



AVAA AMPLIFIER

Quarterly Newsletter of the Association of VA Audiologists

Summer 2023: **All Things Extern!**

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK: *Michele Gortemaker, Au.D.*
AVAA President



It's that time of year again! Externship application deadlines are nearing and interviews are just around the corner. As I reflect on my own time securing an externship, I recall thinking through the pros and cons of my options, including geographical location, variety of clinical services offered and compensation. I was fortunate to have VA mentors who gave me the grace to have all offers on the table before making an informed decision. It seems that in the (many) years since I went through this journey, deadlines have become earlier and the competition for externships has ramped up. It seems a little wild that we will be selecting externs to start 8-10 months in the future when they have a lot of valuable coursework and clinical experience that will occur during that time frame.

I truly believe that Au.D. students with traineeships and externships in the VA come away with such a valuable experience. We have the most interesting patient population who present with new challenges each day, and of course they have the best stories to tell. In addition to the patients, we have such a unique care delivery model in the VA. This allows students to see how health care could be delivered if there were less restrictions imposed on the patient and provider by those who determine access to benefits. I am so grateful to VA Audiologists who have come before me with a vision to educate the next generation of Audiologists using best practices and evidence based care.

IN THIS ISSUE:

- [FAQs from the Program Office](#)
- [My VA Audiology Journey](#)
- [JDVAC is for Externs too!](#)
- [Pets of AVAA](#)
- [AVAA Soundbites](#)

(Continued on page 2)



FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK: *Continued*

Years ago, students and universities relied on word of mouth or local VA clinics forwarding announcements for externships. In 2019, AVAA Past President Dr. Christine Ulinski spearheaded launching the AVAA Externship website. This has allowed any VA Audiology clinic with an externship (paid or unpaid) to provide information about their clinic and the position in one central location.

While Dr. Ulinski and the group members below launched this project, AVAA board members have maintained and updated the information annually since its inception. This ensures easy access to the best point of contact for each VA externship, making the search process just a little easier for our future externs. We appreciate the past and ongoing efforts of the VA Audiologists who have made this externship project possible.

Christine Ulinski, Au.D., Hines
Alyssa Coxwell, Au.D., Atlanta
Joseph Coskey, Au.D., Omaha
Misty Dedeaux, Au.D., Bioloxi
Susan Lloyd, Au.D., Las Vegas

Dawn Martin, Ph.D., Portland
Shannon Powell, Au.D., Iron Mountain
Andrew Smith, Au.D., Providence
Danielle Stiles, Au.D., Boston
J. Nicole Wiley, Au.D., Bay Pines

Please share the AVAA Externship Website page with any University contacts you might have to help facilitate externship applications for their student cohort.

myavaa.org/open-externship-opportunities

The diagram illustrates the navigation path from the AVAA website home page to the Open Externship Opportunities page. On the left, the AVAA website home page is shown with a sidebar menu. The 'EXTERNSHIPS' link is circled in red. A red arrow points from this link to the 'Open Externship Opportunities' page on the right. The 'Open Externship Opportunities' page lists various VA healthcare systems offering externships, including Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health, Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital, Pittsburgh VA Healthcare System, DC VA Medical Center, Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health, Atlanta VA Health Care System, VA Puget Sound Health Care System, Hershel "Woody" Williams VAMC, Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care, Rocky Mountain Regional VA, Lexington VA Health Care System, Connecticut VA, Loma Linda VA Healthcare System, Phoenix VA Health Care System, and Alameda E. Lutz VAMC.

FAQs from the Program Office



*In this edition of the AVAA Amplifier, the ASPS Program Office answered some Frequently Asked Questions regarding VA Audiology externships/training programs. Many thanks to **Lauren Racoosin, Au.D.** and team at the ASPS Program Office for providing this great information!*

The Q&A below are taken from commonly asked questions and employ acronyms. For a key to the acronyms used, see below:

OAA: Office of Academic Affiliations
NTE: Not to exceed
AY: Academic year
DEO: Designated Education Officer
TQCVL: Trainee Qualifications and Credentials Verification Letter
WOC: Without compensation
HPT: Health Professions Trainee
AHE: Associated Health Education
DoD: Department of Defense
GLR: Graduated levels of responsibility
MOA: Memorandum Of Agreement
CDC: Centers for Disease Control

Q: Can you recommend resources for OAA (Office of Academic Affiliations) and Health Professions Trainee related questions?

