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**UW-Whitewater simulation offers speech pathology and social work students critical hands-on experience**

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A realistic simulation where faculty and staff role-play patients, care givers, police officers and relatives gives students at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater a unique experiential learning opportunity where speech difficulty plays a key role.

After a semester of preparation, a group of faculty, staff, and graduate and undergraduate students at UW-Whitewater gather annually for an interprofessional education (IPE) experience that allows undergraduate and graduate students in the [**social work**](https://www.uww.edu/cls/academics/social-work) and [**communication sciences and disorders**](https://www.uww.edu/coeps/college-resources/communication-sciences-disorders) programs to practice their skills.

The resulting effort, while labor-intensive, is popular with students and designed to help them prepare for their professional roles.

Cody Marie Busch, assistant professor of communication sciences and disorders, and Jennifer Anderson, associate professor of social work, co-direct the semester-long training and culminating clinical event.

“Nursing and social work have a good foundation in interprofessional practice, but speech pathologists are not always included,” said Busch. “This exercise is a great opportunity for speech pathology students to work with other professional roles like we do in the real world.”

The day-long experience includes [**graduate students studying communication sciences and disorders**](https://www.uww.edu/coeps/academics/communication-sciences-disorders-ms) and both undergraduate and [**graduate social work**](https://www.uww.edu/cls/academics/social-work-msw) students as well faculty and staff simulating patients and caregivers. The objective for the students is to work with a partner to obtain a case history of a “patient” with speech difficulties, come up with a holistic plan of care, and do a presentation on the results.

“We refine it every year, asking students for feedback. Students appreciate the real-life aspects, being suddenly confronted with things not going to plan,” said Busch. “We intentionally don’t give them much information, and then they learn more as they navigate the case as an interprofessional team.”

The simulation is set up in six rooms in the communication sciences and disorders clinic in Roseman, with each room representing different aspects of their patient, including their home, medical information, and opportunity to interact with colleagues from other departments including [**UW-Whitewater Police**](https://www.uww.edu/adminaffairs/police) and [**University Health and Counseling Services**](https://www.uww.edu/uhcs) who played critical roles and provided additional context about the patient. Students also interact with the “patient” and the patient’s sister.

“You can read about interprofessional practice in a book, but to be able to get good at it you have to do it,” said Busch.

About 30 students a year participate in the simulation, which is mandatory for speech pathologist graduate students and optional for social work undergraduate and graduate students.

In the second year of the speech pathology program, students complete three required external placements in various settings. The IPE experience helps students be more prepared for collaborating and communicating with other professionals in their offsite clinical experiences.

Students earning a master’s degree in speech pathology find work in a variety of settings, from  childcare centers, schools, rehab hospitals, inpatient acute care, and skilled nursing. Most are hired before they graduate, often by the institutions where they were placed as students.

“That is the beauty of the field of speech-language pathology. We can work in a variety of settings and also work with individuals across the lifespan,” said Busch. “If you want to be in a helping profession, speech-language pathology is a great choice!”

Students studying social work also benefit from the hands-on, professional nature of the simulation. Undergraduates often complete field work with an on- or off-campus organization in their final semester prior to graduation. Students pursuing a [**Master of Social Work**](https://www.uww.edu/cls/academics/social-work-msw), MSW, are required to complete a field experience and either a community-based social work or clinical social work practice prior to earning their degree.