



## Combined AuD/PhD Program Guide

This informational guide was created by members of the Student Academy of Audiology (SAA) Education Committee to assist students researching and applying to combined doctorate of audiology (AuD) and doctorate of philosophy (PhD) programs. Within the discipline of audiology, opportunities exist to pursue paths toward clinical practice, research and academia, or a mix of both. The AuD is a clinical-oriented, entry-level professional degree that prepares the recipient to primarily work in direct clinical service to patients in audiologic and vestibular settings. The PhD is traditionally a research degree, in this case focusing on audiology, hearing, or vestibular science, that prepares the recipient to engage in academic, clinical, and scientific research. This guide was compiled to centralize and integrate informational resources with advice from the experience of students and professionals who have taken the combined degree path.

A [survey](#) of 25 AuD/PhD professionals and students provides first-hand advice and insight into the unique experience of pursuing a combined degree throughout this resource. Of the 25 surveyed individuals, eight were current AuD/PhD students, ten completed AuDs and were currently working on PhDs, and seven completed both degrees. This summary of survey responses aims to share pros/cons, tips/tricks, and highlights the diversity of experiences between combined programs.

Neither the authors nor the American Academy of Audiology (“the Academy”) are the authoritative source on combined AuD/PhD programs. The most accurate and up-to-date information should always be referenced from the individual graduate programs.

### **Why Do a Joint AuD/PhD?**

With exposure to the precision required of laboratory research and the reality of clinical practice, AuD/PhDs are well-equipped to study a broad array of topics that build the evidence base for audiology. Jacobson and McCaslin suggest there is a growing need for PhD-level audiologists as significant contributors of science in our profession to reduce the risk of other professions stepping in and assuming responsibility. Further, there are a large portion of PhD audiologists who serve as university professors and researchers reaching retirement age, without a commensurate generation entering to lead academic programs ([Jacobson & McCaslin, 2019](#)).

Are today’s AuD/PhDs on track to contribute to the profession through research and teaching? [Survey](#) questions aimed to broadly characterize the research being done by young AuD/PhDs and their career trajectories. Responding students and professionals were asked how they

would label their research. Four described their research as “*basic science*,” 17 described their research as “*translational*”, and four described their research as “*clinical*.” Several respondents emphasized that research and clinical training mutually benefit the development of each other. One respondent suggested research experience “...*will enhance your clinical practice and better prepare you for the ever-changing scope of practice in our field*,” while another stated that dual training “*forces you to be mindful of evidence-based practice in your clinical training and clinical application in your research training*.”

After graduating with both degrees (i.e. AuD/PhD), responsibilities may include a combination of patient care, clinical supervision, undergraduate and graduate teaching, mentoring student projects, writing grant proposals, designing studies, collecting data, publishing and presenting research, service to university (e.g., departmental, school, and university committees), and administrative duties. Of those surveyed, three were currently in postdoctoral positions. Respondents had mixed reports regarding how their degrees influenced their job opportunities. The majority of those who had applied for university faculty positions felt they were stronger candidates because of their dual training.

While AuD and PhD education can help you develop into a strong clinician-scientist with many opportunities, it also presents unique challenges. The SAA Education Committee has compiled factors to consider if you are interested in pursuing both degrees based on both experience and input from a sample of AuD/PhD students and professionals.

### **Looking for an AuD/PhD Program**

Choosing where to pursue an AuD/PhD should include careful considerations of academic, clinical, and research offerings, as well as institutional support for clinical and research activities.

### **Finding Potential Advisors**

One of the first steps in looking for a program is seeking out potential research mentors or advisors. You may first start by looking at programs that are actively doing research in areas that are similar to your interests. One survey respondent recommended that in addition to seeking a mentor that serves your research interest, “*try to identify mentors that are invested in your success - that is much more important than the research topic area*.” Another respondent suggested that finding a mentor need not be intimidating: “*Don't be shy to approach researchers whose work interests you! Most are happy to discuss opportunities with you and point you in the right direction, even if they don't have openings in their own labs*.”

### **Program Timelines**

Another important factor in choosing an AuD/PhD program is considering the options for duration and timeline in pursuing both degrees. [Universities offering PhD programs](#) and AuD programs may have formal (university-recognized) or informal (ad-hoc) joint programs that offer either simultaneous (dual-track) or sequential/successive degree options.

- A **simultaneous model** consists of completing requirements of both AuD and PhD degrees at the same time or within a close time period.

- A **sequential/successive model** consists of completing one degree in its entirety before beginning requirements on the second degree. Sequential/successive models may differ in whether the AuD or PhD is awarded first.

Some programs may not have a defined timeline and will work with you to create one. Other programs may allow you to apply for the PhD program after enrolling and starting the AuD degree program. Students must communicate directly with the university to determine their timeline model.

Talking to current and past students can give you a better sense of the experience at that university. Surveyed AuD/PhD students and professionals strongly recommended consideration of timelines when choosing a program - many commenting about required difficulty with time management and balancing clinical and research skills. AuD/PhD students and professionals also report advantages to simultaneous degrees, specifically, "*a simultaneous AuD/PhD may save you a year or two of school,*" or greater opportunities to have tuition paid for when also pursuing a PhD.

More information on AuD/PhD program and mentor considerations can be found here: [Selecting PhD Programs and Advisors](#).

### **Considerations Prior to Applying**

Based on the responses gathered, a few common themes emerged from the students who have either finished or are in the process of completing their AuD/PhD programs. If you have a specific question on the AuD/PhD program at the university of your interest, it is strongly suggested to reach out to the program and potential PhD mentor directly for the most accurate information.

### **Managing Competing Requirements/Interests**

Pursuing a degree meant to prepare students equally for both the clinical and research aspects of audiology presents a challenge when it comes to balancing responsibilities (such as teaching, clinical rotations, research, lab work, etc.). Time management was indicated as a significant challenge for those pursuing both degrees simultaneously; notably, this concern was reported less often by those completing requirements sequentially. One respondent aptly stated, "*I had to overload my schedule to fit in my required classes, clinic time, and research assistant/teaching assistant responsibilities while still moving forward my research trajectory.*" Another described their experience as "*stressful, less time spent in the clinic due to taking extra classes, more complicated schedule.*"

### **The Dissertation and Final Year Externship**

Both degrees include a significant culminating experience. For the AuD, this is the final year externship, and for the PhD, this is the dissertation. As both of these traditionally occur last in a degree plan, AuD/PhD students must decide how to order or overlap these culminating experiences. Respondents completed the clinical externship at varying time points through their AuD/PhD journey. Some respondents were able to complete the clinical externship along with

their AuD cohort peers in their final year, while others had to postpone their clinical externship to the end of the AuD/PhD. A few respondents continued research work or started new research during their externships by choosing or creating “*hybrid*” research/clinical externships in settings such as university or specialty hospitals connected with research programs, where they could devote a portion of their time to both research and clinic. Depending on the structure there may be a gap between clinical rotations in the first years of the AuD program and the externship.

### **Time in Graduate School**

One of the benefits of completing a simultaneous AuD/PhD is often stated as “*being shorter than if you would accomplish two degrees individually.*” Many of the respondents reported combined simultaneous AuD/PhD took less time for overall completion than individually accomplishing two degrees. Respondents in simultaneous AuD/PhD programs most frequently reported having finished or expecting to finish both within 6 years, with a few reporting 7 to 8 years. One respondent earned their AuD/PhD in 4.5 years, but this respondent also had to complete an extended part-time final year externship to obtain the required clinical hours. Respondents completing sequential degrees reported 7 to 13 years, with the AuD requiring 4 years and PhD entailing an additional 3 to 9 years.

The pace at which the program is completed will depend on the requirements and support from your institution and mentor, your ability to efficiently manage the competing demands of both degrees, and factors specific to your research questions and recruitment for projects.

### **Funding Opportunities**

Typically, research doctoral students are funded while clinical doctoral students are not. There are many funding mechanisms that exist for PhD students that may cover expenses for an AuD if done concurrently. Funding may include:

- Grants and Scholarships: Funding that is determined based on merit, need, or a combination thereof. These typically have a specific purpose and eligibility criteria, and are provided to successful applicants.
- Tuition Waivers: The university does not charge tuition. The student may still be responsible for associated fees.
- Stipends: Funding provided periodically to help defray expenses, similar to a paycheck.
- **The National Institutes of Health (NIH)** offers research grants for individuals at different stages in their careers. Fellowship (F) grants are available for those at the pre- or post-doctoral stage. More information regarding [types of research training grants](#) as well as [resources to guide grant applications](#) is available on the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders website. There are 3 fellowships for which AuD/PhD students may be eligible:
  - For students in formal AuD/PhD programs who have not yet been conferred a degree, [F30](#).
  - For students in ad hoc AuD/PhD programs who have not yet been conferred a degree and are in their PhD candidacy phase, [F31](#).

- For students who already have an AuD and are in their PhD candidacy phase, [F32](#).
- **Professional organizations** offer scholarships and grants for both AuD and PhD students pursuing research endeavors.
  - [American Academy of Audiology Foundation Scholarships and Grants](#)
  - [American Speech-Language-Hearing Foundation Grants and Scholarships](#)
  - [Council of Academic Programs in Communication Sciences and Disorders](#)
  - Also, check your state's professional organization!
- **Graduate Assistantships (GA)**
  - **(Graduate) Teaching Assistantships (GTA/TA)** are a common source of funding for PhD students who have not procured external funding. Typically, assignments are made by the student's department to fulfill teaching responsibilities. These may include a tuition waiver and/or a stipend. While some programs consider AuD students for GA or TAs, PhD students tend to be prioritized due to the expectation for funding and because teaching experience, including course design and management, is expected of those continuing in academia.
  - **(Graduate) Research Assistantships (GRA/RA)** may be provided by a student's PhD advisor or department. An advisor may allocate funding for a PhD student out of their own funding or a department may have specific funds for RAs. These may also include tuition waivers and/or stipends.

Altogether, this [survey](#) of individuals who have earned or are pursuing both AuD and PhD degrees revealed the wide array of experiences one may have in this endeavor. Respondents reflected upon advantages and disadvantages of overlapping training for the degrees and provided data characterizing the type and topics of research being investigated by AuD/PhDs.

### **Links to Additional Relevant SAA Resources**

- [SAA Blog](#)
  - [#Research](#) Posts
- [Doctoral Students page](#)
  - [Selecting PhD Programs and Advisors](#)
    - Choosing a Degree (AuD, PhD, or AuD/PhD)
    - Choosing a Program
    - Choosing an Advisor
- [Applying to Audiology Graduate School Guide](#)
  - [PhD Programs](#)
  - [AuD/PhD Programs](#)