A: Links to Resources:

OAA webpage: www.va.gov/oaa
ASPS SharePoint: [Office of Academic Affiliations](#)
FAQs [OAA FAQs - PowerApps](#)

Q. We have never had a funded extern but would like to start, how do we begin the process?

A: The only method by which new training programs can be funded is through the OAA Request for Funding Proposal (RFP) process. Currently, there are no RFPs planned right now for Audiology. Any opportunities that come up in the future will come through OAA AHE and the Audiology National Program Office.

FAQs from the Program Office - Continued

Q: We would like our new Extern or Fellow to start before the current one leaves. This will cause them to overlap. Is that possible? Will funding be available to pay them both during the overlap period?

A: Overlapping Externs is ok because the funding is from separate academic years. As long as the accurate NTE dates, and TQCVLs are reflective of the correct AY, you should be fine. Check with your DEO as they may need to request additional funding via the quarterly needs and excess portal—to cover the overlap.

Q: If a student completes the degree from a program in “candidacy status”, will they never be eligible to work in the VA?

A: At this time, an individual must complete the requirements for the degree and graduate from a fully accredited program to be eligible for employment in the VA.

Q: A student has inquired about wanting to do a Fourth Year Externship at our facility without pay. We do not have funding for a Fourth Year Externship at our facility, but the trainee has family in the area, wants to be near, and wants to have a VA experience.

A: Your facility will be the one to approve if you can have a WOC. There is not a national rule that precludes a WOC 4th year. Talk to your DEO about this opportunity. If not already in place, an Academic Affiliation with the school must be established.

Q: Our HPT candidate will finish school but needs time to move to the area and get settled. As a result, the time from start date to graduation date will be less than one year (2080 hours). Is that ok? Will the student still get credit for time should they pursue VA employment following the externship?

A: Start/end dates are determined locally and can start on any day. Consistency (May–April; July–June) is requested. A trainee may start on any day and is not limited to the start of a pay period, since their time is limited and aligns with an academic schedule.

Any hours not completed may be returned by your DEO in the Needs and Excess quarterly report. The trainee would receive credit for VA experience and is eligible for non-competitive hiring.

FAQs from the Program Office - Continued

Q: Can trainees earn comp time or overtime pay if they work extra hours?

A: First, check with your local DEO for guidance.

The following citation addresses this issue. It is from VA Handbook 5007, Part II, Chapter 2, paragraph 2.m.(1)(c). Please note the last sentences which is underlined for emphasis. Essentially, trainees can earn what we refer to as "comp time" although the official label is "equivalent time off."

Per annum basis trainees will be paid their regular straight time base rate but will not receive any additional premium pay by reason of working on a legal holiday, on Sunday, or at night. These trainees will receive their regular straight time pay for time off if relieved or prevented from working solely by the occurrence of a legal holiday. No compensation will be paid these trainees by reason of working overtime; however, they may be granted equivalent time off for service in excess of 8 hours in a day or 40 hours in a week.

Please note that the operative word in the last sentence is "may." There is no requirement that trainees receive comp time, but the option is available. We would recommend that that decision be made at the level of Director of Training, in collaboration with the Chief of Service.

Q: Does OAA have any templates or forms to help with Supervision Documentation of Associated Health Trainees?

A: The Program Office does not have a standard template. In our experience, the university and the clinic, who are both responsible for the student training (under the MOA) develop an appropriate GLR. This is typically documented on a clinical skills evaluation form which is developed by the University. The American Speech Language Hearing Association (ASHA), our professional and certifying professional organization, maintains the following to be eligible for certification, at the conclusion of the academic training. graduated level of responsibilities (GLR) form. [2020 Audiology Certification Standards \(asha.org\)](https://www.asha.org/standards/2020-audiology-certification-standards). **Note, ASHA certification is not required to practice Audiology.*

Q: Can our Extern continue past graduation?

A: Per OAA, the student cannot continue past graduation since they are no longer affiliated with the university once they complete their degree program.

FAQs from the Program Office - Continued

Q: Does the 1/6th exemption extend to other Federal facilities? For example, some VAMCs are in close proximity and have training relationships with DOD facilities, sharing their resources. Would the same time-1/6th—apply to those trainees?

A: Yes— the request would need to be sent regardless of if the request is to go to another federal facility or a non-federal facility. The working definition of an Educational Detail (also called 1/6th rotations or Offsite Rotations): an educational detail is an authorized training experience which provides direct benefit to VA but is not available at the VA facility or the affiliate in the case of affiliate-sponsored programs and requires the HPT to be sent to a non-VA location for this training experience.

