SPLH Graduate School Application Tutorial: Student Instructions

1. **Background**

   Applying to graduate school is a multi-step process. Most graduate schools only accept students to begin a program in the Fall, with most application deadlines set for January or February. **This tutorial assumes that you will be applying for a fall graduate school start with a January or February application deadline**. If you do find a graduate school that takes a Spring/January graduate class, the application deadline will likely be in October so you'll need to move up the timeline in this tutorial to meet that deadline.

2. **Perform well academically (Admission – Graduation)**

   Entry into graduate school is highly competitive. Numerous components of your application affect your competitiveness for admission but GPA is one heavily weighted component. For this reason, it is important that you perform well academically throughout your undergraduate studies. Make it a point to know your grade in each of your classes throughout the semester. If the grade is not one that you would want to see on your transcript, immediately make an appointment with your instructor or attend office hours to discuss how you can improve your performance.

3. **Prepare for and take the GRE (Summer between Junior and Senior Year)**

   You should prepare for the GRE during the summer between your junior and senior year. You can find information about the GRE at https://www.ets.org/gre/. The GRE is a standardized testing consisting of three major portions/sections: Verbal Reasoning; Quantitative Reasoning; Analytical Writing. There are numerous test preparation books and courses available to help you prepare for the test. It is a good idea to do your test preparation in the summer so that you don't have to juggle GRE preparation with other course activities. KU offers GRE test preparation courses (see http://www.continuinged.ku.edu/programs/testprep/index2.php). The GRE is taken via computer with many testing locations available throughout the US and other countries (see GRE website). You must register to take the GRE (see GRE website). You can take the GRE multiple times, although you must wait 30 days between attempts and you cannot take the GRE more than 5 times in a 12-month period. The GRE is an expensive test and you must pay each time you take the test. Therefore, it is generally best to prepare well the first time you take the exam so that you achieve your best scores on that first attempt. You should take the GRE at the end of summer or beginning of fall of your senior year so that you can (1) use your scores to help you select graduate schools to apply to; (2) have time to re-take the GRE to improve your scores; (3) focus on your classes during the academic year and not worry about the GRE.

4. **Identify graduate programs to apply to (Summer between Junior and Senior Year)**

   Ideally you should start thinking about where you might want to attend graduate school during your junior year so that you have time to look at program websites and gather information about the program. **By the First Day of Class of Fall Semester of your Senior Year, you need to have a VERY good idea of where you plan to apply.** By this deadline you should have a fairly solid list of the schools you plan to apply to. If you need input from your advisor, contact him/her early in the semester to make an appointment so that you can finalize your list early.

   In terms of identifying programs, there are several websites that will help you find information

about programs.

   a. *American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)* provides some general advice about finding graduate programs. See http://www.asha.org/students/academic/Graduate-School/.

   b. *US News and World Report* ranks MA SLP (http://grad-schools.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-graduate-schools/top-health-schools/pathology-rankings) and AuD programs http://grad-schools.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-graduate-schools/top-health-schools/audiology-rankings. These rankings will give you some idea of which programs are "good." However, it is important to realize that these rankings are generated (at least partially) by an opinion poll (i.e., various people are asked which programs they think are good). In many cases, the programs that are highly ranked are strong in many (perhaps all) aspects of clinical training. Programs with lower rankings may be strong in certain aspects of clinical training, which could be a good fit for you if their strength matches your interest. Do not rule out programs just because they are ranked lower on this list. Visit program websites and perhaps the program itself to make your own judgment about how well the training program fits your interests.

   c. *ASHA EdFind (http://www.asha.org/edfind/)* allows you to search for MA SLP, AuD, and PhD programs by location. You can also search for specific programs by name. Each entry provides the graduate admissions contact. This is the person you should contact if you have questions about the application procedures or if you would like to arrange a visit to the program. For most programs, EdFind also provides information about the competitiveness of the admissions process. For example, EdFind may provide the number applications received and the number admitted. You can use this information to determine the percentage of applications admitted. In many cases, EdFind also provides the average GPA and GRE scores of the students who were admitted. You can use this information to compare programs you are considering applying to and to compare the average scores to your own scores. Please note that there was a change in the GRE scoring method in 2011. Thus, GRE information on EdFind may be reported in the old score format. You can use this conversion table http://www.msinus.com/content/revised-gre-conversion-chart-old-gre-vs-new-gre-converter-table-232/ as a guide for how an "old" GRE score might compare to the "new" GRE score format.

