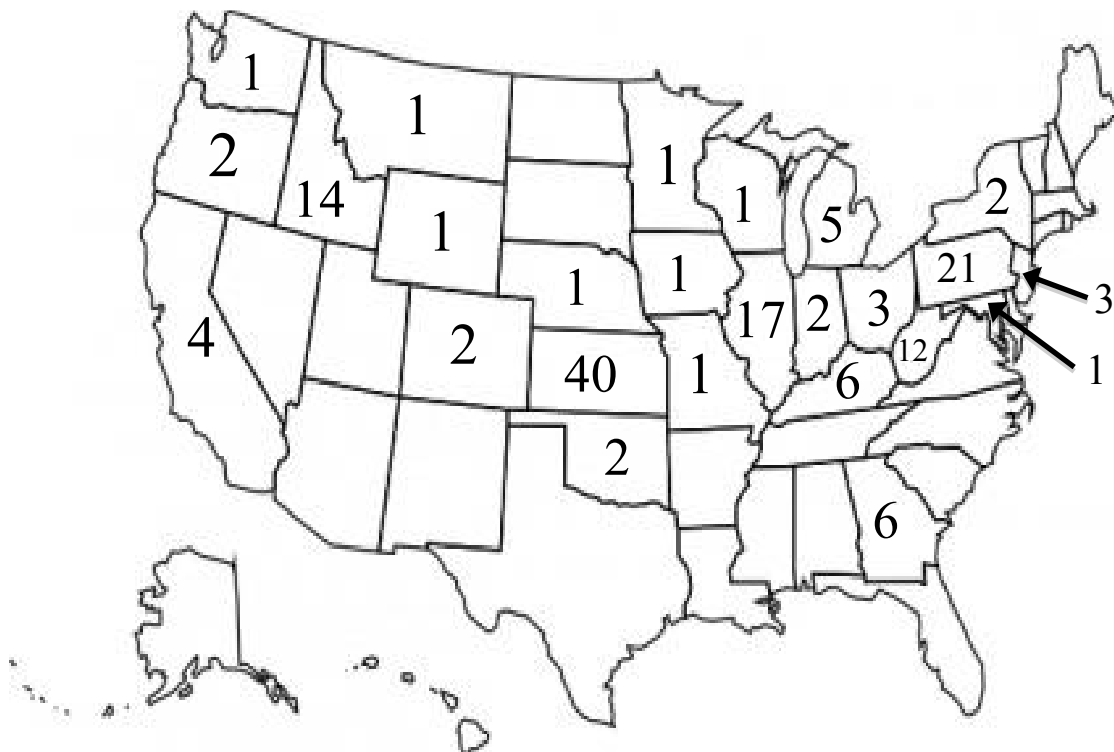
Age and Gender. Respondents' mean age was 25.49, with a range of 21 to 43 years. Of the 151 respondents, four were male and 147 were female.

Ethnicity. One hundred thirty-eight of the respondents were of the White/non-Hispanic ethnicity; four were Hispanic and three were Asian/Pacific Islander. There were six participants that indicated they were of some other ethnicity (i.e., American Indian/White/African American, Asian/African American, Basque, White/Asian, Turkish, and White/Hispanic).

Classification. One hundred six respondents were first year graduate students and 41 were second year graduate students.

Anticipated profession. The anticipated profession that was most widely represented was speech-language pathology (147 respondents). Four of the respondents indicated they were pursuing graduate degrees in audiology.

Figure 1.

Geographical Representation of Respondents*Materials*

A 20-item questionnaire was developed and included demographic questions (7 questions), potential influences or influential people that were present when choosing the major (10 questions), and the factors the participants had when choosing their particular graduate program (3 questions) (Appendix B).

Procedures

Packets of questionnaires were mailed to a designated faculty member at each university. Prior to mailing each packet, the faculty member provided information regarding how many questionnaires he or she would be able to distribute to students.

Each packet included a letter to the faculty member (Appendix C) as well as 20 to 60 questionnaires. Enclosed with each questionnaire was a letter for the student (Appendix D) and a business reply envelope.

Participants were asked to complete the questionnaire by circling the letter next to the selection that was most appropriate to them. The questionnaires were completed anonymously in 10 to 15 minutes. The data were used to identify the influences when choosing communication sciences and disorders as a major, choosing a particular graduate program, and once knowing those influences, how they can help recruitment to the field.

