PLANNING FOR THE 2020-2021 ACADEMIC YEAR DURING COVID-19

A Focus Group Summary of CSD Faculty's Plans, Challenges, Strategies, Available Resources, and Requests for Support for the Coming Academic Year

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ASHA
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association

Table of Contents

Focus Group Objectives

In spring of 2020, faculty in Communication Sciences and Disorders (CSD) reported a wide variety of professional challenges through the following surveys:

- ASHA COVID-19 Tracker Surveys fielded in March and May 2020
- CAPCSD Member Survey fielded in April 2020

These challenges included:

- Rapid shifts to remote teaching while striving to maintain quality education and student engagement
- Clinic closures
- Transitions to telepractice/telesupervision
- Use of case simulation to meet clinical hour requirements
- Interruptions to research and clinical services
- Concerns for faculty, student, and client safety and well-being

In June 2020, ASHA conducted three focus groups to gain additional insight in order to assist faculty with addressing these challenges.

Focus Group Objectives

ASHA administered focus groups with CSD administrators (including department chairs, program directors, and clinic directors) to address the following key questions:

PLAN

What is the plan at each program for teaching academic courses and providing clinical education for the 2020-2021 academic year?

CHALLENGES and STRATEGIES

What challenges has the academic program experienced and what strategies are being used to address these challenges?

RESOURCES

What resources is the academic program using to provide academic courses and clinical experiences, and what topics would the academic program like more information on?

SUPPORT

How can ASHA support academic programs moving forward as they prepare and implement their plans for the 2020-2021 academic year?

Procedure

ASHA conducted **three (3) focus groups** with CSD program administrators from the following types of programs:

- **AuD programs** and **PhD programs in audiology**.
- **Master's programs in speech-language pathology**.
- **Master's programs** and **doctoral programs in speech-language pathology**.

The focus groups were conducted virtually via Zoom in June 2020 and consisted of 7-10 participants each, with 22 participants total.

Each group was asked the same set of questions covering:
- Plan for the 2020-2021 academic year
- Challenges and strategies to meet the challenges for clinical education, including their opinions on competency-based education
- Challenges and strategies to meet the challenges for the following areas: academic teaching, research, academic program operations, faculty concerns, concerns about students
- Resources they were using to address the challenges
- Further information and resources they would like to support their program moving forward

Participants were encouraged to expand on their answers and to bring up topics of particular concern to them.
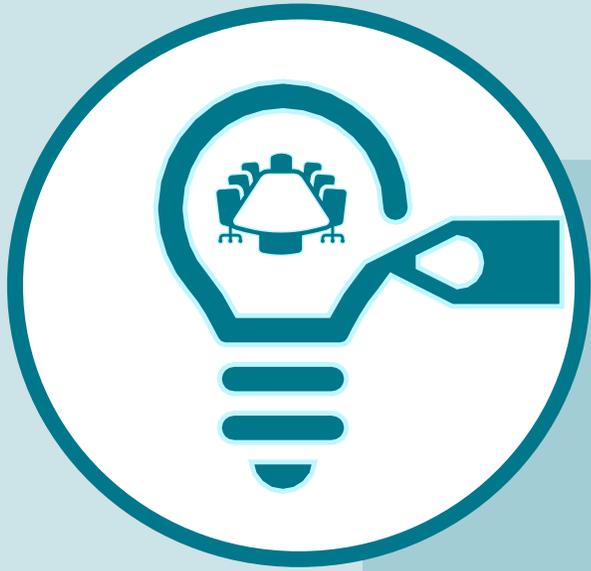
I. PLANS FOR CSD EDUCATION IN THE FALL OF 2020-2021

Planned Approach to Fall 2020

CLASSES

- The majority (14) of programs were planning a **hybrid approach** with a range of 50-100% of didactic courses taught online while labs, skill-based courses, and clinics would be held in-person on campus. Participants emphasized that **in-person classes** would consist of small class sizes.

