



## ***Eight-Year Program Review IBHE Report Summary:***

### **PROGRAM REVIEW REPORT SUMMARY**

1. **Reporting Institution:** Eastern Illinois University
2. **Program Reviewed:** M.S. in Communication Disorders & Sciences
3. **Date:** February 1, 2024
4. **Contact Person:** Rebecca Throneburg, PhD, CCC-SLP, Department Chair  
**Telephone:** 217-581-7447  
**E-mail:** rmthroneburg@eiu.edu

### **5. OVERVIEW**

The mission states that Department of Communication Disorders & Sciences offers a student-centered approach to instruction with emphasis on disciplined thinking. Rigorous academic and clinical instruction, research/creative activity, and community service are integrated to prepare students to contribute meaningfully to a diverse society. The department serves the community by providing evidenced-based clinical services to children and adults diagnosed with communication and swallowing disorders. The Department of Communication Disorders & Sciences mission aligns with EIU's mission. Themes of student-centered, rigor, critical thinking/reasoning, excellence in teaching, research/creative activity, service, and preparing students to contribute meaningfully to a diverse society are core values in both.

Historically, the first course in "speech correction" appeared in EIU's catalog in 1947. The Department of Speech Pathology and Audiology was created in 1964. In 1971, EIU's program was one of three accredited programs in Illinois, with only 42 accredited programs nationally. Currently there are 318 accredited programs in the U.S. There are 17 Master's Degree programs in the state of Illinois under the ISBE headings of Communication Sciences and Disorders, Speech-Language Pathology, or Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology. At the time of the last IBHE review, there were 13 programs in the state.

The 60-66 students in the two-year graduate program in speech pathology come from EIU's undergraduate program and typically 10-plus other in-state and out-of-state undergraduate programs. First year graduate students complete on-campus courses and clinical practicum experiences during the summer, fall, spring, and summer 2 terms. Students then leave campus to complete a full-time 14-week medical internship and a full-time 14-week educational internship throughout the state prior to graduation. Graduate students are actively engaged in pre-professional activities, including the National Student Speech-Language-Hearing Association (NSSLHA) local chapter and presenting clinical research at EIU, state, and national conferences. Students with the M.S. degree in Communication Disorders and Sciences from EIU meet the requirement to be a nationally certified speech-language pathologist, with an Illinois professional license in speech pathology and the Illinois school support personnel educator license in speech pathology.

The program has excellent student outcomes on program completion rates, national Praxis scores, and employment. The graduate program has achieved First Choice designation at EIU from 2009 through 2024. Students also excel as frequent recipients of the Williams Travel Awards and the Frances Meyer Hampton Scholarship from the Graduate School.

### **6. MAJOR FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

- a. **Description and assessment of any major changes in the program/discipline context** e.g., (1) changes in the overall discipline or field; (2) student demand; (3) societal needs; (4) institutional context for offering the degree; (5) other elements appropriate to the discipline in question; and (6) other.:

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics most recent data indicates that the job outlook is expected to grow much

faster than average for both speech-language pathology (19%) and audiology (11%) during the 10-year period between 2022-2032. A critical shortage in speech-language pathologists continues across the nation and in Illinois. The Illinois State Board of Education 2023 Unfilled Positions Report indicated there were 354 unfilled positions for speech-language pathologists in Illinois schools. There are also shortages of speech pathologists providing services in the Illinois Early Intervention system. Speech-language pathology is rated at #3 in best healthcare jobs in 2024 by US News & World Report and is consistently in the top 10.

While the demand for speech-language pathologists remain high, in the last three years, some graduate programs nationally report that they have open seats they could not fill with qualified applicants. The graduate program at EIU has remained fully enrolled each year with 30-33 graduate students per year, typically 60-66 graduate students in the two-year program.

The Council for Clinical Certification (CFCC) and Council on Academic Accreditation (CAA), both affiliated with the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, revised the professional standards for speech-language pathology, effective in 2023. Changes were made to increase focus on diversity and better fit current practice models. These standards identify knowledge and skills that are necessary for students to demonstrate as part of their graduate program. Upon completion of the graduate program, the Department Chair verifies that all clinical practicum and coursework requirements are met to be eligible for ASHA Certification of Clinical Competence (CCC) as a speech-language pathologist

**b. Description of major findings and recommendations, including evidence of learning outcomes and identification of opportunities for program improvement**

Incoming graduate students in the CDS master's degree program have mean undergraduate GPAs of cumulative GPA =3.8 (range 3.33- 4), major GPA 3.8.