Data Analysis & Reliability

Answers to the questions were tallied and recorded on a spreadsheet by the principal investigator and then by a research assistant. Comparison of the spreadsheets resulted in 94% reliability. Totals for each question that were ultimately used in this study were that of the principal investigator as she was most familiar with the study and recording the results. Data were then analyzed descriptively.

RESULTS

The questionnaire that was completed by the participants was split into four different sections in order to answer each research question. These sections examined the following topics:

1. When participants became aware and decided on the profession.
2. Influences when deciding on communication disorders as a major.
3. Influential people who aided in the decision-making process.
4. Influences when deciding on a particular graduate program.

The results of this study were reported in regards to the number of responses received for each question and their corresponding percent.

Becoming Aware and Deciding on the Profession

Of the 152 responses to the question regarding when participants became aware of the profession, 43% said they first became aware of the profession of communication disorders in college whereas 29% said they became aware in high school (Table 2). In addition, the respondents had the choice to pick “other” if none of the selections fit. The responses that were provided by the four people who selected “other” were as follows:

- I found out when my child needed the services
- My mom is an SLP
- When looking at degrees offered in Idaho universities
- When shadowing a physician’s assistant turned into shadowing an SLP

Table 2.

When did you first become aware of the profession?

Selected responses	No. of responses	% of responses
College	65	43%
High School	44	29%
Out of School/Work Setting	18	12%
Preschool/Elementary School	14	9%
Middle/Junior High School	7	5%
Other	4	3%

The 65 participants who indicated that they first became aware of the profession in college were then asked to indicate what year in college they became aware of the profession. Twenty-four (35%) of the respondents reported that their sophomore year in college was when they first became aware of the profession, while 18 (26%) identified that they became aware either entering their freshman year or during their freshman year (Table 3). In contrast, four participants said they became aware of the major after transferring from another college and one participant became aware while pursuing a second degree. The one respondent who selected “other” indicated that they were aware of the career earlier, but learned more and began considering the profession during his or her senior year of college.

Table 3.

If it was college, when did you become aware of the profession?

Selected responses	No. of responses	% of responses
Sophomore year	24	35%
Entering freshman/freshman year	18	26%
Junior year	14	21%
Senior year	6	9%
Entering transfer student	4	6%
Second degree	1	1%
Other	1	1%

The way in which participants most often heard of the profession was word of mouth (N=56) (Table 4). Another 56 respondents learned of speech-language pathology from other sources than those that were listed. Some trends found in the “other” responses were as follows:

- Through family or friend (N=16)
- Through personal experiences (N=3)
- Through college coursework (N=2)
- Through working in another career (N=1)

In contrast, preschool/elementary school and career days were the least likely ways in which participants learned about communication sciences and disorders as a profession with eight and two participants selecting these two responses respectively.

Table 4.

How did you originally find out about this profession?

Selected responses	No. of Responses	% of responses
Word of mouth	56	36%
Other	56	36%
Individual career research	23	15%
Career counseling experience	11	7%
Preschool/Elementary School	8	5%
Career Day (K-12)	2	1%

Of the 156 responses concerning when participants decided to pursue a degree in communication sciences and disorders, 68 participants reported that they decided to pursue the degree in college (Table 5). Thirty-six decided on communication disorders in high school, whereas 32 decided after working in another career. There were five respondents who selected “other” response and provided the following responses:

- It was an option in high school.
- I decided during pursuit of a second degree.
- While pursuing another career.
- I taught for two years following graduation and in my second year of teaching I applied to graduate programs.
- I decided after 12 years as a stay at home mom.

Table 5.

When did you first decide to pursue a career in this profession?

Selected responses	No. of responses	% of responses
College	68	44%
High School	36	23%
After working in another career	32	21%
Within 1 year of college graduation	11	7%
Before high school	4	3%
Other	5	3%

Influences When Deciding on the Profession

The second section of the questionnaire examined the influences when participants were deciding on communication sciences and disorders as a career. One hundred thirty one (87%) of the respondents chose the desire to help others as the main influence when deciding on this profession (Table 6). Availability of jobs (70%), expected salary (50%), and personal contact with professionals (43%) were also main influences toward the decision-making process. Brochures/posters, information from a counselor, and personal experience from receiving services for a communication disorder presented little influence when making decisions. Some common trends in regards to the “other” selection were: “My love for children and/or adults (N=2),” “It allows for flexibility (N=2),” “Influence from a parent (N=2),” and “It fit my personality (N=1).”

