Department of Communicative Disorders (CMD)
Strategic Plan
2015-2017

*Strategic plan that is aligned with revised Academic Strategic Plan (2016-2021)

**CMD Goal 1 (consistent with goal 2, strategy 4 of URI Academic Plan— involving students in research; Consistent with goal 1, strategy 2 of URI Academic Plan— expanding experiential learning opportunities):** Increase research productivity and student learning opportunities through engagement in scholarship across the lifespan; from early childhood risk and resilience, to typical and atypical communication difficulties and disorders associated with aging.

**Rationale:** National data reveal that difficulties with language, literacy and communication pose very significant risks to early childhood development. At the same time, communication difficulties (speech, language & hearing) among the aging also pose significant risks to health and wellness among the elderly. Although the CMD faculty members have significant expertise in these areas, additional resources are needed to leverage this expertise to (1) increase faculty productivity in research, and (2) provide additional opportunities for students to engage in scholarship with faculty mentors.

**Action Step 1:** CMD will partner with HDF and pursue an interdisciplinary tenure-track hire in the area of early childhood risk & resilience to facilitate development of an inter-professional program of scholarship.

**Action Step 2:** CMD will partner with HDF, the Gerontology Program, and the Aging & Health Cluster Hire initiative to pursue an interdisciplinary hire in communication and aging to facilitate development of an inter-professional program of scholarship.

**Action Step 3:** CMD will partner with the Department of Psychology to develop a language, reading and communication disorders specialty area/certification program to foster both additional educational and scholarship opportunities.

**Outcomes:**

1. Increased faculty research productivity (publications, grants, presentations)
2. Increased engagement of students in scholarship with faculty mentors
3. Increased opportunities to participate in inter-professional education and scholarship for both faculty and students.

**Resources Needed:**

1. Permission to search for and hire well-qualified personnel for the tenure-track positions requested.
2. Faculty time to develop programmatic research programs and certificate programs for both graduate and undergraduate students.

**CMD Goal 2 (consistent with goal 1, strategy 2 of URI Academic Plan—restructure advising to support students in meeting life goals):** Determine the feasibility of using pre-existing certificate programs and/or majors to expand alternative career path options for undergraduates who do not, or are unable to, pursue a graduate degree in speech-language pathology or audiology.

**Rationale:** There are a number of academically sound undergraduate majors in CMD who, upon matriculation, do not possess academic profiles competitive enough to gain entrance into graduate school. For these students, there is a need to develop alternate educational paths that provide opportunities to enter the workforce following the earning of a B.S. in Communicative Disorders.

**Action Step 1:** CMD will Collaborate with Department of Human Development and Family Studies to create an efficient academic path for undergraduate CMD majors to simultaneously earn a certificate in early childhood education development. With this certification, students may be qualified for viable careers in early childhood intervention.

**Action Step 2:** CMD will develop a comprehensive, advising-enhanced website to convey information about additional potential career path options (e.g., Gerontology, Health Studies, Deaf Education, English as a Second Language teacher certification, Occupational Therapy). As part of the vetting process, CMD will evaluate the extent to which different academic options have the potential to lead to employment opportunities.

**Outcomes:**

1. A curricular map outlining how students can pursue early childhood education certification, while simultaneously completing an undergraduate degree in CMD, will be developed.
2. The number of undergraduate students who pursue early childhood education certification will increase.
3. The number of students who are aware of alternative career path options will increase.

**Resources Needed:**

1. Faculty time to develop curricular map and integrate this into advising
2. A plan to disseminate this information to undergraduate majors through advising and periodic e-communication with students to be sure that this alternate plan is in place early enough for the student to graduate in a four-year time span.
CMD Goal 3 (consistent with goal 1, strategy 2, action step 2 of URI Academic Plan—emphasizing experiential learning opportunities): Enhance opportunities for experiential learning by increasing the number and breadth of off-campus clinical placements for graduate students

**Rationale:** With changes in the healthcare industry, it has become more difficult to secure and maintain external clinical placements for graduate students in all health-related fields including speech-language pathology.

**Action Step 1:** Reconfigure graduate curriculum to maximize ability of students to secure in- and out-of-state clinical placements by creating one semester that is free from on-campus coursework.

**Action Step 2:** CMD will work with the newly formed clinical collaborative (i.e., Communicative Disorders, Kinesiology, Physical Therapy, Nutrition & Food Sciences, Pharmacy, & Nursing), URI’s legal office and the Business Engagement Center to increase efficiency of affiliation agreement process with external placement sites, and to develop additional placement and inter-professional opportunities for students.

**Outcomes:**

1. Availability of external placement opportunities for graduate students will increase.

**Resources Needed:**

1. Faculty time to develop and expand external placement opportunities.
2. University support for engaging and securing cooperation of health care organizations that control external placements for students.

CMD Goal 4 (consistent with goal 1, strategy 6, action step 2, of URI Academic Plan—implementing the new gen ed curriculum via new and revitalized courses): Expand relevance of communication disorders to the general education curriculum

**Rationale:** Student demand for the CMD major has grown significantly, although a sizeable number of the students who initiate interest have not been successful candidates for graduate school. Given the popularity of the major, as well as the ongoing competition for admission to graduate programs offering a general education course and a grand challenge course will increase availability of a topic of interest to students, and potentially enhance CMD’s ability to identify as well as recruit high quality undergraduate students.

