

“Students with Communication Disorders in Kentucky Higher Education:  
Challenges and Resources”

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## Abstract

Quality resources for the academic and social success of university students with communication disorders are necessary. Seeking to promote success in students with these disorders are programs at Eastern Kentucky, Western Kentucky, and Murray State. Current literature on these disorders gives insight on the unique skill-sets and experiences of students with communication disorders. Following the included research, the programs from each respective university found to be the most successful in the aforementioned areas are Eastern Kentucky's Speech-Language-Hearing Clinic, Western Kentucky's Communications Disorder Clinic, and Murray State University's Student Disability Services.

People living with communication disorders are as human as the rest of us and they are just as unique. Living with a communication disorder is not like living without one. Everyday actions, such as talking with friends in person or on the Internet, can be challenging. Living with someone who has a communication disorder means changing the way we think about daily life. It is not only avoiding humor aimed at communication disorders and acting more patient, but also appreciating the existence of these loved ones in a way that may not have ever been considered for someone without communication disorders.

Many people are unaware of how vastly different life can be when someone has a communication disorder. Struggling to speak at all, selective mutism, one day doesn't mean the same is true the next day, or even later that hour. People who live without communication disorders should not equate an expectation of improvement to acceptance. Supporting a loved one who has a communication disorder should focus on providing assistance when necessary, not searching for a cure.

This project reviews relevant current literature on communication disorders. Included are the conditions of the lives of those who have communication disorders, as well as the social and academic elements of their lives, within and outside of the context of higher education and the university environment. The goals of this project are to shed light on the importance of resource availability, the power of word-of-mouth when informing students of academic assistance, and the difficulty in overcoming over-stigmatization of resources. It is important to showcase the stigma that can so often lead to the avoidance of university resources by those who need them most, as we cannot reduce an issue before it is addressed.

## Definitions

Four disorders prevalent among university students are aphasia, apraxia, dysarthria, and stuttering. Definitions are based upon those of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). The information contained within this portion references the sections of ASHA's website which deal with adults, rather than the conditions of children. The reasoning behind this choice of reference material is largely because the symptoms and conditions of adults are more applicable to the typical college student than those of children, due to both age and social factors such as increased exposure to older adults as well as mature situations.

*Aphasia* is a communication disorder resulting when the left side of the brain has been damaged, often by a stroke or traumatic brain injury (TBI). Effects are primarily difficulties with speech, listening, and comprehension of language. The intensity varies from episodes of mild confusion to permanent or temporary inability to communicate. Because the range of damage influences the types of behaviors or symptoms which manifest, it is difficult to pinpoint with much specificity the range of struggles typically experienced by those with this condition. Some speak fluently, but their comprehension of language is impaired. Others can understand language well, but may speak in scrambled patterns. Each case is unique.

*Apraxia* is a motor speech disorder, characterized by difficulty with word-creation. For example, people with this disorder may use nonsense words or other words with similar characteristics to the intended words. Typically, people with apraxia have control over words they comprehend and formulate, but have difficulty with physical word production. Similar

to aphasia, the cause of apraxia is usually either a stroke or a traumatic brain injury. It is common for people with apraxia to recognize their error in speech and attempt to correct it, with varying levels of success. People with this disorder may have more success using memorized phrases than creating conversation on their own, where they feel vulnerable.

*Dysarthria* is a motor speech disorder often characterized by changes in voice quality and rate of speech. Symptoms include mumbling at a fast pace, sudden changes in pitch, and slurred or choppy speech, as well as possibly a voice which sounds nasal or raspy or stuffy. The cause is tense muscles in the throat, which can distort produced sounds and result in muffled words. Because dysarthria affects the muscles used for speech production, some people with this condition have limited lip, jaw, and tongue movement. The vast range of possible causes – many kinds of brain damage, either in the womb or as the result of an accident – makes treatment difficult without an analysis of the cause for the disorder, and assistance for dysarthria is no simple task. Some people living with dysarthria might need to use alternate means of communication, such as relying more on sign language or written communication.

*Stuttering* is a fluency disorder which can be described as a noticeable tendency to use fillers – simple words, syllables, and sounds which fill conversation while speakers arrange their thoughts – as well as repetition of whole words or word fragments. The two main branches – global, meaning the disorder reaches into every aspect of verbal communication, and local, meaning the disorder primarily reacts to certain stimuli or situations – show the variations which can be found in this disorder. No conclusive evidence

reveals the cause of stuttering, though genetics are commonly thought to play an important part. Some stuttering disorders begin during the development of grammar skills, and continue on into adulthood. Although some people with stutters can move past a stutter which developed when they were young, others struggle with the disorder their entire lives. Stuttering can impact formal communications and presentations in such ways as, for example, impeding forward progress in a speech due to repeated words or sounds. The anxiety brought about by stuttering in a formal situation can also cause people with this disorder to lose track of their thought processes and make them appear less prepared or professional than they would otherwise.

#### Living with Communication Disorders

Research reveals multiple ways to cope with communication disorders – as many possibilities exist as the people living with them. Most literature regarding people with speech disorders focuses heavily on stuttering disorders. The data regarding communication disorders is so homogeneous that it lacks the representation needed to adequately inform and serve either university students or those who interact with them.

The research on language disorders is more varied than communication disorders. Unfortunately, these studies place a great deal of focus upon those who live with aphasia, with some occurrences of SLI (specific language impairments), non-organic language disorders, and dyslexia. A more diverse range of material, in regards to the multitude of conditions within the spectrum of communication disorders, could create a better understanding of the diversity of both the disorders and those who have them.

## Speech Disorders

Several articles examined comparisons between the experiences of people with, and without, speech disorders. This body of research includes Zhang (2010) and Beilby (2014). These articles investigate the situations of those with stuttering disorders and describe the gap between those with stuttering disorders and those without, through statistical and situational comparison, and documentation of the challenges of having a stutter. The researchers also described the psychological experience of having a stuttering disorder – including not just what can be measured biologically, but also what manifests psychologically.

In “Stuttered and Fluent Speakers' Heart Rate and Skin Conductance in Response to Fluent and Stuttered Speech,” Zhang (2010) contrasted speakers who did not stutter with those who did, focusing on physiological and psychological effects of speech on participants. Following previous research, they found that both non-stuttering and stuttering speakers experienced heart rates and overall physiological arousal when giving speeches. They found that the emotional higher displeasure among speakers who did stutter was primarily a reaction to their stuttering, more so than the speech itself, which is information which could suggest that specific coping strategies are necessary to help combat the anxiety of stuttering.

In “Psychosocial Impact of Living with a Stuttering Disorder: Knowing is not Enough,” Beilby (2014) examined the roadblocks and struggles of life with a stuttering disorder for both the person affected as well as affected loved ones. Beilby argues that the environment, as well as the psychological influences, for a child or adolescent with a



stuttering disorder are paramount. Beilby discusses the predominant occurrence of issues with attachment and levels of trust between those who stutter and their parents, though he does not come to a conclusion as to what could be done to prevent the further manifestation of these problems -- he merely acknowledges a significant pattern of developing attachment issues. Beilby also examines how the partner of someone who stutters perceive them, as well as the quality of life experienced together by the couple. His conclusion easily ties into other findings regarding stuttering disorders: the self-concept derived from the internalization of this disorder impacts the psyche of someone with a stuttering disorder, and is most notably centered in their reaction to the stutter itself. This reaction can intensify the dissatisfaction in interpersonal relationships that Beilby's research recorded.

#### Language Disorders

Research by De Letter et al. (2012), Helenius et al. (2009), and McNeil et al. (2015) describes the experiences of people with communication disorders compared to those without those disorders. These articles investigate the elements of non-organic language disorders as well as specific language impairment and dyslexia, and they draw attention to not only what people with language disorders go through, but also what they are capable of that those without them are not. It is important that students with communication disorders know they have strengths as well. Contributions to the field of study regarding communication disorders could increase the chances of success for people with these conditions in the future; the more those with communication disorders can be empowered in the present, the more we can head-off the stigma for those who have yet to be diagnosed.

In “Non-Organic Language Disorders: Three Case Reports” by De Letter et al. (2012), three case studies are presented. Participants developed language disorders unconnected to brain lesions. The authors cite the importance of taking into account the behaviors and symptoms of language disorders that are inexplicable when considering physiological conditions of patients alone. While the information in these case studies cannot be used to the general population of those with communication disorders -- a fundamental issue with case studies as a whole -- it is important to acknowledge the evidence of psychological distress on the manifestation of communication disorders. A common thread through these case studies was that they could not be treated solely on the basis of their physiological signs and symptoms, but rather than their psychological state had to also be addressed. At its core, this article shows the value of understanding and sculpting the way that individuals interpret their situation as someone with a communication disorder, especially the way they may internalize the causes and effects of their disorder.

In “Neural Processing of Spoken Words in Specific Language Impairment and Dyslexia,” Helenius et al. (2009) explain how young adults with SLI (specific language impairment) suffer from difficulties developing a wide vocabulary and from poor memory of short-term verbal responses. This study focuses on the neurological responses of participants’ real words and pseudo-words, utilizing repetition as a means to analyze the progression of symptoms and functioning. The authors compare the results of dyslexic participants to those of SLI participants in order to show a contrast between their vocabularies and memorization abilities. Their findings are people diagnosed with SLI do indeed struggle with broadening

their vocabulary and developing short-term muscle memory for speech, which can be measured on a continuum of linguistic difficulty between dyslexia and SLI. The importance of this information lies in how it expands our understanding of the varied manifestations of dysfunction within the realm of language and communication disorders.

In “Reliability and Validity of the Computerized Revised Token Test: Comparison of Reading and Listening Versions in Persons with and without Aphasia,” a case study by McNeil et al. (2015), the researchers examined whether the Computerized Revised Token Test (CRTT) was a qualified measure of comparison between people who suffer from aphasia and those who do not. The CRTT contains both reading and listening portions. This test is important because it helps to draw conclusions between the experiences of those with and without aphasia. Their findings were inconclusive; while the CRTT was an adequate measure of how those with and without aphasia read and responded to verbal messages, the methods used to record their findings and organize them were difficult to standardize.

Finding such as these -- complications documenting information in a way which can be generalized -- are reminiscent of the conditions under which university students with these disorders attend school: the struggles of students can be seen, but few definitive ways exist in order to assist them as they pursue higher education. A lack of substantial support in the education system itself has lent itself to an even greater need to have proper social support for these students.

### Social Support for University Students with these Conditions

Three key societal groups for students with communication disorders are their families, their peers, and their professors. Their families often form the basis for how they learn to function with their condition. Their peers often help them form ideas regarding the relationship between themselves and others. The opinions of professors guide students' perceptions of grade and degree progress, whether they are valued and accepted, and how much the school is willing to do to assist students with disabilities and disorders.

### Family

Articles that focus on the experiences of people with communication disorders and their families include works by Lewis and Freebairn (1998) and Clegg et al. (2005). The purpose of this research was to demonstrate what individuals with these conditions experience, as well as to describe what the families of these people experience. Research on the families of students with communication disorders shows that they view themselves as being at a disadvantage. Learning to cope with their condition and how to communicate with others despite their condition often comes from the familial level.

In "Speech Production Skills of Nuclear Family Members of Children with Phonology Disorders," a case study involving children who have phonology disorders, Lewis and Freebairn (1998) explained the differences between families with and without a child who has a phonology disorder. Using difficult sentences as well as both real and nonsense words, they tested each group's ability to repeat a specific vocabulary which would typically prove difficult for someone with a phonology disorder. They found that the families who had

a child with a phonology disorder were less likely to correctly and easily articulate the vocabulary than that those who did not have a child with a phonology disorder. These results were similar to those in tests on written language ability. The importance of this study is that it demonstrates how an entire family can be affected by the abilities and disabilities of each member; as a family, it is sink together or swim together. This conclusion strongly advocates for the conscious and continuous social support of children diagnosed with these disorders -- or any disorder -- through educating their families about their condition as well as introducing psychotherapy.

In "Developmental Language Disorders - A Follow-Up in Later Adult Life. Cognitive, Language and Psychosocial Outcomes," Clegg et al. (2005) furthered our understanding of the conditions later in life for those who are diagnosed with DLD at a young age by examining adult males who had been diagnosed with Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) as children. Participants were given intelligence tests, memory and theory of mind assessments, and measures of their psychosocial state. Their results were compared to a sibling who did not have DLD (the siblings served as the control group). The findings suggested that those with DLD had more difficulty with phonological processing and verbal short-term memory, as well as a higher risk of developing a psychiatric disorder as adults. They found a positive correlation between DLD diagnosis and low levels of social adaptability. The importance of these data lies in the connection between having DLD and having difficulty adapting to social situations. It is this type of research which increases the awareness of the correlation between social support and academics.

## Peers

Peers have an effect on a person's self-concept, especially those of children and young adults, and can impact every aspect of how someone thinks of themselves -- directly or indirectly. When young people interact with others of a similar age group, their peers help them define where they fit into society. The effect of peers on the self-image of someone with a communication disorder can be positive, negative, or both. The extent to which peer influence can damage or repair a young person searching for a place in society varies based on other factors – such the existence of other disorders.

