

Thinking About a PhD?

Finding a Research PhD Program

This presentation has been compiled and adapted from Schuele and Bacon (2001) and several presentations at the ASHA Convention from 1999 to 2003. Appreciation is expressed to all who have participated in the ASHA sessions. Permission is granted to individuals to use or adapt this presentation in their recruiting efforts.

Credit this source as appropriate:

Schuele, C. M. (2004). *Thinking about a PhD? Finding a research PhD program* [Presentation prepared for the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association]. Available from www.asha.org

PURPOSE

- Which PhD program is for me? This presentation was designed for persons who are considering obtaining a PhD and need to identify programs that will meet their academic and professional objectives.
- The purpose of this presentation is to provide a framework that can be used as one searches for a suitable PhD program.

PURPOSE

- This presentation provides guidelines that will help you identify potential programs and mentors. The guidelines also will help you evaluate the potential experiences and resources available in doctoral programs of interest to you.
- If you are unsure of whether you want to pursue a PhD, then you may find the accompanying presentation, *Thinking About a PhD? Deciding to Pursue a PhD*, helpful.

Note

- If you have viewed *Thinking About a PhD? Deciding to Pursue a PhD*, please note that a few of the slides at the beginning of this presentation are redundant with the content of that presentation.

Shortage of PhDs in Communication Sciences and Disorders

- There is a documented shortage of persons with PhD degrees to assume academic and research positions in communication sciences and disorders (CSD). This shortage is likely a result of growth within the professions and anticipated faculty retirements in the years ahead.
- Thus, there are currently (and are anticipated to be in the future as well) many opportunities available for persons with PhD training in CSD.

Academic and Research Careers in CSD

- Persons who have academic and research careers in CSD typically have their PhD training in speech-language pathology, audiology, or speech, language, or hearing science.
- However, it is not uncommon for CSD faculty members to have their PhD in related fields such as linguistics or psychology, or to have an interdisciplinary degree. Thus, you may wish to explore PhD training programs in related disciplines as well as CSD.

PhD: A RESEARCH DEGREE

- PhD training involves research training that leads to a research degree. PhD trained persons engage in the generation and dissemination of knowledge. This stands in contrast to the role of clinicians, who primarily engage in the application of clinical knowledge to meet the communication needs of individuals with communication disorders.
- A research PhD is not a degree that prepares you for clinical practice.

PhD: A RESEARCH DEGREE

- A PhD prepares you for...
 - An academic career where you engage in teaching and research.
 - A research career where you engage in research.
 - A clinical research career where you engage in clinical research alongside clinical practice.

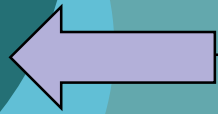
Which universities offer the PhD?

- The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (www.carnegiefoundation.org) classifies universities into categories based on the mission of the university.
- This classification is relevant when choosing an institution in which to pursue a PhD and when choosing an employment setting.

Which universities offer the PhD?

- On their Web site you can find the classification for each institution of higher education. For category definitions:
www.carnegiefoundation.org/Classification/CIHE2000/defNotes/Definitions.htm
- See the ASHA Web site for CSD departments that award PhD degrees.
www.asha.org/students/academic/doctoral/doctoral_programs.htm
- Some universities offer interdisciplinary PhD programs that are relevant for those interested in CSD. Consult individual universities.

Universities and Colleges: Differentiating Types



Doctoral/Research

Universities - Extensive:

Research PhD education is integral to the mission of the university, with 50 or more doctoral degrees awarded per year across at least 15 disciplines.

Doctoral/Research

Universities - Intensive:

Research PhD education is integral to the mission of the university, with at least 10 doctoral degrees awarded per year across at least 3 disciplines or a total of 20 doctoral degrees per year.



Master's Colleges and Universities, Baccalaureate Colleges, Associate's Colleges:

Primary focus is teaching, minimal expectation of research productivity

Source: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

What type of university?

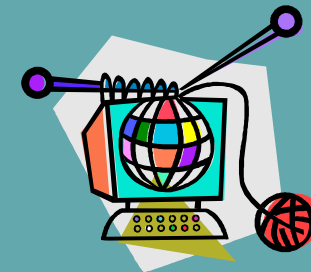
- The majority of doctoral programs in CSD, and other fields, can be found at Research-Extensive Universities. Doctoral programs in CSD may also be found at Research-Intensive universities. You will want to explore how doctoral training fits into the university mission as this will influence the resources available to you as a PhD student.

