

## Utah State University Deaf Education Listening and Spoken Language Graduate Training Program

The **Listening and Spoken Language (LSL) Deaf Education** program in the Dept of Communicative Disorders and Deaf Education was built on a strong foundation of best-practices and guiding principles in family-centered early intervention for the development of listening and spoken language skills in children who are deaf or hard of hearing (DHH). It is well documented that a critical shortage exists of appropriately-trained deaf educators for 0-5-year-old children who are deaf or hard of hearing (Johnson, 2004; Jones & Ewing, 2002; McLeskey & Billingsley, 2008). To assist in filling the local and national need for highly-qualified deaf education teachers who are specially trained to provide services to children and families to facilitate listening and spoken language development, Utah State University developed a LSL graduate training program for students to earn a Master's Degree in Communicative Disorders and Deaf Education and an Early Childhood 0-5 Special Education Teaching License with a Deaf and Hard of Hearing Endorsement issued by the Utah State Office of Education.

When children who are DHH are identified early and provided with appropriate, comprehensive family-centered early intervention services from properly-trained professionals, most are able to progress at age-appropriate rates and many require minimal special education services by the time they enter elementary school (Kennedy, et. al., 2006; Moeller, 2000; Yoshinaga-Itano et al., 1998). Positive outcomes associated with early identification and intervention, including better language, speech, and social-emotional development than later-identified children; more typical rates of cognitive development; and lower parental stress as the child acquires language and increases communication have been documented (Yoshinaga-Itano and Gravel, 2001). The LSL graduate training program at USU provides teachers with the skills, strategies, and training experiences needed to support children in spoken language development, with the goal of mainstream educational placement with their same-aged hearing peers. This goal is accomplished through a progressive approach to graduate student training that ensures that all students obtain foundation breadth in family-centered deaf education early intervention services, research-based best practices in academic curriculum design and implementation, competence in cultural and linguistic diversity, and effective practices in providing services to children with disabilities, including an understanding of state and federal laws.

An integral part of the LSL graduate training program is for students to learn effective interdisciplinary collaboration. For example, teachers of the deaf must develop effective collaboration skills with colleagues in special education to meet the comprehensive needs of children with additional disabilities. To do this, USU Deaf Education faculty collaborated extensively with the USU Department of Special Education faculty to develop a program of study that retains the content depth in deaf education, but also provides opportunities for students to take coursework in effective instructional practices relative to students with additional disabilities. This is an important component to our graduate training program given that many children who are DHH have additional disabilities and deaf education professionals must be proficient in meeting their unique needs.

The USU graduate training program also models interdisciplinary services with speech/language pathologists and audiologists. Deaf education teachers should understand the services provided by a speech/language pathologist and know how to integrate and complement the classroom goals with each child's individual goals. Deaf education teachers also must be knowledgeable about current hearing technology (e.g., digital hearing aids, cochlear implants, FM systems), how to use and troubleshoot these devices, and how to effectively partner with audiologists. Improvements in technology have resulted in dramatically improved success in communication, language acquisition, and academic skill development for educational achievement in mainstream classroom settings (Cole & Flexer, 2007; Geers et al., 2009; Robertson, 2009). However, such success is dependent on having professionals who are well trained in the specialized auditory skills, hearing technology, and teaching strategies necessary for optimal child outcomes (Estes, 2010; Lenihan, 2010).

A unique aspect of the USU graduate training program is the opportunity students have of participating in supervised hands-on practicum experiences during every semester of their program. These experiences, which start with observation and progress to increasingly more independent service delivery, provide a critical foundation for students to develop competence and excellence in services to children. Students complete practicum rotations to gain direct experience in LSL early childhood education, such as: 1) home visits (in-person or via tele-intervention) providing services to infants and toddlers ages birth to 36 months, 2) toddler groups for families when children are 18-30 months of age, 3) preschool classrooms for children ages 3-5 for a language and literacy-rich environment that emphasizes age-appropriate academic and social learning through natural environment and play exploration, 4) kindergarten transition, 5) special education services for children with additional disabilities, 6) an audiology rotation for students to gain first-hand experience in audiological services, and 7) a cochlear implant rotation so that students better understand how to collaborate with cochlear implant audiologists. Practicum experiences are directly linked to the coursework goals and student competencies so that students are better able to connect theory to practice. This model of intensive practicum experiences is possible because of 1) our partnership with early childhood special education programs, 2) our partnership with the Utah Schools for the Deaf, and 3) the on-campus practicum site for students, called *Sound Beginnings*, which was established in 2007. Sound Beginnings currently serves over 40 birth-5 year-old children who are deaf or hard of hearing in a new 10,000-square-foot state-of-the-art facility located on the USU campus. All classrooms have an adjacent observation room, each equipped with audio/video technology for additional graduate training opportunities.

Deaf education masters degree and DHH Endorsement graduate students must show that they have mastered the coursework and practicum requirements, with demonstrated competencies consistent with the National Professional Standards that guide family-centered, evidence-based practices. Throughout the training program, students will document their acquisition of deaf education competencies by developing a portfolio containing materials that are tied to, and will be evaluated against, professional standards and core state competencies for early intervention and preschool education.

In addition to coursework and hands-on practicum experiences, students gain content expertise and research experience by completing a research thesis or educational project. This requirement facilitates student growth in exploring and interpreting empirical research in a specific content area of LSL deaf education. Students prepare a comprehensive proposal to demonstrate content knowledge and empirical evidence, followed by either a research thesis or development of an educational project. Students receive extensive faculty support in completing these requirements.

The following options are available to students, depending on the degree and licensure they are seeking:

## **BACHELOR'S DEGREE**

### **Deaf Education/Early Childhood Composite**

This program is appropriate for students who seek a Bachelor's degree in early childhood special education with a listening and spoken language deaf or hard of hearing emphasis.

*Credit hours: 121*

Upon completion of this program, students will receive:

Bachelor's Degree in Special Education

0-5 Special Education Teaching License from Utah State Office of Education

## MASTER OF EDUCATION DEGREE OPTIONS

### **Master of Education (M.Ed.) Degree in Communicative Disorders and Deaf Education, plus:**

- **0-5 Early Childhood Special Education Teaching License issued by Utah State Office of Education**
- **DHH Endorsement issued by Utah State Office of Education**
- **Early Intervention II Credential issued by Utah Department of Health**
- **Early Intervention DHH Endorsement issued by Utah Department of Health**

This program is appropriate for students who have obtained a Bachelor's degree in a related field (e.g., ComD, K-12 elementary education, K-12 special education, Family Consumer and Human Development) but who do not hold a 0-5 special education teaching license. Program of study includes deaf education specialization coursework for depth and expertise in teaching children who are DHH to develop listening and spoken language skills; and coursework to meet requirements for 0-5 early childhood special education licensure, DHH Endorsements, and Early Intervention II Credential. Some pre-requisites are required.

*Credit hours: 60*

### **Master's Degree in Communicative Disorders and Deaf Education, plus Deaf or Hard of Hearing Endorsement**

This program is appropriate for students who have obtained a Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Special Education and who hold a current 0-5 Special Education Teaching License. Program of study includes deaf education specialization coursework for depth and expertise in teaching children who are DHH to develop listening and spoken language skills. Some pre-requisites apply.

*Credit hours: 43*

### **Deaf or Hard of Hearing Endorsement**

This program of study is appropriate for students who are not seeking a degree but who wish to obtain additional training to increase knowledge, skills, and strategies for providing services to children ages who are deaf or hard of hearing and who are developing listening and spoken language skills.

*Credit hours: 20*

### References:

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