Survey on Perspectives of Pursuing a PhD in Communicative Disorders

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Of all faculty positions in the field of Communication Sciences and Disorders, 6-7% are unfilled (ASHA, 2002). Fewer faculty in the field means that fewer people create the research to choose treatments for clients or teach future clinicians. Madison, Guy, and Koch (2004) compared surveys from speech-language pathologists (SLPs) who had completed a master’s degree to faculty to determine reasons why SLPs do or do not pursue a Ph.D. Reasons for not pursuing a Ph.D. were mismatched. There has been no attempt to understand, from a student's perspective, why students are not pursuing doctoral degrees. Many graduate students are not pursuing a Ph.D., and the prevailing question is why?

Objective

The goal of this survey was to discern students’ views about pursuing a Ph.D. and to compare students’ perceptions to the experiences of faculty.

METHOD

A prospective comparative survey of faculty and students at three universities contrasted students’ perceptions about life as a faculty member with the reality of a faculty member’s career.

Two surveys, one for faculty and one for students, were created via online survey software available at surveymonkey.com where each 27 question survey was expected to take approximately 5-10 minutes.

Each question was created by the student investigator after conversations with peers and perusing the ASHA discussion forums concerning topics related to obtaining a Ph.D. in the “Ph.D. Education” forum. The first list of questions was carefully selected to fit into seven different areas: general demographics, deciding to get a Ph.D., teaching perspectives, research perspectives, general career questions, personal, and to pursue or not pursue.

The survey was sent to 279 people (45 faculty and 234 students) and 73 (18 faculty and 55 students) actually completed the survey for a 24% response rate.

RESULTS

Students Considering Pursuing a Ph.D.

Students were almost evenly split between decidedly ‘no’ and decidedly ‘yes’:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>0%</th>
<th>10%</th>
<th>20%</th>
<th>30%</th>
<th>40%</th>
<th>50%</th>
<th>60%</th>
<th>70%</th>
<th>80%</th>
<th>90%</th>
<th>100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>Students</td>
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Why a Ph.D. shortage?

Students felt the reason was largely because of the appeal of clinical work. Faculty agreed, but also felt there were ‘other’ reasons:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clinical work</th>
<th>Other</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>Students</td>
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Finding Personal-Professional Balance

All faculty felt they achieved some level of balance, but some students didn’t think they could find balance in a career as a professor:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Balance</th>
<th>Mostly Balance</th>
<th>Sometimes Balance</th>
<th>Rarely Balance</th>
<th>No Balance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>Students</td>
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Faculty Inspiration and Student Involvement in Research

Many faculty were inspired to do research by a respected professor or mentor. Many students at the master’s or Au.D. level are involved in research:

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<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Students</th>
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Top 3 Reasons NOT to Pursue a Ph.D.

Faculty and students ranked 14 reasons for not pursuing a Ph.D. The top 3 reasons (not including ‘other’) were compared to the reasons from Madison et al. (2004) faculty and SLPs. Colors indicate matched reasons across groups:

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Students</th>
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Top 3 Reasons TO Pursue a Ph.D.

Students and faculty ranked 13 reasons for pursuing a Ph.D. The top 3 reasons (not including ‘other’) were compared to the reasons from Madison et al. faculty and SLPs. Colors indicate matched reasons across groups:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Students</th>
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</table>

REFERENCES


Madison, C.L., Guy, B., & Koch, M. (2004). Pursuit of the Ph.D. ‘Research interest’ was similar across faculty groups and SLPs whereas ‘interest in higher education’ was different across faculty groups and students.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was supported by the Students Preparing for Academic and Research Careers (SPARC) award from the American-Speech-Language-and-Hearing Association.
Learner Outcomes:
Participants will be able to:
1. describe their own perception about the professional and personal lifestyles of faculty.
2. identify the differences between students’ and faculty’s perceptions of reasons for and against pursuing a Ph.D.
3. discuss with peers and colleagues the direction of our field and the actions they wish to take to alleviate the situation.

Disclosure Statement
The authors have no financial or nonfinancial interest in any organization whose products or services are described, reviewed, evaluated or compared in the presentation.