Building the Department of Speech Pathology and Audiology (1962-67): Establishing a Speech & Hearing Therapy Subdivision

The Founding Chairperson: Pauline Isaacson, Ph.D.

In the early 1960s, when Pauline Isaacson, Ph.D., was finishing a 20-year endeavor to build a full Department of Speech and Drama in Central State College, she was privy to a statewide movement to incorporate subdivisions that would train professionals in the treatment of the speech and hearing handicapped. She whispered that need into the ear of responsive President William C. Hansen and, when he concurred, she searched for a person trained in that specialty at Northwestern University to get the ball rolling in 1962, and then, in 1963, attracted a Ph.D. in speech pathology and audiology from Michigan State University to build the subdivision into a quality training program.

By the time Isaacson retired from her departmental chairmanship in 1965, her wisdom and leadership had established (in what became Wisconsin State University-Stevens Point) a dynamic, comprehensive Speech and Drama Department and the evolving speech pathology and audiology therapy emphasis was a strong part of it.

Gerald Johnson’s 2004 written eulogy for Isaacson accurately describes her:

"This little lady, with a mind as big as all outdoors, always stood in the way of mediocrity … with a look upon her face that told us that here was a woman with strength and character. Her charm was her directness and honesty. We knew what she stood for and her desire to see her vision materialize … The School of Communicative Disorders was born out of her vision. Pauline never wavered in her dream of having a top-flight program that others would call their own … What a tender, loving person Pauline was. In spite of her drive and motivation, there was always a twinkle in her eye. No obstacle was too grand to surmount. Her mind knew no boundaries. The road to the top was always a challenge. But she never made it so. She was always on top of the mountain."

Isaacson’s striking role in "broadening opportunities for students" in the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point was not over. In 1982 Wisconsin Governor Lee Sherman Dreyfus cited her later contribution, "(she is to be commended for) almost single-handedly developing and directing the Office of International Programs which has become one of the UWS’s great success stories through offerings in England, Germany, Poland, Spain, Malaysia, India and Taiwan … and for contributions she has made to the world community in bringing together and promoting understanding between peoples from all parts of the world."

Breaking the Ground for a Subdivision: Gerald E. Chappell

Gerald E. Chappell, with a master’s degree in speech pathology from Northwestern University, arrived at Central State College in Stevens Point in the fall of 1962 to join the faculty of five in the Department of Speech and Drama.

Chappell describes the deciding earlier visit:

"In the Spring of 1962, at the beckon of Pauline Isaacson, my wife, Christine, and I drove up to Stevens Point, found the only stop light in town (at Division and Main Street), proceeded to the college area, and parked our car on two-way Main Street. I went into Old Main to visit with Miss Isaacson, found her quaint office at the top of the stairway, and was struck with her cordiality and enthusiasm to hire me and get some courses started in speech and hearing therapy. I had never viewed myself to be a college teacher, but it seemed to me that the door was wide open to do so and accomplish remarkable things. Thereafter, my wife and I were greeted by charming President William C. Hansen. We both found Miss Isaacson and her job offer to be irresistible and, after a bite at the nearby Campus Café, agreed that we should go for it – accept the position."
Wearing a crew cut and a bow tie, Chappell arrived for duty with lots of enthusiasm. Isaacson informed him that his first job was to take care of any communication problems that existed in the six grades of the Campus Laboratory School. In the next two years he did so. Isaacson said his first job also included administering therapy for any communication problems that existed in the college students. In the next two years he did so.

Isaacson said his second job included developing and teaching freshman, sophomore and junior courses and training students in speech pathology and audiology. In the next two years, while the new students in the emphasis were watching his diagnostic and therapy techniques for eliminating the communication problems of elementary school kids and college students, he developed and taught an introductory course in speech correction, phonetics, basic procedures in audiology, anatomy and physiology of the speech mechanism, voice and articulation disorders, and voice science, doing so for half a dozen college students who heard of the new emphasis, signed up, and were raring to learn.