5. **How many schools to apply to?**

   This is a common question and not one that is easy to answer. The number of schools to apply to depends on a variety of factors. In general, you should consider how competitive you are for a particular program. To determine this, compare your GPA and GRE scores to the average (or typical range) GPA/GRE of admitted students. If your GPA and GRE are appreciably higher than the average (or typical range), then you are **highly competitive** for that program. If your GPA and GRE are similar to the average (or are within the typical range), then you are **competitive** for that program. If your GPA and GRE are appreciably lower than the average (or typical range), then you are **less competitive** for that program. In general, the majority of your applications should be sent to programs where you are competitive or highly competitive and fewer applications should be sent to programs where you are less competitive. If there are

not many programs where you are competitive or highly competitive, then you may need to develop an alternative plan in case you are not accepted to any graduate programs.

To facilitate a detailed discussion with your advisor, it is helpful if you put the information about

the graduate programs you are considering into a chart, such as the one below.

Template (add more rows as needed)

MY STATS	MY GPA	MY GRE-V	MY GRE-Q	MY GRE-W	
PROGRAM 1	Avg GPA	Avg GRE-V	Avg GRE-Q	Avg GRE-W	MY COMPETITIVENESS
PROGRAM 2	AVG GPA	AVG GRE-V	AVG GRE-Q	AVG GRE-W	MY COMPETITIVENESS

Example

MY STATS	3.60	GRE-V=150	GRE-Q = 145	GRE-W = 3.5	
PROGRAM 1	3.50	145	140	3.0	COMPETITIVE
PROGRAM 2	3.65	155	150	4.0	COMPETITIVE

6. **DRAFT your application materials, request letters of recommendation, and determine transcript request procedures/timelines (by end of Fall Break of your Senior Year)**

   Most graduate programs will require: (1) personal statement; (2) resume; (3) transcripts from all schools attended, including community colleges; (4) GRE scores; (5) three letters of recommendation. *See website for additional packet about applying to KU for graduate school.* Much of the advice is relevant for other programs too.

   For tips on writing a **personal statement and resume**, see the KU Writing Center, Writing Guides at http://www.writing.ku.edu/~writing/guides/, click on Personal and Professional Writing for helpful links on this topic. The KU Career Center also offers tips on resume writing at https://career.ku.edu/sites/career.drupal.ku.edu/files/files/jobsearch/resumebooklet.pdf and they also offer a resume review service (details available on the website.

   To **order a KU transcript**, see http://www.registrar.ku.edu/transcript/. Note that KU transcript processing can take up to 3 business days and you also need to factor in mailing time to the graduate program you are applying to. Plan accordingly. Look for transcript procedures for other schools you have attended on the school's website. In some cases, you may need to call or e-mail the graduate programs you are applying to to find out if they need certain transcripts (e.g., community college, study abroad, etc.).

   To **order a GRE score report**, see https://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/scores/send/asr. Note that GRE order processing can take up to 5 business days. Plan accordingly.

   You will need **three letters of recommendation**. It is recommended that at least TWO of your THREE letters of recommendation be from SPLH FACULTY (i.e., not GTAs). The reason for this is that SPLH faculty will be very familiar with the qualities that admissions committees look for. The third letter can be from anyone who knows you well and is able to comment on relevant skills for graduate study and/or for a career in speech-language pathology, audiology, or research (depending on the program you are applying to). This could be an SPLH GTA, faculty outside of SPLH, an employer, a supervisor (e.g., for a volunteer activity), etc. Think carefully about what your recommender will be able to say about you. Ideally, the recommender should be able to write a detailed letter about your ability to succeed in graduate school and in the career you are pursuing. If the recommender really doesn't know you (e.g., you earned a good grade in the class but never spoke in class and never saw the instructor outside of class), then the letter will likely not be as convincing because the

recommender doesn't have any detail to provide. **Make initial contact with your potential recommenders by Fall Break.**

7. **Finalize application materials and give letter writing materials to recommenders (by Stop Day of Fall Semester of your Senior Year)**

   Write the final draft of your personal statement and resume. Follow the timeline you created for requesting transcripts and GRE scores.

