

UW-Eau Claire Communication Sciences & Disorders

Strategic Plan Executive Summary

The goal of the CSD department at UWEC is to provide a rigorous educational experience for both undergraduate and graduate students, preparing them to be effective professionals in the field and beyond. The faculty/staff within the department strive for excellence and innovation in pedagogy, in the classroom, in the clinic, and in the community at large.

The current broad goals of the department include:

- 1) The CSD department will continue to implement innovative technology, pedagogy, and research to meet the current and anticipated needs and demands of the program, profession, and departmental/clinical operations.
- 2) CSD Undergraduate students will meet levels of distinctive achievement in academic and clinical applications.
- 3) CSD Graduate students will meet levels of distinctive achievement in academic and clinical applications.
- 4) The CSD department will develop and strengthen new and existing community partnerships to enhance civic engagement at the undergraduate and graduate levels.
- 5) The CSD department will build capacity for diverse learners through intentional curricular and clinical experiences.
- 6) The CSD department will promote our CSD programs to the campus and region, as well as nationally and internationally.

During academic year 2023-24, we wrapped up our current strategic plan:

Innovative instruction:

We acquired an Anatomage virtual cadaver table, which is now being used regularly in our Anatomy and Physiology of the Speech and Hearing Mechanism and Neurological Aspects of Communication and Cognition courses. We have continued to update clinical tools, like upgrading the computer for our laryngeal stroboscopy unit, purchasing additional audiometers for our community hearing screenings, and replacing iPads used in our on-campus clinic. Perhaps most exciting is the addition of three new high-tech AAC devices that have been integrated into graduate and undergraduate level courses and clinical experiences.

There is a strong presence of scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) in our department. We conduct research that informs our pedagogy and draw upon SoTL research from others. Our department is a sponsor of *Teaching and Learning in Communication Sciences and Disorders* (TLCSO), as we are committed to evidence-based teaching. Our faculty are recognized widely as SoTL experts and regularly provide ASHA Webinars, research round tables, and conference presentations on the topic. One of our faculty members was awarded the TLCSO reviewer of the year in 2024. We also have a SoTL Lab, which involves 8 of our faculty members and 12-15 students each semester. One of our instructors participated in the Wisconsin Teaching Fellows and Scholars program this past year. Our recently hired clinic director has made several modifications to in-house clinical programming to better reflect what is happening in the real world. In addition, the clinical director and another clinical faculty member are conducting SoTL research about clinical supervision.

Undergraduate distinction:

Undergraduate students now have multiple clinical options, which allow them to gain experience through undergraduate clinic and/or the SLPA certificate program. The SLPA certificate program has become very popular, with eight students who successfully completed the certificate in 2023-24, and another 14-16 who will complete it in 2024-25. In the summer of 2024, an SLPA student was able to service all of the summer clinic programming alongside faculty, filling a need for speech-language services in the community while providing an excellent clinical learning opportunity. This included four brain injury groups, two aphasia groups, a Parkinson's group, a children's music group, garden group, two pediatric speech sound groups, and an early language group, as well as a multi-age walking group. A number of volunteer and clinic-adjacent experiences are available to undergraduate students, including Aphasia Camp, TBIconneCT partners, the State TBI Support Group Summit, walking group, garden group, poetry group, music group, and more. Many of our undergraduate students are involved in student-faculty collaborative research as well (n = 37). Sixteen of our students presented at the ASHA Convention, with others presenting at other conferences.

Graduate distinction:

Graduate students have a large variety of clinical experiences through courses, in-house clinic, summer pre-externships with community partners, and traditional externship placements. Several classes have course-embedded clinical experiences, where students engage in clinical work that is connected to their course-based learning (e.g., Collaborative Counseling, TBIconneCT, AAC). Simulations are included in other courses (e.g., Aphasia and Related Disorders) and we are exploring options for other courses. Graduate students work with occupational therapy and physical therapy students from a nearby university in an interprofessional learning experience. Some graduate students are involved in Aphasia Camp and some help facilitate the Brain Injury Association of Wisconsin annual conference. Specialty clinics, such as the SPEAK OUT! and SPEAK OUT! Therapy Group for individuals with Parkinson's disease, the Gender Affirming Communication Group for transgender individuals, and voice clinic offer students opportunities that are less available in other clinical contexts. We also initiated a statewide, virtual Young Persons Brain Injury Group in late 2024.

