
CLINIC PROGRAMS

Maximizing Auditory Rehabilitation for Clients, Students, and Faculty through an Intensive Training Program

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The Summer Intensive Aural Rehabilitation Conference, SIARC, is a blend of service delivery, student training, and community awareness that occurs over a 5-day period in a university setting. It is an opportunity for students to gain intensive experience in serving adults with hearing impairment and their communication partners while all experience the benefits of cooperative learning in a social environment. The conference includes daily classes led by the students on coping with hearing loss, facilitating communication, and new technology, as well as guest lectures by a rehabilitation expert. Audiologic assessments, hearing aid checks, and trials with new technology allow attendees to evaluate their current hearing status and the potential benefits of new technology in a variety of social situations including dinners, plays, and tours. Participant feedback suggests that the program has far-reaching benefits as community awareness is raised regarding the needs of those with hearing loss, family communication is facilitated through technology and coping strategies, and student training is enhanced through intensive clinical experience.

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The Summer Intensive Aural Rehabilitation Conference (SIARC) is a week-long program that provides in-depth experience with issues faced by those with hearing loss in a supportive and resource-filled environment. The typical experiences of someone seeking help for hearing problems are two or three visits with an audiologist for hearing tests, hearing aid fitting, and follow-up sessions to learn about care and use of the aid. A recent survey revealed that when aural rehabilitation services are offered, practitioners most often provide informational counseling, communication strategies training, and information about hearing assistance technology (Prendergast & Kelley, 2002). This information is often provided in hand-out format. Minimal, if any, time is devoted to investigating and minimizing residual communication deficits, particularly as they relate to family interactions. Unfortunately, students educated by this model are likely to perpetuate it. SIARC addresses the needs of clients as well as student training in several ways.

SIARC OBJECTIVES

Implement an Intensive Immersion Approach

SIARC addresses the needs of clients and their families in a collaborative environment. The format includes substantial didactic instruction; however, the focus expands beyond the information counseling that is often a mainstay of aural rehabilitation services (Prendergast & Kelley, 2002) and emphasizes guided learning activities and real-life practice. The conference includes daily classes for participants to learn about hearing loss and its effects, coping strategies, communication skills, and new technology to reduce problems associated with hearing loss. Resource material and assessment results are added into the SIARC notebook that is provided each participant. Specialized lectures by renowned rehabilitation experts are included to provide research updates. The invited guest lecturer participates in the classes and the activities to reinforce the concepts discussed throughout the week. Evening activities are held to allow participants to practice new skills and technology in a social environment and discuss their progress during their classes. The 5-day intensive format stimulates group cohesion. Ample time is devoted to investigating the social and emotional consequences of hearing loss that can only be accomplished once members identify themselves as a group, and trust and sharing are operational norms.

Educate Communication Partners

The goals of SIARC extend beyond the individual with hearing loss to include the family or significant others. Both individuals with hearing loss and their communication partners are faced with difficulty when hearing loss interferes with message reception. Couples must learn to modify their environment, to recognize the social and emotional consequences of hearing loss, and to respond to

communication breakdowns. Participants come to understand that, although an individual might experience hearing loss, the family shares the hearing problem. Furthermore, inclusion of significant others in the rehabilitation process leads to increased success (Preminger, 2003).

Educate the Community and Practice Self-Advocacy

SIARC provides an opportunity for participants to advocate within the community for accessibility of services for individuals with hearing loss. Group members must make their listening needs known at lodging, dining, and entertainment venues throughout the week. Furthermore, there is great need in the community for education regarding the benefit of using hearing assistance technology. In preparation for the Conference, student and faculty Conference planners addressed seating, lighting, and technology needs with restaurants, music halls, and guided tour venues. For example, when there was no provision at the Dallas Music Hall for captioning, meetings with lighting/sound engineers, house manager, and the stage producer led to an innovative arrangement for using several laptops to display the captioning. Likewise, personnel at the Dallas Arboretum were not aware of the need for hearing assistance technology on their guided tours of the gardens in the noisy trams. This was also true of staff at the Meyerson Symphony Center where hearing assistance technology is available during performances, but had not been provided on the tours of the Center. Both the Music Hall and the Arboretum have expanded their services for those with hearing loss following SIARC. The Music Hall has provided at least one more captioned performance with laptops and the Arboretum has investigated the purchase of assistive listening technology. Several local hotels also were familiarized with their responsibilities under the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Educate Graduate Students

