

Special Education and Communication Disorders
Enhancing the lives of individuals with special needs throughout the lifespan.



Maximum
Potential for
Learning



Autonomous
Communication



Sensory Access
& Rehabilitation

Biological, Behavioral and Technological Aspects of Communication and Learning
Clinical Training Models for Practitioner Preparation
Strong Academic – Clinical Partnerships

ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP THAT IMPACTS
NEBRASKA, THE NATION, & THE WORLD

STRATEGIC PLAN 2017-2022

ADDRESSING UNL 2025 GOALS AND CEHS SPIRES OF EXCELLENCE



**COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
AND HUMAN SCIENCES**

*Department of Special Education
and Communication Disorders*

Introduction

Building on nearly a century of success in professional training, the Department of Special Education and Communication Disorders (SECD) seeks to be a nationally recognized center of excellence in addressing learning, communication, health and well-being throughout the lifespan for individuals with special needs. Our strategic plan for the next five years will focus on increasing our research efforts, translating research evidence into practice, enhancing experiences for our students, and expanding doctoral training in our disciplines. To do this, we will focus our efforts on four areas of emphasis: learning disabilities (reading, writing, math), social/emotional development, speech/language interventions, and sensory access and rehabilitation.

Disability can be congenital or acquired and can have lasting impacts on individuals, families, and communities. Prevalence of disability has been shown to be 0.8% among children less than 4 years of age¹, 5.5% for ages 5 to 20 years², and at least 20% of adults (>18 years of age) in the US (more than 53 million people) report some type of disability.³ Although a smaller percentage of children have a disability, a much larger percentage are at risk for learning disabilities, communication disorders or sensory impairments due to acquired deficits, poverty, poor nutrition, or limited access to health care. The most common disabilities include developmental delay, specific learning disabilities, speech language impairments, and cognitive deficits.

Disabilities affect education, graduation, employment, health and well being. In Nebraska from 2008-2009 to 2014-2015, the number of children receiving special education services in schools increased from 46,018 to 51,262. On statewide accountability tests (2014 NESAT test) in grade 11, only 33% of special education students are proficient in reading, 24% in math, and 40% in science.⁴ Federal accountability assessments (NAEP) show proficiency levels 32 to 35 points lower for students with disabilities compared to those without disabilities. Finally, while the overall graduation rate for Nebraska students stands at 89.9%, the adjusted cohort graduation rate for students with disabilities is only 71%.⁵

The employment rate for working age people with disabilities is substantially lower than those without disabilities (34.5% compared to 76.8% based on 2013 ACS data), and only 21.5% work full-time. In addition, the median annual income for people with disabilities is substantially less than those without disabilities.⁶ Regarding health and well being, individuals with disabilities experience difficulties or delays in getting health care, suffer from other health conditions (e.g., obesity, high blood pressure, psychological distress), and receive less social/emotional support.⁷

While significant numbers of individuals have, or are at risk for, disabilities that impact learning, behavior, communication, and access to sensory information, the experts to address these critical needs are in short supply. Speech language pathology and special education have appeared on the Teacher Shortage Areas nationwide list since 1990⁸ and demand for our professions of practice (audiology, speech language pathology, special education) is expected to grow. The Bureau of Labor and Statistics projects that, from 2014-2024, employment of audiologists will grow 29%, speech language pathology will grow 21%, and special education will grow by 6%.⁹

SECD's Strategic Plan represents a collective approach to serve people with special needs through research, teaching, and service/outreach. Our areas of emphasis: learning disabilities (reading, writing, math), emotional/social development, speech/language interventions, and sensory access and

¹ Erickson, W., Lee, C., von Schrader, S. (2014). 2013 Disability Status Report: United States. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Employment and Disability Institute (EDI). Retrieved Febr. 9, 2016 from www.disabilitystatistics.org.

² Erickson, W., Lee, C., von Schrader, S. (2014). 2013 Disability Status Report: United States. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Employment and Disability Institute (EDI). Retrieved Febr. 9, 2016 from www.disabilitystatistics.org.

³ Courtney-Long EA, et al. (2015) Prevalence of disability and disability type among adults – United States, 2013. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 64(29), 777-783. Retrieved Febr. 9, 2016 from http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6429a2.htm?s_cid=mm6429a2_w

* (Note: This survey does not ask about hearing impairment.)