Table 6.

What influences led your decision to enter this field? (Mark all that apply)

Selected responses	No. of responses	% of responses
Desire to help others	131	87%
Availability of jobs	105	70%
Expected salary	75	50%
Personal contact with professionals	65	43%
Family member experiencing a communication disorder	55	36%
Introductory course in field	33	22%
Other	28	19%
Information from counselor	14	9%
Personal experience from receiving services	11	7%
Brochures/posters	4	3%

Participants were then asked to pick their number one reason for deciding on communication disorders (Table 7). Over half of the participants (61%) indicated that the desire to help others was their number one reason when deciding to enter the field. Other top reasons were the availability of jobs and having a family member experiencing a communication disorder. Brochures/posters (0%) and information from counselors (1%) were the least influential factors. The two respondents who chose “other” identified that their number one reason for choosing the field was their love for children and there was not a single reason. Rather, there was a combination of the previously stated reasons.

Table 7.

What was the number one reason for your decision to enter this field? (Select one)

Selected responses	No. of responses	% of responses
Desire to help others	86	61%
Availability of jobs	24	17%
Family member experiencing a communication disorder	13	9%
Expected salary	6	4%
Introductory course in field	5	4%
Personal experience from receiving services	3	2%
Personal contact with professionals	2	1%
Other	2	1%
Information from counselor	1	1%
Brochures/posters	0	0%

Participants then rated the various factors using a scale from one to four with one being not important at all, two being of little importance, three represented that the factor was important, and four was that the factor was very important. The desire to help others was the factor with the greatest number of responses (N= 103) within a rating category (Table 8). Whereas, 2% of respondents believed that it was not important at all. Knowing an SLP/audiologist was the factor that had the most participants who said it was not important at all.

Table 8.

Rate how important the following factors are when selecting a major.

Factors	Summary of Responses			
	1 not important at all	2 a little important	3 important	4 very important
Salary	6% (9)	23% (34)	52% (77)	19% (29)
Benefits	6% (8)	28% (40)	45% (65)	21% (30)
Work Schedule	8% (11)	22% (32)	41% (60)	29% (43)
Working with children	18% (27)	25% (37)	31% (45)	25% (37)
Working with adults	15% (21)	33% (48)	30% (43)	21% (30)
Working with special populations	12% (17)	24% (35)	39% (58)	25% (37)
Knowing an SLP/audiologist	32% (44)	29% (41)	25% (35)	14% (19)
Family member	40% (56)	23% (32)	26% (36)	11% (16)
The will to help others	2% (3)	7% (10)	21% (31)	70% (103)

Influential People

Working speech-language pathologists/audiologists (N=49; 32%) and parents (N=46; 30%) were the two most influential people when selecting communication disorders (Table 9). Thirty-three participants indicated that no one was influential in the decision-making process. A counselor was the least likely person to effect the decisions with only eight participants indicating that they were influential. The “other” selection had the following trends: family friends (N=6), former bosses (N=2), and past clients (N=2).

Table 9.

*Was there a person who was influential in your decision to enter this field?
(Mark all that apply)*

Selected responses	No. of responses	% of responses
Working Speech-Language Pathologist/Audiologist	49	32%
Parent	46	30%
No One	33	22%
Family member	28	19%
Teacher	19	13%
Family member with communication disorder	18	12%
Academic Advisor	16	11%
Other	13	9%
Counselor	8	5%

Influences When Deciding on a Graduate Program

Geography, finances, and quality of graduate programs were the leading factors impacting participants' selection of where to attend graduate school (Table 10).

Specifically, location of the graduate program was the primary factor when deciding what program to enter (N=113). Tuition cost (N=91) and reputation of the program (N=89) were also part of the majority. In contrast, encouragement from alumni/current students and university size were the two least influential factors. Some common trends in the

“other” category were positions for graduate assistantships, the fact that it was the only place they were accepted, and the fact that the program had a clinical focus.

Table 10.