The Conference affords intensive training for graduate students in the delivery of rehabilitation services and illustrates, first hand, its positive impact. SIARC's week-long training includes diagnostic, hearing aid, and hearing assistance technology experiences that may otherwise occur during typical clinic rotations. In addition, the Conference allows students to interact with group members and observe first-hand the consequences of hearing loss for a family and to participate in the problem-solving processes that are a defining feature of the experience.

SIARC is similar to the Elderhostel program offered at Gallaudet University starting in 1981 (Bally & Kaplan, 1988). The goal of that week-long program was to provide information about the effects of hearing loss and coping skills to persons with hearing loss, their families, and friends. An advanced program was also available in which participants explored assistive devices, learned about medical aspects of hearing loss, and tried new approaches to speechreading and problem solving. The classes were led by audiologists, speech-language pathol-

ogists, or project assistants. The project assistants included professionals interested in learning how to conduct aural rehabilitation programs. Although very similar in structure, SIARC differs from the Gallaudet Elderhostel in many ways. First, the lower age limit is not restricted to 60 years as was required by the Elderhostel program. SIARC attendees have been as young as 24 years of age, making needs in the workplace or college environment an important component of the conference. Second, SIARC has a major focus on graduate student education. Students apply assessment and remediation concepts presented in an adult rehabilitation course. The intensive learning experience for students mirrors that of the participants. Third, the real-world experience is an integral component of SIARC. Daily classes include planning strategies to cope with possible communication difficulties to be encountered, as well as sharing self-evaluations following each event by both the students and the participants. Finally, SIARC is designed to address the needs and perceptions of the communication partner by including specialized assessments, notebooks with resources, and guest speakers.

The components of SIARC as it has evolved over 3 years are presented, followed by review of financial support for the conference, and a summary of key components for maximizing student training for service delivery of aural rehabilitation. Finally, a summary of outcome measures surveys conducted at the conclusion of the week is presented. The information is provided as a model for other graduate education programs to enhance their training in aural rehabilitation so that graduates might enter the field with a commitment to a comprehensive rehabilitation program.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Participants

For each of the 3 years, 2001 to 2003, the Conference was announced to all Callier Center clients who had purchased hearing aids within the previous year. Clinicians were asked to contact clients experiencing persistent and significant communication difficulties. Also, brochures were distributed to clients who received services through the Callier Assistive Device Center, to other nearby universities, the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services, and the state and local Self-Help for Hard of Hearing People (SHHH) chapters. The announcement was also posted via a Web page (www.utdallas.edu/~thib/siarc) and listservs. Each summer there were 14 participants with ages ranging from 24 years to 92 years. Of these, 58% (first summer) to 76% (third year) were below 65 years of age and still in the workforce. This is in contrast to the participants of the traditional 1-hour aural rehabilitation classes offered at the Callier Center who were typically over the age of 65 (90 %) and retired (80%).

SIARC was designed to have limited enrollment so that each graduate student could be assigned to a person with hearing loss and his/her communication part-

ner and attend classes with that couple. This allowed for maximum interaction with the couple while utilizing new technology and strategies throughout the day-time and evening activities. Although the number of participants could have been doubled by assigning two couples to each student, the complexity of scheduling and space limitations precluded this arrangement.

The hearing losses of participants who already were using amplification ranged from moderate to profound, and some individuals without amplification became aware of having a mild hearing loss. The majority wore behind-the-ear aids (75%) and purchased their hearing aids through the Callier Center. Two individuals tried amplification for the first time during the conference week and subsequently purchased hearing aids.

