

Assistant program offered

What would a speech language pathology assistant do? What groups of people would they serve? I've never heard of a speech language pathology assistant. These are among the most common questions and comments heard by Linda Wortman Lowe, program director, when she talks with students about the first speech language pathology assistants program.



Lowe

Surrounded by several preschoolers, the SLPA may pull out a "grab bag" full of objects we use everyday, such as spoons and cups, and would assist the children in taking turns to name or describe the object. The SLPA would also encourage the children to tell what the object does, identify it if it is large or small, name what color it is and ask who wants to go next. All of these language experiences come from one play opportunity.

In another setting, an SLPA may work with a person who has experienced a stroke or a communication disability. Helping people to relearn how to speak or to use devices that talk for them is the primary goal of communication intervention. Because the SLPA is under supervision of the speech, language pathologist, all activities would be demonstrated and approved for the SLPA in all settings.

The new SLPA program offered at Western Piedmont Community College and four other colleges in the region will prepare graduates to work under the supervision of a licensed speech, language pathologist to provide day-to-day activities for those persons experiencing a communication disorder. Employment opportunities may include working with speech, language pathologists in various health care or education settings including hospitals, public schools, home health care, long-term care facilities, and private practice while caring for people throughout the lifespan.

"This is an opportunity of a lifetime for students to be the actual

pioneers of a new health-care employment track," Lowe states, "and as pioneers, this ground-breaking effort will change the history of health-care service delivery as we know it. Graduates of the SLPA program will have a variety of choices in the type of work setting, the age of the persons being served and will enjoy the many challenges and rewards that come with serving people with communication needs."

Only graduate of the associate degree in speech language pathology assisting will qualify for registration with the North Carolina State Board of Examiners for Speech Language Pathology and Audiology. As a newly designed program, it responds to the surveyed needs of a statewide job analysis used to develop the SLPA program in order to meet the standards set by the Board of Examiners.

The first year may be completed on a full- or part-time basis at WPCC. Beginning with the summer semester of 1998, the second phase of the SLPA program will be conducted at Caldwell Community College, where course work will include broad-based information on communication and hearing disorders and instruction in following written plans for individual clients.

Supervised field experience will include working with clients of different ages with various communication disorders.

Appalachian State University in Boone offers a master's program in speech and language pathology.

For more information on enrolling in this program, contact Nancy Shoaf at WPCC at 438-6128 or Carolyn Woodard at Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute, allied health admissions counselor, at 726-2254.