Bachelor of Philosophy Sample Plan of Studies
Major: Communication Science and Disorders

During my senior year of high school, I had the wonderful opportunity to explore the field of communication science and disorders by interning with an audiologist and two speech language pathologists at Children’s Hospital in Richmond, Virginia. Towards the end of my internship, after reflecting on all of the exciting new knowledge that I had acquired through this experience, I knew that this was an area I wanted to further pursue. With the University of Pittsburgh nationally ranking in the Top Ten for its renowned program and outstanding faculty in the field of Communication Science and Disorders, how could I not take advantage of studying at such a prestigious school?

My major here at the University of Pittsburgh is Communication Science and Disorders; however, I am not confined to study in only this specific area. Instead, the University has offered me many opportunities to enlarge my scope of interest by investigation other related academic disciplines that reinforce my major. Thus, I intend on obtaining two minors: Neuroscience and Linguistics. A broad understanding of neuroscience has proven to be especially beneficial because communication heavily depends upon the function and state of the brain; disruptions in neural connections can easily lead to interruptions in successful communication. In addition, linguistic errors can often occur in individuals with communication disorders. Therefore, a thorough understanding in linguistics can aid in classifying and determining the nature of these linguistic errors. With a solid foundation in both neuroscience and linguistics, I hope to gain insight into the various aspects of different communication disorders.

My course load thus far has consisted of many classes which have complimented my academic interests. In addition to taking classes within my major and minors, I have taken a variety of psychology courses such as Social Psychology and Developmental Psychology. This semester, in my Cognitive Psychology for Non-Majors class, I have gained an extensive amount of knowledge on attention and memory and their relevance to language. I also completed a course in the Honors College, History of Medicine, where I learned about the history of stuttering, and Morality and Medicine, where I learned about the ethical issues encountered in clinical settings such as confidentiality and informed consent.

Learning has always been a passion of mine, and I am always searching for new opportunities to learn outside of the classroom. Ever since my freshman year of college, I have been actively engaged in research. I serve as a research assistant in the Speech Pathology and Audiology research programs within the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System under the supervision of Dr. Malcolm R. McNeil. I am involved in a variety of research projects and grants and have even assisted several graduate students with their studies. Through my participation in research, I have learned so much about the research process from experimental design to data collection and analysis. Finally, I am registered for a Directed Study this semester under Dr. McNeil. One area of concentration I have within the field of Communication Science and Disorders is neurogenic speech and language disorders, specifically aphasia. Aphasia is a neurologic disorder, usually resulting from a left-hemisphere stroke, which negatively impacts the ability to comprehend and produce spoken or written language. In my Directed Study, I have been focusing on agrammatism, a language impairment which can appear in individuals with aphasia, by reviewing a wide array of literature that will contribute to my research in this area. By studying individuals with aphasia, I hope to gain a better understanding of how we as humans process and understand language.
As one can see from my previous coursework, I have also had the privilege to enhance my education by exploring other academic areas beyond my own scope of study. One primary goal of clinical audiologists and speech-language pathologists is to maximize the communicative abilities of their parents by teaching them various strategies, techniques, and other more non-traditional modes of communication. Interestingly, through my coursework in the humanities, I have been exposed to many different styles and methods of communication. For example, my film and art classes taught me that both film and art can function as powerful tools of communication; through their works, filmmakers and artists can convey a variety of emotions and address numerous issues concerning their personal lives, politics, and society. Likewise, writing can also serve as an effective means of communication. In my literature class, Short Story in Context, I studied extensively the fictional works of several authors and factors, both internal and external, which impacted their writing. Even my history class on ancient China further reinforced this idea of writing as a robust form of communication. After reading an assortment of texts written by ancient Chinese historians, I realized that it is through this documentation that so much valuable information about the richness and depth of ancient Chinese culture and history is still preserved today. Thus, from these courses, I have developed a deeper appreciation for the many diverse aspects of this world and their relevance to my own major.

In a university which highly encourages scholastic achievement and academic excellence, I am excited, eager, and motivated to seek out and seize every available opportunity. My chosen curriculum and selected program of study, both inside and outside of the classroom, have indeed provided me with a very comprehensive, challenging, and unique educational experience which I never could have dreamed of receiving elsewhere.