About half of the attendees were couples and the other half were singles who had communication partners such as a sister or close friend. Of the couples, the husbands were more likely to be the one wearing the hearing aid (75%). One couple attended all 3 years, and one couple and two individuals attended 2 consecutive years.

Each year, the participants from the previous year were invited to return for one of the presentations by the invited guest lecturer. This was done to provide a refresher on the concepts learned the previous year and information regarding new technologies or research. It is interesting to note that, although the majority of the conference attendees each year were employed, they took vacation time to attend for the week. Four participants traveled approximately 200 miles to attend.

Conference Features

Assessment of needs. During the week, the participants each received an audiologic evaluation, hearing aid evaluation (if wearing amplification), and a communication assessment. As technology rapidly changes, consumers often wonder if there is something that would better serve them, so the assessments provided the necessary information to evaluate their current fitting and recommend a trial with a new device. Hearing assessment included video otoscopy, air and bone conduction pure-tone thresholds, tympanometry, otoacoustic emissions, and sentence recognition in noise. This was performed for the participant with hearing loss and his/her communication partner to facilitate the understanding of this process from both perspectives. Following that, a hearing aid check was performed via electroacoustic and real ear measures for those wearing amplification. Based on these results, technology such as ear level FM receivers or digital aids with noise suppression were offered for trial during the week. In addition, individuals with hearing loss and their communication partners completed a needs assessment that outlined specific problem areas in communication. Self-assessment scales have included the Communication Profile for the Hearing Impaired (CPHI; Demorest & Erdman, 1987) and the Client Oriented Scale of Improve-

ment (COSI; Dillon, James, & Ginis, 1997). For both individuals with hearing loss and their communication partners, this type of an assessment was an important tool that allowed them to enter into a dialogue about their difficulties as well as their goals.

Extensive trials with assistive listening technology. SIARC provided immediate access to listening and alerting technologies. In the traditional delivery of rehabilitative services, individuals learn about hearing assistance technology during hearing aid orientation, traditional weekly audiological rehabilitation groups, or through visits to a listening device center. Often, they forget about or are intimidated by the technologies because they have limited opportunity to try them in the environments in which they are needed. During the Conference, participants were introduced to the technologies in lecture and hands-on formats, and then used them in several social venues. Being able to try the devices with their communication partners in real-world activities allowed them to experience their benefits and/or disadvantages while the audiologist was nearby to solve any problems that may have been misinterpreted as a malfunction. The immediate reinforcement strengthens retention, reduces apprehension, and increases the likelihood that such problem-solving techniques would be used following the Conference.

Instructional sessions. The daily schedule included 50-minute classes, described below, that were offered at the same time each day in small groups of about four or five couples. This small group was conducive to sharing information and addressing everyone's questions. The daily schedule of classes included explanation of hearing loss, assistive listening technology, current research, and coping skills. A sample schedule is included in Appendix A.

1. Explanation of hearing loss and audiogram: Following a general discussion of the audiogram, each participant reviewed his or her own thresholds with respect to speech acoustics. Throughout the week, more diagnostic techniques were completed and explained and additional information was provided regarding speech acoustics. All assessment records are kept in the SIARC notebook for convenient access during class discussions.

2. Assistive listening technology and new developments: A comprehensive review was provided of the general types of hearing assistance technology including alarms, telephone, signal-to-noise enhancement, and text communication. In addition, the legal issues were reviewed so participants understood their rights to request devices. Interactive sessions were provided where several devices were available for trial.

3. Current research in audiology/rehabilitation: To be knowledgeable consumers, participants should be updated on the current research topics such as benefits of high-frequency amplification or the value of testing for dead regions in the cochlea. Presentations on these topics by the invited lecturer, as well as by students conducting research, allowed participants to ask questions in a comfort-

able environment.

