

Trainee Matters

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The AuD at Salus University: a Capstone Experience

In this issue, we continue exploring audiology training routes across the world with a focus on distance learning opportunities. This article is provided by **Karen Myers** who completed the Doctor of Audiology (AuD) Online Bridge programme at Salus University.

Completing the International Bridge Doctor of Audiology (AuD) programme at Salus University has been the culmination of both a personal and professional journey for me. I am happy to share the details of this adventure in hope that it may help to motivate others who may be contemplating the pursuit of this same path.

I have been an audiologist for many years and I have loved being part of this profession. I have relished the ongoing process of continuing education that helped me to remain current with new discoveries and methods in the field. I have witnessed the rapid expansion of technology and the explosion of knowledge about hearing science and the human brain. These advances have catapulted us into an exciting era of hearing healthcare, laden with unprecedented opportunities and challenges. In recent years, I have become particularly interested in auditory processing disorders and I've immersed myself in learning as much about the topic as I can.

As an early student of audiology [1], the Master of Arts in Audiology programme I completed was just one year. Some of the audiology/speech pathology undergraduate programmes at the time were an outgrowth of faculties of education and, unfortunately, coursework was not as deeply rooted in the sciences as it is now. In the ensuing years, there has been a needed shift to a strong foundation in science as a prerequisite to entering graduate school. There have been ongoing discussions about the comparative value of an arts vs. science education for audiology, leaving some to question whether students with a predominantly science background were better prepared to be audiologists than those students who had pursued a more diverse liberal arts undergraduate programme.

Fortunately, recent research has begun to

show the importance of integrating science and art in healthcare education to create observant, compassionate practitioners who engage well with their patients [2,3]. Moreover, during my time at Salus University, I found my original training, while brief, provided an excellent foundation for further exploration and learning.

For several years, I vacillated about whether I should apply for the Doctor of Audiology programme. I was much closer to retirement than I deemed practical for what seemed so large an investment in time and resources. Overwhelmed by personal and family concerns, I hesitated through two deadline extensions and then I decided not to complete the application process I had begun at another university. I continued to watch as the final deadline arrived and the application portal closed.

Serendipitously, a few months later I was part of a panel for an employment interview. The candidate happened to mention that there was a four-day workshop for auditory processing disorders at the university from which he would soon be graduating. I learned it was Salus University, and I felt driven to inquire if they would accept me as a participant in the workshop. It was then that my relationship with Salus University began. From the first contact, I encountered an open, friendly, welcoming team of individuals who helped me complete the workshop application and travel arrangements for the learning experience.

I later learned that this workshop was one of the mandatory on-campus events that each AuD student must attend to complete the requirements for the degree. I also learned that while the online distance learning AuD programme at Salus University designed for American audiologists transitioning from the Master's degrees had ended, the International AuD Bridge programme was in full operation

and continued to enroll students from around the world.

The workshop experience was excellent. The teaching staff was stellar, the curriculum was well-crafted and the camaraderie among the students and with the faculty was refreshing. The Director of Distance Education Programs, Dr Giri Sundar, encouraged me to apply for entry to the International AuD Bridge programme. A new cohort was registering for classes in just two weeks. I demurred, thinking of my roles as a mother and a daughter, both of which needed extra attention at the time. I talked to students who were already in the programme and they assured me that it was possible to balance my personal responsibilities with my academic efforts. Ultimately, thinking 'why not try?' I submitted the necessary documents and forms and was accepted. As I began the courses, I really enjoyed being back in an academic environment, even after having been away for several decades.

The International AuD Bridge programme at Salus University provides a unique advantage for the practising audiologist. The lectures can be viewed asynchronously, allowing maximum schedule flexibility. The structure of the programme allows the student to view and acquire knowledge through the lens of their professional experience.

Salus University has a set curriculum of 28 courses that everyone must complete plus two workshops on selected topics. This provides the homogeneity which ensures that each student has a similar experience and draws from the same well of knowledge. A degree from Salus University means that the candidate is exposed to the latest evidence-based research and current best practices in advanced auditory biology, psychoacoustics, genetics, auditory electrophysiology, otoacoustic emissions, intraoperative neurophysiologic monitoring, tinnitus and hyperacusis, assessment and treatment of vestibular disorders, auditory processing disorders, auditory neuropathy spectrum disorders, early hearing detection

in infants, paediatric audiology, amplification and assistive technology, cochlear implants and other implantable devices, educational audiology, aural rehabilitation, and industrial audiology, among other courses. Included in the curriculum was the course 'Signals, systems and speech perception' which provided a perspective that addressed the integrated interplay of nature, art and technology.

The classes are arranged in such a way that the two classes taught in each six-week session are interrelated. Taking both classes together creates a powerful synergy that maximises the learning experience. The courses are taught by world-renowned professors who are leaders and giants in their respective specialties. Each teacher brings a wealth of expertise and experience that provides not only a rich didactic environment, but access that allows mentoring and guidance beyond the virtual classroom. Every teacher showed a personal interest and commitment to helping us succeed.

One of the concerns that is often expressed when considering online education is the lack of interaction between the students and the opportunity for meaningful discussions [4]. I believe that Salus University has done an excellent job of engaging the students in conversations through discussion boards. Each course requires participation from each student. The level and quantity of responses to questions posed by the instructor are specified. I enjoyed the lively discussions and diverse expressions of opinion, experience and knowledge. I was both inspired and challenged by the postings of my fellow students and the responses by my professors.

The combination of discussion boards, and the bonds developed during the summer workshops, created a virtual community that has endured beyond graduation. I continue to keep in touch with members of my class over a year after their graduation and consider myself fortunate to have professional friendships with fellow audiologists from India, Greece, Israel, Columbia, Australia,

New Zealand, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Brazil, the United States and Canada.

Earning the AuD degree has been a transformative experience. It has given me the ability to continue my professional career with the confidence that I am delivering evidence-based, best practice care to my patients.

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Declaration of Competing Interests: None declared.