- Four programs indicated that fall classes would primarily be **face-to-face on campus**, and only two programs were planning to hold all courses and clinic **online/remotely**.

CALENDAR

- **Ending the semester early**: six programs specifically noted that their institution planned to end any on-campus activities by Thanksgiving and finish the final weeks of the semester fully online.

CLINIC

- **Telepractice** was planned for use among many speech-language pathology clinics.

- Audiology clinics were planning to hold **in-person visits whenever possible** and with modifications.

When reporting these plans, many participants added the caveat that plans were tentative and may change depending on the state of the pandemic.
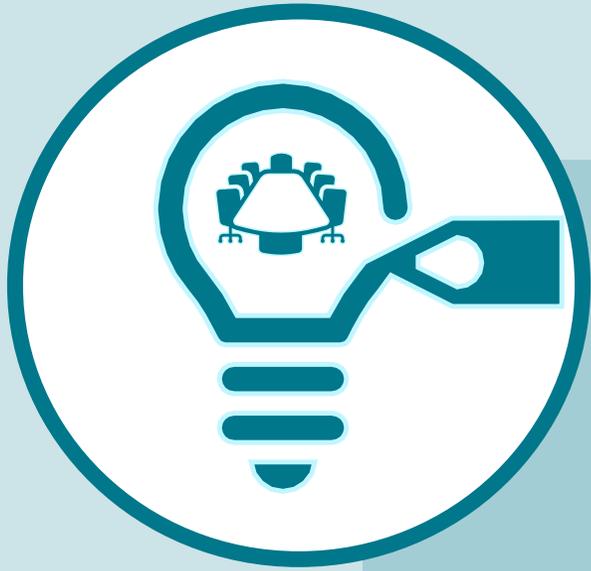
II. CHALLENGES TO CLINICAL EDUCATION AND STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS THOSE CHALLENGES

Challenges to Clinical Education

CLINICAL HOURS and CLINICAL PLACEMENTS

- Focus Group participants reported that the sudden closure of on- and off-campus clinics due to the pandemic meant that many students lost their clinical placements before completing the clinical hours required for certification.

- Even when placement sites did not close, supervisors often were not allowed to continue having students at the site or were overwhelmed with new responsibilities and could not take on students.

- Nearly all participants in the focus groups reported similar challenges to ensure that students had opportunities to meet their clinical hour requirements.

TELEPRACTICE/TELESUPERVISION

- Focus group participants reported that pre-COVID regulations from HIPAA and the CFCC required more supervision coverage for telepractice than in-person supervision.
    - Depending on state regulations, sometimes telepractice was not allowed at all.

- Participants reported that clinical supervisors felt that they did not have enough time to devote to the supervision of all students when 100% supervision was required.

- Protecting client privacy and following HIPAA requirements while using telepractice was especially difficult for programs with limited use of telepractice tools before the pandemic started.

Looking to the Fall, with many external clinics still closed, especially medical sites, participants expressed that they continue to feel strapped when trying to secure available placements for students.

Strategies to Mitigate Challenges to Clinical Education

Participants reported a variety of strategies to ensure students continued their clinical education despite clinic closures.

Alteration of Physical Spaces for Greater Safety

- Smaller groups of students in a single space
- Instituting curbside check-ins for clinic
- Adding plexiglass separations

Investment in Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- Consulting with local medical system to determine PPE reusability
- Passing the cost of PPE on to students/using clinic revenue to share PPE costs

Other Techniques

- Modifying schedules to allow for clinical placements during school breaks
- Subsidizing offsite community clinics and schools with supplementary therapy

Investment in Telepractice and Clinical Simulation

- Adding or expanding telehealth practices and virtual services
- Relying on clinical simulations and maximizing the use of clinical simulations
- Videoconferencing for taking case histories
- Student use of tablets to view live assessments from another room

Advocacy

- Advocating with the CFCC to continue the following allowances for telepractice with telesupervision:
    - Allowing clinical educators to supervise more than one session concurrently
    - Allowing clinical educators to provide 25% direct supervision, comparable to in-person supervision requirements
    - Allowing programs to determine how many hours may be earned through telepractice (separate from the hours earned through clinical simulation)

Building Greater Capacity for Clinical Education

Focus group participants were asked about and shared their ideas on how to build greater clinical education capacity to ensure that all students meet their clinical requirements for certification.

