Underrepresented Student Experiences Applying to Speech-Language Pathology Graduate Programs: Challenges and Capital

Jenna Maree P. Wong
University of Texas at Austin, jennamareepwong@utexas.edu

Underrepresented Student Experiences Applying to Speech-Language Pathology Graduate Programs: Challenges and Capital

Abstract

This longitudinal study investigated the challenges and sources of community cultural wealth that underrepresented communication sciences and disorders (CSD) students leverage in navigating each application stage to master's level speech-language pathology (SLP) programs. Four surveys were distributed over 11 months via Qualtrics to CSD undergraduate seniors enrolled in 12 universities in California. This study included 88 eligible participants who completed at least one round of the longitudinal survey. Applicants recognized the underrepresentation of their identities in the field which served as both a challenge and motivator for becoming a practicing, culturally competent SLP. Obtaining application-related knowledge was the most significant challenge throughout the application process. Applicants' entrepreneurial nature allowed them to build their network, especially with people with shared identity-markers, to provide them with application and emotional support. Although participants experienced doubts in their application, they overcame this with their steadfast sense of purpose and commitment to their community. This study suggests that underrepresented students utilize a range of strengths that allow them to overcome the most significant challenges that arise at each stage of the application process. Although the challenges of navigating the application accumulate over time, the applicants' network and sense of self ultimately ease the stresses of applying. Several structures, including social media, ASHA STEP Mentoring, and student support groups were beneficial for underrepresented applicants and have implications for increasing diversity in the SLP workforce.

Keywords

graduate school, diversity, recruitment, graduate admissions

Cover Page Footnote

Introduction

A master's degree is required to be a speech-language pathologist in the United States. Therefore, undergraduate students must gain admittance to a speech-language pathology (SLP) master's degree program by successfully navigating the graduate school admissions process—a process that is notably competitive and rooted in systems of oppression (Ellis & Kendall, 2021). Due to these systems, the seemingly straightforward process of applying poses distinct challenges for underrepresented students (e.g. Graduate Record Examination biases; Posselt & Grodsky, 2017). These systems contribute to the longstanding racial homogeneity in the SLP workforce where 91.1% of speech-language pathologists are White, and White SLP applicants have the highest acceptance rates compared to all other races (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association [ASHA], 2023; Council of Academic Programs in Communication Sciences and Disorders, 2022). These systems have also acted against people based on their gender, socioeconomic status, disability, and LGBTQ+ identity (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, plus additional identities), as evidenced by United States policies, such as the Civil Rights Act (1964), which protect these identities.

Given the lack of diversity in ASHA workforce members, researchers have predominantly focused on identifying educational barriers for underrepresented students in an effort to reduce challenges to entering the career (Kovacs, 2022; Lugo et al., 2023). Few studies, however, have evaluated the sources of support that underrepresented students leverage when applying to graduate school. Evaluating these supports in the context of the challenges that students encounter reveals what structures are valuable and what gaps remain in our existing support systems. Furthermore, a small but growing number of studies have engaged with underrepresented populations using an intersectional approach to understand the holistic experience of having multiple-minority identities (e.g. Abdelaziz et al., 2021). This study sought to contribute toward equity efforts in the field by exploring the support systems that assist applicants from marginalized racial, gender & sexuality, and/or socioeconomic (e.g. first-generation college student, low-income) populations in navigating the SLP graduate school application process. As the field prioritizes increasing workforce diversity to promote clinical care and professional well-being (ASHA, 2013), it is necessary for the field to assess the intersection of challenges and supports of underrepresented SLP applicants so that communication sciences and disorders (CSD) programs can shape equitable pathways into SLP master's programs.

Barriers for Underrepresented Students in CSD. A growing literature has identified multiple, intersecting exclusionary and institutional barriers facing underrepresented students in CSD. Prior to even applying, students may encounter exclusionary experiences that impact academic success and self-efficacy. Experiential learning opportunities such as volunteer work and conference attendance can be financially inaccessible for students from low-income backgrounds (Roberts, 2023b). Identity-based microaggressions create psychological stressors which lead underrepresented CSD students to feel isolated, disconnected, and as though they do not belong (Abdelaziz et al., 2021). These challenges disrupt academic success and belonging in the years leading up to graduate school applications.

The application process itself is also hindered by systemic obstacles. Completing applications is financially demanding considering fees to submit applications and send transcripts (Fuse, 2018).

Identifying necessary application information and meeting application deadlines also posed a challenge to underrepresented students who are the first in their family to attend college (Kovacs, 2022; Sylvan et al., 2020). Additional barriers to the graduate admissions process included limited experiential learning opportunities, challenges forming social connections, lack of cultural diversity within their department, and Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) related hindrances on learning and mentorship (Lugo et al., 2023). Thus, underrepresented students were more likely to encounter application-related challenges due to the financial means and navigational knowledge that higher education and the application process demand.

Sources of Support for Underrepresented CSD Students. Growing research and practices have focused on supporting underrepresented CSD students, which in turn, promotes their navigation of the graduate school application process. Structures such as organized mentoring (Mahendra & Kashinath, 2021), affinity groups (Alicea & Johnson, 2021), familial support (Cleveland et al., 2023), and flexible office hours (Saenz et al., 1998) provided socioemotional and academic support that promote students' success throughout their undergraduate career leading up to the application process. Furthermore, Roberts (2023a) identified specific themes for inclusion across underrepresented students including "diversity as a social good" (e.g., faculty acknowledging that diverse backgrounds are needed in the field) and "collective agency" (e.g., peer-to-peer support). Framing the experiences of underrepresented students as assets promoted their sense of belonging in the field. These supports promoted underrepresented student persistence during their undergraduate education, yet less is known about how these supports function directly in the graduate admissions process.

The field has made progress to promote equity in the admissions process by eliminating GRE requirements and implementing holistic review processes to select students who are the best fit with the mission and values of a program rather than students who demonstrate the greatest academic success (Mandulak, 2022). Implementing these changes, however, is not fool-proof in removing barriers for underrepresented applicants considering factors like implicit bias (Girolamo et al., 2022). With continued research on best practices in implementing holistic review for graduate admissions, these methods show promise for promoting cultural humility in the recruitment and education of future clinicians (Guiberson & Vigil, 2021).

Community Cultural Wealth Framework. This study is the first, to my knowledge, to have used the community cultural wealth (CCW) theoretical framework in CSD research, and apply it to the experiences of underrepresented graduate school applicants (Yosso, 2005). CCW is an asset-based perspective on Communities of Color, or broadly marginalized communities, that steers away from the deficit-based lens that views these communities as environments filled with cultural disadvantages. By using CCW to capture the knowledge, skills, and strengths fostered within the cultures of underrepresented CSD students, the assets that underrepresented students utilize in overcoming systemic inequalities in the application process begin to be understood. Heightened awareness of these oppressive institutional barriers in the field emerged following the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement during the summer of 2020 calling for meaningful dialogue questioning how CSD organizations maintain oppression (Ellis & Kendall, 2021). Using CCW, this study identified how underrepresented SLP applicants survive and resist oppression in their experiences leading up to and during the application process (Yosso, 2005). This framework illuminated how applicants made sense of the assets they brought into the graduate school

application process and how universities can support these strengths as students navigate applications. The CCW framework acknowledges six forms of interconnected cultural wealth found in underrepresented SLP applicants: linguistic, navigational, aspirational, familial, resistant, and social capital. These six types of cultural capital were instrumental for underrepresented SLP graduate school applicants.