4. Coping skills and communication strategies: Clients benefit from not only hearing how others solve problems but also by engaging in the problem-solving process and then practicing the solutions (Trychin, 2002). In the SIARC program, specific strategies were reviewed and practiced in the Coping Strategies class so that communication partners could determine which might be useful in their particular situations. Practice was also offered through a computerized training program, *Communication Made Easy* (Tye-Murray, 2002), in which a difficult communication scene is presented with visual and acoustic cues followed by four possible scenes that might relate to what was said. If the incorrect scene is selected, the user can choose one of several communication strategies such as repeat, rephrase, request one word, or use the “Don’t cover your mouth” instruction, etc. During the evening activities, some of the strategies were applied and the couples shared such experiences during their group sessions the following day.

Real-world practice. Participants gained confidence practicing new strategies or trying new devices within groups of persons with similar difficulties. Furthermore, the visits to theaters, museums, concert halls, and restaurants allowed participants to experience their new techniques with their communication partners. The importance of guided learning and real-world practice was clearly illustrated when one group discussed the detriments of bluffing. One member stated his frustration because he *knew* he should not bluff and *knew* that he should inform others of his difficulty, but he did not quite know *how* to go about doing it in a way that was effective and comfortable. The sessions offered an opportunity to role-play in different scenarios which ultimately led to successful implementation during an outing that evening.

Graduate Student Education

Graduate students were involved in all aspects of planning and implementing SIARC. To gain the skills and confidence to conduct an aural rehabilitation program, they helped determine the class content, delivered the information, participated in group sessions, and interacted with participants in an often emotional climate. Preparation for the summer conference began during a spring-semester adult aural rehabilitation course. In addition to didactic instruction, guided learning exercises fostered the understanding of the impact of hearing loss, productive group dynamics, and effective leadership. These included observation of established support groups for individuals with hearing loss, listening activities, and participation in mock group sessions that emphasize problem-solving activities, coping skills, and communication strategies. Via laboratory coursework, students with simulated hearing loss performed several communication exercises such as obtaining directions to an unknown place, or completing exercises from the *Communication Made Easy* program (Tye-Murray, 2002).

To provide real-life experiences that prepare them for the demands of SIARC, students led an adult aural rehabilitation class. During the spring semester, students had one of several opportunities to provide services on a short-term basis: the university's 4-week Learning to Live with Hearing Loss classes, Coping with Hearing Loss classes at senior centers, and T.E.A.C.H. (Teaching Employees about Communication Handicap) classes that stress effective communication strategies for individuals who communicate with people who are hard of hearing. The latter class was designed specifically for staff in the clinic office and the on-campus Office of Disabilities and was particularly germane to SIARC as the Conference stressed the needs of communication partners.

Other course requirements that complemented student learning goals of SIARC included an investigation of the accessibility of assistive listening technology in various venues within the community. Area medical facilities, government agencies, entertainment facilities, and places of worship were rated with respect to the type and availability of accommodations, knowledge of staff to implement its use, and compatibility of devices with hearing aids. Students advocated within the community for adequate accommodations and learned to stress self-advocacy for their clients. Students also explored the quality and availability of on-line informational resources for hard of hearing people. During the spring semester, students also prepared 45-minute informational sessions intended for presentation at SIARC. Topics included Advocacy and the Americans with Disabilities Act, Assistive Listening Technology, Alerting Systems, Tinnitus, and Understanding the Audiogram. The sessions include related interactive or hands-on activities and handouts for the SIARC resource notebook.