Chappell found a cubby hole (a small office big enough for a couple of children and several observing college students in training) between two classrooms (Mildred Williams and Hildegard Kuse) in the Campus Laboratory School wherein he did much of his therapy and instructing. In turn he captured the two-room health center in the basement of the college library alongside the college nurse (President Hansen’s daughter, Helen) wherein he worked on the communication problems of college students and of some teaching faculty. At first, his basic therapy equipment consisted of a small table, two chairs, a portable audiometer, an articulation test, a mirror, and a tongue depressor. And his first teaching materials consisted of a skeleton, a piece of chalk, and one classroom with a blackboard that he used when home economics didn’t need it.

Stacking the First Building Blocks for a Subdivision: Gerald F. Johnson, Ph.D.

Gerald F. Johnson, Ph.D., moved into Stevens Point to start the 1963-64 academic year as leader of the speech pathology and audiology emphasis or subdivision.

Aylesworth-Johnson Johnson later recalled that when he and his wife, Maxine, first visited CSC’s Old Main late in 1962 their impression was that it was like their old high schools. They climbed a creaky stairs to Isaacson’s quaint office wherein they found an energetic little lady sitting in a rocking chair behind an old wooden desk. After she called Chappell up to meet them, they followed him down through musty hallways into the catacombs of Old Main and the adjacent library and squeezed into his two-room work quarters. All though the campus was not much at all (Old Main, the Library, and Nelson Hall), and Stevens Point looked like an old frontier town with little to offer and nothing to do, Johnson envisioned the remarkable challenge he would have to develop a program in speech pathology and audiology, and thus, he convinced Maxine to move to Stevens Point. Jerry later remarked of that endeavor, “Little did we realize the emotional, rocky, bumpy, frustrating, time consuming road that lay ahead.”

Johnson, by working hand-in-hand with chairman Isaacson up through the chain of command to President James H. Albertson, soon negotiated the moving of the rapidly developing program into the old radio station in the basement of the east wing of Old Main. And by negotiating the acquisition of a part time secretary, some furniture, and a state of the art hearing testing suite with audiometric equipment and other teaching materials, he established the college “Speech and Hearing Clinic.” The 10-room clinic had a certain appeal with three offices on the north end, a secretarial desk and waiting area for clients, an observation room looking into one of the therapy rooms, three therapy rooms, one of which was reasonably soundproofed, two storage rooms, and, at the far end, a classroom.

In the next two years, Johnson did his share of demonstrating diagnostic and therapy techniques; introducing courses in the psychology of speech, theories and therapies for stuttering, and hearing rehabilitation; and writing grants to fund the program. Since some students were ready to treat clients, both Chappell and Johnson commenced to supervise their therapy practicum.
Completing the Early Training Team: Donald L. Aylesworth, Thomas Wentland, and Gary Glascoe

Chappell took a leave of absence (1964-66) to study for his Ph.D. at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Replacing him was Donald L. Aylesworth with a master’s degree in speech pathology from the University of Michigan. Aylesworth’s experience working in the public schools and some hospitals added much expertise to the program of the speech pathology and audiology subdivision. Academically, Aylesworth had a strong interest in anatomy and physiology, counseling, and clients with neurological disorders and thus he developed coursework and training experiences relative to clients in the areas of stroke and aphasia, cerebral palsy, and related neuromotor problems.

Aylesworth later discussed why he decided to join the emphasis team in speech pathology and audiology:

"Wisconsin State University-Stevens Point seemed like it was where I would feel comfortable - like a rural placement - being an old farm boy and I wasn’t sure (at that time) of the direction I wanted to go. I knew it was an opportunity to find out if I liked university-type teaching. At that point I had spent six years in the public schools, had worked some for the United Cerebral Palsied Association, and spent a little time in hospitals. It was a chance to get into something that was evolving."

