Preamble

The Communication Disorders Program (CD) at Georgia State University began with only one faculty member in 1974. The Program grew to include three full-time faculty members and became accredited by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association in 1993. Since that time, the Program has evolved and currently has four full-time academic faculty members, three full-time clinical faculty members, and two joint faculty members. The Program continues to be one of four units within the Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education. Reflective of the transformative nature of Georgia State University, the Communication Disorders Program has evolved and continues to prove its robustness by looking toward the future and exploring new directions for science, teaching, and clinical practice in speech-language pathology.

As we look forward to the next five years, the Program seeks to mirror the University’s goals of promoting innovation, accelerating research, and building on our existing strengths. Our vision is to be recognized as a dynamic program focused on the needs of cities excelling in scholarship and preparation of highly trained speech-language pathologists and researchers who are prepared to embrace the opportunities of the 21st Century. Our mission is to offer a high quality graduate program, which educates students to implement evidence-based services across the scope of practice in speech-language pathology. We will accomplish this by providing state of the art instruction and cutting-edge research that maximizes interdisciplinary collaboration across the university.

The Strategic Plan that follows includes goals and initiatives that will enhance our graduate program, build our research infrastructure, and expand our involvement in post-baccalaureate or undergraduate education.
Goal 1: Enhance the existing master’s level graduate program in communication disorders. Traditionally graduates of our program have been highly sought after by employers from a variety of spheres serving pediatric and adult populations. Looking toward the future, we believe we need to advance our graduate training by incorporating contemporary models of instruction that successfully intertwine clinical and scientific content while focusing on the needs of individuals with communication disorders in the city and that afford global opportunities to students enrolled in this program. Additionally, recruitment of high performing students from across the country and subsequent enrollment in our program will enhance our graduate program.

Initiative 1: Explore innovative instructional designs that may positively influence our student outcomes. In order to produce highly competent speech-language pathologists it is essential that they are provided cutting edge training. Therefore, we will explore methods of instruction such as on-line courses, increase involvement of ancillary professions in our courses (physical therapy, neurology, etc.), and investigate other clinical training models that may strengthen the currency of our present delivery of master’s level training.

Initiative 2: Nationally recruit and enroll high performing students in the Master’s degree. The ability to nationally recruit and enroll high performing students pursuing a master’s degree in communication disorders is greatly enriched by financial support. Therefore, we will implement a process of offering graduate research assistantships and LEND fellowships to high performing students admitted into the program at the time an offer of admission is made. Assistantships will cover tuition and provide a stipend for the first year with a possibility of extension beyond the first year. Additionally, we will expand current funding mechanisms, including funding that permits creative implementation of our training program (e.g., training grants through the Department of Education). We will nationally recruit top students by improving the visibility of the unique opportunities our program offers in the areas of city service delivery, high-risk populations, psychobiology of stress, augmentative communication, and delivery of clinical services in a city environment. We will engage the resources within the College of Education through the Dean’s office to assist us in developing recruiting materials that will improve our ability to nationally recruit high performing students.

Initiative 3: Take advantage of the city location of our program and global opportunities offered through Georgia State University. Our program is uniquely situated in a thriving city and is part of a hub for international efforts in education. In order to further enhance our master’s level graduate program we will create a clinical education opportunity that allows our students to become involved in speech-language pathology training in an international context. In order to do this we will utilize international opportunities already existing within the College of Education and University that allow students to learn abroad. Additionally, we will expand clinical training opportunities that expose our students to populations unique to the Atlanta city environment.
Key Performance Indicators Goal 1:

1. **Innovative Design**:
   a. At least two courses will be developed that includes mixed instructional delivery (i.e., face to face and online) and involvement of ancillary, complementary methods and professionals.
   b. Information from training programs utilizing other clinical models will be collected and discussed by the program faculty.

2. **National Recruitment**:
   a. Funding will be offered to and accepted by 80% of high performing Master’s students who apply from within the state as well as out of state. Funding may take the form of graduate research assistantships or fellowships. High performing is defined as those students with undergraduate GPAs equal to or higher than 3.75.
   b. Recruitment brochures will be developed and a plan for distribution by faculty attending state, national, and international level conferences.

3. **Global Opportunities**:
   a. The CSD program at GSU will also serve as a host institution for international faculty and students.
   b. At least one clinical experience will be offered abroad. GSU students will apply/compete for the experience.
   c. Develop one new clinical training experience to expose students to a population unique to the Atlanta city environment.

**Goal 2: Build the research infrastructure in the current Communication Disorders Program.**

In order to build a strong research infrastructure in the CD program it is imperative to include students at all academic levels in research endeavors. This inclusion creates a strong pool of potential doctoral students for enrollment in the PhD program. More importantly, targeting students at all levels will be critical for developing a strong research culture in CD that will strengthen our national recruitment efforts at both the MEd and PhD levels.

**Initiative 1: Create a Ph.D. in Communication Sciences and Disorders at Georgia State University.** A proposal for establishment of a PhD in CSD is currently being considered by the University. Our goal is to accept students into this program beginning in Fall, 2013. A PhD in CSD is critical for expanding the research base of the Program, as well as for enhancing our national reputation.

**Initiative 2: Increase the number of Master’s students opting to pursue the Master’s thesis.** Currently students who decide to pursue a Master’s thesis must add thesis course credit to their Master’s program plan that is already filled with required coursework. As a result the thesis is not currently a very attractive option for many students. Accordingly, it will be important to amend the curriculum to allow students to receive course credit for pursuing the Master’s thesis without overwhelming them or lengthening the program of study. We will explore options for
introducing more flexibility into the Master’s curriculum in order to provide support for students interested in participating in research.