What prompted you to enter into your particular college program? (Mark all that apply)

Selected responses	No. of responses	% of responses
Location	113	75%
Tuition cost	91	60%
Reputation of program	89	59%
Interactions with faculty	67	44%
Program size	53	35%
Types of experiences	50	33%
Cost of living	47	31%
Family	37	25%
Encouragement from alumni/current student	34	23%
University size	29	19%
Other	20	13%

Once influential factors were indicated, participants provided information about how many programs they applied to and to how many they were wait listed. The range of the number of programs applied to was from one to eighteen programs (Table 11). An average of four programs were applied to by respondents with most of the respondents saying that they applied to anywhere from one to four programs. The range of

respondents that were wait listed was zero to eleven programs (Table 12). Most participants were wait listed to zero or one program.

Lastly, participants were asked to indicate reasons that they chose communication disorders as a profession that were not asked earlier. They were also asked to provide any further comments in regards to this study. Results to these questions are found in Appendixes E and F.

Table 11.

To how many programs did you apply?

No. of programs	f	cf
18	1	153
17	0	152
16	0	152
15	0	152
14	0	152
13	1	152
12	3	151
11	3	148
10	3	145
9	3	142
8	8	139
7	7	131
6	11	124
5	21	113
4	25	92
3	22	67
2	15	45
1	30	30

f=frequency

cf=cumulative frequency

Table 12.

For how many programs were you wait listed?

No. of programs	f	cf
11	1	148
10	0	147
9	1	147
8	0	146
7	0	146
6	0	146
5	3	146
4	8	143
3	7	135
2	21	128
1	45	107
0	62	62

f=frequency

cf=cumulative frequency

DISCUSSION

This study explored two factors used by graduate students in communication sciences and disorders when deciding about their profession. Specifically, these were deciding on a major and deciding on a program to attend. The data were then split into four categories:

- When participants became aware and decided on the profession.
- Influences when deciding on communication disorders as a major.
- Determining influential people that aided in the decision-making process.
- Influences when deciding on a particular graduate program.

Becoming Aware and Deciding on the Profession

Most of the participants were unaware of the field until college, which concurs with Oney and Stewart (1997). This study provided additional insight by examining what year in college students first became aware. The data indicated that during their sophomore year in college or earlier was when a majority of the respondents became aware of a profession in communication disorders. Most respondents did not decide to pursue the major until college or after working another job for a while. Oney and Stewart (1997) reported similar results with a majority of their participants deciding on communication disorders in college. Along with finding when participants became aware and decided on the profession, this study surveyed what influences led participants to originally find out about the profession. The current study suggested that individual career research and word of mouth were two of the most common pathways when discovering the profession.

Influences When Deciding on the Profession

Similar to Brodsky and Cooke (2000), this study found that the desire to help others or be in a ‘helping profession’ was influential in choosing communication disorders as a career. Brodsky and Cooke discovered a similar pattern with the desire to work with people and the diversity of work settings to be the top influences. Oney and Stewart (1997) also had similar findings with the primary reasons that led to the decisions of communication disorders being: the desire to help others, availability of jobs, and expected salary.

Influential People

In the study by Byrne (2008), parents or family members were the most influential people when choosing a career. Parents were ranked high, however, the current study found that working speech-language pathologists/audiologists were most influential. Rockwood and Madison (1993) indicated that a family member or friend that is in the profession had influenced their sample. Parents and SLPs had similar response numbers as influential people in this study, but the specificity of the SLPs being friends or family was not made.

Influences When Deciding on a Graduate Program

In regards to deciding on a graduate program, some students refer to the student outcome measures needed for accreditation. As results showed, the outcome measures of the universities used were very similar. So, the responses about factors when deciding on a graduate program can be assumed to be similar among the universities. The three highest-ranking factors that influenced decisions when choosing a particular graduate

program to attend were location of the college, tuition costs, and the reputation of the program.

Strengths of the Study

There were participants from 25 states that completed the questionnaire, which represented half of the United State. The questionnaire offered many options for factors that are considered when choosing a career in communication sciences and disorders as well as a variety of formats for the questions. Another strength of this study is that there was a good response rate associated with the survey design.

Limitations of the Study

A limitation of this study is even though 25 states were surveyed, not all states or regions were represented. Specifically, the southern and New England areas of the United States were not included in this survey. Also, there were more first year graduate students who participated in this study due to the time of the year that the programs were surveyed. Another limitation was the format of question 15 on the survey. Some participants misread or misinterpreted the directions for the question as they rated the factors starting from one being the most important to nine being the least important. However, the question was intended to ask the participants to rate importance on a scale of one to four for each factor. A third limitation was that responses were not compared between universities to determine if trends were present within students at the same or similar universities. Outcome data is one limited way to compare university programs. The lack of university program information is another limitation to this study. One final limitation was that this study is considered a pilot study in that it represents responses from nine of the 259 programs..

