

Ph.D. in Communication Sciences and Disorders
CIP 51.0204
University of Central Florida

Board of Governors' Staff Analysis
September 2025





Table of Contents

| | |
|--|---|
| PROGRAM DESCRIPTION AND OVERVIEW | 3 |
| NEED FOR GRADUATES IN THE LABOR MARKET | 4 |
| STUDENT DEMAND AND PROJECTED ENROLLMENT | 6 |
| ALIGNMENT WITH INSTITUTIONAL AND SYSTEM STRATEGIC PRIORITIES..... | 7 |
| FACULTY | 7 |
| RESOURCES | 7 |
| ESTIMATE OF INVESTMENT | 8 |
| CONCLUSION AND BOARD STAFF COMMENTS..... | 8 |

Program Description and Overview

The University of Central Florida (UCF) proposes a Ph.D. in Communication Sciences and Disorders to be housed within the College of Health Professions and Sciences. This proposed doctoral program builds upon UCF's existing bachelor's and master's programs in Communication Sciences and Disorders, offering advanced, interdisciplinary education for speech, language, and hearing science professionals. The proposed program expands on traditional speech-language pathology to include emerging technologies such as advanced instrumentation, simulation and virtualization, data analytics, and healthcare management as applied to communication disorders.

The focus of the proposed program will be to recruit students who are licensed in communication sciences and disorders, including speech-language pathologists and audiologists. However, students may also enter the program with a bachelor's degree in communication sciences and disorders or a related field. Students entering with a bachelor's degree would earn a master's and licensure as part of the program. All students must successfully pass a qualifying examination and conduct original dissertation research, which they must successfully defend before a faculty committee.

Program graduates will have the knowledge and skills necessary for advanced roles in clinical and industry settings related to communication sciences and disorders. Graduates will be prepared to work as speech-language pathologists and will also be prepared for postsecondary faculty positions in communication sciences and disorders or a related field.

The University of Central Florida's Board of Trustees approved the proposed program on April 17, 2025. If approved by the Board of Governors, this will be the third Ph.D. program in the State University System in CIP 51.0204, joining existing programs at Florida State University and the University of South Florida. Table 1 provides a summary overview of the proposed Ph.D. in Communication Sciences and Disorders.

Table 1: Proposed Program Summary

| Ph.D. in Communication Sciences and Disorders | |
|---|---|
| Tuition per Credit Hour | Standard approved graduate tuition rates for resident & non-resident students |
| Delivery Mode | Traditional |
| Location | Main Campus |
| Graduation Requirements | 72 Graduate Credit Hours |
| Effective Date | Fall 2026 |

Source: University of Central Florida Ph.D. in Communication Sciences and Disorders program proposal

Need for Graduates in the Labor Market

The proposed program will prepare graduates to be skilled in communication science disorders with knowledge and skills in related disciplines, which may include linguistics, acoustics, engineering, and data analytics. Program courses in communication science disorders will be embedded with content on emerging technologies, simulation and virtualization, and computational analytics as they are applied in communication science disorders. The program will position graduates for jobs such as speech-language pathologists and postsecondary faculty in Florida and nationally.

The School of Communication Sciences and Disorders at the University of Central Florida has current program faculty who work closely with healthcare and industry partners on active, funded projects and understand the required competencies for program graduates. The university reported starting an advisory council composed of community members, industry partners, and communication sciences and disorders alumni who are engaged in educational activities related to clinical supervision, research, and continuing education.

Doctoral Degrees Awarded in Similar Programs in the System

University of Central Florida's proposed program would be the third active Ph.D. program under CIP 51.0204 in the System. Florida State University (FSU) and the University of South Florida (USF) currently offer a program in this CIP code. University of Central Florida's proposed program focuses on emerging and advanced technology and methodologies, which differ from the existing programs. Both FSU and USF provided letters of support stating that the technology focus of this program will expand opportunities for collaboration across institutions.

As shown in Table 2, six doctoral degrees were awarded in the 2023-24 Academic Year across the System.

Table 2: Degrees Awarded, Ph.D. in Communication Sciences and Disorders, CIP 51.0204

| Institution | 2019-20 | 2020-21 | 2021-22 | 2022-23 | 2023-24 |
|-------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| FSU | 6 | 1 | 2 | - | 5 |
| USF | 5 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| Total | 12 | 9 | 4 | 3 | 6 |

Source: Board Office of Data Analytics, Degrees Awarded by CIP, retrieved 6/24/2025.

Workforce Demand

The proposed Ph.D. in Communication Sciences and Disorders will position graduates for employment opportunities that are projected to grow in Florida and nationwide. These include positions such as speech-language pathologists and postsecondary faculty in health specialties. Table 3 provides additional details of the future workforce demand for these occupations.

