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Providing Future Speech-Language Pathologists at Seton Hall University with a Community

Abstract. This paper discusses Seton Hall University's Undergraduate Chapter of the National Student Speech Language Hearing Association. As an organization run entirely by students, NSSLHA provides future Speech-Language Pathologists at Seton Hall with a group of friends and fellow students with similar career goals. NSSLHA works to create engaging programming that allows students to come together and study, learn, relax, and have fun together. The importance of NSSLHA's presence on Seton Hall's campus is explored within this paper.

One of the crucial elements of a welcoming and lively college campus is its opportunity for students to become involved and work with their fellow students. Those at Seton Hall University are fortunate enough to have more than 150 student organizations to choose from and find their place in (Dallavalle, 2019). Roughly thirty-five of these student organizations are pre-professional organizations that provide students with an opportunity to meet, socialize, and work with students who have similar career interests and goals. Regardless of their major or field of study, Seton Hall students can find an organization that will present them with friends to study with, professionals to network with, and additional career-related experiences to learn from.

As I entered Seton Hall as a freshman in their Education and Speech-Language Pathology program, I thought that my major and career interest were so specific that there wouldn't be an organization for my major like I knew there was for nursing students or business students. However, I was pleasantly surprised to be invited to a Welcome Meeting within my first week of classes by Seton Hall's Undergraduate Chapter of the National Student Speech Language Hearing Association, commonly referred to as NSSLHA. I certainly had never heard of NSSLHA but as a freshman who was eager to make friends and become involved, I figured I could give the club a try.

Since that first meeting, I have learned so much more about NSSLHA on its undergraduate chapter level and on its national level. On its national level, NSSLHA is a wide student organization designed for "pre-professionals studying communication sciences and disorders (CSD) recognized by the American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA)" (NSSLHA, 2021). ASHA is the organization that certifies practicing Speech-Language Pathologists in the United States. Therefore, NSSLHA provides students with resources and programs not only to aid their educations, but also to prepare them for their professional careers as ASHA-certified clinicians. NSSLHA currently holds over 340 chapters across the country and serves as a valuable resource for hopeful Speech-Language Pathology students at those colleges that are fortunate to have a NSSLHA chapter.

Seton Hall is one of those colleges fortunate to hold a NSSLHA chapter. Because Seton Hall's Speech-Language Pathology programs – both its Education with Speech and its Psychology with Speech – each consist of four years of undergraduate study and two years of graduate study, Seton Hall has a separate graduate chapter of NSSLHA in addition to its undergraduate chapter. As a third-

year student in the program, I am an active member and now officer in Seton Hall's Undergraduate chapter of NSSLHA, but I look forward to being a member in the Graduate chapter once I get there. As students become active participants and members in NSSLHA, there are opportunities to gain leadership experience within the organization as well. Each spring, Seton Hall's undergraduate chapter of NSSLHA elects a new executive board of seven officers to serve for the next school year. I am currently the Secretary and taking on my first year as an officer has been exciting and very rewarding.

NSSLHA is an active club throughout the entire school year. At the beginning of the fall semester, we always kick off the semester by hosting an All About the Program meeting. Seton Hall's Speech-Language Pathology programs are unique in that they allow students a direct admission into their graduate school program on the grounds that they meet specific criteria during their undergraduate education at Seton Hall. NSSLHA hosts our All About the Program meeting to remind the incoming freshman and our returning students their responsibilities that include maintaining a 3.2 GPA, taking six undergraduate courses as pre-requisites for the graduate program, and completing twenty-five observation hours with a certified SLP before graduate school (Seton Hall University, 2020). NSSLHA's All About the Program Event is our favorite way to effectively kick off a new school year and orient the new freshman students into our program.

Throughout the rest of the school year, NSSLHA holds a variety of events each month. The events that we hold most consistently throughout the year include exam review sessions and Speech-Language Pathologist panels. Because the six pre-requisite courses that SLP students take as undergraduates are only offered during one semester – instead of in both the fall and the spring – all students end up taking the same classes as their peers at the same time. For example, all sophomores in the SLP program take Introduction to Communication Disorders during their fall semester. While this arrangement often leaves our chapter in a constant state of stress – as one cohort of our organization is invariably preparing for an exam at some point – it provides us with the opportunity to create group study sessions for our members. For each semester, we try to plan an exam review session for each class running at the time. In the fall, we host a review on Kahoot for our sophomores taking Introduction to Communication Disorders and a separate review for our juniors taking Anatomy and Physiology of the Speech and Swallowing Mechanisms. In the spring, we do the same but for those classes unique to the Spring semester. These events end up being fairly popular as they are an excellent opportunity for students to study with their peers in a relaxed, no-stakes manner where upperclassmen are simply running a review game for them. We invite all students to come, regardless of how much they have been studying before the review, because students who may be behind on studying can use the review sessions to determine what areas of the content they should focus on once they start studying.

In addition to planning out the events that happen in nearly the same way each year, NSSLHA spends a lot of time organizing a Speech-Language Pathologist panel each semester. For these panels, we invite roughly five to six practicing Speech-Language Pathologists from a wide variety of settings to share their workplace experiences. Because SLPs work in so many settings – hospitals, schools, private practices – and with so many populations – children with articulation difficulties, adults recovering from neurological conditions, infants with feeding disorders, or individuals with autism – it is so important that NSSLHA brings in a wide variety of SLPs to speak to our students. Upon inviting the SLPs in to speak with us, we ask them to share their education experience, where they work, what their caseload looks like, and any tips or advice they have for us. These panels are often

our most popular events as it is nice for our undergraduate students to meet real, working individuals who have reached their goals in the same field we are working towards. At times we've hosted panels where we specifically invited graduate students who were still in school to receive their master's degree, and this provided a unique student-perspective for our organization. In addition to learning from and listening to our panelists, students in NSSLHA can also take advantage of these panels by speaking to and networking with the SLPs. Each SLP who joins us for the panel is often more than willing to share their contact information so that our students can reach out to them for potential observation experience. The panels that NSSLHA organizes each semester are often the events that our organization is proudest of and finds the most rewarding.

NSSLHA is a unique and special organization that Seton Hall students are lucky to have an opportunity to be a part of. I am so grateful for the opportunities my involvement in NSSLHA has given me and for everything that I have learned about my future profession from this organization. As SLP students at Seton Hall are often a relatively small cohort, it is so important to have an active and communal group of people to work with and learn from throughout our education. Our class are challenging and at times can be very stressful, but with like-minded individuals to socialize and study with, NSSLHA makes Seton Hall's Speech-Language Pathology program a lot more enjoyable and rewarding.

References

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