Undergraduate Students’ Knowledge of Applying to and Attending Graduate School in Speech-Language Pathology: The Effect of a Panel Presentation

By: Chelsea Swadling

Supervisors: Mrs. Kathryn Hillenbrand
Mrs. Cary Cekola
Mrs. Kristina Ledlow
Introduction

I gathered a professional panel of speech-language pathologists (SLPs) to give a presentation to speech-language pathology and audiology undergraduate students about applying to and attending graduate school.

The study I conducted was to determine the effectiveness of a panel presentation in preparing undergraduate students for applying to and attending graduate school.
Purpose of the Event

Primary Purpose: to expand the knowledge base that speech-language pathology and audiology undergraduate students possessed about attending and applying to graduate school.

Secondary Purpose: to reduce undergraduate students’ level of anxiety associated with the process of applying to and attending graduate school.
Previous Researchers’ Findings

Several authors have concluded that undergraduate students are undereducated, as well as underprepared for, applying to and attending graduate school. (Huss, Randall, Patry, Davis, & Hansen, 2002; Landrum, 2010; Rajecki, Lauer, & Metzner, 1998)

Graduate school requires the completion of academic coursework, research, and clinical training, which when combined with performance anxiety, financial constraints, and competition makes graduate students vulnerable to stress. (Myers, Sweeney, Popick, Wesley, Bordfeld, & Fingerhut, 2012)
Research Design

This panel presentation followed strict parameters including the use of...

- A population of speech pathology and audiology undergraduate students
- A panel of professional certified speech-language pathologists
- Anonymous pre- and post-lecture surveys
- Focused advertising
- Pre-planned methods used for data collection
Participants

Included:
~32 third-year and fourth-year undergraduate speech-language pathology and audiology students planning to pursue a graduate degree in speech-language pathology or audiology &
~6 nationally certified speech-language pathologists (1 male and 5 female)
Methods

Focused advertising: used to obtain participants for this research study

Anonymous surveys: used as the method of data collection (administered to the participants pre-presentation and post-presentation)
Pre-and Post-Lecture Surveys

Probed for an undergraduate’s level of knowledge of...
- The requirements for a graduate school application
- The information to include in a personal statement
- How to obtain letters of recommendation
- The number of recommendation letters required
- How and when to take the Graduate Record Examination (GRE)
- Ideal Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores
- Where and how to explain a poor grade in an application
- Factors to consider when choosing where to apply
- What options are available if denied
- Factors to consider when accepting
- What to expect in graduate school

***Last question probed for an undergraduate’s level of anxiety towards graduate school at that moment
Tool of Measurement: Rating Scale

Figure 1: Rating Scale Used to Denote Participants’ Level of Knowledge on a Survey Question Topic

KEY (Scale):
0 = No knowledge on the topic
1 = Small amount of knowledge on the topic
2 = Moderate amount of knowledge on the topic
3 = Substantial amount of knowledge on the topic
4 = Great amount of knowledge on the topic
Data Collection

Data compared participants’:

1) pre-presentation survey responses against their post-presentation survey responses
2) third-year undergraduates’ responses with the fourth-year undergraduates’ responses
3) levels of anxiety before the presentation with the levels of anxiety after the presentation
Participants' Mean Survey Response Scores Pre-Lecture and Post-Lecture

Question #11  
Pre-Lecture: 1.4  
Post-Lecture: 3.3

Question #10  
Pre-Lecture: 1.3  
Post-Lecture: 3.1

Question #9  
Pre-Lecture: 1.4  
Post-Lecture: 2.9

Question #8  
Pre-Lecture: 2.3  
Post-Lecture: 3.3

Question #7  
Pre-Lecture: 0.9  
Post-Lecture: 1.4

Question #6  
Pre-Lecture: 1.8  
Post-Lecture: 2.0

Question #5  
Pre-Lecture: 2.5  
Post-Lecture: 2.8

Question #4  
Pre-Lecture: 2.3  
Post-Lecture: 2.6

Question #3  
Pre-Lecture: 2.3  
Post-Lecture: 3.3

Question #2  
Pre-Lecture: 1.5  
Post-Lecture: 3.1

Question #1  
Pre-Lecture: 2.3  
Post-Lecture: 3.0

Responses representing small improvements (<0.5 or 12.5%)

Rating Scale [0-4] (In Percentages)

(0%) (12.5%) (25%) (37.5%) (50%) (62.5%) (75%) (87.5%) (100%)
Discussion

• Some degree of increase in each question leads to the conclusion that each student left the presentation having learned something new.

• Significant increase in questions 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 10, and 11 compared to the small increase in questions 4, 5, 6, and 7 could be due to...

- the degree to which each topic was covered
- how much a topic could be covered
- a participant’s baseline of knowledge on a covered topic prior to the lecture
Percent Increase in Participants' Knowledge Following the Lecture

- 3rd-year undergraduates
- 4th-year undergraduates

**Result #2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Percent Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>48.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#7</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#8</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#9</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#10</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#11</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

- A participant’s baseline of knowledge plays a large part here.
- The fourth-year undergraduates were found to have a greater baseline of knowledge on all topics covered compared to the third-year undergraduates.
- This explains the smaller increase of knowledge that the fourth-year undergraduates demonstrated on each question post-presentation, compared to the greater increase of knowledge that the third-year undergraduates displayed on each question.
Result #3

Participants' Level of Anxiety Pre-Lecture and Post-Lecture

- Low: Pre-Lecture 6.25%, Post-Lecture 0.00%
- Moderate: Pre-Lecture 56.25%, Post-Lecture 34.38%
- High: Pre-Lecture 37.50%, Post-Lecture 62.50%
- Super High: Pre-Lecture 0.00%, Post-Lecture 3.13%
Discussion

The increase in undergraduate students’ level of anxiety after the presentation may be due to...

-being exposed to an overwhelming amount of info over a short period of time
-learning the expectations of graduate study and the application process
-not having all of their (the participants’) questions answered
Conclusions

- All participants displayed an increase in their level of knowledge of at least one or more of the topics covered.
- Therefore, this presentation had a positive impact on the undergraduates’ knowledge about applying to and attending graduate school.
- Even with the significant increase in the participants’ anxiety levels post-presentation, this presentation was still beneficial to all participants.
Future Recommendations

Conduct further research to...

- Discover if the positive conclusions made in this study can be generalized to other programs and other universities across the United States.
- Discern what topics the panel presentations should focus around in each major.
- Determine if the demographics of the panel members is related to the effectiveness of the presentation.
- Discern undergraduates’ anxiety towards graduate school in other programs, as well as at other universities.
- Discover effective ways for undergraduates to cope with graduate school-related stress and alleviate anxious feelings related to applying to and attending graduate school.
Thank-You For Coming!

Questions???
References


