

# 10th Anniversary of Jerger Future Leaders Conference in Audiology

## A Smashing Success!

By Erin L. Miller



**A**nother stellar group of early- to early-mid-career audiologists were selected from the largest pool of applicants so far to attend the 2018 Jerger Future Leaders in Audiology Conference (JFLAC). The conference convened at the American Academy of Audiology (Academy) headquarters in Reston, Virginia, September 12–14, 2018, and

generously sponsored in part by the Oticon Hearing Foundation.

Former (J)FLACers joined from across the country through remote video to toast the conference's 10th anniversary and to welcome the new JFLAC class. Academy President Lisa Christensen, AuD, a 2008 FLAC alumni, provided a brief history of the conference. FLAC and JFLAC alumni Brenna Carrol, Tish Gaffney,

Bre Myers, Virginia Ramachandran, and David Jedlicka (through video) each discussed the impact that the conference has had on them, both professionally and personally.

The newly established Leadership Development Committee (LDC), along with staff liaison Rachael Sifuentes, and many other Academy staff team members, helped create an aggressive agenda for attendees



Back starting from the left: Jodi Baxter, AuD; Devon Weist, AuD; Tricia Scaglione, AuD; Hannah Siburt, AuD, PhD; Jessica Messersmith, PhD; Moumita Choudhury, AuD; Chris Araj, AuD; Victoria Gonzalez, AuD, PhD; Trent Westrick, AuD; Spencer Cheshire, AuD

Front starting from left: Jennifer Phelan, AuD; Lori Zitelli, AuD

to learn leadership skills for self, team, and organization. Attendees were welcomed to the conference by the Academy's Past President Jackie Clark, PhD, who also provided a discussion of her leadership journey.

Brad Stach, PhD, an Academy founder, past president, and current

board member, presented on the history of the Academy. As LDC chair and a past president, I shared leadership insights that facilitated some lively discussions about the profession's current state of affairs.

The attendees also learned about Academy operations from Tanya Tolpegin, CAE, Academy executive director, and about Academy partner organizations from Kitty Werner, Academy vice president of public affairs, and Dina Santucci, Academy senior director of business development. Adam Finkel, Academy director of government relations, briefed the group before they headed to Capitol Hill to advocate to their members of Congress.

A "leadership project" is one of the highlights of the JFLAC conference. The 12 attendees were assigned to three teams to develop a product or service that would benefit the Academy membership. They pitched their idea as if appearing on the TV show *Shark Tank*. The "sharks" included current Academy board members Holly Burrows and



Dr. Brad Stach discusses the evolution of the Academy and the profession with the Class of 2018.

Chris Zalewski. The ideas each team provided were so outstanding that the “sharks” decided a piece of each project should move forward and the group will begin implementing their suggestions into the Academy Enterprise. Stay tuned for further developments!

The Leadership Development Committee would like to thank the Academy, the AAA Foundation, the Oticon Hearing Foundation, 2012 JFLAC alumni, and Bre Myers for their continued support of the JFLAC conference. It is through their generosity that this leadership development opportunity can continue and prosper!

Also, we extend our congratulations to the 2018 JFLAC alumni listed below! Each shared a few thoughts about their recent JFLAC experience.

### Chris Araj

I’m overwhelmed with positive thoughts. I don’t even know where to start. I really enjoyed being able to witness the Academy HQ in person—it made everything more real for me—knowing we’ve got these 35 dedicated staff members behind the scenes advocating for our profession. Our Capitol Hill visit also was amazing—I didn’t realize how easy it is to set up a constituent meeting and how receptive they are about hearing our thoughts on issues pertaining to audiology. The opportunity to network and build relationships with 11 other like-minded audiologists was fantastic! The small group setting is really the way to go.

### Jodi Baxter

JFLAC was an incredible opportunity to learn from others who share the same passion and drive for our profession! I am grateful for the knowledge I gained and the new friends made.

## JAMES JERGER FUTURE LEADERS OF AUDIOLOGY 2018



### Spenser Cheshire

Truly a *leadership* conference. JFLAC 2018 stood apart from other conferences by being laser-focused on leadership in our field of audiology. It gave me a better understanding of the AAA organization and structure, as well as the challenges facing the profession and how we all can participate in collaborative ways to address those challenges. A highlight of the conference was a strong network that was built with other audiologists in a similar point of their career within just a few days. I believe the conference showed all of us how we can be active participants in advancing the profession and it equipped and empowered us very well to do so.

