

## **Early Career Professional Meet David Alexander**

“I will never go into the communication sciences and disorders (CSD) field” was what I was thinking as an undergraduate student as a junior at Loyola College in Maryland. I crumbled up my clinical observation hours and tossed it into the trash can like a basketball player doing a free throw. Because of my perception of the type of work that is done in the CSD field, my plan was to pursue my pending Army career as I was contracted to join the Armed Forces after graduation (2002), which I did as an Aviation Officer (Blackhawk Helicopter pilot). I gained a lot of leadership experience through my 12-year career through the natural progression of rank, volunteering for projects, and (in Army terms) being “voluntold” for projects/activities/missions. I’ve learned the importance of teamwork, relying on “subject matter experts (SME),” and dividing tasks to accomplish a mission. For example, I was an aviation officer in command of an engineer team. My mission was to train engineering units on their mission essential task list (METL), which is very different from aviation’s METL, and outside my skillset. However, as the lead trainer, of my team, I realigned the traditional training and administrative roles for Soldiers so that the SMEs had a more active role in developing details of training and all of our talents contributed to the success of our missions. As an assistant Professor of Military Science and Leadership at the University of South Dakota, I was reintroduced to Audiology as I was invited by Dr. Jessica Messersmith, who has made a huge impact on my new professional career, to observe audiology clinic sessions since I was in the process of going back to school to become a nurse. I bit the fishhook and audiology reeled me in....audiology was for me! After I redid my observation hours (I guess I should have listened to my undergraduate professor when she said, “Always keep this log and do not lose your hours. We do not have any copies here at the school. This is the only copy”), I went back to school in 2011 (and went into the Army Reserves) and started my externship at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center in 2014. It was Dr. Messersmith who informed me of opportunities for professional development such as the Minority Student Leadership Program and the Leadership Development Program, which I completed and continually try to utilize the skills I’ve learned in those programs. When I first joined ASHA after I graduated in 2015, I thought the only way to serve in ASHA was at the National Level and so I submitted Committee Interest Forms. Because of movement within two Boards, I was offered to serve one-year terms on the Committee on Leadership Cultivation and the Political Action Committee. I feel indebted to ASHA for the opportunities it as afforded me and wanted to “give back.” I saw the “Call for Volunteers” for the “Student to Empowered Professional Mentoring Program” and I decided to “pick up the phone” and answer and be a mentor to a student.

I have been in the audiology field for approximately three years and currently have multiple audiology jobs. After my ASHA Board terms are up and the opportunities to serve go to other individuals, I will keep looking for opportunities within ASHA, but will not only wait for another National Board position. While I wait I will continue to seek opportunities within my work settings on how something positive can be sustained or improved and taking the lead (or just participating) in a project. Why? Because I know,

at least in the work place, there's always something to do....so let's get it done and get it done right. Also, now I know there are other opportunities to serve through the "Call for Volunteers" where I can possibly contribute to various organizations and serve at various levels. I'm looking forward to this journey.