We established a plan and timeline for curricular updates to the graduate program. New courses will be developed, and new course sequencing will be proposed, with likely implementation in summer/fall of 2026.

Community partnerships:

Clinical services continue to be offered to the community such as the speech/language/hearing screenings offered at L.E. Phillips Memorial Library and the River Source Family Center, filling a small part of the void left when HSHS Sacred Heart & St. Joseph's closed their doors in April 2024.

Supporting diverse learners:

Within the curriculum, mapping of EDI has continued to document course-by-course implementation, with ongoing work to increase infusion of EDI principles into academic courses and

clinical experiences. We have implemented standardized organization of our Canvas learning management system modules to create consistent ease of access across courses. All assignments incorporate transparent design principles, so that students always know the assignment purpose, steps, and how it will be evaluated. The EDI committee modified the University Belongingness Questionnaire to be delivered at the departmental level. We also created a comprehensive survey of demographic factors, so that we can get a better sense of which students have a sense of belonging in the department and those who do not. Thus far, they have conducted a focus group with graduate students, to further refine the tool. In 2025, they will deliver the survey to undergraduate students.

Recruitment & retention:

The department has also been very active in student recruitment and engagement using the relentless relationship framework. Our strong commitment to student-faculty collaborative research, clinic-adjacent experiences for undergraduate students, instructional internships, supporting student organizations, and engagement activities (e.g., our sophomore breakfast, coffee and doughnuts in the lobby, etc.) are elements of that relationship-based engagement programming. Faculty and students have participated in high school visit days, including College-wide recruitment events and individual department events.

We are in a time of transition at UW-Eau Claire, where enrollment in undergraduate programs has slowed. The department is working on ways to reach new groups of students, including those who may be place-bound and unable to attend a brick-and-mortar campus – our new fully online undergraduate program is designed to provide the same rigorous education as the on-campus version. We expect this program to grow over the next few years.

This strategic plan expired at the end of academic year 2023-24. A new strategic plan, spanning 2024-2031, has been developed, with goals and action steps for 2024-25 summarized below:

Goal 1: Develop curricular and extra-curricular experiences that expose students to a wide range of foundational knowledge and applied/clinical skills, encouraging them to value humanity and become contributing, global citizens.

- Complete paperwork for proposed curricular changes, for implementation in fall 2025 or fall 2026.
- Identify best practices for clinical supervision.
- Support and encourage student organization participation and student engagement in other

Goal 2: Establish the reputation of UWEC SLHS alumni as exceptional clinicians, scholars, and meaningful contributors to society. Utilize our strong reputation to recruit new students.

- Develop a module for supervision of SLPAs for graduate program.
- Host a focus group to better understand the values, priorities, and needs of current students

Goal 3: Recruit and retain students with diverse lived experiences, supporting their equitable access to our program and their success once they're in our program

- Complete a literature review process to identify recruitment strategies to target new populations of prospective students.
- Implement the updated holistic admission process.
- Begin exploring alternative program entry, such as 4+1 programs.

Goal 4: Refine departmental policies and procedures to promote equitable contributions, enhanced efficiency, department cohesion, and a sense of meaningful work.

- Update and better define workload expectations (especially for scholarship and service) in position descriptions and Department Evaluation Plan.
- Identify strategies to promote faculty goal achievement, including travel support and/or release time.

Goal 5: Implement community programming that has a positive impact (mutually beneficial) on the health of our students, faculty, and community members. Achieve a distinctive reputation, secure clinical placements for our students, and enhance community awareness of our mission.

- Determine measures to monitor graduate student and undergraduate student workload and capacity (e.g., clinic formula, assignment workloads).
- Identify incentives to encourage community partners to participate in clinical education (i.e., taking a student placement).
- Identify ways to create a network for community clinical supervisors, both to support each other and be supported by a faculty member.
- Establish a more regular schedule for an advisory board.