In “A Longitudinal Study of Autism Spectrum Disorders in Individuals Diagnosed with a Developmental Language Disorder as Children,” Mouridsen and Hauschild (2009) extended previous research in an attempt to determine if being diagnosed with developmental language disorder (DLD) could be a precursor to a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorders (ASD). The author noted “mean ages at first ASD diagnosis for the DLD and comparison group were 18.4 ... years and 25.8 ... years respectively” (p. 693). This information would suggest people with DLD receive a diagnosis for ASD an average of 7.4 years earlier than those without DLD. Both ASD and DLD are conditions which result in complications managing speech, language, and social interaction. The authors conclude a distinct correlation between a lack of sufficient knowledge regarding effective communication by those with DLD and the diagnosis of autism spectrum disorders in adults.

## Professors

Professors have an impact on how young people perceive themselves as students. Students depend on their professors to guide appropriate classroom behavior and to provide reasonable expectations, and they also look to professors to indicate how successfully they are complying with rules of their university. The manner in which professors treat students in need of additional assistance is important to the self-image, and so much more, of those students. For students of all capability levels, professors are a resource for learning academic and social efficacy.

In “Exemplar Variability Facilitates Rapid Learning of an Otherwise Unlearnable Grammar by Individuals with Language-Based Learning Disability,” von Koss Torkildsen et al. (2013) compared the functionality of those with and without language-based learning disability (LLD). Professors exposed participants to a set of non-words with an underlying grammar system, with the intention of using the results to analyze which group was more successful in identifying the underlying grammar generalizations. They found participants with LLD were more receptive to grammar generalizations which demonstrated a distinction between how those with LLD analyze language and how those with normal language ability analyze the same language. This study shows students with LLD approach both verbal and written words in a completely different manner, which means their education should be approached in a completely different manner.

These findings could be pertinent information to professors seeking to understand the way in which students with communication and learning disorders function in the classroom

-- the key to creating a better environment for students is to begin by gathering information about what they need. Through understanding this body of research, professors can assist students on a more human level, with an increased understanding of the common ranges of ability which can be found in certain populations. An important thing to keep in mind in regards to the education of these students is that, while some tasks considered easy by others might be challenging for them, other tasks will come more naturally to them than their peers, which is why their education should be unique: someone with a completely different pattern of understanding language should not be taught the same way as the general student body.

#### Performance of University Students with these Conditions

Academic performance of students with communication disorders is critical when evaluating their academic capabilities. The university environment for students with these conditions can be examined through two primary categories: academic and social. The academic element often has the greatest influence on these students within the realm of university policies and procedures, that is, supplemental assistance to give them an equal footing in comparison to others students. The social element, however, is more heavily focused on how comfortable they feel in the university environment as students with communication disorders. Consideration should be liberally given to how a communication disorder impacts the life and livelihood of a student.

#### Academic

The academic environment for students with speech and learning disabilities and disorders can be a difficult one. The intentions of those who apply laws and enforce the



rights of these students are not always reflected in the end result. In recent years, many legislative changes have been made regarding students with documented disabilities, as the last two decades have been busy for all fronts on the fight for equality, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. These modifications have been designed to make seeking, acquiring, and excelling at higher education more likely for every student, creating the requirement for accommodations for those with documented disabilities. Improvements in the future could better serve the needs of students who arrive with social and/or learning disadvantages. Increasing research on communication disorders and spreading the data to educators has encouraged advancements by expanding perspectives in the field. Still, numerous obstacles impede the development of new methods for these students to excel, such as difficulties in documentation and legislation. The changes necessary to create an environment conducive to the learning of students with communication disorders takes time.

The article “Today's Policy Contexts for Special Education and Students with Specific Learning Disabilities” contains Turnbull’s (2009) reaction to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the effects of similar attempts to create a nondiscriminatory environment for students who suffer from specific learning disabilities. He employs the Matyroska, Russian nested dolls, as a metaphor to provide context to special education. He uses the smallest doll to represent those with learning disabilities, and utilizes the largest doll to represent human service systems. He comments on the construct of disability, outdated definitions, whose place it is to decide who has a disability, and the

difference between learning differently through deviating learning patterns and learning difficulty due to a significant struggle with learning and language comprehension.

### Social

The gap between the social and academic elements of the university are vital in the process of understanding the conditions for students with disadvantages and challenges. For many students with communication disorders, having difficulty in school does not necessarily involve difficulty in reading, writing, or speaking for school activities or assignments. Communication disorders impact how students cope with their conditions during interactions with their fellow students and faculty -- both inside as well as outside the classroom.

In “Psychological Factors that Foster or Deter the Disclosure of Disability by University Students,” De Cesarei (2015) investigates the common psychological factors which contribute to whether students will disclose their disabilities in an academic environment, particularly at the university level. Important factors include level of self-awareness, social stigma, previous experiences, and level of intervention by family, psychological professionals, and legislative measures. De Cesarei states, “The exposure to positive social reactions increased willingness to seek help, compared to exposure to situations in which negative reactions were received” (p. 669). De Cesarei concludes a low sense of self-worth and the absence of early intervention can reduce the likelihood that students will feel comfortable about their disabilities, and, as a result, they are often less likely to seek help through social support.

## Resources

As part of the movement in equality following the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, growing numbers of universities are programs dedicated to assisting students with documented disabilities such as communication disorders, physical handicaps, and other conditions associated with difficulty in an academic environment. Although students benefit from these programs, which range from student-run organizations to departments within the university construct, many students are being left behind or are unaware of the resources available to them. Some students are hesitant or outright opposed to utilizing programs for those with disabilities.

Many causes exist for students to avoid resources. Social stigmatization of needing extra assistance is very strong in a university environment. For some, taking on the label of a disabled student who needs help from teachers and tutors is a stressful and demeaning position, especially for people who believe they should do everything for themselves or young adults who are under the impression they simply cannot improve.

The resources investigated for this project were from Eastern Kentucky University, Eastern Kentucky University, and Murray State University. For each university, their programs for communication disorders, student disability department, and programs for support with written language and formal speeches were analyzed and compared. Specific resources for students with communication disorders included Eastern Kentucky University's Speech-Language-Hearing Clinic, Western Kentucky's Communications Disorder Clinic, and Murray State University's Center for Communication Disorders.

## Eastern Kentucky University (EKU)

### *Speech-Language-Hearing Clinic*

The SLHC works to help people of all ages with a wide range of conditions, including assisting adults with apraxia, dysarthria, stuttering, and aphasia. While they may serve the general public, the SLHC is an especially important resource for students at EKU who have communication disorders, because they can get quality treatment onsite. The website for the Speak-Language-Hearing Clinic borrows definitions from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, attaching links to each condition, which is helpful for students who may need a diagnosis.

Among their services is their Aphasia Support Group, run by Dr. Tamara Cranfill and Dr. Sue Mahanna-Boden, with the assistance of graduate students from EKU's Communication Disorders program. The support group not only encourages students with aphasia to familiarize themselves with people who have lived with this disorder for years, but it also gives students affirmation via a university-sponsored group made chiefly for those with similar struggles. At monthly meetings, members focus on recovering from the injury causing the aphasia and its psychological side effects. They openly encourage the loved ones of students who have aphasia to attend the meetings and further educate themselves.

Another unique feature of this clinic is the sliding scale fees. Affordability is important to those who deal with a disorder in their daily life. Sliding scales allow lower-income families better access to a decent facility which specializes in communication disorders. It is rather common knowledge that most university students have limited funds,

and often struggle financially, especially in the area of health care and mental health. This clinic opens its doors to those who have lower economic status, which can be a great relief and benefit for a college student with little money and few options to help them cope with their disorder.

Robyn Wahl, the Clinic Director, sheds some light on the inner-workings of the clinic. Wahl described SLHC as providing “therapy services to clients ranging from 2-72 with articulation, language, voice, and fluency disorders... also provides services to many ECU students and faculty with communication disorders”. (R. Wahl, personal communication, November 9, 2015). Many college students may have been struggling with a communication disorder for years, and never got treatment for it, so a clinic that serves all ages will be especially equipped to help students recognize past symptoms and issues.

Students at ECU usually learn about SLHC through their Services for Individuals with Disabilities office, according to Wahl. This partnership is logical in a university setting. Most universities, with resources of any kind, tend to rely on word-of-mouth through flyers and various testimonies from students to spread awareness of a program. However, informal communications is not an entirely stable means of informing students about resources which could completely renew their perspective on the academic environment. A valid suggestion could be to create a regular means of reaching out to students who express trouble communicating, such as a flyer or a quick survey which professors could pass out to students, with information about both their disabilities office as well as SLHC.

Efforts SLHC extends to avoid stigma include following the HIPAA regulations regarding patient confidentiality. They work to create a safe, welcoming atmosphere which encourages students to seek out their services. “As with other support services on campus, our clinic is viewed as a benefit to students. The ECU SLHC is a great resource to our campus and community.” (R. Wahl, personal communication, November 9, 2015). It is evident in the way Wahl describes the program: they are very dedicated to helping students thrive at their university, despite any conditions which may have slowed them down.

