

RETURNING TO STUDY

The joys and heartaches of pursuing an AuD in Australia.



BY
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Hearing Savers

After two decades of clinical audiology experience, I embarked on a journey of further education and enrolled as a student on the A.T. Still University Post-Professional Doctor of Audiology online program. In this article, I'll share my journey from a curious teenager to a mature adult student, touching on the motivation, inspiration, joys and challenges that have fuelled my pursuit of an AuD in our remarkable profession. I'm eager to share my experience and inspire those considering a similar path!

Early student life

I believe my journey is like that of Ash Barty, despite lacking her natural sporting prowess, fame or global recognition! Like Ash Barty's career shift from the Australian cricket team to the number one women's tennis player globally, my journey reflects pivoting changes in my pursuits. My first pivot started as a teenager: at a towering height of 6.1 feet, I was destined for a spot on the Australian netball team. However, when life-altering spinal surgery shattered that dream, I realised the importance of having a backup career. My academic journey started with a visit to La Trobe University's Open Day, where I had the privilege of hearing Dr Susan Block speak passionately about working with stuttering patients. This ignited my interest in Speech Pathology, and I enrolled in the Bachelor program in 1996.

In my final year of Speech Pathology, I had the opportunity to collaborate with audiologists at the university speech pathology clinic, working alongside Dr John Bench and Dr Norm Erber to establish the Auditory Processing Disorder University Clinic and contribute to various research projects. This experience inspired my second pivot and I pursued postgraduate

studies at the University of Melbourne, completing a Graduate Diploma and Master's Degree in Audiological Science in 2002. I had the honour of being lectured by distinguished figures in audiology, including Graeme Clark, Brian Pyman, Richard Dowell and Angela Marshall, Angela whom we fondly referred to as the "mother of audiology."

My current career

Throughout my audiology career, I've stayed connected with patients through face-to-face clinical work. As a business owner, I spend three days in clinical roles and two days handling administrative and managerial responsibilities. I've worked in clinical roles at two national audiology chains and also successfully established two independent audiology clinics: Absolute Hearing and, more recently, Hearing Savers. Responsibility as an owner has extended beyond audiology to include roles such as a supervisor, mentor, customer service officer, bookkeeper, IT help desk staff, and occasionally cleaner. In addition to clinical work, mentoring and nurturing talent in the profession have been genuine passions of mine. One of the most rewarding

aspects of my journey has been the privilege of supervising audiology students and staff and, more recently, supervising two graduate audiologists completing their internship who have become valuable team members.

During the extended COVID-19 lockdown period in Melbourne that lasted two years, I took the opportunity to reflect on my career, aspirations and personal growth goals. Once activities like sourdough baking and paint-by-numbers had run their course, I decided I needed to further my knowledge. I spent six months considering a range of educational paths, including a PhD, MBA, AuD, and other health-related courses. Ultimately, the AuD program at A.T. Still University met all my criteria, with a blend of core and optional subjects, asynchronous learning and set deadlines. I relished the opportunity to interact and foster collaboration with global and local students, along with its partially self-directed approach that allowed me to actively participate in discussions, assignments and interactive learning. As the Confucian saying goes, "Tell me and I forget, teach me and I remember, involve me and I learn."



Above/ University of Melbourne Class of 2002.

The mature-aged student

Starting the AuD journey began with the application process, which had its initial challenges like calculating my GPA, creating my first resume, and this time being on the other side of an interview. Predictably, my family, friends and colleagues had varied reactions, with comments ranging from "Do you really need more on your plate?" to "Why would you return to studying?" and even "Do you even have time for this or are you just crazy?"

Upon starting the course, I was in awe of the seamless use of technology, eliminating the need for physical library visits, photocopying books and manual citation formatting. Apps are used to access literature, ensure proper grammar and manage citations. Adapting to these changes sometimes led me to seek help from my school-aged children. Fortunately, the course is designed to assist individuals with varying IT skills, offering a crash course in navigating this new digital landscape during the initial weeks of the program. Our cohort hails from countries such as the USA, India, the UK and Canada and

we are planning a graduation meet-up next year.