⁴ http://reportcard.education.ne.gov/Default_State.aspx

⁵ Education Week Research Center (2015). Nebraska State Graduate Brief 2015. *Next Steps: Life After Special Education*. Educational Projects in Education, Inc. Retrieved July 13, 2015 from www.edweek.org

⁶ Erickson, W., Lee, C., von Schrader, S. (2014). 2013 Disability Status Report: United States. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Employment and Disability Institute (EDI). Retrieved Febr. 9, 2016 from www.disabilitystatistics.org.

⁷ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Center for Health Statistics. DATA 2010 [Internet database]. Hyattsville, MD: CDC; 2010 Retrieved Febr. 10, 2016 from: <http://wonder.cdc.gov/data2010/focus.htm> AND <http://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/disability-and-health#two>

⁸ Teacher Shortage Areas Nationwide Listing 1990-1991 through 2015-2016. Retrieved Febr. 13, 2016 from: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/pol/tsa.pdf>

⁹ Occupational Outlook Handbook, Bureau of Labor and Statistics, US Dept. of Labor. Retrieved Febr. 13, 2016 from: <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/>

rehabilitation are guided by state and federal shortages in qualified professionals, state and federal priorities for funding, and existing strengths of faculty in the department.

State and federal funding agencies (NDE, NIH, NSF, IES, USDOE, and OSEP) are committed to disability research, personnel preparation, or leadership training. For example, NIH currently has at least 14 active grant announcements (PA, PAR, or RFA) related to disabilities. IES has an “overarching priority to support research that contributes to school readiness and improved academic achievement for all students and particularly for those whose education prospects are hindered by inadequate education services and conditions associated with poverty, race/ethnicity, limited English proficiency, disability, and family circumstance”. In 2016, the US Congress (House and Senate) passed the “READ Act”, or Research Excellence and Advancement for Dyslexia Act. The bill requires the NSF to spend at least \$5 million per year on research on specific learning disabilities, and, of that, at least \$2.5 million on dyslexia research.

Building a framework for our training programs and integrating our strategic initiatives will be necessary to: 1) write collaborative, interdisciplinary grant proposals that address learning, communication, health and well being in a comprehensive way; 2) train leaders and scholars; and 3) provide 21st century clinical practice. To realize our strategic plan, the unit will need to hire an appropriate balance of tenure stream, professor of practice/lecturer, and research faculty as well as strong support staff. In addition, we seek to build clusters of faculty around our areas of emphasis who will be able to develop exemplary curriculum, build interdisciplinary grant applications, and with funding, can serve as a critical mass of investigators for larger scale grants. Faculty hires are not limited to just a single discipline, but rather should be viewed as having the potential to span multiple areas within and outside our department. Our goal is to leverage new hires to capitalize on existing expertise and develop new collaborations or strengthen existing collaborations. “Serving People with Special Needs” is at the core of SECD, yet we support an approach in which new faculty positions may have joint appointments and/or transdisciplinary expertise. We envision that new faculty positions will: 1) address our areas of emphasis from multiple perspectives that include biological, behavioral, and technological aspects; 2) build on current expertise in SECD, CEHS and UNL to create collaborations and contribute to a critical mass of faculty in our areas of emphasis; and 3) help increase research funding and support the expansion of undergraduate and graduate student enrollment.

Mission, Vision, Values

The role of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln as the primary intellectual and cultural resource for the State is fulfilled through the three missions of the University: teaching, research, and service. Teaching, research, and service take on a distinctive character at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln because of its status as a comprehensive land-grant university. These traits permit opportunities for the integration of multiple disciplines providing students more complete and sophisticated programs of study. Its land-grant tradition ensures a commitment to the special character of the State and its people. The faculty is responsible for the curricular content of the various programs and pursues new knowledge and truths within a structure that assures academic freedom in its intellectual endeavors. The curricula are designed to foster critical thinking, the re-examination of accepted truths, a respect for different perspectives including an appreciation of the multiethnic character of the nation, and a curiosity that leads to life-long learning. Additionally, an environment exists whereby students can develop aesthetic values and human relationships including tolerance for differing viewpoints.

The College of Education and Human Sciences is dedicated to enhancing the lives of individuals, families, schools, and communities and to strengthening the relationships among them.

The mission of the Department of Special Education and Communication Disorders is to enhance the lives of individuals with special needs, their families, schools, and communities.

Our vision is that individuals with special needs will:

1. Achieve maximum potential for learning,
2. Communicate autonomously,
3. Enjoy optimum health and well being throughout the lifespan.

The Department values:

Collaboration – We work together across multiple disciplines and scientific fields in order to find answers to big questions and solve difficult and complex problems.

Collegiality – Our interactions with others are respectful, polite, and professional. Each member's contributions is valued.