### Moumita Choudhury

There are no words to truly express the amazing experience I had at the 2018 JFLAC. I made friends with a bunch of passionate audiologists, lobbied for audiology on Capitol Hill, pitched a project idea, developed in less than 10 hours to the Academy a la “Shark Tank,” brainstormed (with gallons of coffee and as much food) from early morning to night. I learned so much and had even more fun!

### Vicki Gonzalez

JFLAC provided a tremendous opportunity for like-minded individuals to come together and inspire one another through advocacy, education, leadership, and teamwork. I walked away with lifelong friends and a perspective on audiology that energizes me to become more involved in the present and future of our profession.

### Jessica Messersmith

JFLAC 2018 provided me the opportunity to network with 12 bright audiologists, whom I now have the privilege of calling friend. In just a matter of days with each other, we grew to know each other, learned the history of the Academy, discussed the current state of the Academy, and brainstormed multiple excellent possibilities for addressing current challenges and opportunities for growth. After this experience and interacting with these individuals, I am even more excited and optimistic about the future of our profession!

### Jennifer Phelan

Inspired. That’s the one word I would say describes my experience at JFLAC. I was inspired by being with other like-minded audiologists. Our successes were celebrated and our struggles were understood. It was truly a remarkable experience that made me proud to be an audiologist and makes me want to do more to advocate for the profession of audiology.

### Tricia Scaglione

JFLAC 2018 was one of the most rewarding experiences of my professional career. The conference taught me that I am not just one audiologist, rather I am the academy, and I can make a difference. It lit a fire in me that I didn’t know had dimmed and made me realize that making my voice heard on Capitol Hill is not nearly as intimidating as I thought



Dr. Jessica Messersmith presents her team's project to the Academy Sharks.

it would be! I am beyond thankful and humbled to have had the opportunity to work with such a dynamic group of accomplished individuals, whom I now call friends. I highly encourage others to consider applying or nominating someone you know for JFLAC 2020!

#### Hannah Siburt

JFLAC was inspiring! I was excited and felt honored to be accepted to JFLAC 2018, but did not understand the true value of this experience until leaving (and that continues to grow). The opportunity to spend three days solely focused on leadership and the profession with a group of peers who have similar ideas and enthusiasm is extremely unique and an irreplaceable experience. I learned so much about the Academy, the profession, and myself this week. I am grateful for the opportunity and for all of the leaders and academy staff who organized JFLAC.

#### Devon Weist

It was such an honor to first be selected to the 2018 JFLAC class. However, that was just the beginning. From the efforts the planning committee took to engage, teach, and empower us to help move the profession forward in a positive manner, to the 11 colleagues I met and now will consider life-long audiology friends, this was truly one of the most valuable experiences I have ever had in my career. Many times, you return from conferences and struggle to implement the things learned. This conference, however, started to have an impact on my thinking processes even before I returned to my clinic Monday morning. I am re-energized and feel proud to tell people I'm an audiologist! The future of audiology is not something to fear, but embrace! Together we as audiologists do have the power to shape our profession and how we continue to serve those with hearing and balance difficulties.

**Trent Westrick**

JFLAC connected me with colleagues at a similar place in their careers who share my enthusiasm and motivation regarding the future of audiology. Hearing from Academy leadership and sharing ideas with like-minded peers was inspiring and positively changed my outlook on many aspects of the profession. JFLAC provided me with a clear understanding of “not what the Academy can do for me, but what can I do for the Academy.”

**Lori Zitelli**

I entered the 2018 JFLAC meeting hoping to discover and develop my leadership style. I left the 2018 JFLAC meeting with knowledge and resources to strengthen my leadership skills, a clearer understanding of how the Academy works, a new interest in advocacy, and 11 lifelong friends. Thanks so much to all who made this experience possible for me.

**Conclusion**

The comments shared by the 2018 JFLAC alumni truly capture the value of this leadership conference. We hope each attendee can leave this conference feeling empowered, having gained additional knowledge and insight about the profession, and that they will be inspired to do their part in advancing the profession of audiology. The next JFLAC will be in the fall of 2020. Stay tuned for application materials and consider applying to participate in this outstanding leadership development opportunity!

*Erin L. Miller, AuD, is a professor of instruction with the University of Akron in Akron, Ohio. She is the chair of the Academy's Leadership Development Committee, an Academy past president, and chair of the 2018 JFLAC program.*

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