

# Sumitrajit Dhar

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T 847 491 2470

F 847 491 2523

Dr. John Peterson, Ph.D.  
President  
University of Tennessee

[s-dhar@northwestern.edu](mailto:s-dhar@northwestern.edu)

Dear Dr. Peterson,

I received the unfortunate news that the University of Tennessee had decided to close the department of Audiology and Speech Pathology on its Knoxville campus about a month ago. I have recently found out that this decision might not be final, and that the University is still accumulating information about the impact of eliminating this program. I would like to take this opportunity to add my thoughts to your database.

I am a scientist interested in hearing and am also clinically trained as an Audiologist and am currently a member of the faculty at the Roxelyn and Richard Pepper Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders at Northwestern University. Work in my laboratory is focussed on inner ear mechanics and the resulting acoustic emissions that can be recorded in the ear canal. Dr. Ashley Harkrider on your faculty has a similar interest. Professionally, I am the current president of the Illinois Academy of Audiology and serve on two national committees related to research and academic education in Audiology. My involvement in the field of hearing science and my experiences with different professional organizations has given me a clear perspective on the contributions of the faculty in the Department of Audiology and Speech Pathology at the University of Tennessee and the impact of the training programs housed in that department.

Work initiated by Dr. Anna Nabalek and now continued by other members of your faculty has created a new important and useful clinical tool in the Acceptable Noise Level (ANL) test. Listening in noise remains to be the most significant challenge for those with hearing loss and even the most sophisticated amplification device is unable to provide substantial relief to this problem. The ANL test has become a vital tool in the clinician's arsenal in ascertaining the potential impact of noise on an individual's behavior and comfort. There are clear signs that this work will be carried forward by other members of your faculty and applied to different types of amplification devices.

Electronic and digital signal processing technology is developing at a rapid pace and today's amplification devices, hearing aids and cochlear implants alike, are incorporating these new technologies often without any evaluation of their efficacy. One of the members of your faculty Dr. Patrick Plyler has been one of the rare voices to systematically evaluate new technologies in hearing aids and report their impact on human behavior. Such work is not only valuable for the practitioner and the consumer, but also sets a perfect example for students coming into any health-care related field.

I am also familiar with the work of Dr. Deborah Von Hapsburg, another member of your faculty. Even at this early stage of her career she has taken on and answered some very important questions pertaining to speech perception in infants. This population is inherently difficult to study but understanding the development of speech perception is key to developing realistic models of sensory perception of speech and language as well as its breakdown. Dr. Von Hapsburg's work dovetails with work done in Dr. Ashley Harkrider's laboratory. Dr. Harkrider has developed a line of work that is pivotal to the development of sensitive physiological measures of peripheral auditory function. It is noteworthy that along with developing knowledge about the sensitivity physiological tests of auditory function, Dr. Harkrider has also shed light on how these measures are affected by more ecologically relevant stimuli. In fact, one of the most interesting aspects of this group of researchers is their constant collaboration in parallel with their individual research enterprise.

The high quality of research and knowledge generation that I have noted above is readily apparent in presentations by students from this program at meetings and conferences. I for one always circle the presentations authored by your students when I attend any audiological conference. In outlining these significant lines of research work and training, I come to the realization that this work will go on as these individuals will find academic homes at other prestigious institutions. It is unfortunate that the history and tradition of high quality training and research in the hearing sciences cannot continue at the University of Knoxville, Tennessee.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sumitrajit Dhar'.

Sumitrajit Dhar, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor