

Audiology from the Student's Perspective

By Erica B. Friedland

Those in our profession have numerous outlets to voice opinions, learn what others are thinking, and discuss current trends. Listservs, written publications, or live discussions are some of the many forums where these exchanges take place. The majority are written or posted by individuals who are currently practicing (or researching). The question is, when do we hear from the up-and-coming in the profession? How many times have we said and heard, "Students are the future." Yet when do we take the time to ask them what they are thinking and then really listen to their thoughts and ideas about current topics and the future of the profession? I was curious and decided to ask students at ACAE-accredited programs exactly what they were thinking. There is a lot we can learn from these insightful and thoughtful answers. This is the first of a two-part series.

Q: Why did you choose audiology for a career?

A: I think my decision to pursue audiology stemmed from a combination of events. It started out as the stereotypical, "I fell in love after my first audiology class." I felt like I was on the edge of my seat learning about ears and hearing (and I feel like such a dork saying that now). It was one of the few classes that actually captivated my attention. I did an internship with the Boston

Children's Hospital. What really hooked me was working on the finishing touches for a cochlear implant convention they were hosting. Implantees, families, and professionals all gathered to learn, share, and network. If I hadn't seen the implant on some of these individuals, I never would have known they were born with a hearing impairment. It was so incredible to me that an audiologist could have such a profound impact on someone's life, and I wanted to be a part of that.

Diana Russell, Nova Southeastern University (NSU), Class of 2014

A: I was drawn to the field of audiology from a personal inspiration. Growing up with a family member who has autism and is non-verbal, I have experienced first-hand the complexities involved in discovering appropriate and feasible modes of communication. Similarly, hearing loss commonly creates challenges and communication barriers. As an audiologist, I want to help these individuals connect to the surrounding world by providing them with access to sound and appropriate strategies. Through both conventional and creative techniques, I hope to offer individualized care. Audiology provides a balance between offering medical health care and personal patient care.

Sara Garbo, Washington University in St. Louis (WUSTL), Class of 2015



A: Unlike some of the students in my program, I never set out thinking I wanted to be an audiologist or SLP or anything of that nature. My original life plan was to join the military. In pursuing this path, I attended West Point and everything was on track until I had an extensive knee injury that left me unable to walk for seven months. My recovery/rehab occurred in an Army hospital, and I was exposed to a variety of injuries, a portion of which were acoustic in nature. My physical therapist specialized in vestibular therapy, and during our sessions we would talk about her



several programs and researched their faculty members, current research projects, clinical sites, curriculum, and funding opportunities. Having access to a variety of clinical sites is critically important to the development of all graduate clinicians.

Molly Krygowski, The Ohio State University (OSU), Class of 2016

A: When applying to an AuD program, a main focus of mine was on the overall quality of the school. Not that lists from the Internet are always correct or accurate, but I know that there are lists out there ranking the AuD programs across the country, and I would lie if I say I didn't look at them and if they didn't sway me somewhat. However, that said, just because a program is at the top of the list doesn't mean it's the best school or is the right fit for you.

I researched several potential schools' Web sites and just browsed around. For me, however silly this is, the easier I was able to navigate their Web site, the better I felt about that school. I then looked for opportunities that they offered. I wanted options both during and after school—research, clinic rotations, job opportunities, student groups, etc., the more the better. Also, tuition was a big player in deciding where to apply. Looking for scholarship opportunities is a must. Graduate school isn't cheap. Interviewing or visiting a school for a tour is another must. You'll never know if you truly like a program unless you visit and can picture yourself going there.

Adam Voss, WUSTL, Class of 2017

career. Long story short, I refocused my career goals, and here I am today.

Shannon McCormick, NSU, Class of 2017

Q: When applying to AuD programs, what were the most important characteristics you looked for in a program?

A: While there are many aspects of a program that I considered, the most important things I looked for were the program's core initiatives, if they were based within a medical

school, and what my instincts told me after my visit. My experiences and impressions during my visits were what stuck out to me the most. I firmly believe in visiting a program before applying to get a true sense of how you see yourself in that particular environment. If it's not meant to be, you will feel it at that initial visit.

Alyssa Pursley, WUSTL, Class of 2016

A: In choosing an AuD program, I was looking for the most well-rounded clinical and research experience possible. I applied to

A: To be totally honest, I was very naïve to what I should be looking for in a program. Audiology was such a new concept to me; I didn't really

know where to start. My search circled primarily on locations that were outside of New England. I never had the “study abroad” experience in undergrad and thought this would be a great opportunity to step outside of my comfort zone, foster my independence, and experience life outside of MA for a little while. Looking back, I could easily tell you a list of things I should have been looking for, such as diverse clinical experiences, a well-rounded curriculum, and a faculty with diverse specialties that we can learn from.

Diana Russell, NSU, Class of 2014

Q: What are the biggest challenges AuD students are facing today?

A: As audiology now requires a doctorate, I think one of the biggest challenges facing students is affording the degree. While grants and scholarships are available, most students have to take out a significant amount of loans to pay for school. Due to this, many audiology students will be saddled with debt for years after graduation. Students might feel the need to work part-time jobs to help with expenses and have to sacrifice time that could be used for studying or research to work. Another challenge is balancing clinical experience with research. As some programs require a capstone or thesis project, students might not be getting as much clinical experience as they would like.

Sarah Webster, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH), Class of 2017

A: Besides final exams and papers... AuD students are faced with several challenges in today’s constantly

changing health-care world. As a student, it’s hard to keep track of what’s going on outside the classroom. Especially as first and second year students, although we have clinic a few times a week, it’s hard to follow the day-to-day happenings of the typical audiologist outside the few hours a week we have with them. I feel like there is so much beyond what you can learn in the classroom that is necessary knowledge for the job.

Adam Voss, WUSTL, Class of 2017

A: The biggest challenge that AuD students are facing today is recognition amongst others in the medical field. Many times I have explained what I am going to school for to members of the health-care community, but to no avail. Once people find out that we are not obtaining an “MD,” people seem to disregard the extensive nature of the AuD. However, I do think this will change over time. The more AuD students who wish to get involved and educate the community, the more respect our field will receive.

Kelly Sharpe, NSU, Class of 2017

A: I would argue that one of the biggest challenges is lack of autonomy and stability. The controversies surrounding scope of practice and professional autonomy are confusing and concerning for students. Even at the student level, it is clear that divided leadership also divides resources and legislative power.


Sadie Schwarz, UNC-CH, Class of 2016

A: I believe the biggest challenge facing AuD students today is determining how we, as entry-level audiologists, will demonstrate our expertise in hearing health care.

With the introduction and growth of Internet hearing aid corporations, we must assert our value as professionals over the convenience of purchasing hearing aids from Internet retailers. Providing evidence-based, comprehensive patient care, validated through reliable outcome measures, ensures the continued recognition of audiologists as experts in hearing health care. Molly Krygowski, OSU, Class of 2016

Conclusion

It is clear as a profession we have to continue the monumental task of educating the world, including our partners in other health-related fields, as to what we do and why it is important. Graduating students that are knowledgeable, experienced, and worthy of the respect of their medical professional peers is one of the pieces of the puzzle. The key to strengthening this piece is built into accreditation standards. Rigor of education and well-rounded, diverse clinical training must be assured. If we want our profession to be more respected, then we must make it more respectable. This is done through consistency from program to program. This is what one accreditation umbrella accomplishes.

Check back to read student responses to a new set of questions in the next issue of *Audiology Today’s* ACAE Corner, September/October 2014. 

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