**Initiative 3: Integrate undergraduate students into CSD faculty research programs.** We will explore the possibility of course credit for undergraduate students who wish to participate in CSD faculty research programs. Currently undergraduate students interested in participating in research in CSD must volunteer their time and are not eligible for course credit. Arguably the experience of participating in research is enriching for students regardless of compensation or credit. Realistically however the numbers of students expressing interest in research are expected to increase when course credit for participation is available.

**Key Performance Indicators, Goal 2:**

1. **PhD Program:**
   a. Institutional and state approval for doctoral program will be obtained;
   b. Recruitment materials will be developed to assist in marketing the new PhD degree program.

2. **Master’s Theses:**
   a. A thesis course will be added to the current curriculum that allows MS students to pursue a thesis for course credit over multiple semesters;
   b. A resultant 20% of students in each cohort will write a Master’s thesis.

3. **Undergraduate Research Participation:**
   a. An undergraduate research course will be added to the CSD course offerings that allows undergraduate students to pursue research for course credit over multiple semesters;
   b. Research labs in the CD Program will report an increase of 1-2 undergraduate student volunteers participating in research projects.

**Goal 3: Become more involved in undergraduate or post-baccalaureate education.** A large number of students who apply to our Communication Disorders program migrate from other disciplines. These students typically must take a certain number of prerequisite courses in order to successfully complete the graduate program. Although the coursework is required, it is often difficult to enroll in prerequisite courses unless one is a matriculating student in the master’s program. Offering an opportunity for students to easily take prerequisite courses could be a viable way to ensure that there is consistency in content/programming for students that apply to our graduate program, while fulfilling a need for “out-of-field” students.

There are also students that learn of our field later in their undergraduate experience. Providing undergraduate courses to introduce the field of communication sciences and disorders during freshman/sophomore years will provide students with an opportunity to make career decisions early (as well as strengthen their application when applying to graduate school).

**Initiative 1: Utilize Edu-Ventures and ASHA resources to gather information about online undergraduate options in CD.** Currently, there is a trend of programs offering “core” prerequisite and certain “survey” courses online. In order to determine demand, as well as pros
and cons for our program we will consult with Edu-Ventures, a research and consulting firm that specializes in higher education, to determine the number of online courses for core prerequisite courses in CD, number of CD students interested in taking prerequisites online, and number of CD programs that have a “prerequisite/post-bac” program. We will also consult with ASHA to determine what must be done to ensure adherence to academic/accreditation standards if and when online courses are offered. Once this information is gathered, we can make an informed decision as to whether or not online education is a viable option for our program.

**Initiative 2: Create a Freshman Learning Community/Service Learning Course that introduces the field of communication disorders to a more diverse group of undergraduates.** Early exposure to the field of CD positively influences students’ awareness of the field and desire to pursue a career in CD. Creating undergraduate course that introduce the field in an engaging way, via mechanisms that the university currently has in place (i.e. Freshman Learning Communities), will allow us to have access to students that wouldn’t traditionally have exposure to our field and program (including undergraduates housed in other colleges within the university, as well as minority students). By creating courses that link CD to topics that are relevant to today’s world, students that have traditionally not known of CD, would be inspired to pursue a career in CD at GSU.

We have identified at least one topic that can be taught within the Freshman Learning Community (FLC) format and have contacted personnel within that office about all requirements related to the creation of that course.

**Initiative 3: Collaborate with the Department of Communication to explore options and facilitate ways to improve student enrollment in CD-related courses, as well as student involvement in CD-related service activities.** A number of undergraduate students in the Department of Communication have an interest in pursuing a graduate degree in CD. Those students take coursework that introduce the field via a concentration in Communication Across the Lifespan (CAL). Currently, the CD program collaborates with Communications as needed to ensure that this CAL courses are offered and available to students without a background in CD. Our goal is to provide support CAL students so that they can be viable candidates for our (or any) graduate program in CD. Continuing to provide opportunities for observations in the field, providing opportunities for undergraduate research (see Goal 2, Initiative 3), and collaborating with personnel in Communications to ensure that undergraduate CAL students have opportunities to take core prerequisites that will prepare them for a graduate program.

Currently, there is limited undergraduate involvement in volunteer/service activities related to CD. Our goal is to increase undergraduate involvement by expanding National Student Speech Language and Hearing (NSSLHA) membership to undergraduate CAL and post-bac students. This will provide these students with a support network, as well as provide them with opportunities to volunteer within the community.

**Key Performance Indicators, Goal 3:**
1. **Online Options:**
   a. A decision not to offer online undergraduate courses will be made; or,
   b. A decision to offer online undergraduate courses and which undergraduate courses to offer online will be made, and at least one pilot course offered.

2. **Freshman Learning Community:**
   a. A course will be developed that is designed specifically to introduce incoming freshmen to the discipline.

3. **Support CAL Students:**
   a. All interested undergraduates will be provided the opportunity to join NSSLHA
   b. (a) A structured membership opportunity will be developed to allow undergraduate participation in NSSLHA.
   c. A flyer about what is needed for graduate admission in CSD will be provided to academic advisors in Dept of Communications.
   d. An informational session about the graduate program at GSU will be provided to the CAL students annually.