*Office of Services for Individuals with Disabilities*

OSID works with students in both academic and professional aspects of their functionality. They reach out to those with a range of conditions, including learning disabilities, vision problems, deaf and hard of hearing, among others. They have a wide range of services and programs and resources available for those who qualify, such as receiving an interpreter and giving a free orientation for students to learn about how to best function in a university environment in such areas as their rights and the technology available. They also offer test proctoring and eTextbooks, which can help some students who need more time to complete their exams or have difficulty processing written language.

Within their department, the OSID staff works to assist those with a variety of disabilities, including making sure those with disabilities can still participate comfortably in recreational activities within the university environment. While the average person may not pause to consider those with invisible, or at least not readily visible, illnesses should be recognized in inclusive activities, OSID specifically describes their work as inclusive for all

within the spectrum of recognized disabilities. This clinic welcomes students who have difficulty communicating in a typical environment, but could excel in a helpful environment.

*Noel Studio for Academic Creativity*

Noel Studio helps students primarily with communication projects, such as speeches or presentations. They can be visited as a walk-in clinic or by appointment. On their page, About the Space, they describe the options available: “work alone, in small groups, or with a highly trained consultant to brainstorm, draft, or refine communication projects in an interactive, high-energy environment” (para. 2). Their various areas to work in include breakout spaces for groups, practice rooms for singular students or small groups, a media wall with a large monitor and laptop connectivity, and an invention space with wall-to-wall white boards. One way they are currently trying to reach out to students better is their expansion into online consultations, so students can receive face-to-face interaction without the social anxiety and stigma from others seeing them in the clinic. These services can lift a huge weight off of the shoulders of students who struggle with speech and communication disorders. Having someone understanding as backup to hear students practice before they give a speech or presentation can really impact a student’s self-confidence.

Another way Noel Studio can be useful to students, however, is the fact that their consultations can also extend to writing and research. During their time with students, the staff can also assist with the editing and revision of a larger paper, or proofread an essay, which can be especially helpful for those who struggle with language. Noel Studio can also be useful for those with reading difficulties, as having someone to assist them in perusing

multiple articles in search of the best ones to investigate in depth can be a real time saver.

Strong points in the Noel Studio's favor would be the personalization of each consultation.

## Western Kentucky University (WKU)

### *Communications Disorder Clinic*

The CDC at ECU assists people with language disorders and stuttering, alongside other conditions such as articulation disorders and fluency disorders other than stuttering. Run by Caroline Alexander Hudson and Mary Lloyd Moore, their staff consists of highly-trained individuals with a passion to serve those in their community and at their university. Having staff with a high organizational loyalty fits the clinic with a set of tools which are much more likely to take each student on an individual basis and care for personal needs, rather than treating them like a case to be solved. Dedicated workers often leads to a better product, which, in this case, would be students with communication disorders feeling satisfied and accomplished in their education.

Unique elements of this resource are their level of quality and the extent of information available for parents looking into their clinic, which could mean students who may be hesitant to become involved in the program have the option of their parents reaching out first, in order to make them feel more secure about the clinic and how it can help them. This clinic raises the bar for other clinics in these fields, and many would benefit from an extensive FAQs page, such as WKU'S CDC has on their website. They also cite the importance of early identification, "the first years of life are critical ... A baby understands



much about language before uttering his or her first word. This knowledge is the basis for development of communication, speech, and language skills”.

The website outlines the definitions of communication disorders and notes common causes and treatments. This information is key, because it has advice for those who live with communication disorders, as well as people who live and work with them. They have a page with messages from students and parents of students who were pleased with the progress achieved through the clinic. This feedback is important, as it shows a desire to create a strong force of word-of-mouth for the clinic.

A few of the featured responses are shown below.

“Thank you, thank you, thank you! I have and will continue to let people know about the WKU Speech Clinic.”

“It has been a great semester and I am very appreciative of all the help we received from WKU. Could not have been better!!”

“My daughter has done extremely well with her speech since being in class here. I truly believe that she has improved because of these sessions. I am now and will continue to recommend this class to anyone that might need it.”

#### *Student Accessibility Resource Center*

The SARC focuses on getting the proper accommodations for students with documented disabilities. They strive to help incorporate a better understanding of the limitations of students with disabilities into the expectations placed forth for those students by the university. Above all, their goal is to help each student who qualifies for SARC

services to reach their upmost potential, whether through the assistance of accommodations or simply the moral support that having the SARC team behind them, or a combination.

