

The Purpose of APS

The characteristic that distinguishes students majoring in communicative disorders & sciences from those in other majors is the deep-rooted passion they have for their field of study. Many students have friends who have become hearing impaired due to chronic exposure to loud noise. Some have family members who experienced difficulty with speech due to stroke or other neurological incidents. Others have received speech-language therapy during childhood. Although the personal histories of these students are quite variable, it is fair to say that their experiences planted the seed of interest in communication disorders. Moreover, when their interest is paired with their passion, the yield is the desire to help others and “make a difference.” Many students often report that they “can’t wait” to work with clients. Few know, however, that they don’t need to wait until they graduate for their passion and altruism to begin making the impact they strive for. In general, these students are unaware that they are needed as advocates. Hence, the purpose of the Advocacy Program for Students (APS) is to assist individual students and local NSSLHA chapters in achieving the following:

- A** **Asserting** the need for student advocates, and emphasizing their value for the cause.
- P** **Preparing** students for the role they will undertake as advocates.
- S** **Simplifying** the process, removing the overwhelming nature of democracy, and replacing it with a less intimidating, step-by-step procedure that students can reasonably follow.

The purpose of this program is NOT to serve as an instructional module for classroom lectures. The instructional content of this program has been taken directly from the legislative resource pages of the ASHA Web site (i.e., <http://www.asha.org/about/Legislation-Advocacy/>) and from various ASHA materials that are sited throughout. Remember that URLs referenced in this guide are subject to change. Whenever possible an alternate address will be provided.

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Why students MUST play an active role

As a representative for the National Student Speech Language Hearing Association (NSSLHA), the office of Diane Feinstein invited me to a “constituent breakfast” that it holds for individuals interested in advocating their cause and/or hearing about projects the Senator is currently working on. The room was filled with roughly 100 Californians of all ages. The Senator spoke for one hour about the projects she had been working on, then opened the floor for questions, and concluded the breakfast after a question and answer session.

When the breakfast was over, about half of the people in the room lined up to take a photograph with the Senator and to introduce themselves. Unable to pass up the opportunity, I joined the line quite rapidly. In my progression up the line, I couldn’t help but notice all the business cards being handed to the Senator before each professional snapped their new collector’s photo. There was a routine being carried out from professional to professional. Business card, handshake, *snap*... business card, handshake, *snap*... business card, handshake, *snap*...

As the only student in the room, I had no business card, but was more than happy to break this rather monotonous cycle the Senator had found herself in. When it was my turn, I approached the Senator with a brochure on “Voice Quality Management” that Linda Lucas, ASHA’s Director of Grassroots Advocacy, had given me the previous day at the ASHA National Office. I gave her the brochure and said with a smile, “Hi Senator Feinstein we value your voice at the National Student Speech Language Hearing Association. So, we wanted to give you this brochure on maintaining voice quality, created by the American Speech-Language Hearing Association. Thanks for all you do to support us.” I can’t recall what she replied, but the expression said it all.

Meeting the Senator was an exciting event for me. It was so exciting that I got lost in the Hart Senate building afterwards trying to find my way out. I was walking around that very large building for what seemed like hours. I decided to retrace my steps and walked back by Senator Feinstein's office. As I was walking towards her office, amidst a flock of her legislative assistants, I saw Senator Feinstein leaving for another appointment. She held only ONE THING in her hand. And what was that one thing? None other than the brochure I had given to her. My purpose was fulfilled and my voice heard. And who was rewarded for my visit? The professional organization's that I represent, NSSLHA and ASHA.

She may not have been familiar with NSSLHA and ASHA before my visit but she is now. Can you say the same for the representatives in your state?

Senator Feinstein is only one legislator from California. There is a nation full of legislators (senators and congressmen) that ASHA wants to communicate their message to. Students have a unique voice that stands out to legislators. Legislators love hearing from students! We are their future constituents. So it's time that we use our voice as students and advocate for ASHA and the causes they support. Clients with disabilities and university programs lacking funding need our help! Health insurance agencies are jeopardizing the rights of the individuals they cover! We have to help those individuals get the best care. What better reason is there to put our passion and altruism to work than for advancing the treatment and quality of care for individuals living with speech and hearing impairments? What better way is there to have an impact on the laws and policies governing our field? We need to get passionate for this profession AS STUDENTS, using our energy and enthusiasm for grassroots advocacy around the issues that matter most to us.