On a personal note, balancing full-time work, parenting, physical activity and a social life was made possible by the unwavering support of my husband, family and amazing friends. My husband has transformed from an average cook to a Michelin-star-worthy chef and has taken on additional household tasks. I appreciate the asynchronous nature of the AuD program, allowing flexibility to view lectures at any time while adhering to weekly deadlines. This may mean listening to a lecture while driving to work or being the parent on duty at a child's sporting activity. While most subjects have been insightful, two have stood out: implantable technology and personnel management. The former involved learning about new surgical implantable devices, including bone conduction, middle ear and cochlear implants, and changes in surgical techniques. As for personnel management, it was an excellent refresher of personally traits and generation differences that are relevant when working with a range of staff and patients.

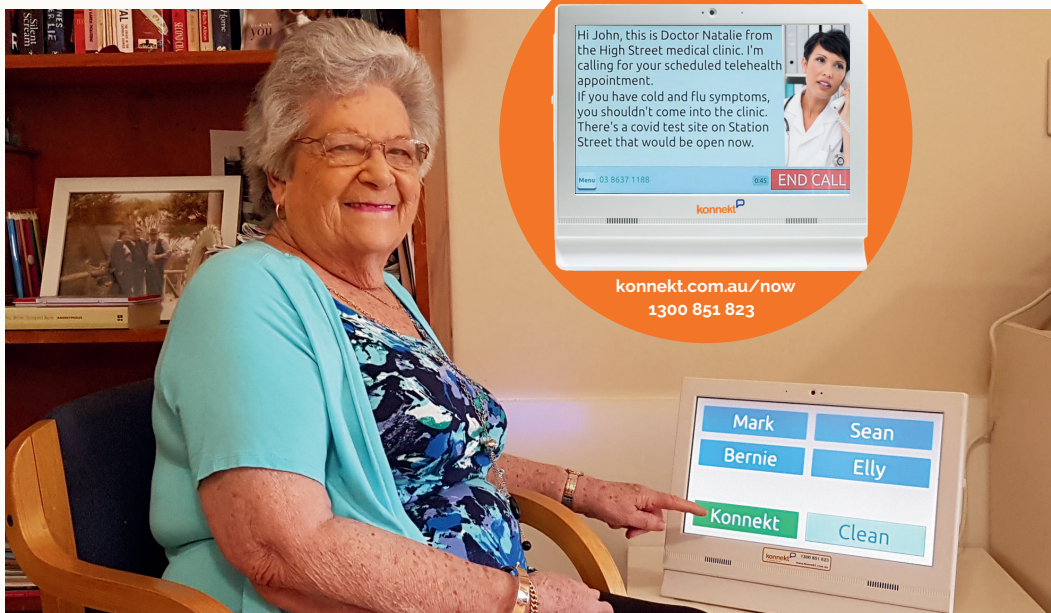
It is worth doing?

Absolutely! Pursuing my AuD has significantly enriched my theoretical knowledge and clinical expertise, making me a better audiologist and enhancing the patient experience. Despite the challenges of balancing study, work and personal life, I found this journey remarkably enjoyable and profoundly rewarding. It has reignited my passion for our profession, exposing me to previously unexplored areas. I feel more energised and motivated to remain deeply engaged in the amazing field of audiology. Starting with my inherent love for clinical practice, I now derive even greater satisfaction and excel at a higher level, all thanks to the enriching experience of further education. I wholeheartedly recommend pursuing the AuD to my fellow colleagues. In conclusion, while my netball career didn't unfold as expected, I successfully pivoted into basketball at the young age of 45, recognising my true calling. However, I also acknowledge the importance of maintaining my day job as a clinical audiologist! ●



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