Purpose

This study examined the challenges that underrepresented SLP applicants face at each stage of the application process as well as the strategies they used to navigate the application process using the CCW framework. Analyzing applicant voices during the application process responds to the growing calls to use qualitative research to center underrepresented voices and to explore institutional supports for CSD students (Kovacs, 2022; Lugo et al., 2023; Roberts, 2023a). The underrepresented identities in CSD represented in this study's sample included Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), first-generation college student, low-income background, and LGBTQ+. Research questions were asked to characterize the types of support applicants identified and how these supports allowed applicants to contend with the challenges they encountered as a method to inform programs and practices that support underrepresented applicants.

1. What challenges do undergraduate SLP applicants from underrepresented backgrounds encounter at each stage in the application process?
2. How do applicants' identities relate to their perceived challenges?
3. What forms of community cultural wealth do underrepresented undergraduate seniors access during each stage of the SLP graduate school application process?

Methods

Survey Design. A series of four surveys were distributed over 11 months at each stage of the application process. The first survey collected demographic information from participants (July-October 2021). The subsequent surveys were disseminated at the following application stages: application preparation (November-December 2021), application submission (January-February 2022), and receiving application decisions (April-May 2022). The survey questions are shown in Table 1. This design was selected to assess student experiences at different points across the application process. The present study focused on the responses to 19 open-ended questions that are particularly relevant to the understanding of underrepresented students' graduate application challenges and strengths.

Recruitment and Participants. The following inclusion criteria were used for this study: (a) expected graduation date of Fall 2021 or Spring 2022 from a CSD undergraduate program and, (b) intended to or were unsure about applying to SLP graduate programs for matriculation in the following fall semester. All surveys were disseminated via Qualtrics XM web-based survey tool (Qualtrics, Provo, UT). The first survey was distributed via email, QR code, or link on a digital flyer. In 2021, the author identified 17 CSD undergraduate programs in California as listed in the ASHA EdFind database (ASHA, n.d.-b). To recruit participants, the author emailed undergraduate advisors and each campus' chapter of the National Student Speech-Language-Hearing Association (NSSLHA). Ultimately, eight institutions are represented in the study where seven are Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). In this study, MSIs are universities designated or eligible for

designation as a Hispanic Serving Institution or Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution, or both. Six institutions are public universities and two are private universities.

Table 1

Survey Timeline and Questions

Survey # and Purpose	*n*	Date Administered	Survey Questions
Survey 1: Demographic background	88	July – October 2021	How do you racially/ethnically identify yourself as? (Select all that apply) Please share any additional parts of your identity that you feel are crucial to understanding you.
Survey 2: Approaching the application	10	November – December 2021	What motivates you to become a speech-language pathologist? What challenges or concerns do you have about applying to graduate school? How do you feel like race, or other aspects of your identity, has either positively or negatively impacted your experience as you approach the graduate school application process? Please elaborate on your responses to any of the previous questions.
Survey 3: Advancing through applications	8	January – February 2022	What, if any, challenges did you encounter when deciding which schools to apply to? What, if any, difficulties have you faced in the application process? Who or what has been instrumental in supporting and encouraging you through the application process? Who and or what supported your decision to apply to graduate school? What was a meaningful experience that increased or decreased your confidence in pursuing graduate school? How did your identity/identities relate to this experience? Please elaborate on your responses to any of the previous questions.
Survey 4: After the application	9	April – May 2022	Did you have doubts during the application process? Please explain. How did you overcome doubts or wavering of confidence during the application process? What was the greatest source of stress during the application process? Do you believe any of the following has impeded on your ability to apply to graduate school? (Access to financial aid, extent of support from faculty/advisors, access to knowledge about college/graduate school, covid-19 related barriers, other) Please explain your response to the previous question. Describe a direct/indirect experience during your college career that made you feel discouraged from pursuing a graduate degree in speech language pathology, if applicable. Please elaborate on your responses to any of the previous questions.

Participant recruitment and data collection procedures were approved by the California State University, Fullerton Institutional Review Board. The surveys included informed consent, an approximate completion time of 10-20 minutes, and information regarding the purpose of the study, investigator, and confidentiality. Participants were given the option to submit their email address in the first survey and consent to being emailed the subsequent surveys. Reminder emails were sent to e-mail addresses when a response was not received after two weeks, and then again after another two weeks. Each survey response generated a random three-digit number which was assigned and emailed to each participant after survey completion. This set of numbers was used to link responses over time, and to minimize the number of times participants submitted their email throughout the study. No incentives were offered for participation in this study.

Of the 138 CSD students who responded to the recruitment survey, 88 eligible participants were identified from 12 institutions. From these 88 eligible participants, 63 participants provided an email to receive subsequent surveys and 15 went on to complete at least one subsequent survey during the application process.

The demographic characteristics of the 15 students are presented in Table 2. Participants received a multi-select question for racial/ethnic self-identification and an open-ended question where they shared any additional parts of their identity that they felt were crucial to understanding them. All participants identified with at least one marginalized racial/ethnic identity: nine identified as Hispanic/Latino, four as Asian, three as African American/Black, two as American Indian/Alaskan Native, and one as Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. Three participants also identified as White. More than half of participants identified as having a low-income background (66.7%), transfer student (60%), and as a first-generation college student (53.3%). Additional categories were created for honors students and having a dependent(s) (i.e., "mother" or "head of household"). Two participants identified as part of the LGBTQ+ community (i.e., "transmasculine non-binary" or "queer").

Table 2

Survey Participant Demographics

Demographic Characteristic	*n*	%
Race/Ethnicity		
American Indian/Alaskan Native	2	13.3
Asian	4	26.7
African American/Black	3	20
Hispanic/Latino	9	60
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	1	6.7
White	3	20
First-Generation College Student	8	53.3
Low-Income Background	10	66.7
Transfer Student	9	60
Honors Student	4	26.7
Have Dependent(s)	5	33.3
LGBTQ+	2	13.3

Note. Total *n* = 15. Percentages for race/ethnicity do not total 100 because participants were able to select more than one category.

Table 3 presents the self-reported demographic information for the participants whose quotes are used in this paper. All names are pseudonyms. Four participants completed all four surveys (Diana, Julia, Rachel, and Talia) and three participants completed all but the third survey (Alicia, Amelie, and Riley). In addition to responding to the first survey, Ella completed the second and third, Bailey and Kendall completed the third, and Gabriela responded to the fourth survey. Five additional participants responded to at least two surveys but were not quoted in the results of this manuscript.

