Undergraduates’ Knowledge and Interest in the Doctorate of Philosophy
Degree for Communication Sciences and Disorders
Elizabeth Witter & Tim Brackenbury
Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH

Abstract
ASHA has projected a shortage of professionals in Communication Sciences and Disorders (CSD) who hold a doctorate of philosophy degree. These professionals have expertise in the field and contribute to its development through research and the education of future clinicians. Efforts have been made to remediate this problem through increasing awareness of the shortage and promoting the doctorate degree to students. However, the knowledge and interest that students have about the doctorate degree are not known. To evaluate this, 985 undergraduate CSD students from across the nation participated in a survey inquiring about their perceptions, knowledge, and interest in the doctorate degree in CSD. Results of the survey indicated that students have limited knowledge and interest in the doctorate degree. Their educational backgrounds and experiences relate to their level of knowledge of the doctorate degree. Undergraduate students’ level of interest in achieving a doctorate related to their perceived knowledge of the degree, but not their demonstrated knowledge. Overall, opportunities that relate to doctoral careers should be promoted to undergraduate students in order to increase knowledge and interest in the degree.

Rationale
The past proposals and current progress towards addressing the projected doctoral shortages are predicated on the idea that more knowledge and experience will lead to a greater interest in doctoral level training (Inglim, Olkin, & Wilson, 2002; McCorma, 2008). Yet, there is currently no published information on what undergraduates know about doctorate degrees in CSD.

Research Questions
• What demonstrated and perceived knowledge do undergraduate students have about the doctorate of philosophy degree in CSD?  
• How do their general educational backgrounds relate to their demonstrated and perceived knowledge?  
• How do prior experiences with the doctorate degree and its common professional roles relate to their demonstrated and perceived knowledge of the doctorate of philosophy degree in CSD?  
• How does level of interest relate to their level of interest in pursuing a doctorate of philosophy degree in CSD?  
• How do their general educational backgrounds relate to their demonstrated and perceived knowledge?

Method
Participants
• 985 CSD students from across the United States:  
  • undergraduate freshmen, sophomores, juniors, seniors, and post-baccalaureates.

Materials and Data Collection
• Internet-based questionnaire was used which consisted of 52 survey questions.  
  • Five sections: Background Information, Ph.D. Knowledge and Methods, Encouragement and Qualities, Level of Interest, and Educational Experiences.

Analysis
• A total of 1,663 people responded to the survey in at least some form.
• Respondents and their data were deleted if they did not view the entire survey, answered questions in a manner that did not fit the study’s parameters, and/or did not answer the background information questions.

Interpretation
• The number of individuals who responded to each survey item varied from 685 to 981.

Final data were statistically analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).  
• Four different parametric procedures were conducted: t-tests, Independent-Samples t-test, Pearson Product Moment Correlation, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Results
• Two types of knowledge of the doctorate degree were analyzed and compared: Demonstrated and Perceived.
• 5 level Likert-scale for perceived knowledge: no knowledge, almost no knowledge, limited knowledge, somewhat knowledgeable, and very knowledgeable.
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Interest
• Level of interest did not differ significantly (F(4, 766) = 0.41, p = .78).
• Perceived interest was significant (F(3, 760) = 0.155).

Educational Experiences
• Actively searching for information (citations) was significantly higher for those who had searched (χ²(750) = 12.19, p < .001).
• The overall mean demonstrated knowledge score was 1.66 (SD= 1.08, scale from 0 to 5).
• Perceived knowledge distribution: no knowledge almost no knowledge limited knowledge somewhat knowledgeable very knowledgeable
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Discussion
Level of Knowledge
• The overall mean demonstrated knowledge score was quite low.
• 85% of the participants perceived their knowledge of the doctorate degree as “limited” or lower.

Level of Interest
• There was a bimodal distribution to the students’ level of interest.
• Demonstrated knowledge about the doctorate degree did not have a major impact on interest in the degree.
• Students with greater knowledge were further along in their education, attended programs that offered degrees at all levels, had higher GPAs, actively searched for information about the doctorate degree, spoke with CSD faculty, and/or had research experience.

Implications
• The majority of the attempts to address the projected doctoral shortages have come through the discipline’s governing bodies.
• The focus needs to shift from the national to individual program level.
• Programs and faculty should emphasize the reasons that they got their own doctorates and why they remain in academic positions.
• We should consciously expose students to the multiple aspects of working with a doctorate, such as the joys of questioning and discovering, and the advancement of the field.


References
