Sac State’s speech clinic:
Celebrating 60 years of service

The two Sacramento State students sit in the small room with 3-year-old Rosalie McInnis, holding a make-believe tea party. The three talk among themselves as the students lay out tiny cups, saucers and plates, and bring out the “guests” – stuffed animals and puppets.

Rosalie pours out the tea and gives cookies to the guests, interacting with the characters.

It looks like play, but there is very serious work going on here. Rosalie is one of the clients at the University’s Maryjane Rees Language Speech and Hearing Center. It’s part of the Speech Pathology & Audiology Department, which is celebrating its 60th anniversary – six decades of bringing affordable, quality care to its clients. During that time, the department has grown and is ranked as one of the best graduate programs of its kind in Northern California.

“We’re working with Rosalie on pronouns,” says graduate student Carrie Hagler, who is paired with undergrad Janelle Wong. They even sing a song about tea parties with plenty of “he’s” and “she’s” in it. “She’s getting bombarded with pronouns today,” Hagler continues, “so next week we’ll be asking her to say more pronouns.”

Rosalie’s mother Mary brought her daughter to the clinic when the young girl was just 2 because Mary was concerned about her speech development.

“We are very blessed,” Mary McInnis says. “We feel very fortunate to have Sac State’s help.”

It’s not just children who receive treatment at the clinic. The program covers all ages. And it covers all types of disorders. “You have to think of it as more than just speech, but anything that gets in the way of communication,” says Department Chair Laureen O’Hanlon. That includes breathing and swallowing disorders, stuttering, dyslexia and physical issues such as cleft palate and stroke.

Private clinics might charge $200 for one 50-minute session. The Maryjane Rees clinic charges fees based on clients’ needs, usually $400 for 24 sessions. About 200
clients a week take advantage of the service, which is delivered by five faculty members, 20 part-time faculty, 60 graduate students and 160 undergrad juniors.

The program is also a tremendous benefit for the students, who get exposure to a wide range of fields, not just in the clinic but also through field work. Their reasons for choosing this major are varied, but all of them cite the rewards of helping their clients as a major attraction.

“One of the greatest things for me is to see when the light goes on for somebody,” says second-semester grad clinician Patti Osterholm. “When they say something right or when they get something we’ve taught and you can see the joy in their faces.”

“It’s a great career field, so people in our field tend to be happy and rewarded by what they’re doing,” says O’Hanlon. “

The department will celebrate its achievements with “60 Show-stopping Years,” an Oscar-themed gala from 6 to 9 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 10, at the University’s Alumni Center.

In the spirit of Hollywood glamour, each table at the celebration will be decorated with themes from classic movies that relate to different aspects of speech and hearing services such as The King’s Speech, My Fair Lady, Breakfast at Tiffany’s, Slumdog Millionaire, Around the World in 80 Days, The Phantom of the Opera, The Wizard of Oz, and The Miracle Worker. Faculty, clients, alumni and invited community partners will arrive in formal attire, posing for red carpet photos.

The department has reason to celebrate. Since it was founded in 1952, the clinic has served more than 14,000 people from ages 2 to 102.

For Fred and Samantha Coburn, the clinic and its therapists are an invaluable resource. Their 9-year-old son Cedric has Angelman syndrome, a disorder that causes developmental delay and lack of speech, among other symptoms.

The family lives in Napa, but found that Sacramento State offered better services at a better cost than anything in their area.

“Cedric has come so far,” says an emotional Samantha. “It’s made a difference for him to be able to communicate with everyone else about his wants and needs. This is like his little second home. He enjoys coming here.”

It’s that kind of result that O’Hanlon finds so gratifying. “It’s wonderful to be part of a program that serves the community at the same time it’s serving the students. Every day I’m rewarded by what I see happen and the energy around us.”

For more information on the anniversary celebration, call (916) 278-6601. Information on the program is available at www.csus.edu/HHS/SPA/. For media assistance, call Sacramento State’s Public Affairs office at (916) 278-6156.
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