How do we get there? Continue reading to learn the rules of the "game" involved with becoming an effective student advocate.

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Legislative Terminology

Understanding the “Game of Advocacy”

The word “advocacy” can be a confusing term for students. Additionally, the advocacy process (i.e., how to advocate) is often uncertain for the inexperienced. In this chapter, we will define several key words and titles pertinent to advocacy in the field of communication disorders, as well as briefly describe the role of key players (government/state officials) in advocacy procedures.

The “Game of Advocacy”

In “the game of advocacy,” the goal is to get the attention of certain governmental officials in order to gain support for your cause. Following is a list of the key players. You need to understand each of their roles to help you determine the person that will best help you reach your goal.

Congressman: A member of the lower house of the U.S. Congress—The House of Representatives. There is at least one congressman for every state, but many states have several, depending on the state’s population. The U.S. has a total of 435 voting representatives to Congress. A bill must first pass through the House of Representatives before arriving on the Senate side, so the offices of local congressmen are a key focus of advocacy in the initiation of a bill.

Senator: A member of the upper house of the U.S. Congress—the Senate. There are 100 senators, two senators for each state. Senators study, amend, approve, and reject bills introduced in the Senate. They also are in charge of undertaking studies surrounding major social and economic issues within their state of representation. Bills must first go through the House of Representatives before arriving in the Senate. When a bill is passed through both the House of Representatives and the Senate, the bill becomes an act.

Staff: The staff persons of legislators, also known as legislative assistants, are important allies to have in the grassroots advocacy process. Among the duties of legislative assistants are meeting with constituents when the legislator is unable to meet (which is common), assisting the legislator in carrying out their business, taking and directing calls made to the legislator's office, and helping to arrange/organize seminars put on by the legislator. Aside from their duties, legislative assistants tend to be the "information database" of legislative matters going around the office. With their knowledge of the system and of the legislator they assist, legislative assistants are equipped to tell an advocate what the legislator's viewpoint would be regarding the issue Both senators and congressmen have legislative assistants.

Legislative Terminology¹

Bill: A form of legislative measure that gets introduced in Congress.

Congress: The national law-making body of the United States. The U.S. Congress is split into two divisions— the Senate and House of Representatives.

Constituent: A United States (voting) citizen represented by an overseeing legislator of the citizen's district (To locate the legislators of YOUR district, visit <http://www.asha.org/about/legislation-advocacy/grassroots/takeaction.htm>).

Capitol Hill: This term is predominantly and historically used to refer to the Capitol Hill building where Congress meets in Washington D.C. (and often for the surrounding area). This term has occasionally been used to also refer to state capitol buildings. Meeting in person with a legislator (or their staff) at the national capitol would often be referred to as a "Hill visit."

¹ More terminology can be found in ASHA's *Curriculum Guide to Grassroots Advocacy in Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology*, pages 8 and 37–40.

Grassroots advocacy: The method by which an individual goes about seeking legislative changes for the good of his/her organization or cause. Grassroots advocacy can be used to seek increased funding or to change/adjust policy. To view current issues in the fields of speech and hearing that require the attention of grassroots advocacy, check out your state association's Web site at <http://www.asha.org/about/legislation-advocacy/state/associations/> or visit ASHA's Grassroots Advocacy pages at <http://www.asha.org/about/legislation-advocacy/grassroots/>.

Legislation: Law and policy put together by a legislative body (e.g., a bill).

Legislator: An individual in charge of creating or enacting laws and policies. Legislators have various roles in the law-making process. Their roles, and the roles of others involved, are mentioned in the next chapter.

Acronyms

The following acronyms of speech and hearing associations are important to know. Many associations provide resources for keeping up-to-date lists of legislative issues that need attention.

ASHA: American Speech-Language Hearing Association

NSSLHA: National Student Speech Language Hearing Association

[State]SHA: The first letter or two of your state, followed by Speech-Language-Hearing Association, represents your state Speech-Language-Hearing Association. For example,

FLSHA: Florida Speech-Language-Hearing Association

CSHA: California Speech-Language-Hearing Association

This chapter is designed to take students step-by-step through the advocacy process. Students who haven't had advocacy experience can simply use the following tips to achieve successful advocacy outcomes. It is important that students unfamiliar to the advocacy process follow this plan step-by-step and not skip ahead. The steps were created to smoothly and effectively walk students through the process of advocacy. The more thoroughly each step is completed, the more rewarding the process will be in the end.