Which universities have PhD programs?

- A good place to start looking for PhD programs is on the ASHA Web site.

- www.asha.org/students/academic/doctoral/doctoral_programs.htm

On this Web site, programs that offer the PhD are listed and you can link to the program Web sites.



Which universities have PhD programs?

- Next we provide an overview of issues you will want to consider in selecting a program. Some of the information you will want to gather can be gained from literature searches and Web sites, whereas other information may be gained more easily by visiting the prospective program and/or talking directly to the prospective advisor/mentor.

PRIMARY CONSIDERATIONS WHEN CHOOSING A DOCTORAL PROGRAM

- You will want to evaluate prospective programs for the resources offered at three levels:
 - University
 - Department
 - Mentor/advisor
- In the following slides we discuss general issues relative to university and department resources. We then consider issues relative to selecting a mentor or advisor for your doctoral study. Lastly, we consider the application process.

UNIVERSITY

- ISSUE: Is research training a primary educational goal?
 - Look at the Carnegie Classification for the University. Is doctoral education a primary goal of the institution? Are there doctoral programs in fields related to CSD (e.g., psychology, linguistics)?
 - Universities that have doctoral education as a primary goal have an array of resources that support doctoral training.

UNIVERSITY

- In your master's or AuD program, you probably spent most of your time within the CSD department. In your doctoral program, much of your coursework, for example, will be taken within other departments. Faculty from other departments may be part of your dissertation committee.
- University-wide resources may include centers or programs that support your development as a researcher and teacher.

UNIVERSITY

- ISSUE: Is there general support for student research?
 - Are there university-wide scholarships or traineeships for doctoral students?
 - Are there university-wide travel awards?

UNIVERSITY

- ISSUE: Are there any special programs for doctoral students?
 - Some universities have programs that prepare doctoral students for careers in academe/research. For example, many universities offer a program called Preparing Future Faculty (PFF). You can learn more about this program at the national PFF Web site (www.preparing-faculty.org/). Many universities have very explicit support for graduate teaching assistants, helping them to develop their teaching skills.

UNIVERSITY

- ISSUE: Are there relevant course offerings outside CSD? For example, neuroscience, physiology, computer science, physics, electrical engineering, statistics, linguistics, child development, psychology

UNIVERSITY

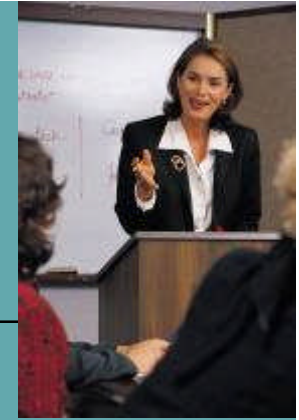
- Between the course offerings in CSD and course offerings in other departments, will you be able to develop expertise in the content area(s) of interest to you.
- You may look at the CSD course offerings and realize you have taken most of the classes. Thus, a good bit of your coursework may be obtained in other departments. You particularly want to know what statistics and research coursework is available.

UNIVERSITY

- ISSUE: Are there opportunities for cross-disciplinary interactions?
 - Are there opportunities to engage in research experiences with faculty and doctoral students from other departments? As research becomes increasingly collaborative and interdisciplinary, research experiences outside CSD may provide critical learning experiences.

UNIVERSITY

- Are the CSD faculty actively engaged in research with colleagues across campus? If your mentor is involved in research with other faculty members, you'll have a chance to participate in collaborative and cross-disciplinary research.
- Are there seminar experiences that bring together doctoral students and faculty from various departments?



- Are there visiting lecturers who bring together doctoral students and faculty from various disciplines? Universities typically have visiting scholars that can greatly enhance your exposure to research.



DEPARTMENT

- ISSUE: Course Offerings
 - What general courses are offered within the department that appeal to all doctoral students?
 - These classes might include research design, grant writing, the publication process, ethical issues in the use of human subjects in research, and so on.

DEPARTMENT

- What courses do doctoral students typically take outside the department?
 - The statistics sequence, for example, may be taken in psychology.
- What specific courses and seminars are offered in your area of interest? It is important to explore this within the department and across the university.

DEPARTMENT

- Are faculty available for independent study experiences?
- What courses are required for doctoral students? What flexibility do doctoral students have in choosing coursework?

