

Diversity in Audiology

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Audiologists provide health care service to diverse communities. To acknowledge and accept those from various backgrounds is beneficial in all aspects of life, but is essential in health care. Awareness of the diverse population in which we serve can encourage growth and learning, and create a more comfortable, professional environment for all who enter.

At Dalhousie University, the importance of diversity in the field of human communication disorders has been recognized in a variety of ways. It is my hope that this approach may be expanded to audiology programs and audiology clinics throughout Canada.

Awareness of diversity has always been a passion of mine. Perhaps this interest has been influenced by my African-Nova Scotia heritage; but the stories of people with different interests and backgrounds are the “real draw” for me. My adventure began as an undergraduate student enrolled in the Sciences program at MSVU, a smaller university with a population of predominantly female students. During my time at this school, I was the recipient of the African Canadian Services University Scholarship, and soon came to realize the small number of female African Canadians studying sciences. I was involved in the school’s Diversity Centre, and attempted to talk to as many people as I could about their experiences at school and in everyday life. After leaving MSVU, I worked for a local hospital as a laboratory assistant. In this job I really began to appreciate how diverse the general population is, and how important it is to have an open mind as a health care professional.

As I entered the audiology program at Dalhousie University, I was very pleased to learn about a new initiative at the School of Human Communication Disorders (SHCD) called the Diversity Task Force. I happily joined. The members consisted of both faculty and students interested in exploring diversity and increasing awareness at the school and in the profession. After the first few meetings the following specific functions of the Task Force were decided:

1. To promote a diverse, supportive, and inclusive environment at the SHCD.
2. To expand the diversity of the professions of audiology and speech-language pathology through promotion, recruitment, and admissions activities.
3. To promote highly trained professionals by reviewing our current curriculum and ensuring that diversity is addressed. This will prepare students to communicate effectively and openly with people from various spheres.

Three years have passed since I first joined the SHCD Diversity Task Force (now known as the Diversity Committee). As I move onto my career as an audiologist, I want to share some items and activities in which the committee had a role:

- Members designed and opened a Diversity Hub website to include information about the

committee, scholarship opportunities, local events, volunteer opportunities, and other resources. It is currently being updated and incorporated into the main SHCD website.

- Members lobbied for a change in eligibility for the student professional line of credit at RBC (since audiologists and speech-language pathologist were not recognized on the list with other health care professionals). Through the hard work of Ken Moors, Dalhousie Faculty of Health Professions financial manager, RBC included these two professions in 2013. With this change, the committee hopes that another option for financial support will allow for candidates from diverse populations to enter the program.
- Subcommittees were developed focusing on the incorporation of diversity into the school's curriculum, and how to diversify the School's bimonthly colloquiums (one result was a presentation by Philippa Pictou on Jordan's Principle).
- Members collaborated with the Aboriginal Health Interest Group at Dalhousie. For the past three summers, SHCD has participated in the Aboriginal Health Sciences Junior University Initiative. This initiative allows Aboriginal youth to spend a day on our campus and to learn about our profession. Committee members also participated in a youth career fair at the Mi'kmaw Friendship Centre in Halifax, and in Eskasoni, Cape Breton.
- The committee recommended changes to the process of using the Affirmative Action Policy in admissions.
- Members of the committee arranged various awareness initiatives including a Diversity Committee Movie night and a poster campaign where students were able to freely share their thoughts about diversity on a public school board.

The SHCD Diversity Committee is continuing to help create an inclusive and supportive environment for all students. It plans to continue educating youth from various backgrounds about the profession, and insuring that diversity is addressed in the school's curriculum. During my time as a student at Dalhousie, I am grateful to have participated and worked alongside such a conscientious and enthusiastic group. I, personally, have grown and learned a great deal.

The intention of this article is to bring awareness to how inclusion and diversity is promoted in your environment. Diversity is an important aspect of who we are as audiologists, and who we will be in the future. As practitioners, teachers, and learners, we can have a strong influence on the direction of our field. I encourage everyone to take steps, however small they may be, to create a more accepting environment for you, your students, and your clients.