Graduates will be prepared for the role of speech-language pathologist. While a master's degree is the minimum education required for this position, graduates of this Ph.D. program will also be qualified for advanced leadership roles in healthcare settings. Nationally, the number of jobs for speech-language pathologists is projected to increase by more than 18 percent through 2033, with an average of 13,700 job openings a year. In Florida, this field is expected to grow by over eight percent, resulting in 548 annual job openings. The current median salary for speech-language pathologists in Florida is \$95,846.

The demand for postsecondary faculty in health specialties is projected to grow nearly 19 percent nationally by 2033 and one percent in Florida by 2032. The current median salary for postsecondary faculty in health specialties in Florida is \$86,800.

Board staff conducted an independent search on Indeed.com for job openings in communication sciences and disorders requiring or preferring a Ph.D., using keywords such as speech pathology and communication sciences faculty. The search identified over 50 current Florida job openings within the public and private sectors. The job titles include speech-language pathologist, professor in speech-language pathology, and assistant professor in communication sciences and disorders. Employers included Sonoma, the U.S Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Encompass Health, BayCare Health System, the Cleveland Clinic, and research universities such as Florida Atlantic University. The University of Central Florida also provided a list of job openings from employers, including Starkey, Microsoft, Meta, Tencent, and Arizona State University.

Table 3: Labor Market Demand, CIP Code 51.0204

| Occupations | % Change in Job Openings | | Annual Average Job Openings | | Total # of New Jobs | | Education Level Needed for Entry |
|--|--------------------------|--------------|-----------------------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------|----------------------------------|
| | FL 2024-32 | U.S. 2023-33 | FL 2024-32 | U.S. 2023-33 | FL 2024-32 | U.S. 2023-33 | |
| Speech-Language, Pathologists 29-1127 | 8.2% | 18.4% | 548 | 13,700 | 690 | 33,300 | Master's degree |
| Health Specialties Faculty 25-1071 | 1% | 18.8% | 714 | 28,400 | 86 | 53,300 | Doctoral or professional degree |

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and Florida Department of Commerce, retrieved: 6/25/2025.

Support from Industry Partners

The letters of support for the proposed program highlight its role in addressing the growing needs in communication sciences and disorders. Industry partners, including the Bose Corporation, Samsung, Sonoma, and Brooks Rehabilitation, provided letters

expressing strong support for the program. The letters emphasized the need for doctoral-level professionals who can drive innovation in areas like hearing aid technology, auditory research, and rehabilitative services.

Student Demand and Projected Enrollment

The University of Central Florida projects student interest in the proposed program based on a survey conducted by the School of Communication Sciences and Disorders. The survey of current undergraduate and graduate students, as well as alumni who graduated in the past four years, focused on their interest in pursuing a Ph.D. in Communication Sciences and Disorders at the college. Of 183 survey responses, 103 students expressed strong interest, while 59 indicated moderate interest in the program.

The anticipated total student enrollment is four in Year 1, with a projected enrollment of 15 students in Year 5, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Projected Total Student Enrollment

| Implementation Year | Proposed Student Headcount |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Year 1 | 4 |
| Year 2 | 8 |
| Year 3 | 12 |
| Year 4 | 14 |
| Year 5 | 15 |

Source: University of Central Florida Ph.D. in Communication Sciences and Disorders program proposal

Alignment with Institutional and System Strategic Priorities

The proposed program aligns with UCF's mission by educating students in an area of strategic interest and providing them with practical experiences and opportunities throughout their education. The University of Central Florida's strategic plan identified health and human performance, grounded in medical discovery and technology, as a key area of focus. The proposed program and its graduates will improve health outcomes through high-impact research that combines clinical insight with technological innovation.

The proposed Ph.D. aligns with the SUS 30 Strategic Plan goals, supporting research and economic development and producing world-class graduates. The program will help address Florida's workforce needs in the healthcare industry.

Faculty

There are 13 existing faculty members within the School of Communication and Sciences Disorders who will participate in the proposed program. The university reported that two new faculty members will be hired for the program in fall 2026.

Resources

University of Central Florida reported that it has resources to implement the proposed program, including multiple research centers, simulation facilities, and a communication disorders clinic that supports high-quality clinical education for students. The university also documented that library and physical resources would be available to sustain the program through Year 5.

The University of Central Florida plans to support the proposed program with graduate student fellowships and assistantships. Graduate students in the communication sciences and disorders program will be allocated assistantships for three or four years, depending on the length of their study plans. Additional support may be provided through competitive student research grants and federal training grants.

Estimate of Investment

The proposed program will be funded through Education and General (E&G) funds. As shown in Table 5, the institution intends to expend \$263,600 in Year 1 and \$346,600 in Year 5. The program will charge students the standard approved graduate tuition rates for resident students and non-resident students.

Conclusion and Board Staff Comments

If approved, the proposed Ph.D. in Communication Sciences and Disorders will be the third program in the System offered in CIP 51.0204. There is sufficient evidence to demonstrate the workforce needs for graduates at the doctoral level. In addition, the university has faculty, physical resources, and funding to implement and sustain the program for five years. Board staff has no concerns regarding the proposed program.



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