On an annual basis, the time spent in educational detail shall be no greater than one-sixth of the time funded by VA for the HPT's appointment; this value does not count any educational detail spent at a federal government site, which VA considers analogous to a VA site.

Q: What is ACEN? Can my site participate? Do we have to participate?

The Audiology Clinical Education Network (ACEN) was established as a collaborative effort to standardize elements of the Audiology externship process. Participants include audiologists and externship sites from the broader audiology community. A standardized timeline was developed to increase efficiency for students, academic programs, and the externship institutions, and includes deadlines for student application, interview, offer and acceptance processes. There are no requirements from VA or OAA to participate in this program for either funded or unfunded trainees. Participation in the ACEN is not mandatory, and each site may determine if they wish their program to participate. However, we wish to make you aware that many VA sites as well as community and private externship sites do participate and follow the ACEN timelines. More information and timeline can be found on the website: <https://audclinicaled.net/>

Q: What are the Standards of Excellence and when will they come out?

The Standards of Excellence are the means through which sites apply and compete for Audiology or Speech Pathology trainee stipends. Sites have traditionally been awarded stipends based on ability of the site to offer a high-quality training experience in the full scope of practice of the profession. OAA has placed a pause on this process for 2023.

At some point in the future, all sites who are interested in trainee stipends will need to submit the application materials to their local facility DEO and to the ASPS Program Office. At this time, we do not have any information on a projected start date for the process.

FAQs from the Program Office - Continued

Q: What is the TQCVL?

A: TQCVL stands for: Trainee Qualifications and Credentials Verification Letter

To qualify to train at the VA, each HPT must meet all requirements of the training program and the federal government to legally work. OAA requires that each program verifies HPTs' compliance with these requirements using a document called the Trainee Qualifications and Credentials Verification Letter (TQCVL).

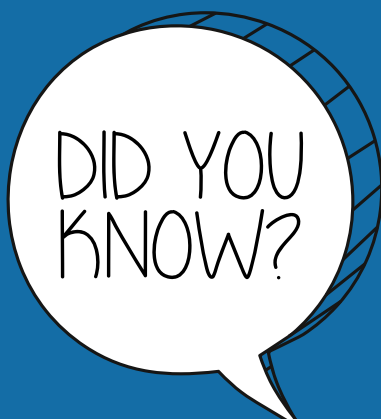
A TQCVL from the director of the affiliated or VA sponsored program must be submitted to the VA Facility Director through the VA Designated Education Officer (DEO) prior to and HPT's appointment. The TQCVL confirms that specific information has been verified by the sponsoring entity for each HPT listed on the accompanying attachment. All HPTs who will receive training at a VA facility must be listed on a TQCVL.

The TQCVL confirms that an HPT is:

- enrolled in the training program completing the TQCVL and has met all admission criteria of that training program;
- has the required credentials to participate in the training program as agreed to by the sponsoring institution, affiliated participating institutions, and the VA
 - eligible for appointment to a Federal Government position;
- able to perform the essential functions of the training program; and
- immunized following current CDC guidelines for healthcare workers to protect themselves, other employees and patients while working in a healthcare facility.

Direct VA-paid HPTs must be US citizens; therefore, non-US citizen documentation only pertains to WOC HPTs.

Link to guide and instructions: [TQCVL Guide for Program Directors \(sharepoint.com\)](#).



There are approximately 90 paid externships per year in VA. In the last 10 years, VA has had over 900 audiology externs!

As the largest employer of audiologists in the country, VA also serves as the largest audiology training program in the US!



My VA Audiology Journey



The AVAA Executive Board hoped to gain some perspectives from a few VA audiologists who transitioned from VA trainees/externs to VA Audiologists and in some cases, beyond the role of clinical care providers. These journeys show how diverse and rewarding the continued journey within VA can be.

Lauren S. Racoosin, Au.D.

*Audiologist/Designated Federal Officer
VHA Rehabilitation and Prosthetic Services
ASPS Program Office
Washington, DC*



I'm happy to share my story –starting as an Audiology Trainee and then joining the VA as a staff Audiologist. Of course, my VA “origin” story is not uncommon as all of the ASPS National Program staff Audiology Team started as Audiology trainees. As well, most of my DC VAMC colleagues also started as VA trainees!

