



Left: ATSU Australian alumni, current students and staff at an Independent Audiologists Australia conference in Queensland, (L-R) Dr Heidi Modrovich, Dr Signe Steers, Melanie Gibson (ATSU), Rachel Gibson, Nicole Eglinton and Colleen Campbell.

testing, and with my psychotherapy background and being a tinnitus sufferer, that was a major interest for me, along with auditory processing testing and auditory training."

WORLD CLASS EXPERTS

Dr Modrovich didn't feel she had a solid grasp of those areas from her university training of 25 years ago. "For my ATSU electives I chose auditory processing disorders, tinnitus and implantable devices," she says. "The subjects were great because I received in-depth knowledge into the latest evidence-based practice such as new tinnitus protocols and I can now confidently create a tinnitus protocol for my clinic. The program's world class and we're taught by experts in each field."

She mostly studied on weekends and says having a supportive husband and independent teenage children helped.

The program is designed so students can study around working and family life. "It's doable and interesting because it's directly related to what you see in the clinic," she says. "While I was studying neuroimaging, patients were showing me their MRI or CT, and I knew how to look at them which keeps you motivated."

"Lectures are recorded and it's well-structured because you watch them in your own time. There are class discussions (on noticeboards) where you write your opinion and research. Your peers respond in a time that suits them to facilitate class discussions."

Assignments are short or long papers, and there are multiple choice open book quizzes.

Organisation is critical when balancing many commitments, so when going on holidays, Dr Modrovich ensured she was on top of things in her course beforehand.

She found it interesting learning about audiology in other countries from classmates and another highlight was going to the ATSU health sciences campus in Arizona to graduate. Her husband is now undertaking the program, as is Brisbane audiologist Ms Rachel Gibson who started in July 2025.

BOOST FOR COMPLEX CASES

Rachel, founder of All Ears in Hearing, was inspired by friends and colleagues who achieved the audiology doctorate. "They all said how much benefit they got out of it, that it improved their knowledge, and gave them that extra confidence in managing complex cases," she says. "I see many complex cases and thought it'd level up my knowledge as it's been 25 years since I was at uni."

Rachel, president of Independent Audiologists Australia (IAA), has many



Above: Dr Heidi Modrovich (second from left) at her graduation in Arizona with ATSU colleagues.

tinnitus and cochlear implant patients and performs a lot of auditory processing tests. "I want to ensure I give those patients, and all my clients, the best service I can," she says.

She studies nightly and at weekends to reach the recommended 12 hours weekly.

"Having lectures recorded is really good as you can pause it if you didn't quite understand something, rewind it and listen again," Rachel says. "You've got time to write notes, and can adjust the timing to speed it up or slow it down."

She also likes the variety – lectures with course lecturers, readings, quizzes and discussion boards which foster connection and a sense of belonging. "You're given a topic to write about, post it on a discussion board, colleagues respond and it's interesting because on some topics, such as ethics, students raise issues you might not have thought about," she says.

ETHICS MANUAL

Rachel is already putting into practise what she's learning; an ethics manual she compiled for the core ethics subject is being used by her staff. She's found it's enhanced her critical thinking; for example, studying the core neuroscience subject is making her think more critically about her tinnitus and auditory processing patients.

"I think about things in a different way and at the end I'll have increased confidence to handle more complex cases," she says.

"There were many interesting electives to choose from; I chose tinnitus, cochlear implants, vestibular management, and auditory processing."

A fully online course was a key reason for choosing the program, so she could study around running her business, practising and family life. "Because you can do it in your own time it's easier than driving somewhere or attending a lecture at a set time," she says. "I was nervous at first because two years is a big commitment but I'm glad I'm doing it now. The staff understand most of us are working, have families and are busy. The biggest thing is to communicate if you're struggling, or something's come up and you need more help or time."

If people want to test the waters before committing to the full program, there's an



(From left) At the IAA gala dinner are Dr Signe Steers, Dr Heidi Modrovich, Nicole Eglinton, Melanie Gibson from ATSU, and Rachel Gibson.

option of doing up to three non-degree seeking subjects. Dr Modrovich, IAA vice-president, highly recommends the doctorate but agrees if audiologists are unsure about committing, trying one subject can help. IAA members receive a 20% discount on non-degree seeking courses.

For more than two decades, the Post-Professional Doctor of Audiology Program has helped audiologists worldwide advance clinical and leadership skills. Program manager and instructional designer Ms Melanie Gibson, who has been part of the program since its early years, says alumni also qualify for this tuition discount.