Table 3

Self-Reported Participant Demographics

Name*	Race	First-Gen	Low-SES	Transfer Student	LGBTQ+	UG	Additional Identity-Marker(s)	Accepted to SLP Grad School?
Alicia	Hispanic/Latino	No	Yes	Yes	No	Public	N/A	Did not apply
Amelie	African American/Black	Yes	No	No	Yes	Public	Daughter of African immigrants	Did not apply
Bailey	American Indian/ Alaskan Native, Hispanic/Latino	No	No	No	Yes	Public	Transmasculine non-binary	N/A
Diana	Asian	Yes	No	No	No	Public	N/A	Yes
Ella	Asian	No	No	No	No	Private	N/A	N/A
Gabriela	Hispanic/Latino	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Public	Mother, full-time employed	Waitlisted
Julia	Asian, White	No	Yes	Yes	No	Private	Single mother, ND	Yes
Kendall	Asian, Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander, White	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Public	Head of household, honors student	N/A
Rachel	Hispanic/Latino	Yes	Yes	No	No	Public	Honors student	Yes
Riley	Hispanic/Latino	No	No	Yes	No	Public	N/A	N/A
Talia	African American/Black	No	No	No	No	Public	N/A	Yes

Note. *All names are pseudonyms. First-Gen = First Generation College Student, Low-SES = Low Income Background, UG = Undergraduate Institution, ND = neurodivergent.

Data Analysis. The CCW framework set the foundation for the codebook and definitions for each of the six forms of capital (Yosso, 2005). The six forms of cultural wealth are inherently interconnected: linguistic, navigational, social, familial, resistant, and aspirational. The codebook was modified during the analysis process to align with the experiences of the applicants. The final descriptions of each type of capital can be found in Table 4. The codebook was used as a metric for systematic application of codes to survey responses (Oliveira, 2023).

The author coded the qualitative survey data by hand and with a digital analysis software package, NVivo 13 (2020, R1), to ensure a rigorous analysis (Maher et al., 2018). The author first read all survey responses using NVivo. Next, NVivo was used to create codes by type of capital. Memos

were made within NVivo to note changes in the codes' descriptions or patterns between the data and the CCW framework (Saldaña, 2015). Codes were printed and cut into individual squares to allow for visual and kinesthetic interaction and sequential and relational cognitive engagement with the data (Maher et al., 2018). Codes were grouped together, reread for cohesiveness, and rearranged as necessary. The author verified codes and analyzed themes until reaching saturation.

Researcher Positionality. As a qualitative study, it is important to discuss how the position of the researcher influences each stage of the research process. This research study was conducted by an Asian American, cisgender, and heterosexual woman, whose parents earned graduate degrees. The researcher was a third-year undergraduate student in CSD at an MSI at the time of data collection, but did not participate in the SLP graduate school application process herself. As a fellow BIPOC CSD student, the author believes that the disclosure of her identity in the recruitment surveys created a sense of comfort among participants to openly share their stories.

Results

The findings detailed in chronological order how underrepresented applicants navigated each stage of the graduate school application process: (a) application preparation, (b) experiences while completing applications, and (c) post-application submission reflections. Each application stage highlighted themes of challenges that study participants faced and the themes of cultural capital that were most prominent during that stage. These themes were contextualized by participants' underrepresented identities. Participants' challenges and capital accumulated over the application process, where anticipated challenges and established sources of capital in earlier stages continued to be relevant across later stages. The two also complemented each other since applicants surmounted the challenges that arose by leveraging a source(s) of capital. Table 4 provides the operational definitions of each form of capital, and a description and example of each theme found in the data. The last column in Table 4 delineated when each form of capital was salient in the application process. Findings are reported in participant's own words, but the author corrected typos and spelled out abbreviations, to preserve student voice as best as possible.

Approaching the Application. Prior to beginning the application process, participants understood that their identity was central to the application and their experiences navigating the CSD major leading up to this pivotal point. The underrepresentation of their identities in the field stirred up concerns around gaining acceptance and why a program might accept them. Simultaneously, recognizing their underrepresentation generated aspirational and resistant capital to serve as motivators when applying in hopes of one day diversifying the field and providing services with cultural humility.

Table 4

Themes by Cultural Capital

Theme	Yosso (2005) Definition	Theme Description	Example	Stage Used in Application Process		
				Before	During	After
Aspirational	Ability to maintain hopes and dreams, even in the face of real and perceived barriers	Maintaining hope in becoming an SLP in the face of barriers	Hoping to diversify the field and serve their community	X	X	X
Familial	Cultural knowledges nurtured among kin that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition	Knowledge nurtured through extended family and community networks	Attending virtual presentations from clinicians who were first-generation college students	X	X	X
Linguistic	Intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style	Multilingualism and intellectual/ social skills developed through communication experiences	Looking forward to providing bilingual clinical services in the future	X		
Navigational	Skills of maneuvering through social institutions not created with Communities of Color in mind	Skills and resiliency to navigate marginalizing systems, such as universities	Using STEP mentoring and university career center for application support		X	
Resistant	Knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality	Learned knowledge to challenge inequality through oppositional behavior	Utilizing social networks to gain instrumental and emotional support to navigate institutions	X	X	X
Social	Networks of people and community resources to navigate social institutions	Highlighting their lived experiences as strengths to resist societal messages that devalue their culture	Gaining encouragement from friends within the major, especially other BIPOC women		X	X

Challenges.

Managing the Application. Applying to graduate school is an overwhelming process, especially for first-generation college students and racial minority students who are less likely to have mentors in the field. There were several moving parts that applicants needed to account for as Diana, an Asian, first-generation college student, explained:

> "Right now, I'm concerned about my letters of recommendation and whether my professors are saying impressive things about me because it was hard to get close to them when I attended such a large undergrad. I'm concerned about meeting all the deadlines for the 7 grad schools I'm applying to and all the little logistical things that go into it. I'm scared that one little mistake might go wrong on Communication Sciences and Disorders Centralized Application Service (CSDCAS) or Cal State Apply and it will jeopardize my application. The whole application process itself and everything that goes into it is very daunting and stressful."

Because applicants were completing applications in the final year of their bachelor's degree program, they were managing several moving pieces. Receiving guidance on affording applications and graduate school, in addition to receiving mentorship on time management to balance the application process and undergraduate courses, would be critical for underrepresented students (Cochran et al., 2018).

Am I Enough? Participants were well-aware of the low acceptance rates for SLP graduate schools, leading them to question their ability to gain acceptance to a program. Rachel, a first-generation, low-income (FGLI) honors student, explained:

> "Although I have been able to immerse myself into the field and garner unique and meaningful experiences in research, volunteering, work, and doing well in my classes, there is always a nagging concern that I am not 'good enough.' The fear of rejection after having worked so hard over the years to achieve this goal causes me stress."

Rachel described this fear of failure, a fusion of imposter syndrome and stereotype threat (Edwards, 2019), that arises despite "doing everything right" (Rachel). For underrepresented students, there was an added hurdle to gaining acceptance as Alicia, a Latina transfer student from a low-income background, shared "I am also concerned about the historically low admissions rates for BIPOC, especially since applying to graduate school is already a heavily competitive process." Recognizing the underrepresentation of their identities in the field was central to how applicants conceptualized the obstacles they would have to overcome in hopes of getting accepted.