I came to the VA as a master's level trainee in (gulp) 1983. I knew I would receive excellent training, but I did not anticipate the extent to which I'd fall in love with serving our Veterans and working with my incredible colleagues in the VA system. I had the honor and privilege of training with the best of the best at the DC VAMC. As a student at GW, I was fortunate to have outstanding professors, including Dr. Lucille Beck. With Dr. Beck as my mentor both in the classroom and the clinic, I enjoyed many wonderful and formative experiences. From nearly the start of my career, I worked on the VA Hearing Aid Program which was advised by a group of recognized authorities in audiology, electroacoustics, psychoacoustics and electronics, as well as important Federal partners including the FDA, NIST and the DDC (now DLC). As a new audiologist I was audiology-starstruck by the extraordinary talent from around the country that participated in the program.

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My VA Audiology Journey - Continued

In the decades that followed, I watched our clinic grow from 2 booths to 10, fortifying our staff along the way. Masters Level Trainees became AuD students and Externs, and many master's level staff audiologists also pursued the AuD. Analog hearing aids became digital with advanced sound processing, and automation took over almost everything! With our focus on expanding and updating clinical best practices, I watched our anechoic chamber and our dear friend KEMAR be replaced by an enhanced vestibular testing lab.

Everything came full circle when I joined Dr. Judy Schafer to help lead the Externship training program, one of the most rewarding roles in my career. In my last several years at the DC VAMC, I served as Lead Audiologist and Externship Coordinator. In 2020 I joined the Audiology and Speech Pathology National Program Office and continue to work in the Office of Rehabilitation and Prosthetics managing the Advisory Committee on Prosthetics and Special-Disabilities Programs. It's crazy to look back on such a long journey, one that has spanned my entire career. The journey has been amazing-in large part to those who have been my fellow travelers. Throughout the years, outstanding colleagues and supportive leadership have been essential to my professional growth and development as well as an important support system in every aspect of my life!



Rachel Kansky, Au.D.

Audiologist

Miami VA Healthcare System

Hello AVAA community, My name is Rachel Kansky and I am a recent AuD graduate. I completed my externship at the Miami VA Healthcare System in 2020 and was fortunate to be able to join this team as a full-time audiologist. The transition from extern to audiologist was exciting, challenging, and while many things about working there were familiar, it was also very new.



As I entered this new life stage, it was a privilege to remain employed in a VA hospital; it helped me to maintain and grow relationships with current coworkers and patients, and it allowed me to continue working in an amazing network dedicated to serving veterans each day.

One of the greatest advantages of transitioning from extern to full-time audiologist within the VA was the opportunity for continuity of work and patient care. I was able to seamlessly apply my student experience, knowledge, and insights to develop a strong foundation and foster clinical independence shortly after being hired.

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My VA Audiology Journey - Continued

As I was already familiar with many protocols, computerized record systems (CPRS, ROES, etc.), and the special patient population, I focused on honing my clinical and diagnostic skills as well as improving on the quality of care I wanted to provide. This understanding of the VA systems not only helped me gain confidence during what can be a tough transition, but also enabled me to provide consistent, commendable care to my patients.

Additionally, as a full-time employee, I have been able to enhance my relationships, mentorships, and support network. The shift in role was tricky to navigate at first due to responsibility and relationship changes between myself and my coworkers. However, maintaining close contact with former preceptors turned mentors and friends proved valuable as I continue learning from their experiences, insights, and guidance. Other multidisciplinary relationships I formed during my extern year similarly grew when I transitioned to full-time, creating new areas for opportunity. As a student, I benefitted from the VA's teaching environment of lifelong learning, collaboration, and professional growth; I now share these characteristics and perspectives with incoming students.

Reflecting on my experience working in the VA, I would be remiss if I did not mention the outstanding benefits patients receive. Within the Audiology service, veterans have access to necessary hearing care without financial concern or burden. The opportunity to work with top-of-the-line technology has benefits not only to the patients who receive the best possible solution for their needs, but also for the provider to know they are able to deliver this care with no hesitation. I love the autonomy audiologists have within the VA and the ability to offer impactful care for our patients.

Overall, my transition from extern to full-time VA audiologist expanded my professional network, deepened my diagnostic and clinical competence, and fortified my commitment to providing exceptional care to veterans. I would encourage all students currently pursuing their extern year to consider the VA as a full-time employment opportunity.

***Many thanks to Dr. Racoosin and Dr. Kansky
for their contributions for this article.***



JDVAC 2024:



It's for Externs too!