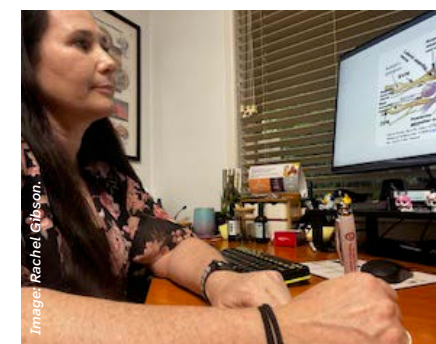
Having received her own Master of Arts (teaching) degree online while balancing work and raising young children, she understands firsthand the importance of flexibility and support. Melanie serves as the first point of contact for students, guiding them through initial weeks and remaining a consistent source of assistance until graduation. She can meet via Zoom if there are questions or students feel overloaded.

"The biggest thing is communication with instructors or the department because we'll work with you," she says. "My goal is to ensure all courses are top level and offer enough variety to meet students' diverse needs."

She regularly reviews student feedback to ensure the program stays current and valuable. There are 26 subjects and each student's academic degree plan includes 12 to 18 courses (subjects) with course materials frequently updated to reflect emerging trends and technologies. Lectures are pre-recorded, and there are transcripts and PowerPoints for easy access. "We're constantly exploring new topics such as artificial intelligence, how to use AI ethically in your practice and how it's being integrated into hearing aids," Melanie adds.

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM

The program features four core subjects; ethics (professional roles and responsibilities), neuroscience and neuroimaging (foundational skills), global



Above: Rachel Gibson studying online.

health care and audiology (learning about audiology in other countries), and culminating case experience. "The case experience enables students to synthesise what they've learnt by presenting or writing up a complex patient case, based on a course they've taken. They demonstrate how they'd diagnose, treat and counsel within real-world clinical contexts," Melanie says.

"There are clinical and business electives including how to open a practice and marketing. Another unique subject, pharmacology, studies the relationship between medication and the auditory-vestibular system. A pharmacologist teaches initial weeks and an audiologist covers ototoxicity. One valuable aspect is peer learning. "Students realise others face similar challenges and share how they handle them," she explains. "Our exit interviews consistently show how much students value connecting with audiologists from around the world and learning new approaches and perspectives they hadn't considered before."

Many instructors are alumni, sustaining a strong global community dedicated to advancing the field. Australia has seen significant growth due to word of mouth and the program's reputation, with 21 students and 18 graduates. "Our graduates love the program and share their experiences," Melanie says. "We love our Australian students; they bring enthusiasm and positivity and have been a wonderful addition to our global classroom."

For more information, visit atsu.edu.

Becoming a Doctor of Audiology

The Post-Professional Doctor of Audiology Program from America's A.T. Still University is gaining momentum with audiologists from Australia and around the world seeking to elevate their expertise and develop new skills.

Confidence is one of the biggest benefits Tasmanian audiologist Dr Heidi Modrovich gained from studying for her doctorate of audiology online at A.T. Still University (ATSU). That, along with gaining new skills and knowledge in clinical practice, have helped transform her career.

"It's given me a new lease on life as an audiologist and a professional confidence that I didn't feel before," she says.

Dr Modrovich put her newfound knowledge into practise while studying the program and has found it immensely helpful since graduating. "As I was learning, I was updating protocols in the clinic," she says. "For example, I had more structure to talk to clients about the latest tinnitus treatments and ideas on what treatments were good."

"Beyond knowledge gained, the doctorate helped me step into my confidence as a clinician. It gave me the foundation to handle different cases, know my scope, discuss

theories with patients, and find the research I need. I'm backing myself now – the program gave me the vehicle to get there."

Previously based in Melbourne, Dr Modrovich moved to Tasmania with her audiologist husband Nick in 2007 to take ownership of AudioClinic Hobart due to its owner's retirement. She completed her MBA and had two children while expanding to seven clinics statewide. After 10 years, the clinic was sold to Oticon Australia and in 2017, the Modrovichs established Ability Hearing and Balance in Hobart, which now includes a Launceston clinic and outreach services. "I'd always wanted to do the audiology doctorate," she says. "I was impressed with the ATSU website and course subjects."

"The second time around setting up our clinic, we didn't want to just focus on hearing aid rehab, we wanted to work to our full scope. Nick was passionate about vestibular