If offered acceptance, applicants had lingering thoughts on why they were accepted. Understanding the push for diversifying the field, along with the tension around Affirmative Action during this time, students like Talia, a Black woman, expressed her concern around the meaning of an acceptance: "I have faced microaggressions, slurs, and more that hurt me during my time in undergrad. I feel like grad school may 'tokenize' my Blackness and may select me only because of my race and not my application." These day-to-day experiences with symbolic violence notably have ostracized underrepresented CSD students (Abdelaziz et al., 2021), and Talia described its enduring impact as she seeks to continue her education in the field. With the negative experiences Talia endured as an undergraduate student, she was wary about graduate programs' commitment to equity as it relates to program acceptances and her potential experience as a student in these programs. As increasingly more departments emerge with statements of their commitment to

diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), Talia was hesitant of programs' motivations for accepting her for a characteristic other than the strengths she would bring into the program and the field.

Identifying Supportive Programs. Undergraduate experiences of navigating a predominantly White department and field have informed applicants of the values they seek in a graduate program. Ella, an Asian applicant, anticipated challenges in graduate school if she attended yet another program that does not actionably support their students of color:

> "Personally, I feel like my CSD department has made little effort in providing resources/support for People of Color (POC) students & does not do that much regarding multicultural issues in the field, which has made me not want to attend grad school here."

Attending a program that values multiculturalism in their classrooms and clinical practice is critical for students' well-being in graduate school and preparation for the services and clients they desire to work with.

Cultural Capital.

Diversifying the Field. The persistent thought of underrepresentation served a dual purpose as it inspired applicants to challenge the dominant narrative about who pursues a graduate degree in SLP and how to become a change agent in the field. Participants were drawn to provide improved services to their community drawing from linguistic, familial, and resistant capital as they recalled encounters with discrimination from their or their family members' past to inspire them to become a clinician. Together, these visions of hope for themselves, their family, and their community uplifted their identities and provided motivation going into the application cycle.

Bringing representation into their communities was a significant motivator for many applicants as they were mindful of the impression it would leave on their clients. Talia highlighted this theme:

> "What motivates me is the fact that I can one day become a clinician that helps children that look like me, in hopes of inspiring and supporting them to the fullest extent. There are not enough Black speech-language pathologists so for me to be one and have a Black client would greatly impact me and hopefully my client as well."

With a lived experience growing up and navigating the field with limited representation, Talia aspired to be a role model for the next generation of youth to demonstrate that they can acquire a graduate degree and they belong in a predominantly White allied health field like SLP. Talia also mentioned the rewarding impact that having a Black client would have on her as she saw this serving as a source of aspirational capital for her once she becomes a practicing clinician.

Practicing Cultural Humility in Clinical Work. Applicants were not only driven to serve their communities as a speech-language pathologist, but to actively bring justice into the field. Amelie, a queer, Black applicant, explained:

> "What motivates me to become a speech-language pathologist is to be one in the growing population of speech-language pathologists that bring social justice, anti-ableism, and anti-racism to the field of SLP and audiology."

She recognized the ongoing work of current speech-language pathologists to diversify the field and promote clinicians' cultural humility. Amelie was motivated to join the movement in making equity and inclusion a priority. Without yet being a certified clinician, Amelie envisioned her future positively impacting the field. This aspiration pushed her to obtain a master's degree in SLP.

These values of cultural humility often stemmed from lived experience. Reflecting on the discrimination that she and her family faced, as Rachel will go on to describe in the subsequent section, Rachel looked back on those moments as sources of aspirational and resistant capital:

> "I want to leverage my interests and strengths in language, healthcare, and education to guide my clients to achieve their highest quality of life via the sacred gift of communication. Having learned of the great disparities in healthcare and education, and motivated by my personal experiences, I will always advocate for multilingualism and preservation of the heritage language and culture."

Amelie and Rachel's desire to promote cultural humility in their careers appeared in different ways that complement the other. While Amelie sought to participate in activism at the organizational-level, Rachel saw herself incorporating this value in her clinical practice. Additionally, despite Rachel's fear of not gaining acceptance to a program, she recognized her worth and what she would contribute to the profession.

Familial Security. Applicants were aware of what the end goal would mean for their family. For those with dependents, as well as those who did not yet have dependents, applying to graduate school and becoming one step closer to their career goal would reap benefits for more than just themselves. This drive to obtain familial security through the profession was evident in Riley's explanation, "I also want to have stability and be able to support my future family." Many student parents, including Gabriela and Julia, ascribed their motivation to their children, and that access to the career would provide their children with a better future and a more present parent through the stability and flexibility of the career. The optimistic job growth in the field provided reassurance to participants that they will have the ability to provide for their descendants—a value that is especially meaningful for applicants who are from FGLI backgrounds.

Advancing through Applications. As applicants worked on their applications, they found that some anticipated application challenges were realized yet they leveraged navigational capital to forge networks that provided them with the information essential to their applications and the encouragement important to their perseverance. They pieced together support systems to build their own network, demonstrating the enterprising nature of underrepresented SLP applicants as they utilized all six forms of cultural capital. This resourcefulness allowed them to enlist various resources to overcome the navigational challenges they faced prior to and during the application.

Challenges.

Cultural Norms versus College Norms. Considering the Eurocentric construction of education in the United States, some cultural norms may not align with educational norms. Obtaining letters of recommendation has been a notably challenging application barrier for FGLI students compared to their non-FGLI counterparts because the hidden curriculum behind obtaining these letters requires interacting with faculty through their research or attending office hours (Estien et al., 2023). These interactions are not only unfamiliar but can additionally be intimidating for underrepresented students considering the predominantly White makeup of CSD faculty. Diana explained how this cultural mismatch throughout her undergraduate program became relevant as she sought letters of recommendation:

> "I believe that due to my cultural upbringing, I've been taught to be an obedient student who shouldn't question your elders or teachers/doctors/professionals…I may not have even been aware of it, but I think this aspect of my culture has caused me to be a 'quiet student'…

This also made it hard to develop relationships with professors. I was always a bit scared to go up to my professors and ask for help. I've always been taught to be independent and not bother others, so asking for help can be difficult for me sometimes."

These experiences are not unique to Diana and are common among FGLI college students like her (Jack, 2016). Expectations for preparing for graduate admissions were unclear, and once applicants became aware of these pieces of the hidden curriculum, they faced an uphill climb to make up for the lost time not engaging with it.

Inaccessibility of Application Knowledge. Applicants anticipated that a lack of access to knowledge on the application process would pose a challenge, and some found that to be true in their experience. With applicants having the most control over their statement of purpose, they felt stressed not knowing what admissions committees would want to read. Rachel elaborated on this challenge: "…feeling like my essays have to be perfect but not really knowing where to start and not being sure how to meaningfully condense all my experiences into the limits of the prompt." Despite providing applicants with prompts, the page limits left applicants with uncertainty in knowing what information is truly valued.

Identifying how the application process functions proved to be just as overwhelming as writing out a personal statement. Kendall, an FGLI transfer student, described her challenges with having "limited resources on the application process and navigating additional application costs, such as CBEST, GRE, etc." In addition to preparing the materials themselves, participants were surprised and challenged by logistical pieces such as sending transcripts from all institutions attended, the cumulative costs across sending transcripts, taking the GRE, and more. Julia, a neurodivergent transfer student, shared her perspective: "I'm a returning student and had 5 transcripts to order for each application, one from a school that had closed and took a month to procure." For students like Julia, these administrative barriers were especially burdensome and discouraging, decreasing accessibility to graduate school.