Prior to the start of SIARC, students were assigned to the couple with whom they would interact during the week. Students stayed with the same couple throughout and participated in needs assessments, hearing and hearing aid evaluations, daily maintenance and instruction regarding trial hearing assistance technology or hearing aids, end of conference review, and social activities. University faculty and faculty associates supervised students throughout the week. Through the daily experiences, the learning rewards were magnified as students had opportunities to apply newly-learned information while in frequent contact with their supervisor or professor. Brief staffings occurred at the end of each day with the students and faculty associates who could address the needs/progress of each couple. Alterations to the schedule to accommodate requests were discussed (e.g., a trial with a directional FM transmitter while riding on the noisy bus to the evening activity). Any necessary arrangements such as programming new technology or charging transmitters were completed that evening or the next morning so that the needs of each couple were addressed as completely as possible each day.

PROGRAM COSTS

The cost of meals, transportation to evening activities, and admission fees for SIARC was \$175 per person or \$350 per couple over the period 2001 to 2003. Participants received complete audiological evaluations, hearing aid checks, and assistive technology trials, which would normally have cost approximately \$400. These services were donated by the faculty, staff, and students of the University of Texas at Dallas Program in Communication Disorders.

A grant was received from the Callier Excellence Fund during the first year to support the faculty and graduate students to develop, publicize, and conduct the program. Funds were also used to purchase equipment, notebooks, battery testers, spare batteries, and hearing aid cleaning tools. Lastly, funds were used to support the travel and honorarium for the invited speaker.

Four hearing device manufacturers supplied personal amplification and FM systems, which were used in the classes as well as during the evening activities. Manufacturers also contributed scholarships for one or more couples to attend the conference. They were recognized on the SIARC webpage and company representatives attended the conference one afternoon to share their products and literature. The Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services also provided funds to cover the cost of scholarships for couples and additional resource materials such as the Speech Reading CD-ROMs from the Central Institute for the Deaf (Tye-Murray, 2002).

CONFERENCE OUTCOMES

The SIARC conferences have been attended by an average of 14 participants and 8 graduate students each year. Students earned practicum hours for direct client contact and gained competence in the delivery of aural rehabilitation. During the final session of the week, all participants met together with students and were invited to share what the week had meant to them. Each year, some participants found it difficult to speak because of their strong emotions about what they had experienced during the week. Students routinely reported they learned “first hand” that successful rehabilitation requires more than just a hearing aid.

A formal evaluation was also conducted through the use of a two-page questionnaire that was distributed on the last day with a stamped self-addressed return envelope (see Appendix B for the questionnaire used the last 2 years). There was an 80% to 100% return rate of the questionnaires over the 3 years. The responses from the last 2 years are indicated in italics under the ratings in Appendix B. On average, 76% reported that the conference “definitely” met their needs and expectations. They reported that the material presented was “very helpful” (88%), and would be “very helpful” to them in the future (90%). All of the participants indicated they would recommend the conference to their friends and most of them (75%) were interested in taking additional training in effective communication techniques.

These client and educational outcomes were very positive and support the ef-

forts to continue the SIARC. Participants commented often on the sense of empowerment they gained through understanding their audiogram as it related to speech sounds they were missing as well as learning about hearing assistance technology that would be helpful in social situations. Several commented on the benefit of the hands-on experience with new hearing aid technology and the benefits of interacting with others with similar difficulties. There was some concern expressed that a week-long conference may be too long a commitment, particularly for employed persons. Another challenge from the students' perspective was the dual responsibilities they had that week, participating in SIARC as well as other ongoing coursework and practicum. Therefore, future plans for SIARC are to move the program to the break period between the spring and summer sessions when extracurricular commitments are low.

SUMMARY

The goal of SIARC is to combine service delivery for persons with hearing loss with student training in an intensive format in which communication skills are enhanced through the use of new technology, problem-solving with other couples, real-world trials of devices, and strategies in noisy environments. SIARC has been attended by persons with hearing loss and their significant others for 3 years. Through grant support, approximately 75% of the participants were able to attend the conference on scholarships. Benefits of SIARC extended beyond the participants and the students. Hearing aid manufacturers received direct input from clients with complicated communication profiles. Personnel in community programs or customer service venues benefited from increased awareness of the needs of patrons who are hard of hearing. Overall, SIARC is an intensive program that complements traditional rehabilitation by addressing diverse communication difficulties in a forum that facilitates trust, while allowing for extensive practice by persons with hearing loss as they relate to their families and to the community.

