

## **Essential skills and attributes required for the study of Speech-Language Pathology in the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders at the University of Alberta**

### **A. Purposes**

The [National Speech-Language Pathology Competency Profile](#) and the [Government of Canada SLP Occupational Profile](#) outline the required competencies and requisite skills for the Speech-Language Pathology (SLP) profession in Canada. This document provides further information for applicants to SLP programs, students, faculty, staff, accessibility advisors, health professionals, and the public about the essential skills and attributes (ESAs) expected of candidates in SLP entry-to-practice programs.

The purposes of this ESA document are to:

1. provide information to prospective SLP students so they can make an informed choice regarding their skills and attributes and whether to pursue a graduate degree in SLP;
2. help guide efforts of SLP students, faculty, and staff toward student achievement of ESAs for entry-level practice;
3. help prospective and current SLP students make an informed choice about registration for accommodations with student accessibility services;
4. help students, accessibility counsellors, faculty, staff, and health professionals develop reasonable accommodations such that students may meet competency requirements while retaining integrity of the process and the profession;
5. contribute to the health, wellness, and safety of learners during their academic program; and
6. contribute to the safe and effective service provision for clients during student-led clinical experiences.

### **B. Essential Skills and Attributes for Graduate Study in SLP**

In Canada, SLPs are generally regulated healthcare professionals who can help prevent, assess, and treat communication and swallowing disorders for individuals across the lifespan. As per the [National Speech-Language Pathology Competency Profile](#), SLPs function as clinicians, experts, scholars, communicators, collaborators, managers, professionals, and advocates. University SLP programs are responsible for providing SLP students with opportunities to develop the essential competencies to fulfill these roles, and to become eligible for entry-level practice in Canada. To practice as a SLP, an individual must register with their provincial regulatory body. For example in Alberta, the provincial regulatory body is the [Alberta College of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists](#). In some provinces successful completion of the [Canadian Entry-to-Practice exam](#) is also required.

Graduate education in SLP requires both the accumulation of academic knowledge and the development of clinical competencies. The University of Alberta Communication Sciences and Disorders MScSLP program is an accredited program and must meet national accreditation standards and requirements when graduating students. ESAs refer to the skills and attributes that allow SLP graduate students to develop scientific knowledge, specific skills and attitudes, and to meet essential competency standards for professional practice. The ESAs are the foundation for academic success and the practice of SLP upon graduation. An offer of admission to a SLP program should not be interpreted as evidence that the program has independently verified that an applicant possesses these ESAs.

Graduate students in SLP must demonstrate skills and attributes in six broad areas:

1. Communication
2. Motor
3. Sensory
4. Intellectual/Cognitive
5. Interpersonal
6. Cultural Responsiveness

([CAPCSD Core Functions](#), 2023)

## **1. Communication**

Students must be able to communicate skillfully with faculty members, other members of the school or healthcare team, clients, families, and other students, in the language of their graduate program (English), in order to:

- Elicit information
- Receive and understand information
- Convey information
- Clarify information
- Create rapport
- Develop therapeutic relationships
- Demonstrate competencies

Examples include, but are not limited to: answering oral and written exam questions, eliciting a history from a client, presenting information in oral and written form to clinical educators, participating in sometimes fast-paced small or large group discussions/interactions; writing assessment and/or intervention reports and documenting services; making presentations (formal and informal) in academic and practicum settings; communicating with members of the healthcare team; communicating assessment and intervention results with clients and their families about communication and swallowing; counselling; interacting in a therapeutic manner with clients; educating clients, families, and other stakeholders involved in the client's care;

adapting communication style to effectively interact with others of diverse backgrounds in various modes such as in person, over the phone, and in electronic format (CAPCSD Core Functions: 2023); interacting with and responding to clinical educators; and writing notes and papers and completing assignments on a web-based educational platform. Students must have the ability to self-organize and self-manage their time and paperwork responsibilities to communicate information in a timely manner.

## **2. & 3. Motor and Sensory Function**

Students must have sufficient motor and sensory function to:

- Attend (and participate in) all classes, group/teamwork, and activities that are part of the curriculum, including small group discussions and presentations, large-group lectures, one-on-one interactions, demonstrations, client appointments (virtually and in-person)
- Read, write, and use digital media
- Perform and complete all aspects of SLP assessment and intervention procedures, which involve working directly with clients, their families, and their community
- Provide therapy and other aspects of care
- Function in a variety of settings (e.g., outpatient services, hospital inpatient, community programs, schools, classrooms, client homes, long term care centres)
- Perform in an acceptably independent, professional, and competent way in sometimes stressful and distracting clinical environments
- Differentiate functional and disordered auditory, oral, written, and visual communication (CAPCSD Core Functions, 2023)
- Correctly differentiate anatomical structures and diagnostic imaging findings (CAPCSD Core Functions, 2023)
- Differentiate and discriminate text, numbers, tables, and graphs associated with diagnostic instruments and tests (CAPCSD Core Functions, 2023)
- Demonstrate other SLP-specific competencies

Examples include, but are not limited to reading books, articles, and online resources; facilitating small and large client groups or audiences, creating client presentations, reviewing sessions, and laboratory work; using a computer; interacting with clients of different ages (from infants to elderly adults) in a variety of community, educational, and healthcare settings; performing a clinical examination of communication and swallowing; manipulating testing materials, managing therapeutic/clinical equipment, performing instrumental procedures such as an audiological screening, voice evaluation, and swallowing evaluation; accompanying team members on rounds and conferences in medical practicum settings; wearing appropriate equipment, such as a gloves, gown, and mask, as called for by the clinical situation.

#### **4. Intellectual/Cognitive**

In addition to cognitive functions such as language, memory, attention, and visuospatial abilities, students must be able to demonstrate or employ higher-level cognitive abilities, including:

- Executive functions (e.g. planning, sequencing, initiation, behavioral regulation, cognitive flexibility)
- Calculation
- Analysis
- Synthesis
- Organization
- Application
- Rational thought
- Clinical reasoning
- Ethical reasoning
- Sound judgment

Examples include, but are not limited to: understanding, synthesizing, and recalling material presented in classes, labs, small groups, client interactions, and meetings with clinical educators; successfully passing oral, written, and laboratory exams; understanding ethical issues related to the practice of speech-language pathology; engaging in problem solving and clinical reasoning, making sound clinical decisions, interpreting the results of client examinations and assessments; analyzing client and environmental characteristics, and determining the appropriate course of client care; working through clinical problems and exhibiting sound judgment in a variety of clinical settings; making concise, convincing, and thorough presentations based on various kinds of data collection, including web-based research; knowing how to organize information, materials, and tasks in order to perform efficiently in clinical settings; initiating, planning, and organizing classroom-based and clinical tasks; understanding how to work and learn independently; understanding how to function effectively as part of a school or healthcare team.

#### **5. & 6. Interpersonal, Cultural Responsiveness, and Professionalism**

Students must demonstrate mature, professional, socially appropriate and ethical conduct. They must be able to:

- Consistently display integrity, honesty, empathy, compassion, fairness, respect for self and others, diligence, and dedication
- Provide care for all clients from diverse backgrounds (e.g. including those whose gender, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, or spiritual beliefs are different from their own)
- Develop mature, sensitive, and effective relationships, not only with clients but with all members of school, community, and healthcare teams

- Maintain appropriate relationship(s) with service users
- Abide by all provincial, national, and local laws and regulations, as well as all codes of ethics and student codes of conduct
- Tolerate physically, emotionally, and mentally demanding workloads
- Function effectively under stress, and proactively make use of available resources to help maintain both physical and mental health and wellness
- Recognize and respond to changes in client and colleague interactions and behaviours
- Engage in ongoing learning about cultures and belief systems different from one's own and the impacts of these on healthcare and educational disparities to foster effective provision of services (CAPCSD Core Functions, 2023)
- Demonstrate the application of culturally responsive evidence-based decisions to guide clinical practice (CAPCSD Core Functions, 2023)
- Adapt to changing environments and be able to learn in the face of uncertainty
- Promptly complete all assignments and responsibilities attendant to the assessment and treatment of clients
- Be responsible and accountable for themselves and their behaviors

Examples include, but are not limited to: being prepared and arriving on time for required learning and clinical experiences; handing in assignments on time; treating faculty, staff, and other students with respect; making an effort to understand prejudices and preconceptions that might affect client interactions or collegial relationships (especially in the areas of race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, disability, age, worldviews, social identities, and religious difference); developing successful working relationships with clinical educators, staff, and peers; maintaining timely, respectful communication; accepting constructive feedback; providing constructive feedback; maintaining a professional demeanor in clinical interactions; representing oneself accurately; appreciating and preserving client confidentiality; responding sensitively to clients' social and psychological issues; understanding social biases and stigmas; developing empathic listening skills; advocating for clients when appropriate; using hospital/clinic/school resources responsibly; asking for assistance when appropriate; getting advice when handling ethical dilemmas; contributing to the effectiveness, efficiency, and collegiality of teams.

### **C. Students with Disabilities**

The Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders (CSD) MScSLP program is committed to ensuring that students are afforded an academic environment that is dedicated to the advancement of learning and that is based on the principles of equitable access and individual dignity; and as such, supports the principle of accommodation for students with disability in the MScSLP program. The CSD Department also strives to preserve the academic integrity of the university, the program, and the profession by affirming that all students satisfy the essential requirements of the program and program courses.

The Department will work cooperatively with the university [Academic Success Centre](#) to determine if the support a student requires can be accommodated in the SLP program and/or on clinical placements. Reasonable accommodation cannot compromise the essential requirements of a program or client/patient safety and wellbeing. The purpose of a reasonable accommodation is to ensure the student with a disability has the same opportunity as his/her student peers to attain the required operational level, but is not meant to guarantee success in the program.

The accommodation required by the student cannot cause undue hardship to the CSD Department and must be approved by the Chair of the Department or designate. Students who receive accommodation must still meet the requirements of courses and the program in order to progress in, and graduate from, the MScSLP program. Disability accommodations are not a guarantee of success in the MScSLP program; even with optimal accommodations, successful completion of the MScSLP program is not assured. Please note that certain accommodations obtained in previous educational settings or academic courses may not be appropriate, particularly with respect to clinical placements and requirements.

For more information, please review the references and resources included in this document.

**References and Resources include:**

[CAPCSD Core Functions](#): Council of Academic Programs in Communication Sciences and Disorders (2023). A guide for future practitioners in audiology and speech-language pathology: Core functions. <https://www.capcsd.org/academic-and-clinical-resources/>

The University of Alberta [Academic Success Centre](#)

[Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine Accommodation/Illness/At Risk Procedures](#)

The Canadian [National Speech-Language Pathology Competency Profile](#)

[Speech-Language and Audiology Canada](#)

[Alberta College of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists](#)

[Government of Canada SLP Occupational Profile](#)