Cultural Capital.
Mentors & Friends Within the Field. Mentors who had gone through the application process, and friends who concurrently went through the process, provided a unique set of supports. Participants especially emphasized support from people who came from underrepresented backgrounds such as "culturally diverse minority women" (Riley, a Hispanic/Latino transfer student) as vital to their navigation. Finding support from those both in their field and community allowed applicants to feel seen and understand that they were not alone in the challenges that arose. Friends applying in the same application cycle shared a point of commonality with participants: "Other friends within this major have been extremely supportive and helpful" (Riley).

Even with the doubt and imposter syndrome amongst underrepresented students, applicants developed a social network to cope with the stresses of applying (Wright-Mair et al., 2023). Beyond friends, mentors and advisors provided reassurance as Diana described: "I overcame doubts by reaching out to others and networking with older people in this profession. I found comfort in advice given by PhD students in my lab." Underrepresented individuals oftentimes question their success and potential due to the structural oppression built into higher education (Edwards, 2019), yet receiving support from those within the institution can combat self-doubt.

Family & Friends Outside the Field. Many participants highlighted the valuable social support from family and friends who were unfamiliar with graduate school and the field of SLP. Despite the lack of logistical application knowledge, they provided valuable social and emotional support. Rachel shared: "Family supported as much as they could (mostly emotionally), but due to lack of familiarity with the process their support could only go so far." While the support was important, Rachel acknowledged its limited nature and went on to list the depth of support she received from her wide network. The socioemotional encouragement alone was not enough to navigate applications, but participants were cognizant of the role that family and friends outside of the field played in demonstrating their enthusiasm and optimism for their applicant.

University Resources. Applicants accessed institutional resources to strengthen their applications. Rachel shared that her campus's Career Center was valuable for "general resume tips and how to approach drafting the Letter of Intent." Furthermore, she elaborated on the benefits of her student support program and how the staff "helped a lot with general readability and editing for my resume and Letters of Intent." Not only were the staff valuable, but she received peer mentorship within her support program.

Bilingual Connections. Cognizant of the lack of linguistic representation in the field, SLP applicants were determined to bring their bilingual language skills to the profession to provide culturally sensitive services to their communities. Being bilingual was central to the identities and experiences of many participants, fueling their drive to become a speech-language pathologist, and thus, was closely tied to their aspirational capital. Furthermore, their "[motivation to] increase bilingual representation in the field" (Gabriela) was closely tied to resistant capital due to their personal experiences with overcoming linguistic discrimination.

Reflecting on her trajectory to becoming bilingual, Rachel shared how her parents were discouraged from teaching her Spanish:
> "Educators early on discouraged my parents from speaking Spanish at home to 'prevent confusion' in our language development (shaking my head), which led me to internalize for a long time that my heritage was not worthy, and would impede my ability to succeed. Furthering my education (including in Spanish) allowed me to see not only the beauty, but the NECESSITY for me to be the speech-language pathologist that fights for the affirmation of home languages, and fights against monolingual prescription."

Because monolingualism, as opposed to bilingualism, was historically promoted as the foremost practice for children's language development, the effects of this previous philosophy pervade to the present as educators and speech-language pathologists may discourage parents from speaking their heritage language with their children. She continued to explain the limitations of having monolingual English health providers in medical settings as well:
> "Witnessing the impact that the language barrier has particularly in healthcare via my grandparents' delayed diagnoses drove me to be someone who contributes to bridging that language gap."

Ironically, the two settings Rachel identified in her personal encounters with linguistic injustices are the two largest employment settings for speech-language pathologists: education and healthcare (ASHA, 2023). Experiences like Rachel's underscores the need for diverse clinicians who practice cultural humility. This desire to serve bilingual communities and combat discrimination as clinicians stemmed from personal experiences with linguistic oppression. In

resisting the prevailing linguistic injustices, participants were intent on using their bilingualism to support heritage languages and cultures.

Reminders of Purpose. Applicants continued to hold themselves close to their purpose and what becoming a speech-language pathologist will mean for their community. By obtaining their graduate degree to work as a speech-language pathologists, applicants would increase the diversity within the field, which is inherently a form of resistant capital. When asked to identify a meaningful experience that increased her confidence in pursuing graduate school, Kendall responded: "A meaningful experience is knowing that there are not many Native Hawaiians, or multiracial individuals like myself." In addition to race, Bailey shared that "a professor who works in transgender voice therapy let me know that trans identities would likely be respected" when the applicant joins the field as a practicing clinician, indicating the need for gender-diverse speech-language pathologists. Reminders of the value they will bring to the field and to their clients continued to motivate underrepresented applicants as they made progress on their applications.

After the Applications. With applications submitted and admissions decisions released, applicants provided overall reflections on the admissions process. At this point, participants who did not apply or were not accepted identified new barriers that arose while finances remained a challenge regardless of an offer of admission. Applicants continued to find strength within themselves and their community, acknowledging that virtual platforms allowed them to expand their network and receive support beyond just the application process.

Challenges.

Financial Restrictions. Financial worries continued even after applications were submitted. With a dearth of need-based aid available for graduate school, participants were aware that they needed to strike a balance between financial sacrifice and minimization of financial risk. Julia detailed making this sacrifice: "[during the application process] I had continued doubts as to whether all this work and financial debt is worth it/will pay off in the future." Accepting debt was one form of sacrifice, along with choosing to apply to less programs, and to not apply to programs that appeared to be financially inaccessible. Riley detailed one strategy: "I've only applied to one school because it was the only feasible option for me, but I know this limits my chances of getting in." Several participants explained the stress around affording their desired programs. While some used the same strategy as Riley, the cost of graduate school was so overwhelming that it deterred Amelie from even applying this cycle: "The lack of grants and funds has discouraged me from pursuing a graduate degree in SLP." The costs associated with applying to and attending graduate school were not only a significant burden for applicants, but many costs came as a surprise, and limited applicants' freedom in where to apply. The most affordable programs are situated within public universities, however, these programs also have the most competitive admission rates. In the 2023-2024 admissions cycle, more than half of the public California universities with an SLP program made offers to less than 25% of their applicants. With these competitive acceptance rates, applying to less schools increased applicants' risk of not gaining acceptance at all.

Next Steps. As a pre-professional undergraduate major, students were moving through the program with a departmental expectation of attending an SLP or audiology graduate program with little support outside of these pathways. Although Gabriela did not receive any offers of admission, she was offered a waitlist spot at one program which she described as "an experience that made

me feel discouraged from pursuing a graduate degree in SLP." Applicants from underrepresented backgrounds were less likely to both receive admission offers *and* have the knowledge to strategically navigate yet another process in taking a gap year. This setback also had critical ramifications for low-income students as Gabriela explained:

> "I will be graduating in a few weeks…won't qualify for FAFSA anymore, and I will have to pay for some classes to retake courses in community college that I took over 10 years ago while having no job and 3 daughters. I can't even get a job related to my field because I am not a speech-language pathologist yet and even to go the speech-language pathology assistant (SLPA) route means I have to acquire more debt just to get accepted in the program and acquire more debt [once I'm in a SLPA program]. Also childcare won't be provided anymore for my little one since I will have graduated so that will be another obstacle I will have to face."

Despite the widespread awareness that there are not enough graduate seats for qualified applicants, students are provided with little to no information on career options outside of CSD and careers that accept a CSD bachelor's degree.