Also I think it's important to mention that a student DOES NOT have to be directly affected by a legislative matter to bring it to the attention of their legislator. Whether a student is directly affected by an issue (the matter affects the student personally) or indirectly affected by an issue (the matter affects the student's field of study), the student remains a prime candidate for advocacy.

Step One: Become a Registered Voter

Politicians are interested in talking with "constituents" another name for people who are registered to vote and can elect them or remove them from office. If you are not already registered to vote, then, get registered. Contact the office of voting and elections in your state of residency (or its equivalent) to find out what you have to do to become a registered voter or visit ASHA's "Get Out the Vote" Web site at http://www.asha.org/gotv/before_election.htm and register to vote. Students can register to vote directly from the "Get Out the Vote" page by printing out the appropriate form for your state and mailing it in. You may also use this page to get updated information on candidates, polling places, polling times, etc.

Then once you register, make sure that you exercise your right and VOTE.

Step Two: Educate yourself about what’s “hot” on the advocacy grill at ASHA

NSSLHA members receive three valuable resources regarding the field of speech and hearing—*The ASHA Leader*, *Contemporary Issues in Communication Science and Disorders*, and one ASHA journal—as well as access to the ASHA members only Web resource pages². These pages hold current, up-to-date information briefs on the issues that need the most attention relative to the speech and hearing professions. This is by far the best resource for the purposes of advocacy.

As a national NSSLHA member, you have full access to ASHA’s legislative resource pages. Visit those pages frequently at <http://www.asha.org/about/Legislation-Advocacy/>.

If you are not a member of NSSLHA then join. You won’t have access to the information that you need to be an advocate if you are not a member of the national association. Information to join the national association is on the Web site at www.nsslha.org/join.

Next, choose the type of advocacy issues you are most interested in supporting -- Federal or state. If you are not sure where to begin, I would suggest looking into the federal issues first to become educated on national issues and then pairing down your focus once you know more.

If you are most interested in federal issues, click on “Federal Legislation & Regulatory Advocacy” then click on “Issue Briefs.” This is where you will spend time reading up on the advocacy issues that impact our profession. Please take your time reading through the different briefs. When you find an issue that especially interests you, go beyond the brief and do further research into the issue. Simply call or e-mail the contact person

² On your first visit to the ASHA Web site, you will be asked to register -- create a login and password. Visit <http://www.asha.org/sitehelp/register.htm> to register for member only access. The login will be your e-mail address. You will be automatically prompted to enter these in every time you decide to visit the member only areas of site.

listed in the brief and tell them you are a student interested in advocating for this issue. Let them know that you are a NSSLHA member participating in the APS and that you plan on contacting your legislator to (further) bring this issue to their attention. Ask the contact person for some guidance about who to talk to and what exactly to say. They will be more than happy to help you. Incorporate their advice into Step Three below.

If you find that you would rather tackle matters on the state level, then visit the ASHA Web site and click on "State Policy." For state advocacy issues, you should locate your state association's Web site by clicking on "State Associations" on the ASHA Legislative & Advocacy page.

Over the next couple of months, ASHA will add a feature to the "Take Action" page of the Web site that will allow for targeted searches by state legislative issues. Bookmark <http://www.asha.org/about/legislation-advocacy/grassroots/takeaction.htm> and visit regularly.

Step Three: Contact the lawmakers in your area and seek their attention

To find the contact information for the senators and congressmen in your area, visit <http://www.asha.org/about/legislation-advocacy/grassroots/takeaction.htm>. This site automatically locates the lawmakers for your area when you provide the zip code.

Another method of locating legislator information is www.congressmerge.com.

After finding the legislators in your area make contact through one of these methods:

Contact the legislator by e-mail. Using e-mail to contact legislators has become the preferred method of contact. Most offices use "web forms" that winnow out e-mails from non-constituents so that the e-mails from people who live in a legislator's state and/or congressional district will receive immediate and priority attention.

