

## Training Undergraduate Students in Communication Sciences and Disorders As Conversational Partners for Persons with Aphasia

This Educational Enhancement Grant was funded for the 2009-10 academic year, but it was not implemented until the 2010-11 academic year.

### Specific Objectives of the Project

1. Increase student comfort level and ease transition into clinical training situations requiring assessment and treatment of adults with aphasia
2. Minimize discrepancy in services to University of Kentucky Aphasia Program (UKAP) clients by first and second year graduate students
3. Reduce students' anxiety about working with clients with aphasia
4. Improve outcomes for UKAP clients
5. Provide "hands on" experience with clients with aphasia to students at the undergraduate level
6. Supplement and/or replace need for student observations of adults in UK speech clinic
7. Examine effects of partner training program

### Progress on Project Objectives

In the fall of 2010, 39 undergraduate seniors in CSD were trained as conversational partners for 10 clients with aphasia as part of a training module in neurogenic communication disorders within the CSD 482 – Clinical Management I. This module provided students, working in teams of 4 persons, to receive some "hands on" experience interacting with people with aphasia. Student teams interviewed clients with aphasia before and after receiving approximately 6 hours of partner training.

Objectives 1, 3, 5, and 6: Students' responses to the partner training experience and the opportunity to sit down with a real patient were overwhelmingly positive. This was reflected in emails to the instructor, spontaneous comments, comments in the course evaluation, and in the course evaluations themselves which neared perfection and were the highest ever for the module. It was not possible to quantify the impact of this experience on the number of student observations in the clinic. My subjective impression was that there were fewer observations.

Objectives 2 and 4. The client's with aphasia also reacted most positively to the students. This experience required them to come in early for extra visits aside from their normal therapy sessions in the UKAP. These sessions were associated with the normal "snafus" such as clients being late, mixing up times, going to the wrong places, and equipment failures. They required the students to make adjustments on the fly and gave them a preview of what was to come.

Objective 7: The data collected by the students in the interviews consisted of factual information, in the form of specific information about each client, e.g., Mr. Smith was born in

Ocala, Florida, that could be verified by the client's significant other. During the course of the neurogenic module in the 482 class, and in the weeks following completion of this module, I worked with my three Doctoral students, Sarah Campbell, Christen Page, and Ashley Whittaker to design an experiment to assess the effects of partner training. The partner training module in the 482 class provided much of the support for a 1 credit research apprenticeship for the doctoral students. Together, the students and the instructor designed an outcome measure, developed procedures to assess its scoring reliability, prepared data for analyses, analyzed the data, and collaborated in writing a paper "Communication of personally relevant information by persons with aphasia to untrained and trained conversational partners." This paper was submitted for presentation to the 2011 Clinical Aphasiology Conference.

### Progress on Outcomes

Outcomes Associated with Objectives 1, 3, 5, and 6. As a consequence of the partner training experience, I came to the conclusion our students need more preparation to work in the UKAP. Thus I completely redesigned the graduate level course in aphasia and related disorder, CSD 677 to be taught as a lecture/lab course in the summer. Currently, the class meets 2 days a week; the majority of one of these days is devoted to a laboratory in which student teams meet with an assigned client to perform specific laboratory activities, e.g. initial interview, assessment, traditional treatment session etc. Most of these students were participants in partner training module last year. My observations of how the summer is going are that the students are taking to this combined lecture/laboratory approach like a "duck to water." I find them asking more questions and am impressed with their willingness to do extra reading outside of class and to voluntarily stay in class after the hour has ended if I have catching up to do.

Outcomes Associated with Objectives 2 and 4: The students are unbelievably enthusiastic about the clinical activity. Even though they realize this experience does not provide them with ASHA credit hours, their hearts are in the activities. I see the clients with aphasia, extremely chronic aphasia, responding at a level I did not think was possible. Moreover, they are hear on time coping successfully and with advance planning with UK's very difficult parking and other problems. The upside of this experience is that all 1<sup>st</sup> year graduate students will have had the aphasia course and some experience before the fall semester begins. This means all will be equally experienced when working in the UKAP, and that should minimize the discrepancy services I've observed for some years.

Outcomes Associated with Objective 7: The partner training experiment did not get accepted for presentation at the CAC, but submitting it did permit one of our doctoral students, Sarah Campbell, to attend the conference. This paper was also submitted for presentation at the Annual Convention of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association in San Diego in 2011.

I am grateful for the support from the Education Enhancement Grant. If I can provide more information about the benefits and outcomes of this activity, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Robert C. Marshall, Ph.D.  
Professor