Cultural Capital.

Community Support. By the end of the application process, applicants had identified a robust support system composed of a range of individuals across their personal and professional networks. While applicants went into detail naming who these different people were as they were going through the application, by the end they grouped them as a collective. Amelie summarized the support she received: "I have overcome a lot of doubts or wavering of confidence during this process mainly thanks to my community around me and those who are BIPOC and have gone through the same process as well." Although she intended to apply this cycle, Amelie elected to take a gap year. Delaying applying by a year was a personal decision; she looked forward to starting early on her application, however, with a community behind to support her.

Social Media Connections. With the rise of COVID-19 during this application cycle, a novel finding from this study was the role of social media influencers and mentors in helping to navigate the application process and beyond. Advice and mentorship through this virtual outlet came from people with shared identities to the applicants:

> "I also utilized lots of resources and mentors that I would find out about through social media, such as @latinaGradGuide and bilingual SLP mentor @abilingualslp, and listening to presentations by first-generation students in higher education who shared their testimonies about their application process and how they got through."
> [Rachel]

In addition to graduate school influencers, students were resourceful and found support from "SLP students in Facebook groups" [Diana].

The ASHA Student-To-Empowered-Professional (STEP) Mentoring Program allows underrepresented students to be virtually connected with professionals in the field to "facilitate the continued recruitment and retention of racial/ethnic minority students" (ASHA, n.d.-a). Both Rachel and Diana took part in this online mentoring program, with Diana noting its influence on her during the application process: "I'm really glad that I found an Asian ASHA mentor who I could ask more personal questions about the field with." Considering only 2.4% of speech-language pathologists are Asian, she continued to share how she deliberately took advantage of

the STEP program's mission: "I chose [my ASHA STEP mentor] specifically because she is also from an Asian-American background." Diana's experience also provided evidence aligned with previous research on mentorship for minority CSD students, encouraging intervention strategies so students can find mentors in the field who share their socioeconomic status, ethnic, or racial background (Fuse, 2018). Social media allowed for connections in a time where social interactions were limited, and even more limiting for students seeking connections within both the field and their underrepresented identity-group. The virtual world increased the potential network available to bridge students to mentors who understand their challenges.

Reassurance of Strength. As in the previous application stages, applicants' belief in themselves was a significant piece in prevailing over the application. Talia shared how she overcame doubts during the application process: "I remembered how hard I worked and reminded myself that I earned my spot." In recognizing their value, participants were asked to share what they believed were the strengths of their application. Diana, who earlier worried that her cultural norms inhibited her interactions with professors, appreciated that her lived cultural experience would positively impact the field in how she would navigate it: "I believe a strength of my application was my personal essay because it clearly explained why I want to be a speech-language pathologist, how being Chinese influences my future career decisions and why I wanted to attend each graduate school." Before and during the application, underrepresented applicants expressed their bouts with imposter syndrome and knowing the competitive nature of applications. In the end, applicants believed in their strengths and continued to appreciate how their identity would be an asset to any graduate program.

Discussion

The results of this study are the first to report the range of strengths that underrepresented CSD students utilize when faced with challenges at each stage of the SLP graduate school application process. Although there has been greater focus on the barriers to applying to CSD graduate programs and sources of support for undergraduate CSD students, there is a dearth of research on their overlap and how these supports allow students to rise above the barriers they encounter as they navigate the application process. This study fills this gap by revealing that underrepresented students are acutely aware of how their identity impacts their perceptions of gaining entrance to the field. Therefore, CSD programs should underscore the necessity of cultural humility and how underrepresented students can contribute to this knowledge. Increasing virtual resources for networking, mentoring, and programming will widen student networks so that they have a strong support system by the time of application.

Challenges directly related to having application-related knowledge were prominent throughout the entire process and only increased across time. Prior to starting applications, applicants found it difficult to identify and manage the application requirements. Another challenge at this stage was determining whether CSD departments embraced equitable practices in their admissions process and in their program. While working on applications, applicants found that previous concerns remained with an added realization that barriers during their undergraduate education have culminated in present challenges such as obtaining letters of recommendation. By the end of the process, applicants who did not receive an offer of admission once again felt lost in navigating

next steps. Applicants who were admitted to a program felt stress regarding the debt they would take on to earn their degree.

Applicants identified several strategies that supported them in overcoming the challenges they encountered at each stage of the application process. Before starting on applications, applicants were grounded in their purpose for applying—using their skills and knowledge to serve their community. This sense of identity and purpose was critical throughout the entire process and was supplemented as applicants worked on applications by their enterprising nature to expand their networks with those who would provide valuable information and support. In building these networks, applicants took advantage of virtual platforms to connect with others from shared identities. This vision of working as a speech-language pathologist with cultural humility, combined with having a community of support, was paramount in persevering through the application process. Especially because aspirational, familial, and resistant capital were intertwined through the entire application process, attention to increasing opportunities to build relationships, particularly with shared identity-groups, were most supportive for underrepresented SLP applicants.

The COVID-19 pandemic emerged as this cohort of students were finishing the second year of their undergraduate program. Space constraints did not allow me to detail COVID-19-related challenges unique to the pandemic, and instead I have chosen to focus the results on processes likely at play before and after the pandemic.

Cultural Capital to Overcome Challenges. The cultural capital that underrepresented applicants invoked during the application process aligned with previous research, both in CSD and STEM, on how this population completes graduate school applications with help from distinct support networks (Matthews et al., 2021; Monarrez et al., 2022). A combination of positive social interactions and institutional support underscored the impact of counselors and support programs on student success and persistence (Tovar, 2015). A significant contribution from this study found that applicants' identities were central to how they navigated this process. The intersectionality of their identities led applicants to rationalize the challenges they encountered and also strategize how their identity lends its strengths in completing applications. Diana, for example, demonstrated this paradox as a "first-generation Chinese-American whose parents don't speak English." Growing up, she witnessed "racism and discrimination due to [her family's] broken English" but she turned these traumatic experiences into motivation to use her bilingualism to serve her community—a strength she identified in her personal statement.

Applicants' resourceful nature revealed the value in social media and virtual programming for prospective graduate students. Studies conducted on higher education aspirations and social media activity have solely examined its impact on prospective undergraduates but found similar results. Similar to what was found in this study, social media participation promoted (a) social capital through applicants' expanded network which provided (b) navigational application strategies and (c) resistant capital to embrace their marginalized identities as sources of efficacy and pride in navigating applications (Brown et al., 2022; Wohn et al., 2013). With the rising influence of technology, especially post COVID-19, virtual platforms connect underrepresented applicants with other applicants, graduate students, and current clinicians with shared identities to provide support that may not be locally available to them.

While applicants became empowered by their experiences with prejudice and earnestly found the support they needed, applicants should not need to rely on the cultural capital they derived from their community to persist in the application process. Despite expanding their networks, many students still noted that knowledge of the application process was burdensome to piece together. Similarly, finding strength in discriminatory encounters is a skill that marginalized individuals have adopted, yet should not be a standard for developing resilience. Institutions should reduce the undue burden of these challenges by proactively accounting for the needs of underrepresented students and interrogating how their policies may exclude certain populations.