Format your e-mail the same way you would a printed letter. End the e-mail letter with your automatic signature (if you have one) or simply type out your full name.

The body of your letter should include the subject matter you wish to address, as well as any personal tie-ins you might have with the issue. Legislators want to hear how you and/or your field of study is affected by the issue.

Read up on your legislator's background or voting record before writing to them to see if he/she is personally affected by the issue. For example, if you choose to advocate for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Full-Funding, a legislator who is disabled would be considered personally affected by this issue.

Make sure your letter is precise, but that it clearly and strongly states your point. When complete, edit your letter and allow some space for your signature. Below your signature, make sure you specify that you are a student at _____ University. Then send your letter right away! A response can take as long as one to three weeks. It may surprise you how responsive your legislator turns out to be. Good luck!

Arrange a visit with your legislator. There is nothing more effective than one-on-one contact. If you feel compelled to visit your legislator in person (and you are encouraged to do so) there is a terrific resource called "10 Easy Steps for Effective Meetings with Legislators" available at http://www.asha.org/about/legislation-advocacy/grassroots/local_visit_10steps.htm.

Fax a letter to the legislator. If there is a pressing issue that you want to bring to the attention of your legislator, faxing a letter is also an appropriate option. If you find yourself writing a letter to a legislator, following is an example on how to begin a letter:

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123 Alphabet Street
Mayberry, CA 95050
(408) 123-4567

August 21, 2003

The Honorable Diane Feinstein
United States Senate
112 Hart Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510-0505

Dear Senator Feinstein,

What about contacting the legislators by mail? Although at one time the preferred method in corresponding with legislators it has become less so due to the recent anthrax and ricin scares. Regular mail is being irradiated which is delaying its delivery by weeks or even months. Even though letters continue to be viewed as more formal and professional, you will receive a faster response by emailing, visiting, or faxing to the legislator.

Step Four: Follow-up

Building relationships is the key to becoming an effective advocate. After you have contact with your legislator it is always appropriate to follow-up with a “thank you plus note.” A “thank you plus note” serves to thank your legislator for the reply/e-mail/meeting/ with you, but also summarize the issue(s) you discussed with him/her in a clear, constructive manner.

If your interactions have been limited to the legislative assistant send a “thank you plus note” to the legislative assistant AND to the legislator. Let your legislator know what the assistant said on the legislator’s behalf and how the interactions have been going. If the assistant was very courteous to you, make sure you mention that.

Once you send the “thank-you plus note” this part of the advocacy process is completed. But it shouldn’t stop there.

You should make it a habit to remain in constant contact with your legislator until your issue has reached the appropriate action. Frequently drop notes to your legislator to update him/her on the status of matters and to keep the issue ever present in their minds.

And don’t give up if the outcome of your issue doesn’t go as you had hoped. Continue to help your legislator understand how important this matter is to people living with communication disorders or the individuals working with communicative disorders. Over time, people will start to see things differently. You have to be patient!

4 Advocacy and Your NSSLHA Chapter

The ideal place to perform advocacy as a student, especially on a first encounter, is with a group of other students and your NSSLHA chapter is the best place to get your feet wet. Using your NSSLHA chapter to facilitate an APS will bring CSD students together for a good cause, raise chapter visibility on campus and in the community, and provide legislative awareness to other university students who might not have otherwise been interested. If you are the president or president-elect of a local NSSLHA chapter and are interested in incorporating APS into your chapter’s activities agenda, then use the following table as a guide. It is recommended that you follow the table in sequence.

Table 1: Incorporating APS into your local NSSLHA Chapter

1	Make sure every member of your chapter is a registered voter and a national NSSLHA member	Mandatory	<p>Your chapter will be more effective advocates if the members are registered voters. Remember, legislators want to talk to constituents.</p> <p>It is also important for your chapter to be in good standing with the national association. NSSLHA requires that all local chapter officers are members at the National NSSLHA level. This is important because the officers, especially the president and vice-president must have an affiliation with the national association they represent in order to lead other students. In order for your NSSLHA chapter to become effectively involved in advocacy make sure that the chapter leadership sets the example by becoming NSSLHA members.</p>
2	Create a position on your board for legislation	Highly Recommended	<p>It is very important that if advocacy is going to be implemented as a service area in the chapter that the Board has a clear commitment to the issue. One way of showing your commitment is by creating an executive position solely devoted to legislative matters, a legislative officer. The</p>