   The **packet for your recommenders** should include (1) a signed educational records waiver (http://splh.ku.edu/documents/EDUCATIONALRECORDSWAIVER2011.pdf); (2) a list of schools you are applying to, the application deadline, and how the recommendation should be submitted (online or hard copy); (3) for schools requiring hard copy materials, you should include an addressed and stamped envelope for each form and/or letter and should complete as much of the form as possible, including the information about the recommender; (4) a brief paragraph reminding the recommender how he/she knows you (e.g., "I was a student in your SPLH 466 class in Fall 2011. I earned a final grade of A. I frequently came to office hours and participated in class discussion. You also have been my advisor since I declared my SPLH major in Spring 2011.") and also to highlight anything that you would like him/her to comment on in the letter (e.g., "I have pursued numerous volunteer activities with children to develop relevant skills to work as an SLP in the schools."); (5) current draft of your personal statement and resume; (6) a print-out of your DPR checklist (i.e., the pdf version of your DPR that you can access online); (7) anything else that the recommender has specifically requested that you provide. Note that if there is anything unusual or concerning in your application that might affect your competitiveness for admission (e.g., low GRE scores, low first year GPA, low GPA from a prior degree program), you should let your recommenders know that. Your recommender may be able to effectively address the issue in his/her letter (e.g., low GRE scores do not reflect your actual abilities; early low GPA does not reflect your current abilities). You also should consider how you can effectively address these same issues in your own personal statement.

   IMPORTANT NOTE: Be sure you know how online letters of recommendation will be requested. For some schools, you can start your application and send out the online request for letters of recommendation before you submit your application. For others, you have to actually submit your application before the online request for a letter of recommendation is sent. You need to factor this information into your application plan. Faculty may be out of town during winter break. You need to communicate to your recommenders when they will likely get the request for an online recommendation and when it will be due to make sure that there won't be any barriers to timely submission of recommendations. For example, you might let your recommenders know that you will submit all your applications by January 1 so they should get requests by January 2 with letters being due January 15-February 15. **Verify that this timeline will work for each recommender**.

8. **Submit applications (End of Finals Week to Application Deadline)**

   Double check everything one last time before submitting your materials. This means spell checking and proof reading all your documents. It is a good idea to print everything in hard copy and slowly read everything aloud to make sure that there are no errors. Be sure to submit your applications at least one week before the application deadline (and more if requests for recommendations don't go out until submission) to ensure that you have plenty of time to deal with unforeseen problems (e.g., the program's submission portal goes offline).

9. **Additional considerations for those applying to PhD programs either alone or in conjunction with a clinical degree program (e.g., MA SLP/PhD or AuD/PhD)**

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A PhD is a research degree and always involves research training with a mentor or mentors. For this reason, when identifying PhD training programs it is crucial that you consider who would be your mentor in that program. Minimally, the mentor's research interests should match your research interests. Ideally, the mentor should be a highly active researcher (e.g., numerous publications, funding for research and for student support, other students working with the mentor) and should have a training philosophy that fits your needs and career aspirations. You can begin to determine the availability of potential mentors by exploring the program's website and reading recent articles of potential mentors. This will give you a sense of whether the research program is a good match to your interests. However, you really need to interact with the mentor and possibly current students of the mentor to fully evaluate whether this is a good fit for you. **You should make initial contact with potential mentors by Fall Break of your Senior Year (at the latest).** If you are planning on applying to PhD programs, make an appointment with your undergraduate advisor and your KU research mentor early in the fall semester to discuss the PhD application process and potential PhD programs and mentors who may match your interests.

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Potential next steps if you are not admitted to a graduate program in SLP or AUD

1. Determine what aspects of your application may have been more competitive or less competitive. Then, think about what you could do over the summer and fall to develop your less competitive areas.