Enhanced Investment in Simulation

- Investing in simulation software
- Developing a comprehensive collection of simulated cases and standardized clients
- Facilitating case study discussions
- Ensuring all students have laptops for simulation and telehealth

Diversifying the Client Base

- Inviting alumni to participate as "online patients"
- Investing in standardized patients for both telepractice and in-person supervision
- Sharing of telepractice clients between an onsite and a remote student
- Working with community and interprofessional clinics to expand clinical opportunities
- Forming partnerships with international clinical sites

Advocacy and Incentivization

- Advocating for the use of telepractice in schools
- Advocating to the CFCC about telepractice/simulations for clinical requirements
- Offering incentives to speech-language pathologists to become clinical supervisors

Adopting Competency-Based Education (CBE)

Participants were asked if they felt a Competency-Based Education (CBE) approach would be a good fit for CSD education. Across all focus groups, most participants agreed that CBE makes more sense from an educational standpoint than counting hours.

- All the focus group participants from the audiology (AuD and PhD) programs and the SLP programs that offer both master's and PhD degrees favored some type of CBE.

- Half of the participants from the master's only programs favored CBE; the other half favored a hybrid approach (that required direct clinical contact to some degree).

Participants stated that competency is what students must ultimately achieve to be successful in their practice.

- Consequently, trying to secure clinical hours for students at a time when the nation was experiencing a public health crisis was difficult.

Faculty felt that CBE is suited to adult learners and can accommodate students with different learning styles, but there was some discussion on how those competencies should be identified (e.g., examine CMS codes for the frequency of procedures) and how the timing and measuring of competencies would look different if a CBE approach were used.

- Some participants noted that it may be necessary to create national competencies in order to have agreement from licensure boards that competencies have been met.

- In this manner, CBE would provide a basic rubric of competencies, not the methods for how to teach them. For example, clinical national exams of other disciplines could be adapted.

While participants largely agreed in shifting to a CBE approach, several reiterated the challenges with this shift

- Some participants worried that other programs may pass students who have not demonstrated competency.

- Participants concluded that if an accrediting body approves a program, they would have to trust that those approved programs were doing a good job in determining their students' competencies.

ASHA's Role as an Advocate for Change in CBE

A common theme when discussing how to build greater capacity for clinical education and moving towards a CBE model was ASHA's role as a leader of the professions.

- Participants in all three focus groups felt that ASHA could serve as an advocate and organizer of efforts to address the need for greater clinical education capacity and the transition to a CBE approach.

- Several participants said that they would like to see ASHA advocate to the CFCC for greater flexibility in clinical requirements.

- Some participants expressed interest in ASHA's working with CAPCSD and the AAA and/or developing a committee to address challenges in clinical education.

- Other participants mentioned how programs are tied to state licensure requirements, and as such, ASHA might advocate to state bodies about the need to innovate clinical education capacity and changes to requirements.
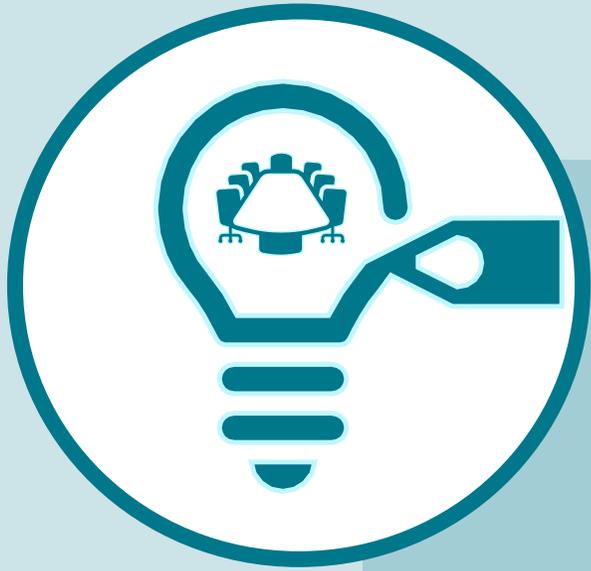
III. CHALLENGES TO ACADEMIC AND RESEARCH EDUCATION AND STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS THOSE CHALLENGES

