The Roxelyn and Richard Pepper Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders offers a major in human communication sciences, providing undergraduate students with a foundation for the study of disorders of hearing, speech, language, and learning. The department’s classroom, clinical, and research facilities are located in the Frances Searle Building on the Evanston campus. The undergraduate program emphasizes the basic science principles underlying all human communication and cognition and introduces students to clinical issues and research findings that pertain to disorders of communication and learning. The major in human communication sciences is particularly appealing to students who plan to attend graduate or professional school in fields such as speech and language pathology, audiology, learning disabilities, medicine, dentistry, and biomedical engineering. It is an attractive major for students admitted to the Honors Program in Medical Education, providing opportunities for students to connect their study of basic scientific principles to research and clinical activities as well as real-life issues. Students who do not pursue medical, clinically based, or research graduate degrees may enter careers in health-related private industry or the public sector.

Undergraduate majors in human communication sciences have the option of pursuing a general course of study, typical for most premed students, or of choosing among three areas of concentration: audiology and hearing sciences, learning disabilities, and speech and language pathology.

Audiology and hearing sciences encompasses the study of hearing, hearing disorders, and the treatment of hearing disorders. Emphasis is on basic communication science, including study of the anatomical, physiological, and physical bases of hearing. Undergraduate courses present information on normal communication processes and provide an introduction to audiological assessment and hearing loss management.

Learning disabilities is concerned with learning processes and their dysfunctions, including disorders of perception, memory, language, and conceptualization. Such disorders lead to problems in the acquisition and use of oral language, reading, writing, and math skills that require specialized remediation. Undergraduate coursework stresses theoretical, scientific, clinical, and educational issues as a foundation for advanced training.

Speech and language pathology introduces students to the psychological, linguistic, neurological, acoustic, anatomical, and physiological bases of normal speech and language behavior. As their knowledge of normal speech, language, learning, and hearing processes increases, students are introduced to the communicative disorders that result from the disruption of these processes. Advanced undergraduate courses are concerned with the nature, recognition, and management of common communicative disorders and present issues related to administration and public policy.

Research Practicum

Students may register for a research practicum in which they gain research experience by working with a faculty member on design, execution, and presentation of a research project. Students may develop ideas for an independent study based on their research practicum experience.

Independent Study

Students may register for units of independent study, in which they work closely with a faculty member on a topic of mutual interest. Students interested in independent study should select courses that may lead to more advanced library or laboratory research.

Programs of Study


Undergraduates may take 400-level courses with permission of the instructor.

- CSD 108-0 Sound and Communication Health (1 Unit) Introduction to communication sciences and disorders. Role of sound in basic human communication; hearing, speech, language, and learning mechanisms required to process and produce sound; assessment and treatment of disorders caused by a breakdown in sound processing. May not be taken with or after CSD 318-0, CSD 320-0, or CSD 373-0.
- CSD 110-0 Introduction to Hearing and Speech Acoustics (1 Unit) Introduction to acoustics, measurement of hearing, and the acoustical properties of speech sounds. Sound waves; standards of measuring magnitude; audiograms; source-filter theory; spectrograms.
- CSD 112-0 The Scientific Exploration of Communication (1 Unit) Introduction to biology and physics of human communication. Basic properties of speech sounds and how they are produced and received; relation between human anatomical structures involved in sound production, modulation, and reception; brain mechanisms of processing speech sounds. Natural Sciences Distro Area
- CSD 202-0 Neurobiology of Communication (1 Unit) Human anatomy, physiology, and neurology in relation to communicative behavior. Sensory, perceptual, cognitive, and motor processes. Natural Sciences Distro Area
- CSD 205-0 Study of Learning and Learning Problems in the Classroom (1 Unit) Study of children’s learning in classroom settings. Field placement, using informal assessments of social, cognitive, and communication functioning, for children with and without exceptionalities.
- CSD 207-0 Seminar in Communication Sciences & Disorders (1 Unit) Major topics of research interest in communicative disorders. Principles of research in communicative disorders.
- CSD 301-0 Anatomy and Physiology of the Vocal Mechanism (1 Unit) Anatomical and physiological mechanisms of breathing, phonation, and articulation. Laboratories include dissection and participation in physiological research. Prerequisite: sophomore standing or above. Natural Sciences Distro Area
- CSD 302-0 Anatomy and Physiology of the Peripheral Hearing Mechanism (1 Unit) Gross and fine structure; function of the peripheral auditory system. Prerequisites: junior standing or above, CSD 202-0, or consent of instructor.
CSD 303-0 Brain and Cognition (1 Unit)  Neural bases of cognitive processing with emphases on neuroimaging approaches in the areas of encoding, perception, attention, memory, language, reading, motor control, and executive functioning. Taught with PSYCH 327-0; students may not earn credit for both courses. Interdisciplinary Distro - See Rules (https://catalogs.northwestern.edu/undergraduate/artsci/ #schoolrequirementstext)  Natural Sciences Distro Area Social Behavioral Sciences Distro Area