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APPENDIX A

SAMPLE DAILY SCHEDULE FOR SIARC

9:30 to 10:00 am	Lecture by invited speaker
10:00 to 11:00 am	Class #1 ¹ – Explanation of Hearing Loss and Audiogram Class #2 – Assistive Listening Technology and New Developments
11:00 to 12:00 pm	Classes #1 and #2 repeated
12:00 to 1:00 pm	Interactive group lunch
1:00 to 2:00 pm	Class #3 – Current Research in Audiology/Rehabilitation Class #4 – Coping Skills/Communication Strategies
2:00 to 3:00 pm	Classes #3 and #4 repeated
3:00 to 5:00 pm	Group tour ² or optional appointments to try new hearing aid or assistive listening technology, visit resource center or view informational videos
5:30 to 6:30 pm	Interactive group dinner
7:00 to 9:00 pm	Evening activity ³

¹Two classes are offered simultaneously in the morning and afternoon so that smaller groups of participants can attend each class.

²Example group tours: Brain Imaging Research Lab, Meyerson Symphony Center, Dallas World Aquarium, Dallas Arboretum

³Example evening activities: Musical Performance, Square Dancing, Wheel of Fortune Game, Dallas Arboretum, Magic Show

APPENDIX B
SIARC EVALUATION

Responses obtained during years two and three are shown in italics in the boxes below selected response items.

Please read and answer the following questions. Circle the number which most *closely* indicates your response. Written responses are also welcomed. We appreciate your opinions.

1. How well have the leaders presented the material so that you can relate to it?

	<i>Not clear at all</i>				<i>Absolutely clear and relevant</i>	
	0	1	2	3	4	5
Technology Class	0	1	2	3	4	5
Research Class	0	1	2	3	4	5
Audiogram Class	0	1	2	3	4	5
Coping Class	0	1	2	3	4	5

2. How helpful did you find the material presented?

	<i>Not helpful</i>				<i>Very helpful</i>	
	0	1	2	3	4	5
	0	1	2	3	4	5
	<i>1</i>				<i>3</i>	<i>24</i>

3. Do you feel that the information you have learned will be helpful to you in the future?

	<i>Not helpful at all</i>				<i>Very Helpful</i>	
	0	1	2	3	4	5
	0	1	2	3	4	5
					<i>3</i>	<i>25</i>

4. Please identify the aspects of the conference that you found to be most useful.

- a. _____
- b. _____

5. Are there any modifications that you can suggest to improve the conference?

- a. _____
- b. _____

6. Did the conference meet your needs and expectations?

	<i>Not at all</i>				<i>Definitely</i>	
	0	1	2	3	4	5
	0	1	2	3	4	5
					<i>2</i>	<i>4 19</i>

7. Are you interested in taking additional training in effective communication techniques?

	<i>Not at all</i>				<i>Definitely</i>	
	0	1	2	3	4	5
	0	1	2	3	4	5
					<i>2</i>	<i>5 21</i>

8. Would you recommend this conference to your friends?

<i>Not at all</i>			<i>Definitely</i>		
0	1	2	3	4	5
					28

9. How useful were the notebooks?

<i>Not at all</i>			<i>Definitely</i>		
0	1	2	3	4	5
					18

10. Do you plan to take further action to investigate and improve your hearing aid communication ability?

<i>No action</i>			<i>Definitely</i>		
0	1	2	3	4	5
					21

Please rate the evening activities:

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Wheel of Fortune						
Cinderella Musical						
Meyerson Tour						
Arboretum Tour						

Please rate the food:

<i>Bad</i>			<i>Very Good</i>		
0	1	2	3	4	5

Please indicate how these evening activities were beneficial to you.

- a. _____
- b. _____

Your additional comments:
