Frequently Asked Questions Regarding the Master’s Degree in Speech-Language Pathology, offered through Distance Education

**Question #1: What is difference between the MSP and MCD degrees?**

**Answer:** The Master of Communication Disorders (MCD) degree was established in 1992. Its purpose was to utilize distance learning as a means for enabling academically qualified individuals who, for various financial and/or logistic reasons, were unable to pursue our traditional full-time, on-campus master’s degree in speech-language pathology (the MSP degree). It is important to note that, from its inception, the MCD degree was never intended to have an open enrollment policy or serve as a mechanism for allowing students with weak academic credentials to become licensed professionals. One degree is not any easier to get in or get through than the other. Upon receipt of either the MCD or MSP degree, graduates will have acquired the same competencies, are eligible for the same credentials, and thus are prepared to work in any setting where speech-language services are provided.

**Question #2: Who is eligible to apply for the MCD degree in speech-language pathology?**

**Answer:** The MCD degree is available to any qualified applicant, irrespective of his/her academic background, undergraduate major, or previous work experience. The Admissions Committee is interested in those individuals whose academic performance suggests they would make the best speech-language pathologists. The Department has no quota to fill or limitations placed upon how many of this type or that type of student can be admitted.

**Question #3: How do students pursue their degree through distance education?**

**Answer:** The term “distance education” means different things to different people. Although students pursuing the MCD degree are provided with online support (interactive message boards and chat rooms, along with the ability to download PowerPoint slides from class and other course materials), this is not a self-paced, online degree, where students pursue their studies at their leisure as their schedules permit. The MCD follows the regular university calendar, which means courses each semester have beginning and ending dates, and exams and papers have specific due dates.

**Question #4: I understand that, as a distance education student, I am not required to pursue my master’s degree on a full-time basis. How much flexibility will I have as a part-time graduate student?**

**Answer:** The curriculum leading towards the MCD degree is fairly rigid, and requires that students be enrolled six or seven semester hours each Fall and Spring Semester (typically two three-hour courses, as specified by the curriculum), and participate in clinical practicum during the summer. All courses must be taken in their proper sequence and students are not permitted to “free lance” the curriculum. Thus, pursuing the MCD degree on a part-time basis merely reduces the amount of course work you are required to enroll in each semester.

**Question #5: Does this mean that the courses offered through distance education are just as rigorous as the ones taught for the full-time students on the Columbia campus?**

**Answer:** Absolutely. The requirements for a specific course do not change simply because you are taking it by Distance Education. The amount of reading, type of papers and exams, and amount of information and competencies you are expected to acquire are exactly the same as the traditional full-time, on-campus MSP degree. The MCD degree is not a “watered-down” degree. The only difference is that you may pursue the degree part-time, without having to have daily access to the Columbia campus. Otherwise, the requirements, responsibilities, and learning outcomes are the same.

**Question #6: How will my undergraduate major and educational background affect the starting point and length of the MCD degree?**

**Answer:** Students with undergraduate majors in speech-language pathology (that include at least 25 clock hours of clinical observation) begin their graduate studies at the beginning of the summer. For these students, the MCD degree usually takes three years plus a final summer internship (i.e., ten semesters). Non-speech pathology majors begin the MCD curriculum in the fall, where they take prerequisite coursework fall and spring semester. Thus, their graduate program will be two semesters longer than those with undergraduate majors in speech-language pathology (four years, or 12 semesters).
Question #7: How does the admissions process for the two degrees (MSP and MCD) work? Am I more likely to be accepted to one degree versus the other?

Answer: The minimum entrance requirements for the MSP and MCD degrees are the same. The Admissions Committee reviews application materials for both degrees and utilizes the same set of standards regarding grades, GRE scores, letters of recommendation, the applicant’s personal statement, etc. Keep in mind that, because of the large number of applicants each year and limited number of slots available for both degrees, those who are admitted routinely have credentials that greatly exceed the Department and Graduate School’s minimum standards. For example, to be considered for admission, applicants must have a minimum undergraduate GPA 3.0 (on a 4.0 scale). However, the mean GPA of those admitted most recently was 3.75. Similarly, average Verbal GRE score for those recently admitted was 154 (61st percentile) while the mean Quantitative GRE score was 152 (52nd percentile). Regardless of your GPA, The Graduate School will not allow us to admit an applicant who has a Verbal GRE score below 146 or a Quantitative score below 140. Thus, the type of grades and GRE scores one needs to gain admission to either the MSP or MCD degree depends on the number of applicants in a particular year, and the quality of that applicant pool. In recent years our applicant pool has been over 350 students, making admission increasingly competitive.

Question #8: If, at some time during my master’s program, my situation changes, can I transfer from one degree to the other (i.e., MSP to MCD or MCD to MSP)?

Answer: Unfortunately, no. Because the MSP is full-time and the MCD is part-time, the course sequencing for the two curricula is set up differently. There is no time during the MCD course of study where a student would be able to transition into the MSP curricula, and vice versa. Do not apply to one degree with the notion of switching to the other as your circumstances change. Once enrolled, you are expected to complete the degree to which you were admitted. Students pursuing both the MSP and MCD degrees will, in many instances, have the same professors for the same classes and have access to many of the same practicum sites for clinical training. One degree is not better than the other, easier or harder than the other, or more respected than the other. They are simply different pathways to achieving the same set of educational and clinical competencies leading to the same professional credentials (i.e., state licensure, teaching certification, and ASHA certification).

Question #9: Many students pursuing the MCD Distance Education degree have full-time jobs and families. What special considerations and accommodations will be made for our other commitments?

Answer: NONE! If the responsibilities and obligations you have to your family and/or employer have the potential of interfering or conflicting with the requirements of the MCD curriculum, you should not apply to this program. Students who choose to pursue the MCD degree do so knowing what our requirements and expectations are and what their present obligations entail. You are encouraged to have serious discussions with your spouse and other family members to determine the degree of support you will need and receive as you embark upon this rigorous endeavor. While many of you have waited a long time for this opportunity, rather than jumping at the first opportunity, you should ask yourself, “Given my present situation, is this the best time for me to make the commitment to pursue a graduate degree?” If “yes”, then we welcome your participation in the program. But, if the answer is “No”, we will be just as happy to see you in a few years when the timing is perhaps better. Whatever your decision, be advised that when you enroll, you do so with the understanding of the commitment we expect from you.

Question #10: Could you please explain your required course prerequisites further?

Answer: In order for your application to be considered, your college transcript must show you have completed coursework in a biological science, chemistry or physics, a behavioral or social science, and statistics. Please note: these are not requirements of our department or the University of South Carolina. Rather, they are mandated by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) and, consequently, all accredited programs in speech pathology are expected to comply with these standards. According to ASHA Standard IV-A:

Implementation: Acceptable courses in biological sciences should emphasize a content area related to human or animal sciences (e.g., biology, human anatomy and physiology, neuroanatomy and neurophysiology, human genetics, veterinary science). Acceptable courses in physical sciences should include physics or chemistry. Acceptable courses in social/behavioral sciences should include psychology, sociology, anthropology, or public health. A stand-alone course in statistics is required. Research methodology courses in communication sciences and disorders (CSD) may not be used to satisfy the statistics requirement. A course in biological and physical sciences specifically related to CSD may not be applied for certification purposes to this category unless the course fulfills a university requirement in one of these areas.

These courses must be completed prior to your enrollment in the program. The Admissions Committee will not act on your application unless all of these prerequisite courses are listed on your transcript.