Examining Existing Challenges. Challenges reported in this study have been found in previous studies including the time-consuming nature of applications, lack of information, and identification of requirements (Sylvan et al., 2020). While these challenges were met by complementary support systems, some gaps remained where applicants could receive more support. Applicants expressed concerns about programs' sincerity in their commitments to DEI which, if made clear, would relieve stress in determining which programs to apply to, and also promote future retention since students feel supported by their graduate program. Financial challenges proved to be an obstacle during and after the application process because applicants were unprepared for the copious amounts of fees tied to an application, along with the burden of cost of attendance for graduate school. Guidance and mentorship for students who were not accepted to a graduate program should be made available.

Limitations. Conducting this study in California provided unique insights to navigating graduate school applications. The SLP programs located in California are some of the most competitive in the country due to the high numbers of applications they receive. Additionally, a majority of these programs are situated within Minority Serving Institutions. Using this sample provides a rare insight into underrepresented SLP applicant experiences in environments where CCW is likely to be more easily accumulated; these geographic and institutional characteristics, however, likely influenced the amount of cultural capital available to participants compared to their peers at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), who may amass cultural capital in different ways and to a more limited extent. Additionally, access to cultural capital was not analyzed by identity group to honor the intersectionality of participants' multiple identities because the author cannot determine what forms of cultural capital are tied to specific parts of a participant's identity. Although this study cannot generalize challenges and strengths specific to certain underrepresented groups, the perspectives of the current participants provided a preliminary understanding of useful supports that may bolster institutional resources and inform future studies that investigate the diversity of underrepresented student experiences.

The survey design and analysis had limitations that can inform future studies. Participant attrition was high considering the study took place over several months during a busy time for student-applicants, and no direct benefits were offered to participants. Multiple open-ended questions in the survey may have deterred applicants from participating. Participant participation was intrinsically driven, possibly by their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the application process, and desire to see change in the field regarding support for underrepresented students. It is possible that applicants with strong feelings about the application process chose to participate. Also, the author analyzed the data independently as the study was completed in partial fulfillment of the

requirements of the author's undergraduate thesis while a student at California State University, Fullerton. No other researchers triangulated the data.

This sample was exclusive to undergraduate students applying and intending to enroll in graduate school immediately after receiving their bachelor's degree. Consequently, this study did not consider the experiences of underrepresented students who take gap years before applying, or students who completed post-baccalaureate programs in CSD and are now applying to SLP master's programs. In the case that there is greater underrepresentation in these non-traditional pathways to SLP master's programs, it is crucial for future research to consider the experiences of non-traditional undergraduate students applying to graduate school.

Implications. Findings from this study have implications to increase support for underrepresented CSD undergraduates applying to SLP graduate programs. Programs specifically designed for underrepresented students to develop community with peers and to connect with mentors provides practical and social support in navigating the application and the field. These programs include affinity groups which promote the success and persistence of underrepresented students (Alicea & Johnson, 2021). Local programming may have limitations for underrepresented students at PWIs who may not have equal access to their communities, so it is recommended that ASHA develops a centralized virtual platform for underrepresented students across the United States. Considering how applicants in this study resourcefully found support from social media and virtual communities, investing in structured virtual opportunities for connection may be particularly beneficial. While several universities have designated CSD DEI student organizations (e.g. Student Speech Therapists and Audiologists Nurturing Cultural Enrichment [California State University, Fullerton]), each operates decentralized in contrast to NSSLHA chapters which operate under National NSSLHA. National NSSLHA's Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Action Work Group can provide a touchpoint for these organizations to virtually collaborate in support of a greater vision of supporting underrepresented students through graduate school and into the field. Designated programming across virtual and in-person modalities could build community and promote the strengths of underrepresented CSD applicants, especially as aspirational and resistant capital were central throughout the entire application process.

Existing programming was found to support underrepresented students. Participants spoke in favor of ASHA's STEP e-mentoring program, indicating that increased resources should be allocated to recruit more students and mentors. Applicants expressed their commitment to their communities yet none described participation in ASHA's Multicultural Constituency Groups. Increasing student participation in these groups would connect students to potential mentors from shared identities, and build their sense of belonging, and in turn, can increase graduate school and workforce diversity. National NSSLHA also provides virtual programming with events such as resume workshops and graduate school application office hours. None of the participants reported these events as a source of support, despite previous recordings of these events being accessible to anyone regardless of membership status. Findings from this study indicate that these resources would significantly benefit underrepresented students who may not have access to information on navigating the application nor have flexibility to attend in-person events held by their local NSSLHA chapter. These resources support underrepresented students, yet more work needs to be done in facilitating awareness of these existing resources.

Future research should continue to engage underrepresented students. Centering underrepresented narratives through research provides a vehicle to critique micro and macro institutional structures in CSD education that bridge pathways to graduate education.

Conclusions

This study provided insights into the issue of recruitment of underrepresented students in SLP programs by uplifting the voices of the applicants themselves, thereby providing insight to their challenges and how they capitalize on their strengths and lived experiences to overcome challenges throughout the application process. This study contributed to the growing literature on underrepresented CSD students by highlighting the interplay of challenges that arose during the application process, and the cultural skills and knowledge that underrepresented students use to navigate the accumulating barriers. Building on previous research, this study temporally situated application barriers. Using the CCW framework, applicants predominantly relied on aspirational, resistant, and familial capital. During the application process, applicants maintained optimism in becoming a speech-language pathologist in hopes of using their skills and experiences to work with underrepresented clients like themselves and promoting DEI in the field. This commitment to their community was cultivated further as applicants found that peers and mentors with shared identities provided the most valuable application-related support. Despite the disproportionate barriers impacting underrepresented applicants, existing resources and experiences bolstered applicants' knowledge and confidence. With more deliberate and widespread implementation of these supports, they may contribute to a decrease in minority attrition from undergraduate to graduate school. Given the field's recent strides toward DEI, it is critical to examine how universities and ASHA can apply and bolster best practices to diversify the recruitment of SLP graduate students and close the demographic gap between the clinical workforce and the patients they serve.

Disclosures

I do not have any financial or nonfinancial relationships to disclose.

References

Abdelaziz, M. M., Matthews, J.-J., Campos, I., Kasambira Fannin, D., Rivera Perez, J. F., Wilhite, M., & Williams, R. M. (2021). Student stories: Microaggressions in communication sciences and disorders. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, *30*(5), 1990–2002. https://doi.org/10.1044/2021_AJSLP-21-00030

Alicea, C. C. M., & Johnson, R. E. (2021). Creating community through affinity groups for minority students in communication sciences and disorders. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, *30*(5), 2028–2031. https://doi.org/10.1044/2021_AJSLP-20-00342

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (n.d.-a). *About ASHA's S.T.E.P. Mentoring Program*. American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. https://www.asha.org/students/mentoring/step/aboutstep/

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (n.d.-b). *ASHA EdFind*. American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. https://find.asha.org/ed/#sort=relevancy

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2013). *Strategic Pathway to Excellence*. American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. https://www.asha.org/siteassets/uploadedfiles/asha-strategic-pathway-to-excellence.pdf

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2023). *2022 Member and Affiliate Profile: Annual Demographic and Employment Data*. American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. https://www.asha.org/siteassets/surveys/csd-education-survey-national-aggregate-data-report.pdf