Knowledge and Skill Areas	More or Less Competitive?	Possible Activities
Academic ability and preparation: How doesthe student demonstrate a firm foundation incore speech-language-hearing (or related) concepts?		• Re-take classes withgrades of C or lower • Take graduate classesas non-degree seeking student • Re-take the GRE
Communication skills: How has the studentdemonstrated an ability to communicate clearly and effectively in spoken and/or written formats?		• Pursue job or volunteer activity involving spoken and/or written communication • Re-take the GRE • Complete a course related to communication
Interpersonal skills: How has the student demonstrated an ability to work collaboratively and effectively with a widerange of people?		• Pursue job or volunteeractivity working with others, especially thosewith disabilities
Analytical skills: How has the student demonstrated a firm foundation in research,critical thinking, and/or clinical application?		• Pursue job or volunteeractivity in a research orclinical setting
Potential for professionalism: How has the student demonstrated an ability to be organized, reliable, and respectful? How has the student demonstrated an ability to growfrom constructive feedback?		• Pursue job or volunteer activity in a professionalsetting
Potential for leadership: How has the studentdemonstrated leadership skills?		• Pursue job or volunteeractivity with a high levelof responsibility

Cultural and linguistic diversity: How has thestudent demonstrated an understanding of diversity and/or the ability to work effectivelywith people from a variety of backgrounds that differ from their own? How does the student demonstrate knowledge or proficiency of languages or dialects otherthan standard American English?		• Pursue job or volunteeractivity working with people who have a different background than your own.

Example Jobs:

- School paraprofessional/SLP-assistant in a diverse school district (Potential knowledge & skill areas: communication skills, interpersonal skills, analytical skills, professionalism, cultural and linguistic diversity)
- Research coordinator for a project working with typically developing children (Potential knowledge & skill areas: communication skills, interpersonal skills, analytical skills, professionalism, leadership)
- Teaching English outside the US (Potential knowledge & skill areas: communication skills, interpersonal skills, analytical skills, professionalism, cultural & linguistic diversity)

Example volunteer activities:
- Volunteer to teach reading to adults (Potential knowledge & skill areas: communication skills, interpersonal skills, analytical skills, professionalism, cultural and linguistic diversity)
- Volunteer to lead reading activities for children (Potential knowledge & skill areas: communication skills, interpersonal skills, analytical skills, professionalism, cultural and linguistic diversity)
- Volunteer to be a conversational partner for someone learning English as a second language (Potential knowledge & skill areas: communication skills, interpersonal skills, analytical skills, professionalism, cultural and linguistic diversity)

Tip: Visit your university's Career Center to revise your resume to be competitive for the jobs and volunteer activities you will pursue. Consult with them to identify job search, internship, and volunteer databases/resources to maximize your success in finding a great job and/or volunteer opportunities in your area.

2. Visit ASHA EdFind http://www.asha.org/edfind/ to determine whether you applied to the right range of programs. Ideally, your numerical data (GPA, GRE) should be within the range shown on EdFind for the majority of programs that you applied to. Of course, numbers aren't the only thing that matters but they do tend to be an important component of the selection process at most programs. Consider whether you need to revise your list of programs for the next application cycle.

3. Consider whether you asked the right people to provide letters of reference. Did you pick people who know you well and can speak to different sets of skills? Did you give them enough time and guidance (e.g., did you provide the instructions for reference

letter writers, did you let them know what skills you thought they could address)? Consider selecting different references and also consider getting to know potential references better. This also could fit into your employment or volunteer plans. These types of opportunities may allow you to get to know a potential reference better so that they would be able to provide a richer letter.

4. Although the above table notes the possibility of re-taking the GRE to improve scores, this should be undertaken with caution. Unless something changes betweenthe first GRE and the second GRE, scores tend to stay the same. Things that could change: you study more for the second GRE than you did for the first GRE, you were extremely nervous for the first GRE and then learn some relaxation techniquesthat help you be less nervous for the second GRE, you were sick for the first GRE and now you take the second GRE when you are healthy. Under these types of circumstances, scores may improve. However, if you employed many of these practices for your first GRE and if there is nothing you can change for your second GRE, it may not be worth your time and money to take the GRE a second time.

5. Consider alternative career paths. Again, a visit to your university's Career Center may be helpful in identifying related fields that fit your interest but either don't require a graduate degree or don't require a highly competitive graduate degree. Bowling Green State University provides a detailed list of alternative career paths to get you started. See http://www.bgsu.edu/health-and-human-services/programs/department-of-communication-sciences-and-disorders/undergraduate-program/CDIS-post-graduate-planning.html