			legislative officer would “specialize” in legislative matters in CSD and be dedicated to promoting advocacy within the chapter. This person should have a passion for the issues and be able to communicate those matters to students and organize them around a cause. The legislative officer will also help the Board determine its priority areas.
3	Call a “legislation meeting”	Mandatory	Once the Board has made a commitment to advocacy. It’s time to get the membership involved. It is crucial that a meeting take place with the students to explain the advocacy and legislative process and to make sure that they understand what will be expected. It may also be helpful to have a student or faculty member from the political science, pre-law or government department at your university on hand to lend additional support. This meeting can be a special meeting called for this purpose only or it could simply be an agenda item at a general meeting. A good way to initiate the meeting would be for your legislative officer to briefly explain the APS and then talk to the group about the Board’s legislative priorities.
4	Print out legislative briefs/summaries for the group	Recommended	It is important that the chapter develop an advocacy strategy so that everyone is organized around the same issue. The Board needs to determine where the chapter’s priority areas should rest and then communicate that information to the membership. Try to discourage individual students from selecting their own issues outside of what the group is trying to accomplish. Establish a process for members to bring legislative priorities to the Board for consideration.

6	Correspond with your state contact	Recommended	Some state contacts send out updates to anyone on their mailing list. If your legislator has a mailing list, join it, and/or sign up every member of your chapter. Make it a practice and encourage everyone in the chapter to correspond with their legislators regularly.
7	Do Something	Highly Recommended	Organize a voter registration drive at your university, contact the office of elections in the state to coordinate using your chapter members as volunteers on election day at poll sites, organize a “take it to the streets” campaign and arrange to get people to the polls on election day, or invite your legislator to come to your campus to meet with students. Involve the political science, pre-law, and public administration students on your campus to work with you. Remember there is strength in numbers. Whatever you decide to do write to your legislator and let him/her know. Any of these activities will increase the exposure of your chapter and really show the students the effectiveness of their efforts.

Now you have learned all you need to know about advocacy and how students really do have a unique voice in the process. You have also learned important legislative terminology, the roles of key lawmakers, and how the system works. You should be more aware of the legislative priorities of ASHA and/or your state association and are more knowledgeable than many professionals in the field. You now have the confidence to contact your lawmakers and have effective conversations and correspondence with them.

You have accomplished a lot but more importantly than everything above mentioned, is how you personally have become an important ally to your state and federal association. Before even starting your career you are becoming a major player in the deep-rooted legislative structure of your future profession. You now possess the skills to make a significant difference in your field and it is my hope that you will pass this knowledge to others.

NSSLHA invites you to share your experiences implementing advocacy in your chapter. Please tell us your success stories so that we may highlight your accomplishments in future issues of our newsletter, News & Notes. Send your submission and electronic photographs to *nsslha@asha.org*.

If I can personally be of assistance to you as you implement APS on your campus, please do not hesitate to contact me:

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Now go forth and advocate !

Acknowledgements

I would like, first and foremost, to thank all the students who took the time to provide their valuable feedback on the early drafts of this program: Marie Patton, 2002–2003 NSSLHA President; Keenya Rudd, 2002–2004 Region VIII Councilor; and Jennifer Reynolds, 2002–2004 San José State University, NSSLHA Secretary. Your continued devotion to the NSSLHA cause will take each of you far. Thank you for your support.

Thank you to ASHA governance and staff who have provided students with the resources to make a difference through advocacy. Special thanks to Lisa O'Connor for her feedback on this program, and most of all, for the ever continuous support for students.

Also, I would like to thank the NSSLHA consultants and staff whose guidance made my positive advocacy experiences possible: Lynn Flahive, NSSLHA Executive Director; Dawn Dickerson, NSSLHA Director of Operations, and Dr. Jean Novak, NSSLHA Consultant-at-Large.

Thank you also to Dr. Anthony Caruso, NSSLHA Editorial Consultant, for his comments and support for this program, and for the tremendous effort he has provided for the NSSLHA journal, *Contemporary Issues in Communicative Sciences & Disorders (CICSD)* over the years.