Brown, M., Pyle, C., & Ellison, N. B. (2022). "On my head about it": College aspirations, social media participation, and community cultural wealth. *Social Media + Society*, *8*(2), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051221091545

Civil Rights Act of 1964, Pub. L. No. 88-352, 78 Stat. 241 (1964). https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-78/pdf/STATUTE-78-Pg241.pdf

Cleveland, E., Biller, M., Benafield, N., Moss, A., Jordan, M., & Yang, M. (2023). Exploring barriers to diversity, equity, and inclusion in communication sciences and disorders students. *Developmental Disabilities Network Journal*, *3*(1), 86–104. https://doi.org/10.59620/2694-1104.1070

Cochran, G. L., Hodapp, T., & Brown, E. E. A. (2017, July 26-27). *Identifying barriers to ethnic/racial minority students' participation in graduate physics* [Conference presentation]. Physics Education Research Conference 2017, Cincinnati, OH, United States. https://doi.org/10.1119/perc.2017.pr.018

Council of Academic Programs in Communication Sciences and Disorders. (2022). *CSDCAS 2021-2022 Applicant Data Report: 2021-2022 Admissions Cycle for the 2022 Entering Class*. Council of Academic Programs in Communication Sciences and Disorders. https://growthzonesitesprod.azureedge.net/wp-content/uploads/sites/1023/2023/04/2021-2022-CSDCAS-Applicant-Data-Report-.pdf

Edwards, C. W. (2019). Overcoming imposter syndrome and stereotype threat: Reconceptualizing the definition of a scholar. *Taboo: The Journal of Culture & Education*, *18*(1), 18–34. https://doi.org/10.31390/taboo.18.1.03

Ellis, C., & Kendall, D. (2021). Time to act: Confronting systemic racism in communication sciences and disorders academic training programs. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, *30*(5), 1916–1924. https://doi.org/10.1044/2021_AJSLP-20-00369

Estien, C. O., Chapman, M., Schell, C. J., Lowy, N., & Gerson, J. R. (2023). Demystifying the graduate school application process. *The Bulletin of the Ecological Society of America*, *104*(1), e02029. https://doi.org/10.1002/bes2.2029

Fuse, A. (2018). Needs of students seeking careers in communication sciences and disorders and barriers to their success. *Journal of Communication Disorders*, *72*, 40–53. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcomdis.2018.02.003

Girolamo, T. M., Politzer-Ahles, S., Ghali, S., & Williams, B. T. (2022). Preliminary evaluation of applicants to master's programs in speech-language pathology using vignettes and criteria from a holistic review process. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, *31*(2), 552–577. https://doi.org/10.1044/2021_AJSLP-20-00352

Guiberson, M., & Vigil, D. C. (2021). Admissions type and cultural competency in graduate speech-language pathology curricula: A national survey study. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, *30*(5), 2017–2027. https://doi.org/10.1044/2021_AJSLP-20-00324

Jack, A. A. (2016). (No) harm in asking: Class, acquired cultural capital, and academic engagement at an elite university. *Sociology of Education*, *89*(1), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038040715614913

Kovacs, T. (2022). Assessing Barriers to Graduate School Admission for Applicants From Underrepresented Populations in a Master's Level Speech-Language Pathology Program. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, *31*(2), 819–837. https://doi.org/10.1044/2021_AJSLP-21-00124

Lugo, V. A., Wood, C., Torres-Chavarro, M., & Garcia-Salas, M. (2023). Barriers to graduate applications: Perspectives of undergraduate students from underrepresented backgrounds in communication science and disorders. *Perspectives of the ASHA Special Interest Groups*, *8*(4), 729–740. https://doi.org/10.1044/2023_PERSP-22-00142

Lumivero (2020) *NVivo* (Version 13, Release 1.0) www.lumivero.com

Mahendra, N., & Kashinath, S. (2021). Mentoring underrepresented students in speech-language pathology: Effects of didactic training, leadership development, and research engagement. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, *31*, 527–538. https://doi.org/10.1044/2021_AJSLP-21-00018

Maher, C., Hadfield, M., Hutchings, M., & de Eyto, A. (2018). Ensuring rigor in qualitative data analysis: A design research approach to coding combining NVivo with traditional material methods. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *17*(1), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918786362

Mandulak, K. C. (2022). The case for holistic review in communication sciences and disorders admissions. *Perspectives of the ASHA Special Interest Groups*, *7*(2), 476–481. https://doi.org/10.1044/2020_PERSP-20-00137

Matthews, J.-J., Perryman, T., & Kneiss, D. (2021). Undergraduate student success initiatives in communication sciences and disorders. *Perspectives of the ASHA Special Interest Groups*, *6*(3), 601–609. https://doi.org/10.1044/2021_PERSP-20-00131

Monarrez, A., Frederick, A., Morales, D. X., Echegoyen, L. E., & Wagler, A. (2022). Hispanic/Latinx STEM majors applying to graduate school: The role of family, peers, and undergraduate research programs in facilitating community cultural wealth. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, *23*(1), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2022.2122973

Oliveira, G. (2023). Developing a codebook for qualitative data analysis: Insights from a study on learning transfer between university and the workplace. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, *46*(3), 300–312. https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2022.2128745

Posselt, J. R., & Grodsky, E. (2017). Graduate education and social stratification. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *43*(1), 353–378. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-081715-074324

Roberts, T. (2023a). Examining inclusion in speech-language pathology graduate programs through minoritized students' advice to a peer. *Perspectives of the ASHA Special Interest Groups*, *8*(4), 693–711. https://doi.org/10.1044/2023_PERSP-22-00226

Roberts, T. (2023b). Minoritized graduate students' recommendations to communication sciences and disorders programs to improve inclusion of minoritized students. *Teaching and Learning in Communication Sciences & Disorders*, *7*(2). https://doi.org/10.30707/TLCSD7.2.1690393489.708494

Saenz, T. I., Wyatt, T. A., & Reinard, J. C. (1998). Increasing the recruitment and retention of historically underrepresented minority students in higher education: A case study. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, *7*(3), 39–48. https://doi.org/10.1044/1058-0360.0703.39

Saldaña, J. (2015). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (3rd edition). SAGE Publications.

Sylvan, L., Perkins, A., & Truglio, C. (2020). Student experience applying to graduate school for speech-language pathology. *Perspectives of the ASHA Special Interest Groups*, *5*(1), 192–205. https://doi.org/10.1044/2019_PERSP-19-00102

Tovar, E. (2015). The role of faculty, counselors, and support programs on Latino/a community college students' success and intent to persist. *Community College Review*, *43*(1), 46–71. https://doi.org/10.1177/0091552114553788

Wohn, D. Y., Ellison, N. B., Khan, M. L., Fewins-Bliss, R., & Gray, R. (2013). The role of social media in shaping first-generation high school students' college aspirations: A social capital lens. *Computers & Education*, *63*, 424–436. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2013.01.004

Wright-Mair, R., Ramos, D., & Passano, B. (2023). Latinx college students' strategies for resisting imposter syndrome at Predominantly White Institutions. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, *23*(2), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2023.2180366

Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *8*(1), 69–91. https://doi.org/10.1080/1361332052000341006