VANDERBILT DEPARTMENT OF HEARING & SPEECH SCIENCES (DHSS)

Autism Specialty Track

High-Quality Personnel Preparation to Serve Infants and Children with Autism
(#H325R240079)

Students enrolled in the Master of Science in Speech-Language Pathology program are required to complete at least five semesters of coursework and a 10-week clinical externship. Students participating in the DHSS Autism Specialty Track also complete the following:

- **Advanced clinical skills training**: Trainees will complete training in autism assessment and diagnosis, how to work effectively in interdisciplinary teams when working with individuals with autism, stimulation experiences with standardized patients, and learnings within the Vanderbilt Treatment and Research Institute for Autism Spectrum Disorders (TRIAD) applied behavioral analysis (ABA) clinical program.
- **Autism-focused Maymester**: 3-week immersion clinical placement working with children with autism.
- **Extended Clinical Practica**: Trainees will receive placements in the Vanderbilt Preschool for Children with Autism (PCA) and/or the Vanderbilt Bill Wilkerson Center (VBWC) Autism Diagnostic Clinic. Placements at these sites will include hands-on experience in delivering autism-specific therapeutic services.
- **Autism Journal Club**: Trainees participate in a monthly journal club devoted to research-to-practice guided readings and discussions in the area of autism. Guest speakers from other departments lead or participate in the discussions for some sessions.
- **Enhanced coursework** (plus Maymester): Trainees take classes in the Hearing and Speech Sciences and Special Education departments. Courses include Communication in Autism: Research to Practice, Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), and Management Procedures for Academic & Social Behavior.

OTHER PROGRAM OPPORTUNITIES:

Travel Award: As available, trainees receive funding to attend an autism-specific conference.

Autism clinical research: SLP trainees who choose to do a research project are linked to existing autism clinical research projects for support and mentoring of supervised research experiences. This experience may support one or more of the following products: Master's Thesis project, conference presentations, authorship on a journal article.

Trainees may receive grant funding for tuition support. Specific expectations for trainees may vary depending on funding support. The Project Director and Project SLP will provide clear guidance on responsibilities for each trainee.

For more information please contact:
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https://medschool.vanderbilt.edu/hearing-speech/msslp/specialty/

Scan for more info and this flyer

VANDERBILT School of Medicine | Hearing and Speech Sciences

7/23/2026

VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF HEARING AND SPEECH SCIENCES GRADUATE STUDIES

Autism Specialty Track Value-Added Experiences

VBWC Autism Diagnostic Program
Through a collaborative partnership between the VBWC and Vanderbilt TRIAD/Division of Developmental Medicine (DDM), students gain hands-on experience in comprehensive autism evaluations. Students who have completed formal ADOS-2 training may:

- Observe comprehensive autism evaluations
- Assist with DSM-5 parent interviews
- Conduct and document clinical observations
- Administer and score ADOS-2 assessments
- Administer standardized language assessments
- Participate in parent counseling and feedback sessions

Vanderbilt Preschool for Children with Autism (PCA)
Intensive communication program for children ages 18 months–5 years. Led by speech-language pathologists and incorporating evidence-based interventions and ABA principles to target communication development and promote social, academic, and behavioral growth.

- Intensive placement (2 days/week) utilizing AAC, modified PECS, Pivotal Response Training, visual supports, classroom management strategies, and behavior support. Students assume increasing leadership responsibilities, including facilitating a "PCA Café" family education session.
- Tues–Thurs, 8:00–11:30 a.m.

ADOS-2 Training Workshop
The ADOS-2 is the standard instrument for assessing and diagnosing autism. Experts at Vanderbilt's TRIAD program conduct this workshop and provide attendees with hands-on experience in the administration, scoring, and interpretation of the ADOS-2 for a variety of ages. Completion of this workshop results in clinical certification for the ADOS-2 and is provided at no cost to trainees.

ABA Clinical Activities
Students may complete a variety of trainings and observations of ABA modules and live sessions in Vanderbilt ABA clinics (e.g., Vanderbilt TRIAD Tadpole Clinic).

Autism Journal Club
Students review assigned articles related to multi/interdisciplinary practice in ASD and participate in collaborative discussions connecting research findings to coursework and clinical experiences. This monthly, 1 hour discussion typically consists of informal Q&A and is held remotely via Zoom. From time to time, this time slot will be used to host relevant speakers or other activities of interest to our Specialty Track. Date and time for this will be determined each semester based on students' other academic commitments.

Maymester
Maymester provides students in our specialty track a unique 3-week immersive (full-time) practicum working with children with autism and their families. During the usual month-long break between spring and summer semesters, graduate student clinicians will participate in classroom and/or clinical placements designed specifically to meet our student's individual interests and needs. Maymester experiences may consist of observations of live and recorded autism assessments, live and recorded ABA therapy sessions, webinars and other learning activities.

Center for Experiential Learning & Assessment (CELA)
CELA is a highly innovative instructional environment at VUMC. CELA's "standardized patients" are trained employees who portray patients and interact in a standardized scenario with our students. For example, standardized patients might portray parents receiving the diagnosis of autism for their child from our students. These patient scenarios are developed in a problem-based learning format that can take a wide variety of forms (e.g., assessing patients, counseling patients and/or families, participating in an individualized education program [IEP] meeting).

Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (LEND)
As part of the Communication in Autism: Research to Practice course, students complete two LEND modules. These modules are focused on autism and how to work effectively in interdisciplinary teams.