Challenges and Strategies: Teaching Academic Courses

The transition to online teaching was immediate when colleges and universities shut down due to COVID-19. While faculty were able to quickly shift their courses online for the duration of the 2019-2020 academic year, Focus Group participants still expressed concerns about preparing for online teaching in the 2020-2021 academic year.

CHALLENGES described by Participants

Shifting courses to online format
- Learning new online course technology
- Steep learning curve for faculty who had never done online teaching before

Re-examining the general approach to teaching
- Developing new techniques for teaching online for effective transmission of concepts
- Keeping students engaged without in-person teaching
- Safety for students and faculty

STRATEGIES offered by Participants

Making all course content and materials available on a digital platform
- Exploring available technology for online teaching
- Offering how-to workshops on developing online courses and trainings on new technologies to faculty
- Providing a toolbox of strategies based on SoTL

Altering the approach to teaching
- Using teaching platforms for small group work
- Assigning a faculty member as back-up to instruction for every course
- Providing in-person teaching simultaneously with online teaching (though this can be difficult to do effectively)
- Using flipped classrooms and asynchronous lectures

Challenges and Strategies: Academic Program Operations

The uncertainty surrounding the spread of the coronavirus has made it difficult to make informed decisions about academic program operations.

CHALLENGES described by Participants

Creating a safe environment for learning
- Need to formulate social distancing and safety plans that take into account both state and institution requirements
- Safety plans need to address in-person classes as well as on-campus clinic

Concerns about communicating accurate and timely information
- Need to keep faculty and students updated about program plans
- Need to decrease anxiety about uncertainty of plans

STRATEGIES offered by Participants

Focusing on social distance and safety measures
- Receiving approval for faculty to telecommute
- Repurposing space made available by using simulations
- Disseminating a template for conducting face-to-face interactions

Increased communication with faculty and students
- Communicating with students and faculty via weekly emails
- Being available to faculty 24/7
- Holding voluntary faculty meetings in the summer

Challenges and Strategies: Research

Campus and clinic closures meant disruptions to research for both faculty and students.

CHALLENGES described by Participants

Research was interrupted
- Research requiring in-person tasks had to be put on hold or modified
- Grants based on completing testing with participants could not move forward

Research labs were closed
- Not only participants, but also faculty and students, were not allowed to be in labs

Interruptions in research for students
- Needing to complete research for students to graduate (especially for AuD students)

STRATEGIES offered by Participants

Shifting the focus of research
- Developing plans for adapting research with participants that followed new social distancing requirements
- Temporarily focusing on research tasks that did not require participant involvement (e.g., analyzing data, preparing manuscripts)
- Submitting COVID-related research grants for funding students and research

Flexing lab time
- Allowing students to be in research labs one at a time instead of closing labs completely

Redesigning research for students
- Pairing third-year students with advanced students on approved research projects

Challenges and Strategies: Faculty Concerns

Participants expressed concerns about balancing safety with the demands of their job.

