

Clinics on Campus

Students Serve the Community

Students are gaining valuable clinical experience and serving the community in the process thanks to two clinics run by the School of Health and Natural Sciences' (SHNS) Communication Disorders and Physical Therapy Programs on the Dobbs Ferry Campus.

For more than 30 years, the Mercy College Speech and Hearing Clinic has served clients of all ages who are experiencing disorders related to speech, language, swallowing and hearing as well as intellectual disabilities. Patients are children and adults from the community, and services are offered on a sliding fee scale, which makes the clinic a great option for people with limited or no health insurance.

Students in the Communication Disorders Graduate Program lead the patient evaluations and provide therapy while observed by licensed speech-language pathologists. All graduate students spend two semesters working in the clinic before starting their off-campus externships.

"The on-campus clinic is a great way to gradually expose students to clinical work," said Ashley O'Rourke, M.S. '11, Ed.D., director of the Communication Disorders Program. "We get to teach using what we consider to be the gold standard model and give students a strong foundation."

Maria Ciraco, M.S. '22, was a patient at the clinic as a child and then returned to Mercy many years later to study communication disorders. Her academic achievement at Mercy resulted in her being chosen as the 2022 Commencement

graduate student speaker for SHNS. She still remembers her own therapy sessions at age five: "My Mercy clinicians were so skilled that I never knew I was working on my speech."

Ciraco considers her time working in the clinic to be invaluable. She recounted leading sessions with a child who needed to improve his language skills, so she planned discussions about topics such as

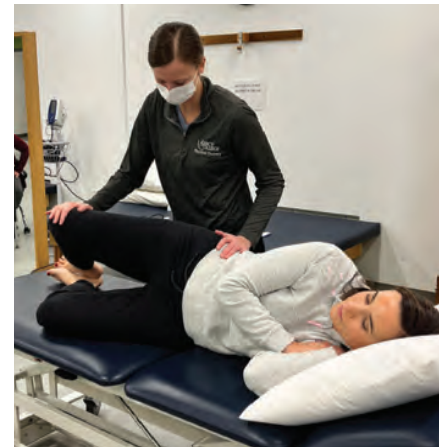
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camping to engage him in speaking. He ended up making significant progress. "I'm so grateful for my experience in the clinic and for all the Mercy professors and clinic staff," she said. "It made me such a better clinician now" — referring to her current role as a clinical fellow at the New York School for the Deaf.

To serve more clients, the Mercy Speech and Hearing Clinic is expanding its services. The clinic ran an aphasia intensive program in summer 2022 to treat patients who lost the ability to speak, which often occurs after a stroke. A few hospitals across the country offer similar programs, but they are expensive with long waitlists. Through a grant from the Phelps Healthcare Foundation, the Speech and Hearing Clinic was able to offer a much more affordable program and will do so again in summer

2023. There are also plans to expand the clinic's teletherapy services, an effort led by Dawn Cotter-Jenkins, director of clinical education and services, communication disorders at Mercy College, who has expertise in teletherapy.

Mercy's Physical Therapy Program also runs a clinic, which serves the Mercy community free of charge as



a way for students to gain clinical experience. Patients visit the clinic with a variety of movement-related issues, often related to exercise injuries. Some patients come in just once for an initial evaluation, while others return regularly for ongoing treatment. Third-year students are required to conduct three patient sessions, but many volunteer to do more.

"The first time I worked in the clinic, I was nervous," said Gil Moskowitz '24. "But then you start talking to the patient and everything you know just starts coming back. Such a cool feeling. The opportunity to apply all the theoretical knowledge you've gained at school is invaluable."

Students lead each appointment, which usually involves a full evaluation, some treatment and then discussion of a home exercise program. A faculty member who is a licensed physical therapist — usually Clinic Director and Associate Professor Matthew Hyland, Ph.D. — observes the entire appointment and confers with the student outside the examination room a few times to give feedback on the student’s assessment and plan.

“This is high-impact practice that sets our students up to be confident clinicians,” said Nannette Hyland, PT, Ph.D., D.P.T., director of the Physical Therapy Program. “Many students feel nervous about being the therapist, but

afterwards, they’re always impressed with how much they knew and how well they did.”

For the past few years, the clinic had operated on a “pop-up” basis for two or three days per semester. At the request of Matt Kilcullen Jr., assistant vice president for athletics, the clinic added weekly sessions for student-athletes in the spring 2022 semester. Then in the fall 2022 semester, clinic hours expanded again to include regular weekly hours on Tuesday nights and Wednesday afternoons. In the spring 2023 semester, the clinic was open to all Mercy students, faculty and staff.

Adam Castro, vice president of

enrollment management, visited the clinic because of chronic knee problems related to running. “The Mercy student working with me, Danielle Stackhouse ’24, was amazing and had an incredible bedside manner. My appointment was about 80 minutes long and very thorough. And the exercises she showed me how to do at home helped!”

Looking ahead, Nannette Hyland plans to involve second-year students in the physical therapy clinic. She is also strategizing on how to expand the clinic, so that it can help shape even more compassionate, innovative clinicians who support people in leading healthier, happier lives.