DEPARTMENT

○ Issue: Core Faculty

- Do the teaching and research interests of the faculty cover your areas of interest? A PhD program is typically strong in one or a few areas, but not in all areas of CSD. You will want to find a program that is strong in your area of interest.
- Is their breadth in your area of interest? In order to have breadth in your PhD program, you may want to be in a program that has more than one faculty member in your area of interest. This breadth will expose you to a range of perspectives, research efforts and styles.

DEPARTMENT

- Are the faculty productive in research? You will want to study with a mentor who is actively involved in research – one who is publishing articles, presenting at conferences.
 - To obtain a picture of a person's research productivity and interests, you can visit their Web site, do searches on PsycINFO or Medline, for example, and peruse the ASHA Convention Program. The Convention Program and a person's Web site may be particularly important to identifying current research efforts.

DEPARTMENT

- How does research doctoral training fit into the overall department mission? Is research doctoral training a priority in the department?
- Do the faculty collaborate with each other? With others at the university? With colleagues at other universities? Do faculty co-author publications with students?



DEPARTMENT

- Do the faculty have *research* grants?
 - Research grants provide funds to conduct research. Part of these funds often support doctoral students as they work on faculty members' research projects. Faculty with research grants will have the resources available to conduct their research and provide a lab that has resources you will need to complete your research and academic training.
 - Grants can include federally funded, privately funded, or university funded grants. A mentor that is actively involved in writing grants and conducting grant-funded research will also be able to mentor you in grant preparation.

DEPARTMENT

- Do the faculty have *training* grants?
 - Training grants are different from research grants. Training grants, typically from federal funds, provide financial support for students in their academic training. This support can include tuition, stipends, and travel to conferences. Often training grants provide students with research experiences in a particular area of need. Students on training grants may have extensive interactions with other students on the training grant. Some training grants include students from several departments.

Physical Facilities

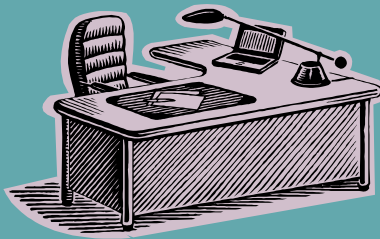
- Issue: What research laboratories are available?
 - Research training requires resources; thus, you will want to know what resources are available to conduct research. What lab space is there? Is equipment available to conduct the type of research that you are interested in?

Physical Facilities

- Issue: Are research participants accessible?
 - Given your own research interests, will you be able to locate research participants for your studies, particularly for your dissertation research? Some universities have extensive support for research participant recruitment. In addition, the nature of the clinical population served by the department's clinical activities may be a source of research participants.

Physical Facilities

- Issue: Is there space for you?
 - You will want to know what office space there will be for you as a doctoral student. There may be dedicated office space for doctoral students or doctoral students may have office space within their mentors' labs.



Physical Facilities

- Issue: Computer facilities

- What computer access will you have as a doctoral student? Does your advisor have adequate computers available in the lab? Is there a computer lab in the department? What software is available on the lab and department computers?



Research-Relevant Training Experiences

- Issue: What is the required research training experience?
 - Some programs have very clear expectations of first and second year projects, or lab rotations with faculty members. You will want to know what research experiences are required and what are typical.
 - The research experiences in the first couple of years of your doctoral program will establish skills so that you can conduct your dissertation at the required level of independence.
 - What other research experience can one expect to obtain prior to the dissertation?

Research-Relevant Training Experiences

- Will you be involved with programmatic research?
 - Beyond required projects, you may participate in the research projects of your advisor or other faculty members.
 - Participation in programmatic research (i.e., a line of research studies) will enable you to experience the development and unfolding of research across time.
 - These types of experiences may be particularly important if you plan to pursue a career at a large research university where you will develop your own programmatic research.

Research-Relevant Training Experiences

- What is the expected role for students? You will want to learn the roles that students take on required research projects as well as ongoing research projects in the lab.
- In required research projects, what level of independence is expected? What faculty support is provided?
- What level of independence is expected in the your mentor's lab?

Research-Relevant Training Experiences

- Are students expected to collect new data for all of their projects or are archival databases accessible to students?
 - Data collection is time consuming and if there are archival databases available, student research experiences can be enhanced.
- Is student participation acknowledged? You will want to know whether students are included as co-authors on conference presentations and journal articles.

Research-Relevant Training Experiences

- In addition, you will want to know how students are mentored in the publication process. Do students have opportunities to participate in the writing of manuscripts with their mentors? Are there opportunities to prepare journal submissions as well as book chapters?
- What professional development activities exist? You will want to know whether students are encouraged to attend research conferences, in addition to the ASHA Convention, and whether financial support for conference attendance is available.

Research-Relevant Training Experiences

- Does your mentor review for the ASHA journals and will you have an opportunity to participate in the peer review process through your mentor?
- Will you participate in grant writing activities with your mentor (e.g., new grant submissions, annual review reports)?
- Is there support if you choose to write a grant to support your dissertation research?

Peer Groups

- Issue: Are there other doctoral students in the lab? in the department or program?
 - How many doctoral students are in the laboratory? Choosing a strong mentor and a strong doctoral program are important. But having peers is usually equally important.

Peer Groups



- A good bit of the learning in doctoral programs is a result of peer interaction. You may work collaboratively with another doctoral student on your advisor's research project.
- Peers are important to bounce ideas off of and to provide you with critical feedback on your work, not to mention the emotional support peers provide as you share the doctoral experience.

Peer Groups

- Are there others in the laboratory?
 - Will you have an opportunity to work with postdoctoral students?
 - Will there be master's students and undergraduate students in the lab who you will supervise and mentor?

Peer Groups

- How many other doctoral students are in the department, and what are their interests?
- It is important that you don't feel isolated in your doctoral program. Peers can be an important source of intellectual stimulation and emotional support. Your peers can have similar interests, as well as very different interests.

Peer Groups

- Are there opportunities for formal and informal interactions with the doctoral students and faculty?
 - Are there formal and informal mechanisms that bring doctoral students and faculty together to discuss research, for example, departmental colloquia or proseminars, journal seminars, and lab meetings (and happy hours!)?

MENTOR/ADVISOR

- In a PhD program you will work very closely with your advisor/mentor. Think of the PhD program as an apprenticeship and your mentor as the person you apprentice with. The relationship of the PhD student and faculty advisor/mentor is quite different than the relationship you had with faculty in your MA, MS, or AuD program. Thus, you will want to carefully choose your mentor/advisor.

MENTOR/ADVISOR

- Issue: Will the faculty member be a good mentor and advisor?
- As a researcher
 - Is the faculty member an active researcher? Is the faculty member actively publishing his or her research findings?
 - Does the faculty member attend conferences frequently? Does he or she take graduate students to conferences (and pay their way!)?

MENTOR

- Does the faculty member have a record of funded research?
- Is the faculty member currently funded?
- Can the faculty member offer financial support? If not, is there other financial support?
- Does the faculty member have undergraduate, graduate, and postdoctoral students in his or her laboratory?



Mentor: Finding a Good Match

Suggested Steps



○ Step 1: Identify the broad area in which you want to study.

- In your clinical training program, breadth across the field of speech-language pathology or audiology was emphasized. You were expected to gain knowledge and clinical competencies across the many areas of clinical practice.
- In your doctoral program, **depth** is now the focus. Thus, you will want to identify your **area of interest**.


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- This does not mean that you need to identify a dissertation research question. Rather, you need to identify the **content area** that you choose to spend your academic and research life focusing upon.
 - Thus, you have begun to identify the content area in which you plan to develop an **expertise**.

- Step 2: Identify professors working in your area of interest.
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- Now that you have identified your area of intended expertise, you want to identify researchers who are active in that area and who may be able to serve as a mentor/advisor to you in a doctoral program.

- Conduct literature searches, peruse scholarly journals, attend conferences to identify those working in your area of interest.

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- Talk to former professors and ask for their suggestions.
 - Visit departmental Web sites. Visit the lab Web sites of potential mentors.
 - You might ask former professors to recommend doctoral programs that are strong in your area of interest, and begin your search there. Look for faculty at these programs who are conducting research that interests you.



Step 3: Narrow the list to include those who are actively conducting research and publishing in your area of interest and then contact those researchers/faculty members.

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- You will want your research training to be mentored by someone who is actively engaged in productive research. Once you have narrowed your list, begin to contact those researchers. You might begin to visit programs or ask to meet with the faculty members at the ASHA Convention or another conference.

○ Step 4: Gather detailed information about potential mentors and doctoral programs.

- Address all of the issues that have been raised in Department and University Resources.
- Meet with the potential mentor to discuss your own area of interest and how it might interface with the mentor's research program and interests.

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- Find out if the researcher is interested and able to take on a new doctoral student.
 - Find out how many doctoral students the researcher is currently advising and ask to meet (or e-mail or phone) the current doctoral students. They'll likely be a great source of information!