Creativity/Innovation – We strive to answer big questions and solve difficult problems to advance the department's professions of practice and deal with complex issues facing individuals with special needs or disabilities, their families, schools, and communities.

Dedication – We are passionate about and dedicated to the mission of the department and college, focused on success in advancing knowledge, training leaders, and serving our clients, their families, and our communities.

Diversity – Our faculty represent diverse expertise in research, teaching, and outreach encompassing professions of practice in special education, speech-language pathology, and audiology.

Integrity – We carry out our mission and strive for our goals with the highest level of integrity.

Respect – We respect diverse people, viewpoints, ideas, and perspectives.

Initiatives

Develop interdisciplinary research and training in the biological, behavioral and technological aspects of communication and learning (CEHS Spires – Innovative Inquiry, Early Childhood, Global Engagement).

- Revise undergraduate and graduate curricula to reflect this initiative.
 - Implement revised undergraduate curriculum in communication sciences and disorders.
 - Implement new graduate curriculum (Masters and Doctoral level) in special education.
 - One-year intensive MS program
 - PhD training with emphasis on intervention design
 - Promote pipelines of students from undergraduate to doctoral.
- Continue promoting undergraduate and graduate engagement in research
 - Distribute department research opportunities in a systematic manner (i.e., UCARE, extramural ventures)
 - Motivate undergraduate students (from SECD or other departments) engaged in research by laying out potential graduate study path, so they might build projects into graduate school theses and on to PhD training
- Grow the number of PhD students and build a rich community for PhD students through quarterly retreat and monthly colloquium.
 - Strengthen relationships with department and campus centers (e.g., CB3, CYFS, the Academy for Child and Family Well Being, etc.) and community agencies to develop collaborative grants, address research areas of mutual interest, and enhance research experiences for students.
 - Actively recruit through networking events at conferences and direct advertising in scientific journals (e.g. American Journal of Audiology, American Journal of Speech Language Pathology, Journal of Communication Disorders, Journal of Special Education)
 - Support collaborative communities of faculty and students within topic areas.
- Advocate for improvements in essential research infrastructure to facilitate scholarly work and dissemination of knowledge. Specific areas include:
 - Library resources linked across all campuses in the University of Nebraska system and accessible to research partners at collaborating institutions.
 - Increase the database of journals faculty can access.
 - Server working space and unlimited data storage systems that are available to all faculty, staff, and students and readily accessible from anywhere. HIPAA compliant storage would be beneficial.
 - Access to essential graphing, mathematical, and statistical software for faculty, staff, and students.
 - Ensure that appropriate statistical software is available in Ricketts Computer Lab

- and expand open hours.
 - Build online software repository for faculty
- Facilitate dissemination of scholarly work to the larger community.
 - Connect with UNL extension program and organize local conference or encourage faculty to give lecture in the counties across Nebraska to promote evidence based practice.

Strengthen academic-clinical partnerships to bring research from bench to practice (and practice to bench) and enhance clinical training opportunities. (CEHS Spires – 21st Century Teaching and Learning, Early Childhood, and Global Engagement):

- Further enhance community engagement/collaboration
 - Market specialty groups and monthly assessment clinics for specific populations (e.g., memory, aphasia, autism, hearing, PVFM, etc.)
 - Enhance partnerships with private/parochial schools
- Develop new clinical opportunities or strengthen existing opportunities that reflect needs within the community and student interests. Examples include:
 - Undergraduate practice experience for program areas (SPED, AUD, SLP)
 - Internship or practicum opportunities at different places including juvenile justice agencies, day cares or other early childhood centers, lab school (K-5), agencies on aging or assisted living, regional and state medical centers, international experiences.
- Develop in-service mechanisms to bring research findings to the community
 - Become an ASHA CEU provider
 - Present CEU activities for off campus preceptors, cooperating teachers, etc.
 - Establish series of seminars, journal clubs, speakers that occur in off-hours and offer free attendance for off-campus supervisors.
- Build strong and long-term partnerships with clinical practicum sites and public school districts to address research needs in the community.
- Build strong and long-term partnerships with clinical practicum sites and public schools to assure that clinical experience requirements can be met for each enrolled student.
 - Identify campus support for assisting with initial negotiation and preparation of affiliation agreements and contractual forms or establish training that that will help us facilitate this process.
 - Maintain state authorizations to provide required externships, field experiences and student teaching placements.
- Implement advisory committee(s) for each program area (SPED, AUD, SLP).

The University of Nebraska does not discriminate based on race, color, ethnicity, national origin, sex, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, disability, age, genetic information, veteran status, marital status, and/or political affiliation in its programs, activities, or employment.