CHALLENGES described by Participants

Staying on track for promotion and tenure
- Both research and teaching plans were interrupted
- Goals for tenure and promotion had to be delayed or re-evaluated

Safety concerns for teaching and research
- Online vs. in-person classes
- Research studies requiring in-person tasks with participants had to be modified or paused

Balancing job requirements with personal demands
- Faculty who were parents often had to work and take care of children at home
- Faculty considered at risk for health issues were sometimes pressured to be on-campus

STRATEGIES offered by Participants

Tenure and promotion options offered
- Extending the tenure timetable

Options for teaching and research
- Allowing flexibility to teach online
- Plans developed to allow faculty to return to offices or labs following social distancing requirements
- Reassignment of classes or back-ups assigned for each course

Flexibility in job requirements
- Providing flexibility in work hours, particularly for faculty with child care responsibilities
- Faculty not required to work a typical "8 to 5" work day, as long as classes and clinic were covered

Challenges and Strategies: Student Concerns

Campus closures and the rapid transition to online courses disrupted students' means for communicating with faculty and peers in the classroom and other campus settings.

CHALLENGES described by Participants

Need for communication and connection between students and faculty, but also students with other students
- Faculty want to make sure students have opportunities to connect, build relationships, and remain aware of key program decisions
- Concerns about students' mental health has been intensified by the pandemic

Concerns about equity in CSD education
- Focusing on both the recent rise in anti-racism activism and the pandemic's uneven impact on students from underrepresented communities
- Some students report additional stress from concern about their families and parent immigration status

STRATEGIES offered by Participants

Creating space for student communication and connection
- Minimizing student attrition between acceptance and beginning of classes by holding weekly chats with incoming students
- Introducing daily chair chats with students
- Instituting virtual student meetings/clubs/lounges

Focusing on student equity
- Supporting students who have undocumented parents
- Giving incomplete grades to students who can't finish
- Dropping the GRE from admissions requirements
- Administering scholarships with a lens towards equity
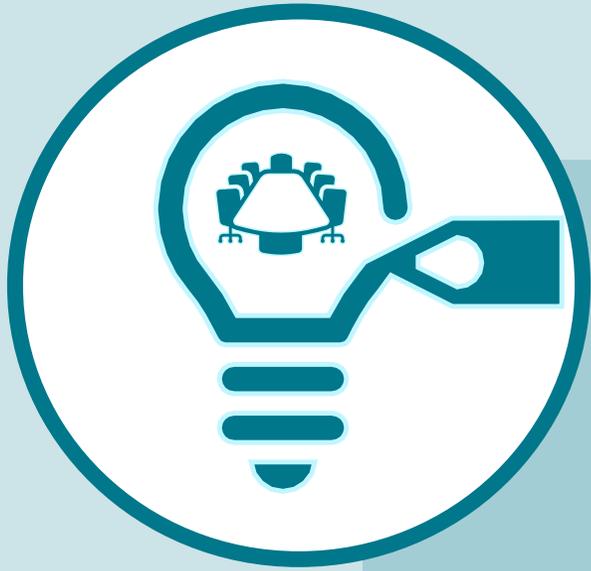
IV. AVAILABLE RESOURCES FOR ACADEMIC PROGRAMS FOR THE 2020-2021 ACADEMIC YEAR

Overview of Current Resources

Focus Group participants were asked to list any resources they are currently using to help plan for the 2020-2021 academic year.

Three types of available resources:

University resources
- Support and training for online teaching

ASHA resources
- ASHA Learning Pass, ASHA Webinars, and ASHA Communities
- COVID-19 webpage

CAPCSD resources
- CAPCSD case studies
- Resources on returning to the clinic
- Webinars (e.g., How to Self-Care webinar)

Additional Topics of Interest

Participants were asked about the specific topics they would like additional information on to plan for the 2020-2021 academic year.
Participants were then asked to provide their preferred format for receiving information.