After completing his master’s degree in speech pathology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Thomas Wentland joined the emphasis team of the newly named Wisconsin State University-Stevens Point during the 1965-66 academic year to help meet the growing teaching and supervisory needs. Bringing along public school experience as a speech therapist, Wentland was a good choice, for in addition to being a good clinician, teacher and supervisor, he was an idea man who contributed much to the expansion of the program. Even with three daughters, his wife, Marilyn, entered the WSU-Stevens Point speech pathology and audiology program as a student. Tom later offered some memories of his early days in the speech pathology and audiology emphasis: "… After a public school career of nine years, where I set up in boiler rooms, stairwells, or locations of lesser ambience, I thought the (WSU Speech and Hearing) Clinic (then a converted radio station dating back to World War II) was immediately left of The Pearly Gates. I wasn’t even bothered by an "office" being in a doorless public space outside of Jerry Johnson’s office because I was granted luxuries of a desk, chair, filing cabinet, and bookshelf. Don Aylesworth let me borrow the typewriter he coveted – there was only one – and his generosity completed my needs.

I wasn’t entirely settled when Johnson gave me my duty list: teach two courses, supervise in the clinic, do diagnostics, and serve the Campus Laboratory School. By the way, Johnson never failed to tell me what to do; but not once did he tell me how to do it. I am totally unashamed to say that I blossomed in his confidence. I must add also that I have never given more trust to another.”

Young audiologist Gary Glascoe joined the WSU-Stevens Point speech pathology and audiology team in the fall of the 1966-67 academic year to take over the audiology courses and therapy supervision and add energy and hustle to the program. Aylesworth left campus to pursue his Ph.D. studies at the University of Michigan.
The following photos are those of the founding forefathers of ComD. From left to right: Pauline Isaacson, Gerald E. Chappell, Gerald F. Johnson, Donald Aylesworth, Thomas Wentland and Gary Glascoe.

Following Events That End in a Major in and a Department of Speech Pathology and Audiology
By the end of the 1963-64 academic year, the number of students in the speech pathology and audiology subdivision had nearly tripled and some had started therapy. Thus during that year the program established a sizable clinic clientele in the Old Main Speech and Hearing Clinic. Since each student clinician in training needed to be supervised for at least one client each semester, Chappell and Johnson’s workload nearly doubled. Some of the students were also assigned cases in the Campus Laboratory School and the program began to see clients in St. Michael’s Hospital.

During the 1964-65 year, the program’s four rather diverse and gregarious faculty covered the coursework and the supervision of practicum in a reasonably relaxed manner. There was a lot of camaraderie between the faculty and they related closely with and had fun with the students. Aylesworth tells of how one of his classes played a trick on him:

“While lecturing, my teaching style was to move around. I always told my students I’m a mover – that’s just the way I am. They could feel free to ask questions at any time, but they had to expect that I would move about. So anyway, they collectively shifted their gaze off toward the window side of the room, bit by bit, until they shifted me under a home economics pipe from which a drop of water hit me on the head. We all laughed. I knew they had pulled a “gotcha” and laughed, because they got me to do it without saying anything.”

By the end of the five year building period (1962-67) for the subdivision program, the required courses for the freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior years were established and set. There were three freshman level credits (the introductory course), nine sophomore credits (voice science, phonetics, and voice and articulation disorders), and 18 upper-level credits (five advanced courses and practicum). A student body of over 50 students spread over the four-year program of study. The students completed most of their course work for a bachelor of science degree in the School of Fine Arts and then transferred to the School of Education for their senior level student teaching experience. Their curriculum included coursework in psychology and education.

Johnson’s grant writing efforts finally paid off in that $40,000 was granted to the program for the 1966-67 academic year for the purchase of scientific, diagnostic, and therapeutic equipment. The audiometric equipment was expanded and scientific equipment was purchased to develop a Speech and Hearing Science Laboratory.

Johnson also requested a major in speech pathology and audiology, stating that the Department of Speech and Drama and the WSU-Stevens Point faculty had recognized the subdivision’s phenomenal growth, leadership, and potential. There was a need to list the program as a major (rather than as a concentration).
The Board of Regents of the Wisconsin State Colleges approved the request as effective for September 1966. Those proceedings created a 54-credit broad field major in speech pathology and audiology in the School of Education, including courses in speech and drama, psychology, and education. Included in the major was a program in the School of Fine Arts for students who did not want to get a position in a school system, but instead wanted to work in a hospital, clinic, or industry.