As part of their services, SARC offers advocacy, captioning, audiobooks, and notetaking, among other things, to help people who have a registered need for auxiliary aids, all of which can be very useful to those who have difficulties with language or speech. The staff at SARC are adamant about their desire to quickly resolve any possible issues or conflicts between a disabled student and their instructors, as well as enhancing the learning experience of students so they can begin to thrive at WKU. Another related service they offer is sign language interpreting, which can be especially helpful for those who have difficulty forming language verbally but can comprehend language on a cognitive level.

#### *Writing Center*

WKU's Writing Center meets with student on a one-on-one basis to assist them with projects from essays to theses. Their staff is made up English majors and graduate students, giving them widespread knowledge regarding the rules of grammar and effective uses of language, which can be very useful for students who have trouble with comprehending more complex grammatical structures or who have issues writing but can formulate ideas well. This resource can assist people with all ranges of communication disorders, so they have to worry about their written works less, but it is most useful for those who struggle with the written word directly, rather than have problems with speech.

As their website says, the services they offer include helping “brainstorm ideas, clarify main points, strengthen logic and support...fine tune sentence style, learn to

proofread” among others. These skills, while useful in all students, are ones which those with language disorders may struggle with especially, due to their issues with forming speech.

## Murray State University (MSU)

### *Speech and Hearing Clinic*

The SHC at Murray State clearly states on its website their goal “to provide the highest quality professional service to our clients... without regard to sex, race, creed, national origin, or handicapping conditions” and all work is done by graduate students with the supervision of both an audiologist and a speech-language pathologist. The clinic caters to the needs of students with difficulty understanding spoken word or have had some form of hearing loss, as well as those who have trouble rooted in the way they speak – such as their tone, volume, or general voice clarity, as well as repeated syllables, like stuttering, or due to an injury, like aphasia.

They provide evaluations of hearing and auditory processing evaluations, as well as speech and language evaluations, and also provide interventions for those who have difficulty communicating. Due to the sliding scale fees, this clinic is a more economic option for the average student than seeing a specialist outside of the university, creating a better environment for students with communication disorders who attend. One of their strongest morals as an organization is to help people, regardless of their position or condition, to the very best of their abilities, and which extends to people from low economic status backgrounds.

As part of the Center for Communication Disorders at Murray State University, the SHC has a direct connection to faculty involved in effectively educating students within the program about the very disorders treated at the clinic. This academic approach can reduce anxiety inside the clinic – they know their field, but are also actively looking to learn more.

#### *Student Disability Services*

The staff at SDS is extremely welcoming and patient with answering questions. Although they are extremely busy, time is always made for them to figure out problems. Director Velvet Wilson often meets with students within the department individually, sometimes without an appointment if it is necessary, and goes out of her way to inform students of what accommodations they deserve.

Specifically for students who have communication disorders, SDS has a bank of note-takers which can be assigned to students who have difficulty processing language on occasion – or even trouble reading and writing on a daily basis, which can be an element of dyslexia. In addition, SDS provides students with Project Pass and Project Mentor.

Project Pass is primarily geared towards incoming freshmen. The first few years of college are vital, especially for those who struggle in an academic environment. This program aims to highlight student resources which are available, and encourage them to participate in other programs for which they may qualify for additional assistance.

Project Mentor pairs up students within SDS with other students, in a peer mentoring service. Mentors are typically upperclassmen or graduate students, and they schedule regular meetings with students who qualify for SDS. During these meetings, the two of them go over

particular class material and help mentees create functional schedules, as well as helping the mentee adjust to the new identity within the university environment. Commonly, helping students with communication disorders focuses upon what they need on an individual basis. Since all students are different, each mentor has a unique approach to helping each mentee. For example, if a student has trouble reading, the mentor could procure audio versions of the mentee's textbooks through SDS; if a student has trouble writing and practicing speeches, the mentor can help create outlines and practice the speech as many times as is needed before the actual presentation takes place.

Project Mentor is founded upon the principle that students within SDS deserve to have someone looking out for what they need on an individual basis, in order to properly create an environment conducive to their particular learning patterns.

#### *Racer Oral Communication Center*

The ROCC is a great resource for students dealing with stuttering and other communication disorders. The center can help teach students coping strategies for speech anxiety as well as working on improving delivery of speeches. ROCC provides an environment for students practice speeches in front of a small audience, or one-on-one, to steadily work up to giving formal presentations for larger groups. The team at ROCC is made up largely of junior and senior students who are exceptionally motivated about helping others give speeches which are both effective and comfortable for the speaker. The staff don't necessarily have to be those who are training in the field of communication disorders, but many of them are, or in psychology programs.