Participants requested information on the following topics:

Simulations and Telepractice
- How to develop effective clinical simulations
- Pedagogy of telepractice
- Effectively using telepractice with students who have no clinical experience

Addressing Student Needs - Community
- Addressing student stress and mental health
- Being an ally to students/persons of color
- Creating a sense of community/relationship building among students online

### Addressing Student Needs – Education and Practice
- Supporting second-year students' confidence in their preparation for practice
- Providing enough audiology experience for SLP students
- Using PPE in the classroom

Addressing Shifts in CSD Education
- Mechanisms for sharing ideas related to academic teaching and clinical education
- Providing the rationale for why the CFCC does not allow students to continue their clinical hours into their clinical fellowship
- Broader discussions on and recognition that CSD education will not return to the old ways (pre-COVID-19)

Participants requested information in the following formats (in order of preference):
- Webinars and podcasts
- Virtual town halls or web chats
- Webpages
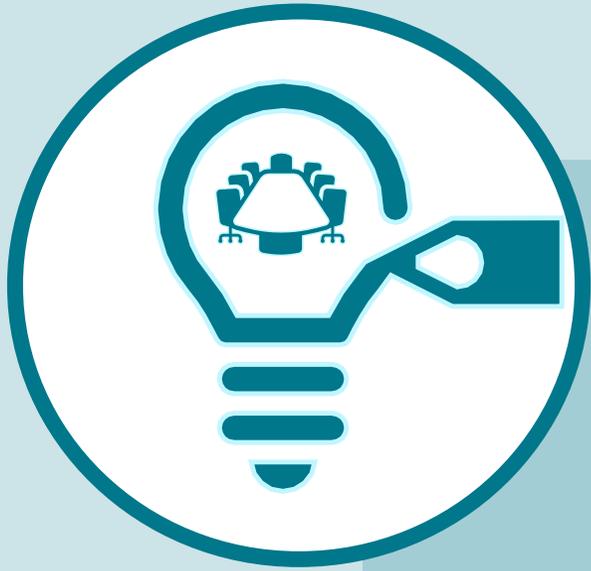
V. REQUESTS FOR SUPPORT

Requests for Support

Focus group participants were asked how ASHA could provide support in preparation for the upcoming 2020-2021 academic year. Overall, participant suggestions for support span three key areas.

Increase available simulations and assist with online education

Increase advocacy and coordinate efforts for change

Provide additional information on timely topics

Increase Available Simulations and Assist with Online Education

REQUESTS from Focus Group Participants

Increase available simulations and assist with online education

- Develop diagnostic simulations
- Create a repository of available simulations
- Continue free access to the ASHA Learning Pass
- Develop trainings for faculty on teaching online course content

CURRENT OFFERINGS	SPECIFIC REQUESTS
ASHA • Telepractice Resources During COVID-19 • Free ASHA Learning Pass access through Dec. 31, 2020 for instructional purposes **CAPCSD** • Best Practices in Healthcare Simulations in Communication Sciences and Disorders (CAPCSD ebook) March 2019 • Podcasts on simulations in CSD, simulation debriefing, and simulation in audiology • Webinar on graduate student telepractice training	**Short-Term** • Extend free access to ASHA Learning Pass for the entire 2020-2021 academic year • Create repository space for institutions to submit and use simulations **Long-Term** • Develop free case studies and simulations • Develop free or low-cost trainings for faculty that focus on online course development and student engagement

Increase Advocacy and Coordinate Efforts for Change

REQUESTS from Focus Group Participants

Increase advocacy and coordinate efforts for change

- Lobby state legislatures for telepractice variances as well as the CFCC to update limits on telepractice hours and to lift the cap on the number of simulation hours
- Advocate for competency-based education (CBE) and coordinate efforts to transition to CBE among stakeholders
- Advocate to CAA to balance the number of new programs approved with the capacity to educate students clinically
- Lead efforts to recruit more clinical supervisors

CURRENT OFFERINGS	SPECIFIC REQUESTS
ASHA • Collected input from AAB and 22 focus group participants in May-June 2020 to inform consideration of and advocacy for CBE in CSD. Information shared with CAA and CFCC in preparation for their Council meetings in August and Sept. **CAPCSD** • CAPCSD Conversations for peer communication • CAPCSD clinical supervision training modules	**Short-Term** • Advocate to the CFCC and state legislatures about the need for flexible use of telepractice towards clinical requirements • Advocate to CAA about the need to balance the number of new programs approved with capacity for clinical education **Long-Term** • Organize a committee (including CFCC, faculty, state health education representatives, other allied health professions representatives) to propose CBE standards • Create incentives and a campaign to recruit clinical supervisors