**Action Step 1:** Determine the feasibility of offering a general education course out of pre-existing courses in the undergraduate curriculum (e.g. CMD 160, Introduction to Communicative Disorders), or by developing a new class. If feasible, then develop a
plan for submission and, if accepted, offer the class as a general education course.

**Action Step 2**: Propose and offer a grand challenge course addressing communication disorders and society developed specifically for freshmen.

**Outcomes**:

1. The number of grand challenge and/or general education courses offered by CMD will increase and faculty will have the opportunity to encourage promising students to consider the major.

**Resources Needed**:

1. Faculty time and availability to develop and offer a general education course and a grand challenge course.

**CMD Goal 5** (*consistent with goal 1, strategy 1 of URI Academic Plan—expanding pedagogical approaches*): Increase continuing education opportunities for students and professionals across the state of Rhode Island to encourage lifelong learning and sustain positive relationships with alumni.

**Rationale**: To keep up with changes in the field of communication disorders and maintain national certification, the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association mandates that all professionals accrue 30 continuing education credits every three years; maintenance of Rhode Island state licensure requires 20 CEUs every two years. CMD is an ASHA-approved CE provider and already sponsors at least two nationally-known guest lecturers for students and professionals (for continuing education credits) annually. This mechanism can serve as a model for increased continuing education efforts.

**Action Step 1**: Determine the feasibility of, and most efficient way, for CMD to expand its continuing education offerings

**Outcomes**:

1. Increased number of continuing education activities per year
2. Increased attendance
3. Stable revenue stream to support continuing education activities

**Resources Needed**:

1. Faculty time for planning and preparation of CEU activities
CMD Goal 6 (consistent with goal 1, strategy 2 of URI Academic Plan—enhancing opportunities for experiential learning across majors): Enhance inter-professional education opportunities for students

**Rationale:** Dramatic changes are underway in terms of how health care is paid for and delivered. Changes are focused on improving the patient experience of care, reducing the per capita cost of health care, and improving the health of populations. Inter-professional education and collaborative practice are recognized as critical components for achieving desired improvements in health care. 

(See: [http://www.asha.org/Practice/Interprofessional-Education-Practice/](http://www.asha.org/Practice/Interprofessional-Education-Practice/))

**Action Step 1:** CMD has a number of specialty clinics (e.g., Aphasia Reading Group, Dyslexia Clinic, Gateway Café, LOUD Crowd, Communication Coaching Program). Some of these clinics already include a degree of inter-professional involvement. Efforts will be made to enhance the level of inter-professional education taking place in these clinics and to increase student involvement. Efforts will also be made to structure these clinics as vertical, multidisciplinary teams that involve graduate and undergraduate students. The newly formed clinical health collaborative team (e.g., Communicative Disorders, Kinesiology, Pharmacy, Psychology, Nursing, Physical Therapy, Human Development) will support the development of inter-professional teams.

**Action Step 2:** CMD will develop a multi-disciplinary diagnostic clinic for mild cognitive impairment that includes professionals and pre-professionals from the departments of Communicative Disorders, Human Development & Family Studies, Kinesiology, Nutrition & Food Sciences, and Psychology.

**Outcomes:**

1. Enhanced involvement of faculty in inter-professional education
2. Increased involvement of graduate and undergraduate students in inter-professional clinical teams

**Resources Needed:**

1. Faculty time, both inside and outside of CMD, to develop and implement these inter-professional teams.
2. One faculty member per specialty clinic to coordinate inter-professional team activities. It may be necessary to hire faculty who are specifically charged with this task.

CMD Goal 7 (consistent with goal 2, strategies 1 & 2 of URI Academic Plan—broadening resources to support research and fostering interdisciplinary knowledge): Generate new knowledge that supports the health, well-being and quality of life for individuals and families with communication disorders across the lifespan
**Rationale:** Approximately 40 million Americans have communication disorders that cost the U.S. an estimated $154 billion to $186 billion annually (www.asha.org). As the population continues to age and more medically fragile children survive, these figures are only likely to increase. Because of this, there is a continued need for research addressing both the nature of communication disorders and effective assessment/intervention practices.

**Action Step 1:** CMD will support the implementation of strategic goal 1 (see previous description).

**Action Step 2:** Departmental resources will be used to support course release time and travel if requested by a faculty member who has a clear plan for how this support will lead to increased publication and grant submission. Results from these investments will be expected and evaluated. Continued funding through this mechanism will depend upon a demonstrated record of productivity.

**Action Step 3:** Departmental resources will be used to support collaborations with productive researchers who are located in other institutions and agencies.

**Action Step 4:** The curriculum will be analyzed to determine if it can be organized in a way that is more supportive of faculty research productivity. If changes are feasible and have the potential to be effective, they will be implemented.

**Outcomes:**

1. Increase in number of peer reviewed publications
2. Increase in extramural funding

**Resources Needed:**

1. Appropriate faculty workload distribution to maximize scholarly output
2. Additional new faculty hires (see goal 1)