An advantage of the ROCC is the ease by which students can get assistance. Booking appointments can happen on the library website, by calling or emailing the center, or by sending them an email, in addition to coming by the location and making an appointment in person. Having options can be a relief to students with issues communicating.

#### *Racer Writing Center*

The RWC specializes in working with individuals regarding essays and projects. As they state on their website, they also help students with “analyzing and understanding an assignment, generating ideas, revising and editing a rough draft, researching, (and) documentation”. However, they make it clear they will not do the work for students or speculate what grade a given piece might receive. They are a resource, so are not meant to be used as a generator, but rather to have their time respected. The services offered include 40-minute appointments with professors and other staff members who have experience in the fields of either English or Literature to some extent.

One great point made by the RWC is they will help students with non-course work, such as writing they are doing of their own accord or personal statements which may be required for internships or job applications. These efforts are a step towards preparing all students, but especially those who struggle with communication on a fundamental level, for professional pursuits outside of the academic environment. The RWC staff can also help with take-home essay exams, if an instructor gives them written permission, which may be part of an accommodation made for students with documented disabilities.

In addition to students having the opportunity to make appointments over the phone and assure they will be seen at RWC, a Grammar Hotline works in conjunction with the Writing Center, which can be called or emailed by students, which is not only useful for those who have difficulty with face-to-face interactions, but also for those who have small questions and yet anxiety connected with the idea of taking up the time of the RWC staff.

### Evaluations and Recommendations

Of the resources described here, the best of each university appears to be as follows: Eastern Kentucky University's Speech-Hearing-Language Center, Western Kentucky University's Communications Disorder Clinic, and Murray State University's Student Disability Services. Each have their strengths in comparing their student body, especially those with communication disorders, but they certainly have a lot in common. One defining characteristic of all the resources evaluated here would be their dedication to creating a better environment for all students, regardless of their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, economic status, or any other defining characteristic which might render them as at a disadvantage in some situations due to prejudice. In order to better serve students who already may be facing a great deal of stigma and living with anxiety connected to their communication disorders, it is important for Kentucky higher education to be on their side.

Eastern Kentucky University's Speech-Hearing-Language Center is an amazing resource for students seeking affordability for professional care on a personal level. They excel at bringing quality services to the students within their university, which is an invaluable characteristic of any campus resource for students with disabilities. Their sliding

scale fees and broad ranges of experience certain make them stand out as a resource in their part of the state, even when compared to the other resources available within the university. The other programs, such as their Aphasia support group, add to the strength of the SHLC, and it is only made more effective with the help of their consciousness to stigma reduction.

Western Kentucky University's Communications Disorder Clinic has a team of trained professionals who are extremely dedicated to the cause of helping students with communication disorders succeed in their studies, and they give many options for outreach, such as through the parents of students with these disorders. Particular strengths of this resource are inclusion of students' families, not only in the treatment of these students, but also in understanding the disorders and side effects involved. Education of family members can lead to a stronger support system, which might lead to a higher chance of increased functioning and success within both academic and social portions of student life.

Murray State University's Student Disabilities Services, complete with Project Mentor and Project Pass, show a strong desire to empower students with all types of disabilities. Some things this resource does especially well would be how personal the staff can be with each student involved. The amount of care the SDS staff puts into their programs and events can be seen in the way the general public reacts to their department. From the time new freshmen with documented disabilities arrive on campus, SDS is working to help them get started on the right foot. Through their time, SDS seeks to keep them strong.

Universities are not merely locations where there are materials by which we can learn, but they are also communities. Arriving from various places and backgrounds and



learning environments, students arrive at a university in hopes of bettering themselves. For that very reason, understanding the needs of those students who have an increased need for accommodations in the academic environment should be important to everyone involved.

For students, people on campus with communication disorders could be friends or family or lovers; their needs are important because they are valuable as people. For teachers, the well-being of every student under their direction is valuable because of their efforts and drive to excel. For families, the needs of students, be they children or siblings or parents, are valuable because of the bonds formed through lifetimes. Being informed about resources such as Student Disability Services at Murray State University and the Communications Disorder Clinic at Western Kentucky University and the Speech-Hearing-Language Center at Eastern Kentucky University should be a priority not only for those who need assistance, but also those who do not. Without these resources, students with communication disorders can get left behind and lose the opportunity succeed. Social support for students with communication disorders can put their fates back in their hands and empower their future.

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