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- Ask where the mentor's former doctoral students are employed. Are they working in jobs/careers that you see yourself in? Contact some of them.
 - Find out the types of financial support that are available. Ask current students what type of funding they have received.

○ Step 5: Pause to consider the benefits of a “good fit”, of a strong mentor relationship.

- You’ll be guided by someone who spends his/her time thinking about that which you want to be thinking.
- You’ll work with someone who has current knowledge of the critical issues in your area of interest.

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- You'll get experience running a lab, managing research projects, and conducting research on a day-to-day basis.
 - You'll gain access to archival databases.
 - You'll gain (much needed) professional contacts with other researchers and doctoral students in your area of interest. These contacts will form your professional network.

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- You'll develop a line of research that will continue to unfold after you complete your PhD program and as you begin your first academic position.
 - You'll set yourself on a path toward a successful and satisfying career.

○ Step 6: Consider the pros and cons of your options.

- You may find a faculty member whose interests are very narrow. Will you be able to pursue your interests in this situation?
- What if your interests shift once you get in your doctoral program? How much wiggle room will there be?

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- What if your mentor leaves (i.e., goes to another university) after you matriculate in the program? Will you follow? Is there someone else you might work with?
 - If the faculty member cannot take a student this year, will you consider waiting another year to begin doctoral study?

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- Remember that the **ultimate goal** is to identify a program and mentor that will provide you with the best PhD education you can get. (And the best for you may be the worst for someone else.)
 - It is difficult, if not impossible, to repair a bad educational experience at this level. The “best PhD education for you” will provide you with the skills and knowledge to pursue the academic/research career that is a good fit for you.

Preparing Your Application

- Allow yourself plenty of time to prepare your application.
- Ask for letters of reference from persons who are familiar with your academic skills and can address your potential as a doctoral student. Make sure at least some of your letters are from current or former professors who are familiar with your academic ability and potential.



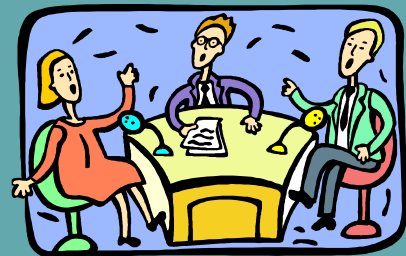
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- Be sure to include a curriculum vitae. Click on [CV](#) for an example.



- Be sure that your statement of purpose clarifies why you are interested in a career in academe/research.



- Be sure that you have talked to a faculty member in the program(s) to which you are applying.



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- If you are not accepted, ask for clarification. There can be many reasons for denial, such as lack of match with faculty interests, lack of funding, applicant's academic credentials are not sufficient, faculty member does not have space for another student.
 - Understanding why your application was denied can enable you to make wiser choices and make a stronger application if you choose to reapply to programs in the future.

Issue: Paying for a PhD

- What are your expenses:
 - Tuition and fees
 - Books, copying costs, and resources (e.g., computer for home)
 - Living expenses
 - Travel expenses to conferences



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- Should I expect to pay for this myself?

No, doctoral students should expect to receive funding that covers the costs of their education in exchange for their participation typically as a research assistant. No one ever got rich on a doctoral student stipend, but certainly many doctoral students have survived just fine on the resources provided.

What are the sources of funding?

- grant funding

- Grants typically include research assistantships. In exchange for tuition benefits and a stipend, you work on a funded research project.

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- There is also grant funding for predoctoral traineeships. Some predoctoral traineeships are awarded to the university, which then chooses to support you, whereas other traineeships are awarded to the student, based on a competitive grant application process (e.g., www.nih.gov [F31]).

○ University funding

- Universities often support doctoral students with internal funds and students are expected to be teaching assistants, for example.
- Scholarships or fellowships may be available from the university.

○ Foundation grant support

- Private foundation funding can provide additional options for funding. For example, the American Speech-Language-Hearing Foundation offers competitive grant and scholarship awards.

- www.ashfoundation.org

For more information ...

- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (1994). Selecting a doctoral research education program in communication disorders. Rockville, MD: Author.

Conclusion

- **Start early!** It may take you more than a year to find a doctoral program that meets your needs.
- **Shop!** Find out as much as you can about each doctoral program you are considering – visit the Web site, talk to faculty, visit the program, talk to PhD students.
- **Apply!** Allow yourself enough time to prepare a thoughtful application.
- If you are not accepted, explore the reasons.
- **Get the best education you can!** The skills you obtain in your doctoral program will set the stage for success in your academic/research career.