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
<b>Mean Major GPA</b>	3.70	3.79	3.76	3.81	3.76	3.89
<b>Mean Cumulative GPA</b>	3.62	3.70	3.66	3.79	3.72	3.85
<b>Size of incoming class</b>	30	32	31	34	34	32
<b>Undergraduate universities attended by incoming class</b>	Augustana, U of Wisconsin, U of Iowa, Elmhurst, Baldwin-Wallace, U of Illinois, Northern Illinois U, Ball State, EIU	Augustana, St. Cloud State U, U of Illinois, Northern Illinois U, Ball State U, Illinois State U, Bowling Green State U, Murray State U, Miami U Oxford, EIU	Augustana, Indiana St, U of Illinois, Illinois St, Maryville, St. Ambrose, U Wisconsin, Assumption, Indiana U, Missouri St, U of Mississippi, EIU	Illinois St, Missouri St, SIUE, Iowa St, Augustana, Indiana St, Eastern Kentucky, Truman St, Grand Valley St, Univ of IL, EIU	U of Illinois,, Illinois St, Indiana St, Augustana, Northwestern, Central Michigan, SIUE, Iowa St, Middle Tenn St, EIU	Illinois State, Indiana State, Iowa State, Ball State, Ole Miss, Elmhurst, Mizzou, Northwestern, Oklahoma State, SIUE, EIU

Graduate Program Learning Objectives include:

1. Students will demonstrate advanced knowledge of the nature, evaluation, and treatment for various communication disorders
2. Students will understand principles and apply methods of clinical treatment for evaluation and intervention for various communication disorders.

3. Students will develop and demonstrate professional verbal and written communication skills, as well as critical thinking for clinical problem solving
4. Students will demonstrate a foundation within the discipline for future evidence-based practice.

Learning outcomes are tracked through a variety of methods including

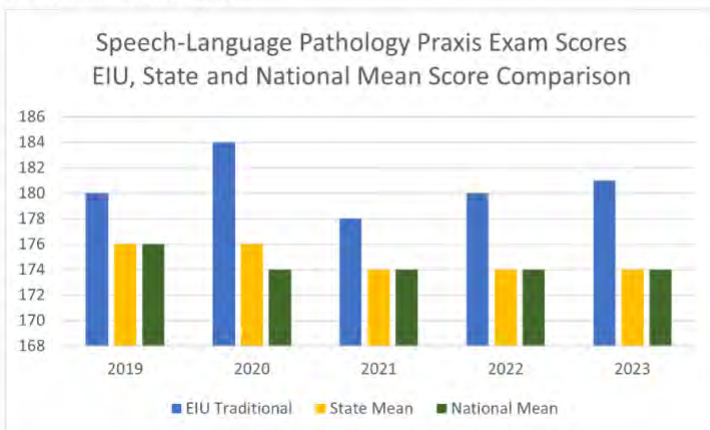
- Mean scores on sections of the Written Comprehensive Exam.
- Performance in Grand Rounds Capstone Course
- Mean rating on final performance evaluation for educational and medical internships
- Graduate Student Exit Survey Results
- Alumni and Employer Survey Results
- Performance on the national Praxis examination required for licensure and certification

A snap-shot of student learning data from 2023 are included below. This information and more is collected, analyzed, and discussed annually and used to make program modifications over time.