Dr. JR McCoy, JDVAC 2024 Student Experience Chair, shares all of the details about what's available for Audiology Externs at JDVAC. Please share this information with current and future externs so they are aware of everything JDVAC has to offer our VA Audiology Externs!



Dr. Emily Cotton and I are very excited to be chairs of the Student Experience at JDVAC 2024. Over the years this has evolved into a separate learning track built for students based on the input of the students that have attended in years past. JDVAC provides a unique opportunity for students to begin building their professional network as they interact with both clinical and research audiologists within the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs.



A key component of the Student Experience is providing guest lectures tailored to students nearing the end of their academic programs. These talks will include resume and cover letter writing as well as interactive instruction from a panel of advisors, all of whom have been working with student interns and externs for many years. The additional educational talks will be determined by YOUR input and promise to provide timely clinical information.

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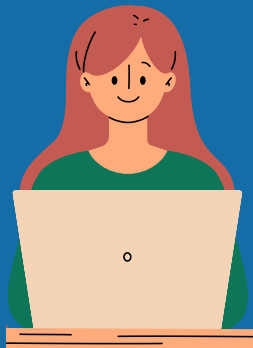
JDVAC 2024: *It's for Externs too! - Continued*

Students will have the opportunity to apply to be a student volunteer and if selected, will be able to attend the conference with registration waived. Volunteer opportunities include working the registration or app desk, introducing and delivering support for speakers, announcing CEU codes for attendees, or providing directions and support for registrants. Students that participate in research projects at their facilities may have the chance to be part of the poster presentations during the conference.

The call for student volunteers' applications will be sent out in the coming months. In the meantime, if you have questions feel free to email me at **terry.mccoy2@va.gov**.



Student volunteers assisting at the JDVAC registration desk



Looking for more JDVAC 2024 info?

Follow us on social media for the latest updates!



Pets of AVAA

**EXTERN
EDITION!**



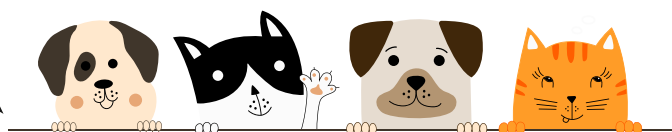
Nola is a 3 1/2 year old Miniature Pinscher/Australian Cattle dog mix. She is a COVID puppy who loves being around people! Nola is named after New Orleans Louisiana, a tribute to her owner, Hines VA extern Grace Laszkiewicz's favorite place to visit. Nola would love to hear the Verifit talk about carrots because she is the #1 carrot lover!

Meet Karma Olive! She is a 1-year old tortoiseshell kitty who loves finding random surfaces to sleep on, plastic bags, and bird-watching on the balcony. She is super friendly with people and loves being the center of attention. Her human servant is Victoria Hanks, extern at the Miami VA.



Phillip Coleslaw (left) and Ladybug (right) belong to Melanie Putnam, extern at the Minneapolis VA. Ladybug thought she was queen of the castle until Phillip Coleslaw showed up in Melanie's parking lot. The two have been up to shenanigans with each other ever since. They love playing with catnip and sitting in the sun of Melanie's new apartment.

We want to see your
fur friends!
Email
AssnVAAuds@gmail.com
so we can feature your
pet!





AVAA Soundbites



The AVAA Board wanted to shake up our "Soundbites" section a bit. Here is a great SUMMER recipe from AVAA Board Member, **Jocelyn Sysko** that you will want to take a BITE out of! Enjoy!

Jocelyn's Gazpacho

- 4 Tablespoons sherry vinegar
- ¼ cup chopped fresh Italian flat leaf parsley
- ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
- The juice of 1 large lime
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 dash hot sauce
- 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 3-4 ripe plum tomatoes
- 1 english cucumber, peeled and coarsely chopped
- 1 bell pepper, either yellow or orange
- 1 5.5 oz can spicy vegetable juice
- 1+ jalapenos (# is dependent on your personal spice level)



Char the tomatoes and peppers. When cooled, peel the skin from the peppers, then seed and coarsely chop. Coarsely chop the tomatoes as well. Add these and every other ingredient except for the sour cream to a blender with 1 cup water and puree til smooth. Cover and chill 24 hours. Serve with a dollop of sour cream and a sprinkle of finely chopped parsley. Best enjoyed cold!



In the next AVAA Amplifier:

Research in VA

Working on a research project with VA?
Email **stacey.sturgulewski@va.gov** so we can include your project in the next edition of the Amplifier