Implications for Future Research

For future research, this study should be replicated with a bigger sample size. The methodology of this study could be used when comparing bigger universities to smaller universities to see if influences are different based on university size. Further research could also compare the influences between urban universities and rural universities. Another study could also compare influences among different ethnicities. Other studies could also look at those universities who have medical facilities attached or those universities that cost more.

Conclusions

These data and information are helpful when it comes to recruitment to the field of communication sciences and disorders. Considering these factors and teaching people about this field can help identify prospective students. It may be concluded that word of mouth was the most common way participants found out about the major. Speech-language pathologists, audiologists, communication sciences and disorders students, and assistants, need to take an active role regarding communication disorders as a career path to help the younger generation become aware of the professions at an earlier point in career decisions. Some recruitment ideas that can be used based off of the results of this study are:

- SLPs could educate juniors and seniors within their school system (if applicable) and let them know about the field and what they do.
- SLPs should educate teachers, nurses, administrators, physical therapists, occupational therapists, and other colleagues in their profession and help them to spread the word about their services.

- Working professionals in all clinical settings should consider having individuals shadow them to expose the younger generation to the field sooner.

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APPENDIX A
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL FORM



FORT HAYS STATE UNIVERSITY

Forward thinking. World ready.

OFFICE OF SCHOLARSHIP AND SPONSORED PROJECTS

DATE: February 6, 2014

TO: Mackenzie McCartney, B.S.

FROM: Fort Hays State University IRB

STUDY TITLE: [562411-1] Examining Factors When Choosing A Communication Disorders Graduate Program: A Survey

IRB REFERENCE #: 14-063

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

DECISION DATE: February 6, 2014

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # 2

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research study. The departmental human subjects research committee and/or the Fort Hays State University IRB/IRB Administrator has determined that this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

Please note that any changes to this study may result in a change in exempt status. Any changes must be submitted to the IRB for review prior to implementation. In the event of a change, please follow the Instructions for Revisions at <http://www.fhsu.edu/academic/gradschl/irb/>.

The IRB administrator should be notified of adverse events or circumstances that meet the definition of unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects. See <http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/policy/AdvEvtGuid.htm>.

We will put a copy of this correspondence on file in our office. Exempt studies are not subject to continuing review.

If you have any questions, please contact Leslie Paige at lpaige@fhsu.edu or 785-628-4349. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

APPENDIX B
QUESTIONNAIRE

Examining Factors When Choosing a Communication Disorders Graduate Program: A Survey

Instructions: Please circle the answer(s) that are most appropriate to you. Your answers will be kept strictly anonymous. When you are finished, please return the survey in the provided envelope.

Demographics

1. **What is your age?** _____
2. **Gender (circle your answer):**
Male Female
3. **Ethnicity?**
 - a.) Hispanic
 - b.) American Indian
 - c.) White/Non-Hispanic
 - d.) Asian/Pacific Islander
 - e.) Other (Please specify):

4. **Name of University you are attending?**

- Home State?** _____
5. **Classification?**
 - a.) 1st year Graduate student
 - b.) 2nd year Graduate student
 - c.) Doctoral Student
 - d.) Other (Please specify):

6. **Anticipated profession/actual profession?**
 - a.) Speech-language pathology
 - b.) Audiology
 - c.) Speech Science
 - d.) Hearing Science

7. Expected/Earned highest degree?

- a.) Master's
- b.) Doctorate
- c.) Other (Please specify):

Factors

8. When did you first become aware of the profession?

- a.) Preschool/Elementary School
- b.) Middle/Junior High School
- c.) High School
- d.) College
- e.) Out of school/Work setting
- f.) Other (Please specify):

9. If it was in college, when did you become aware of the profession?

- a.) Entering freshman/freshman year
- b.) Sophomore year
- c.) Junior year
- d.) Senior year
- e.) Entering transfer student
- f.) Second degree
- g.) Other (Please specify):

- h.) N/A

10. How did you originally find out about this profession?

- a.) Preschool/Elementary School
- b.) Career Day (K-12)
- c.) Career counseling experience
- d.) Individual Career Research
- e.) Word of Mouth
- f.) Other (Please specify):