The other highly significant phenomenon that occurred by the 1966-67 academic year was that the two other subdivisions in the Department of Speech and Drama (Public Address and Theater and Interpretation) were also growing dramatically and were battling each other to cover program costs. The interests of the three subdivisions were remarkably different and no longer compatible.

President James H. Albertson saw the need for the three subdivisions, each having established capable self-integrity and self-autonomy, to split off into three departments. In a memo of December 27, 1966, he announced that effective July 1, 1967, the disciplines included in the present Department of Speech and Drama would be reorganized into three separate academic departments that followed the terminology of the listed subdivisions in the current catalog: Department of Public Address, Department of Speech Pathology and Audiology (located in the College of Applied Arts and Science), and Department of Theater and Interpretation. President Albertson appointed Johnson as chairman of the Department of Speech Pathology and Audiology.

Over the building years, as leader of the subdivision, Johnson faced and surmounted many pressures both from within and outside the Department of Speech and Drama. He recalls that although it was a period of hard times and many challenges, the outcome – a major and the Department of Speech Pathology and Audiology – was worth all of the effort:

"The Department of Speech and Drama was a hostile environment and much of the hostility was directed at me and my ambition to make something of speech pathology and audiology. The hostility was also evident in various deans of colleges (e.g., Dean Warren Jenkins) … In your (Chappell) absence, I and Don took the brunt of the tough years of getting speech and audiology recognized as a viable department. We were likened to “a trade school, technical school, occupational training, vocational program” as if all those were BAD things and not worthy of the college. Upon your return from your Ph.D. studies, you brought with you a steadiness and saneness that gave balance to my strong headedness and drive and desire to make something of SPA into Communicative Disorders. I think people looked to you for calmness and reasonableness. Together, the three musketeers pulled off one huge coup."

**Gathering up Students**

Well, as the legend goes, in 1961, two Stevens Point ladies, Mary Fick and Betty Zuege, visited President Hansen and informed him that they wanted the college to develop some courses in speech therapy because they felt there was a great need in central Wisconsin for trained speech and hearing specialists. Zuege had taught the hard of hearing class in Stevens Point and was privy to that void in therapists. Fick wanted to learn how to help her son with his speech problems. The President sent them to talk to the chairman of the Department of Speech, Pauline Isaacson, who readily concurred and said she would get things rolling if they could find six interested students. They did so.

Thus, the program commenced in the fall of 1962 with seven students and enrollment doubled in the first year.
Since most of the students belonged during this program building period to the Wisconsin State University-Stevens Point Speech and Hearing Association, their presence is portrayed through the photos of that group. As a social and project-based group, the Association was organized in 1965 to provide an opportunity for new students to learn about different aspects of the program and the profession, doing so from more advanced students, so that they could make wise decisions for their future.

During the commencements of 1966 the following students (pictured in the Iris) were among those who earned undergraduate degrees in speech pathology and audiology: Charlotte Louise Kudla, Jennifer A. Bentz, Joyce A. Disher (Schmidt), Barbara Susan Nolan (Pawelski), Jane A. Gromoll, Sandra L. Peotter, Jeannine Sands (Longlois) and Elaine (Wand Rolzin Anderson) Schneider.

During the 1967 graduations, the following students were included within those who were awarded undergraduate diplomas: Sue Siebert Shrank, Marie Rimshaw Birmingham, Germaine Janis Girard, Susan Schoch, Paula Allen Ososki, Judith Davis, and Dennis Tepp.

Much gratitude is in order for the above group of initial students. They too withered the building storms of a beginning program. They accompanied the teaching team through trials and tribulations with outstanding character and dignity. Because of incompleteness in the university records, it was an impossible task to get all the maiden names spelled right and attach all the proper married names.