Mean Percent Accuracy Graduate Written Comprehensive Exam		Mean Ratings Medical Supervisors Out of 5	Mean Ratings School Supervisors Out of 5	Graduate Student Exit Survey on Preparedness		
Total Exam	79%	Eval/Treat	Eval/Treat	# Well-Prepared	# Prepared	# Not Prepared
Practicum	79%	4.85/ 4.80	4.85/4.9	16	7	1
Phonology/Motor Speech	80%	4.8/ 4.75	4.93/ 4.85	19	6	1
Developmental Language	78%	4.73/ 4.75	4.88/ 4.84	22	4	0
Voice	73%	4.92/ 4.79	4.81/ 4.86	6	15	5
Fluency	80%	5.0/ 5.0	4.95/ 5.0	14	11	1
Dysphagia	57%	4.65/ 4.56	4.73/ 4.82	18	7	1
Hearing/Audiology	73%	5.0/ xx	4.5/ 5.0	9	16	1
AAC	79%	5.0/ 5.0	5.0/ 4.86	19	7	0
Acquired Language Cog	83%	4.73/ 4.73	4.84/ 4.82	24	2	0

EIU graduate students are also 100% employed within 2 months of graduation. EIU Graduate students have 100% pass rate on the national Speech Pathology Praxis examination and have scores above state and national averages, with numerous students each year scoring in the top 10% of all test takers. The chart presented below begins in 2019, but it is also notable that in the time period since the last review that in 2017, 9,532 grad students took the SLP Praxis exam nationally. Only 28 people from more than 9000 test takers had a perfect score, one was from EIU. Of the 10,760 graduate students who took the Praxis exam nationally in 2018, only 48 people scored a perfect 200 score and 3 of them were from EIU.

National Praxis (Speech-Language Pathology) Examination Scores Compared to State and National Averages



**c. Description of actions taken since the last review, including instructional resources and practices, and curricular changes**

Since the last review, the graduate program curriculum was revised to remove elective special topics courses to allow sufficient focus on evaluation of and treatment of communication disorders & swallowing difficulties across the life span. Additionally, a professional competencies and regulations course that was previously taught in the summer prior to internships is now taken online with internships to facilitate better integration of learning. The oral comprehensive exam was moved from a summative assessment to a series of formative assessments with case presentation and clinical critical thinking in responding to questions related to on-campus clinical practicums and internships. Information in courses and clinical practicum experiences continues to evolve based on developments in the field, accreditation and certification guidelines, feedback from internship supervisors, alumni, employers.

**d. Description of actions to be taken as a result of this review, including instructional resources and practices, and curricular changes.**

In AY 2023-2024, the instructor of the Voice Disorders course and the Dysphagia course has begun implementing simulations to increase student confidence and competence in medical disorders not typically seen in the EIU clinical practicum. This new partnership with the nursing program simulation lab has received very positive feedback from students this year. We will continue to monitor the impact of these changes on the comprehensive exam, graduate student exit survey, medical internship supervisor feedback, alumni feedback, etc. This year the program is also piloting a diverse tele-therapy experience for all graduate students and has systematically ensured that assessment and treatment of diverse populations was systematically embedded within coursework and practicum experiences to meet changes in accreditation guidelines implemented in 2023.

**Comments from the College Dean:**

The MS in Communication Disorders and Sciences remains a successful program with student centered rigor, students are well prepared through the classroom, hands-on learning experiences, service, research, and creative activity. One hundred percent of students who graduate from this program at EIU are employed within 2 months of graduation. They also have 100% pass rate on the national Speech Pathology Praxis exam. Both things speak volumes to how students are prepared for the field in this program at EIU. The Department Chair and faculty have worked to revise the curriculum to bring additional focus on evaluation and treatment of communication disorders or swallowing issues. Hands on experiences for students include tele-therapy for clients and other programs housed in the Department. They have also worked with the Nursing program to utilize the simulation lab in the School of Nursing to enhance students' learning experiences surrounding issues such as Voice Disorders and Dysphagia, and they continue to seek and monitor feedback from the graduate exit survey, comprehensive exams, internship supervisor reports, and alumni.

We recommend a decision of **Program in Good Standing**.

**VPAA Decision:**

- Program in good standing
- Program flagged for priority review
- Program enrollment suspended

**51.0201 M.S. in Communication Disorders and Sciences**

**VPAA Explanation:** The summary above illustrates the multiple successes of the M.S. in Communication Disorders and Sciences. This program remains fully enrolled each year, even while some competing programs cannot fill their openings and the country experiences a severe shortage in qualified speech pathologists. More than that, the program regularly sees its students perform at an extremely high level on national qualifying exams and a 100% rate of employment within two months of graduation. The assessment of the program has incorporated more diverse measures and has benefited from the piloting of a new tele-therapy component of graduate training.