

An Exploration of Dress Codes in Speech-Language Pathology Graduate Programs

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Abstract

This investigation utilized a mixed methods approach to explore dress code policy in one Midwestern master's in speech-language pathology program. The dress code was policy was analyzed. In addition, two faculty members participated in a semi-structured interview. Findings suggest that the dress code is intended to be accepting of individuality which is supported by the diverse faculty body.

Introduction

- First impressions are important but they are not without implicit bias (Naughton et al., 2016).
- The way females dress has been directly correlated to the perception of their intelligence, competence, and professionalism and greater physical attraction is correlated with higher grades (Gurung et al., 2017; Hernandez-Julian & Peters, 2016).
- Dress code is often associated with professional but professionalism is a social construct (Alexis et al., 2020; DeBiase et al., 2022; Martimianakis et al., 2009).
- The SLP profession is not diverse and there has been active recruitment to try and make the profession more representative of society (Rodriguez, 2016).
- Dress codes often default to white norms that perpetuate microaggressions and disciplinary actions to marginalized populations (Frye et al., 2020).

Methodology

A mixed method approach was used in this investigation.

Qualitative Methodology

- Dress code policy analysis
- Two Semi-structured interview with 10 content questions and 6 demographic questions
- Open coding and axial coding (Pitney & Parker, 2009)

Quantitative Methodology

- Two interviews (16 mins, 22 mins)
- Quantitative analysis of the SLP dress code clinic policy
- Descriptive statistics reported by the interviewees

Results

Qualitative Findings

Grading Practices

- Dress code is deemphasized
- Grades students on their adherence to policy and not appearance
- Faculty rarely talk about student dress

Priorities of the department

- Focus on the student's ability to perform speech-language skills
- Major focus on diversity and inclusion
- Respect individuality

Careers have dress expectations associated with them

- Mental expectations associated with occupations and their dress
- Wear what leadership is wearing
- Dress should not negatively impact working relationships

Quantitative Findings

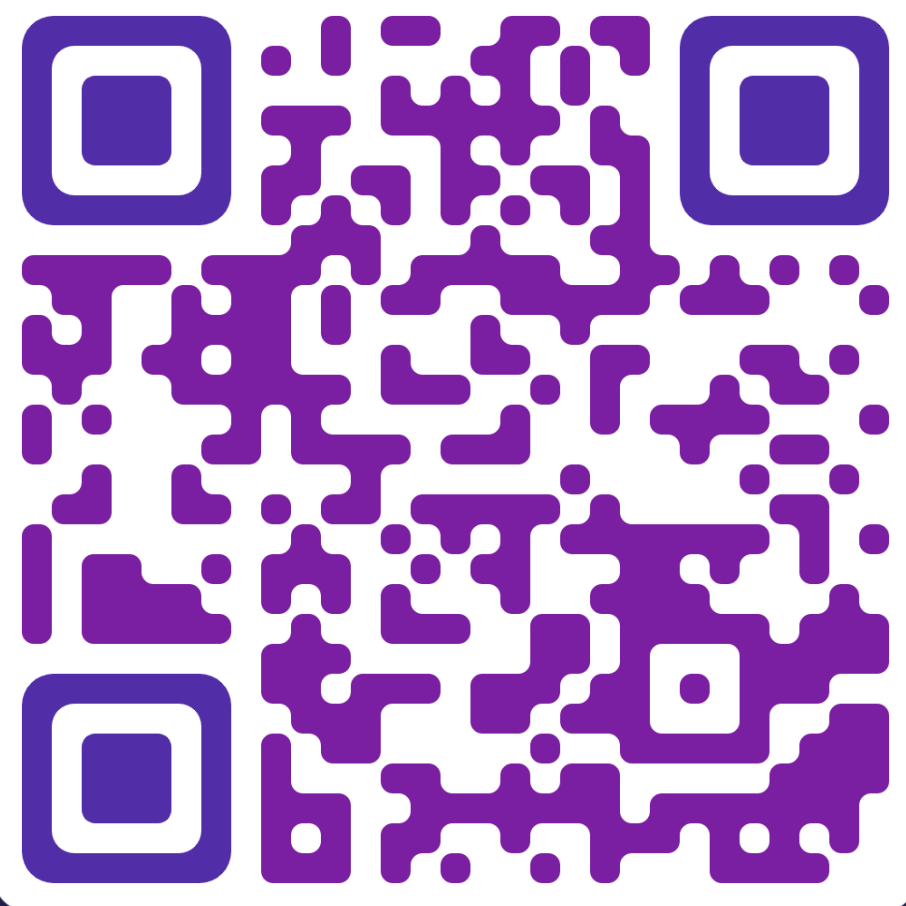
Statement	Participant 1	Participant 2
University status	Private	Private
Number of graduate students in the program	55-60	Approximately 40
Number of faculty in the department	15	8 + adjuncts
Demographic makeup of departmental faculty: Gender	30-40% male; 60-70% female	Majority female with 3 males
Demographic makeup of departmental faculty: Age	Ages 40-60; maybe a few under 40	Ages 30-65
Demographic makeup of departmental faculty: Race	Primarily white/ Caucasian	Two African American
Does the program have students that identify with a marginalized population?	Yes; less than 5%	Yes; LGBTQ+

Analysis using Microsoft word features:

- word count: 140
- sentence count: 6
- Flesh Reading Ease scale: 55.3 (0-100 with lower scores being more complex) (Si & Callan, 2001)
- Flesh-Kincaid grade level equivalent: 8.8 (0-12 with 0 being kindergarten level and 12 indicates senior in high school level)

Conclusion

- Participants demonstrated a holistic view of professionalism that was supported by departmental priorities.
- The culture and leadership of the department supports diversity, equity and inclusion.
- Although dress code is de-emphasized in this program, both interviews demonstrated the connection of SLP dress and role theory.



References and More Info