CSD 304-0 Statistics in Communication Sciences and Disorders (1 Unit)  Introduction to research design and data analysis in communication sciences and disorders; statistical inference. Formal Studies Distro Area

CSD 305-0 Phonetics (1 Unit)  Training in transcription of English speech sounds. Introduction to phonological analysis, dynamics of articulation, and dialect variations. Interdisciplinary Distro - See Rules (https://catalogs.northwestern.edu/undergraduate/artsci/ #schoolrequirementstext)  Natural Sciences Distro Area Social Behavioral Sciences Distro Area

CSD 306-0 Psychoacoustics (1 Unit)  Principles underlying perception of pitch, loudness, auditory space, auditory patterns, and speech. Psychophysical procedures for studying psychoacoustics and the impact of hearing impairment are considered. Social Behavioral Sciences Distro Area

CSD 309-0 Culture, Language and Learning (1 Unit)  Language and culture; transmission of culture through language; effects of cultural variety on perception, cognition, and learning; implications of cultural and linguistic diversity in communicative disorders. Social Behavioral Sciences Distro Area

CSD 310-0 Biological Foundations of Speech and Music (1 Unit)  Anatomy and physiology of the central auditory pathway, experience-related neural plasticity, right/left brain specialization, audiovisual integration, auditory learning and perception, and neural encoding of speech and music. Crosslisted with CSD 410-0 and SAI 502-0. Prerequisite: junior standing or consent of instructor. Natural Sciences Distro Area

CSD 318-0 Introduction to Audiology (1 Unit)  Introduction to the measurement of hearing in humans. Basic anatomy of the ear, measurement of hearing, potential disorders of hearing. Natural Sciences Distro Area

CSD 319-0 Aural Rehabilitation (1 Unit)  Principles and practices in rehabilitation of children and adults, including use of sensory aids, counseling, communication remediation (emphasizing speech reading), and auditory training techniques.

CSD 320-0 Introduction to Speech, Language, Learning, and Their Disorders (1 Unit)  Overview of normal and disordered communication. Speech, language, hearing, and cognitive development disorders and their psychosocial effects, across the age continuum according to etiology, clinical manifestations, and intervention. Anatomy and physiology of speech, language, and hearing. Service-delivery settings; ethical and legal considerations; professional issues.

CSD 332-0 Clinical Assisting in Speech and Language Pathology (1 Unit)  Introduction to clinical practice, the dynamics of the client-clinician relationship and general clinical protocol, and the development and execution of therapy goals and procedures. Prerequisites: CSD 392-0 and CSD 305-0, or consent of instructor.

CSD 334-0 Delivery Systems in Speech & Language Pathology (1 Unit)  Organization and administration of speech language pathology services in schools, health care agencies, and private practice.

CSD 342-0 Language and Cognition in Atypical Development (1 Unit)  Description and theory relevant to the cognitive, linguistic, and social development of individuals with different developmental disorders throughout the lifespan. Social Behavioral Sciences Distro Area

CSD 369-0 Special Topics in Communication Sciences and Disorders (0.5-1 Unit)  Current scientific and professional problems in communication sciences and disorders. Topics vary by quarter.

CSD 373-0 Learning Disabilities (1 Unit)  Psychological, neurological, and linguistic theories of language and learning as related to learning disabilities. Social Behavioral Sciences Distro Area

CSD 376-0 Diagnostic & Remedial Approaches for Children With Learning Problems (1 Unit)  Introduction to the field of learning disabilities and its theoretical perspectives, assessment, and instruction principles, and to the process of clinical teaching. Emphasis on instruction, accommodation, service delivery, progress monitoring, and transition. Social Behavioral Sciences Distro Area

CSD 380-0 Introduction to Clinical Procedures in Learning Disabilities (1 Unit)  Practicum experience in clinical settings. Learning processes and application of instructional approaches. Field studies, reading, and weekly seminars. Prerequisite: CSD 376-0.

CSD 382-0 Autism Spectrum Disorders (1 Unit)  Overview of autism, focusing on its clinical presentation and potential causes, diagnosis, assessments for characterizing autistic features in research, evaluation (based on behavior, cognition, neuroimaging, and genetics) of theories of autism’s causes, and controversies (changing prevalence, myths about causation).

CSD 392-0 Language Development and Usage (1 Unit)  Development of spoken and written language as it relates to child development; includes phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic components. Cultural and individual linguistic diversity. Social Behavioral Sciences Distro Area

CSD 398-0 Research Practicum in Communication Sciences and Disorders (0.5-1 Unit)  Working with a faculty member on design, execution, and presentation of a research project. Activities may include a review of literature, design of an experiment, data collection, coding, analysis, and oral or written presentation of experimental results.

CSD 399-0 Independent Study (0.5-1 Unit)  Prerequisite: consent of undergraduate dean after submission of petition.