Supporting Students Who Stutter

Pei-Tzu Tsai, Ph.D., CCC-SLP
Assistant Professor, Clinical Supervisor
Department of Communicative Disorders and Sciences
What is stuttering?

- Disfluent speech
  - (.) I stutter
  - I-I-I-I s-s-s-stutter
  - I ssssstutter

- Learned avoidance, struggling behaviors
  - Making little eye contact
  - Saying “I don’t know” rather than the actual response
  - Using “um/uh” (fillers) a lot

- In 1 out of 100 students we teach

- A neurophysiological disorder
  - Stress is NOT the cause
Stuttering brain...

Speech production
(motor regulation)

Cognition
(attention regulation)

Emotional memory
(emotion regulation)

(Source: Human Brain Project)

(e.g. Chang et al., 2015; O’neill et al., 2017)
What are some characteristics of a college student who stutters?

The student may seem...

- Quiet
  (not speaking much in class)
- Uninterested, unengaged
  (making little eye contact, not speaking much in class)
- Nervous
- Unprepared, unprofessional
  (saying “I don’t know”; stuttering, using fillers: um..uh..I..like..)
What are some classroom challenges for a college student who stutters?

The student may feel anxious and stutter more when...

- speaking to an audience
  (e.g. classroom presentations)
- speaking to authorities
  (e.g. professors)
- speaking to strangers
  (e.g. meeting peers for the first few times)
- speaking when called on in class
  (e.g. random oral Q/A in class)
- speaking under time pressure
  (e.g. oral exams)
"I had a speech class that was mandatory. And we had to give a speech. And I was terrified," O'Neal recalls. "So I called Coach Brown...and he made me practice it in front of him 100 times...I just went and I nailed the speech..."

(Source: http://www.wbur.org/onlyagame/2016/10/28/shaquille-oneal-little-shaq-books)
How can faculty provide **educational accommodations** for a college student who stutters?

- **Difficulty speaking to professors**
  - Invite students in need to speak to you privately to show support
  - Privately communicate expectations (see below)

- **Difficulty speaking to strangers/new peers**
  - Allow paired ice-breaker activities for new groups of students

- **Difficulty with timed presentations in front of the class**
  - Allow more time, visual cues (NOT the same as reading from scripts)
  - Weigh more on content, less on format/style, when possible
  - Maintain natural eye contact to show interest and support

- **Difficulty with unplanned Q/A’s in class**
  - Communicate privately about answering questions when called on or volunteering to answer questions
  - Communicate time management strategies in class

- **Always ask for consent before asking students to share their experiences**