11. When did you first decide to pursue a career in this profession?

- a.) Before High School
- b.) High School
- c.) College
- d.) Within 1 year of college graduation
- e.) After working in another career
- f.) Other (Please specify):

12. What influences led to your decision to enter this field? (Mark all that apply)

- a.) Desire to Help Others
- b.) Personal experience with a family member experiencing a communication disorder
- c.) Personal experience from receiving services for a communication disorder
- d.) Availability of Jobs
- e.) Expected Salary
- d.) Introductory course in field
- e.) Personal contact with professionals
- f.) Information from counselor
- g.) Brochures/Posters
- h.) Other (Please specify):

13. Of the choice below, what was the number one reason for decision to enter this field? (Select only one)

- a.) Desire to Help Others
- b.) Personal experience with a family member experiencing a communication disorder
- c.) Personal experience from receiving services for a communication disorder
- d.) Availability of Jobs
- e.) Expected Salary
- f.) Introductory course in field
- g.) Personal contact with professionals
- h.) Information from counselor
- i.) Brochures/Posters
- j.) Other (Please specify):

14. Was there a person that was influential on your decision when choosing communication disorders? (Mark all that apply)

- a.) Parent
- b.) Family member
- c.) Family member with communication disorder
- d.) Counselor
- e.) Teacher
- f.) Working Speech-Language Pathologist/Audiologist
- g.) Academic advisor
- h.) None
- i.) Other (Please specify):

15. Please rate how important (not important at all (1), a little important (2), important (3), or very important (4)) the following factors are when selecting a major:

Salary _____

Benefits _____

Work schedule _____

Working with children _____

Working with adults _____

Working with special populations (e.g. TBI, Downs syndrome, etc.) _____

Knowing a speech-language pathologist/audiologist _____

Family member _____

The will to help others _____

16. What prompted you to enter into your particular college program? (Mark all that apply)

a.) Tuition Cost

b.) Cost of Living

c.) Location

d.) University Size

e.) Program Size

f.) Interaction with Faculty

g.) Encouragement from alumni/current student

h.) Reputation of program

i.) Types of Experiences

j.) Family

k.) Other (Please specify):

17. To how many programs did you apply?

18. For how many programs were you wait listed?

19. Are there any other reasons you chose communication disorders as a profession that were not asked?

20. Any further comments?

Thank you for your participation. Place this completed survey into the envelope provided no later than March 7, 2014.

APPENDIX C
LETTER TO FACULTY

March 28, 2014

Dear Colleague:

I am Mackenzie McCartney, a graduate student in speech-language pathology at Fort Hays State University in Hays, KS. I would like to invite you to participate in an important study on the factors your graduate students considered when choosing a communication disorders graduate program by having 20 of your graduate students complete the enclosed survey. This could include first and second year graduate students.

I am conducting the survey to help partially fulfill the requirements for my master's degree. This study is under the direction of Dr. Fred Britten, Professor of Communication Disorders. I am surveying various universities across the United States in order to obtain a wide range of information. To get a true picture of factors involved with this decision-making process, it is important that many students have a chance to participate.

It is important for participants to understand that their *participation is voluntary*. They may choose not to answer some or all of the questions. *The survey response is anonymous* and I do not ask for names or other personal identifiers. Survey results will be presented as summary information only, and no individual answers will be shared.

The survey takes about 10-15 minutes to fill out. For each question, they will completely circle the answer(s) they choose.

Please do not have students put their names on the survey. When the students are finished, please ask that they return their individual survey in the postage paid envelope provided with each survey. I would like to ask that the surveys be returned by **April 7, 2014**.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at mrmccartney@mail.fhsu.edu or 402-621-0470.

Sincerely,

Mackenzie McCartney, B.S.
Graduate Student

APPENDIX D
LETTER TO STUDENTS

February 18, 2014

Dear Student:

I am Mackenzie McCartney, a graduate student in speech-language pathology at Fort Hays State University in Hays, KS. I would like to invite you to participate in an important study on the factors you considered when choosing a communication disorders graduate program by completing the enclosed survey.

I am conducting the survey to help partially fulfill the requirements for my master's degree. This study is under the direction of Dr. Fred Britten, Professor of Communication Disorders. I am surveying various universities across the United States in order to obtain a wide range of information. To get a true picture of factors involved with this decision-making process, it is important that many students have a chance to participate.

It is important for you to understand that your *participation is voluntary*. You may choose not to answer some or all of the questions. *The survey response is anonymous* and I do not ask for names or other personal identifiers. Survey results will be presented as summary information only, and no individual answers will be shared.

The survey takes about 10-15 minutes to fill out. For each question, please completely circle the answer(s) you choose.

Please do not put names on the survey. When you are finished, please return your individual survey in the postage paid envelope provided with each survey. I would like to ask that the surveys be returned by **March 7, 2014**.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at mrmccartney@mail.fhsu.edu or 402-621-0470.

Sincerely,

Mackenzie McCartney, B.S.
Graduate Student

**Survey begins on reverse side.
Please note short return time!**

APPENDIX E

OTHER REASONS NOT ALREADY DISCUSSED

Note: The comments in this section were entered by the participants into the open – response section of the questionnaire for the following question: *Are there any other reasons you chose communication disorders as a profession that were not asked?* The comments were edited to correct spelling and grammatical errors, but content was unaffected.

Other Reasons Not Already Discussed

- Started in psychology and after working in the field after undergrad I saw how flooded it was.
- Working in pediatric psychology was not rewarding.
- Length of program (versus a Ph.D. option in my other career option).
- I am interested in communication; verbal, non-verbal, and particularly those who are ESL.
- I have always liked studying human communication; so disordered communication was a natural next step.
- There is a strong need for an ASHA certified SLP in my small, rural hometown. I want to fulfill this role and give back to my community.
- Really understanding how significant communication is to every person and how important it is to try and allow others to compensate or learn ways to communicate more effectively.
- Previous experience related to the field (voice, public relations, acting).
- Many different work settings.
- It would be interesting to note who chose audiology versus SLP in college and why; it was a tough choice for me.
- Learning more in undergrad about continuing education and what is considered our scope of practice was simply confirmation that this field was perfect for me.
- Ability to work in a variety of settings, diverse populations, ever-changing field.
- I have my B.A. in history and English and I like how closely linked SLP is to English in regards to reading and writing.

- The flexibility of the field was also a factor. I like having the ability to work in a hospital setting, school setting, or private setting. Also, the ability to work with kids or adults was a factor.
- It seemed like a rewarding and enjoyable profession.
- I enjoyed the medical setting but did not want to be a nurse or doctor.
- I was really interested in the social ramifications associated with communication impairments and how the field can impact how people look at individuals with a communication impairment.
- I grew up with a disability, so personal experience that did not necessarily warrant need for special service but has influenced my career path to helping others.
- Convergence of factors influenced my decision.
- Interest in linguistics.
- The flexibility in potential career paths and ability to shift settings throughout your career if desired without having to earn a separate degree.
- Passion for field in linguistics (my B.A.).
- Graduate assistantship/financial aid.
- Ability to work with children and adults and to have weekends off.
- It is interesting.
- I like the manner of interaction with clients; it is more one-on-one to small groups, which fits my personality.

APPENDIX F
FURTHER COMMENTS

Note: The comments in this section were entered by the participants into the open – response section of the questionnaire for the following question: *Any further comments?* The comments were edited to correct spelling and grammatical errors, but content was unaffected.

Further Comments:

- Family and an SLP encourage me that I could use my psychology background and have more fulfilling interactions and more job opportunities.
- Hope I make the money I am wanting
- I started undergrad in a non-communication disorders field. My senior year I chose communication disorders, added a year to undergrad and then applied to various programs.
- I only applied to programs that accepted non-communication disorders degrees on their applications.
- I drive 600 miles per week to attend classes and clinicals because I live in Topeka. KU is an intercampus program with KU Medical Center, so driving is required. I would have applied to Washburn if they had an SLP program; however, I do appreciate the expertise at KU.
- I began with the desire to pursue education, however, my mom informed about how this major allowed me to be in the schools but I was not trapped if I later decided I did not like the school systems.
- Question #15- the “family member” option is confusing.
- Location was my number one determiner of college choice.
- I was interested in teaching, but there were no jobs available and I did not like the salary.
- I was also interested in nursing but did not particularly like the “cleaning” aspects.
- Speech-language pathology provides opportunities to be a medical or educational program.
- For many top-rated schools, the cost of tuition is extremely high and there are very few opportunities for scholarships or grants. I think for me, and others I have spoken to, this was a large part of the decision process.

- This survey made me think about why I am doing what I am doing. It was nice to reflect on those things and to remember what my goals are.