Provide Additional Information on Timely Topics

REQUESTS from Focus Group Participants

Provide additional information on timely topics
- List clinical hour requirements for licensure in each state
- Provide financial aid and job outlook information
- Keep the website up-to-date on cutting-edge issues (such as PPE)
- Provide a conduit for colleges and universities to communicate with their peers on solving challenges
- Provide information on bridging equity gaps among students and clients

CURRENT OFFERINGS

ASHA
- COVID-19 resources for academia webpage
- PPE resources webpage
- State-by-state tracking of telepractice and licensure laws
- Financial aid webpage
- ASHA Communities and SIGs as channels for peer communication

CAPCSD
- Webinar on mental health in troubled times
- COVID-19 resources webpage
- CAPCSD Conversations for peer communication

SPECIFIC REQUESTS

Short-Term
- Create a list of clinical hour requirements for each state
- Update/maintain COVID-19 resources for academic webpage
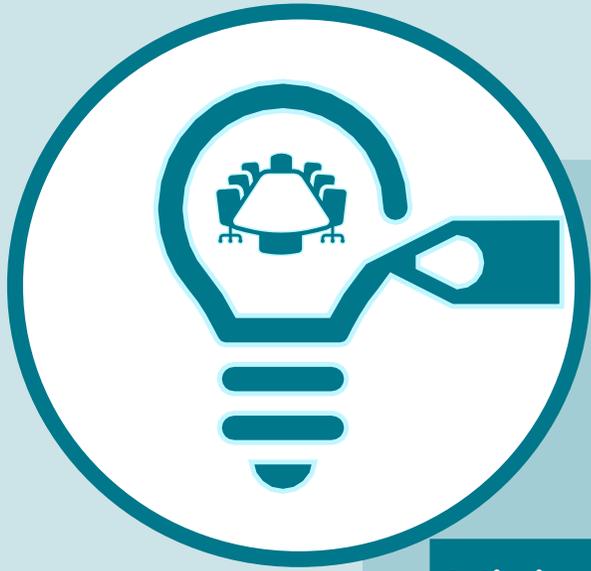- Develop additional guidance on use of PPE/social distancing

Long-Term
- Develop resources on building equity in higher education
- Create repository space for institutions to submit and use plans and materials for addressing challenges (related to teaching, safety, equity)

APPENDIX

THEME	FOCUS GROUP GENERAL QUESTIONS
Approach/Plan	• **Do you expect Fall classes to be: on campus, online, or a combination?**
Challenges & Strategies	• **Briefly, in just a sentence, tell us about a challenge you've had related to clinical education, but then share some details about any strategies that you've used or proposed to mitigate that challenge in the coming academic year.** • **How can we build greater capacity for clinical education?** • **There are other challenges presented by Covid-19, too, most of which fit into five areas: academic teaching, research, academic program operations, student concerns and, and faculty concerns. Select one of those five areas, tell us which one you've selected, briefly describe a challenge in that area, and then tell us about strategies to mitigate that challenge in the upcoming academic year.**
Resources	• **What resources are you using in planning for the upcoming academic year? First, identify whether the resource is from ASHA, CAPCSD, your university, or somewhere else, and then describe the resource.** • **What specific topics would you like more information about in order to support you or your program in the coming academic year? How do you want to learn this information?**
Support	• **Keeping in mind that the credentialing bodies are separate from ASHA as a professional and scientific organization, what would you like from ASHA for the upcoming academic year?**
Competency-Based Education	• **Do you think an educational approach focused on the acquisition of competencies could be a good fit for audiology and speech-language pathology education compared to a time-based training approach? Why or why not?**
Conclusion	• **What is the ONE take-away message that you would like to leave with us on today's topic?**

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