

Meet the Researcher



James W. Dias, Ph.D.

The Medical University of South Carolina

Dias received his doctorate in psychology from the University of California, Riverside. He completed postdoctoral training in the department of otolaryngology–head and neck surgery at the Medical University of South Carolina, where he is now an assistant professor. Dias is a 2022 Emerging Research Grants recipient generously funded by the Meringoff Family Foundation.

OLDER ADULTS, including my grandparents, typically have difficulty understanding speech, especially in noisy or echoey listening environments, and may use their sight to compensate. My research project was developed to determine how age-related changes across the nervous system can explain how older adults are better able to use what they see to understand what they hear. I hope that understanding the underlying neurophysiology for cross-sensory compensation will provide new avenues for rehabilitation, helping people communicate effectively throughout their lifespan.

WHEN I WAS A KID, I wanted to be an astrophysicist and to build the USS Enterprise! By college, my goal was to be a veterinarian. So I have always loved science, but it was not until I started working in the lab at California State University, Fresno, during my master's that I became passionate about multisensory processing. Our experiments in audiovisual speech perception fueled my interest in how the brain takes information from across the senses to understand the world around us. I was first in my family to receive a Ph.D. I trained at the Medical University of South Carolina, developing my skills to include aging research and neuroimaging.

I HOLD A BLACK BELT in American Kenpo. Martial arts are themselves multisensory, incorporating what you hear and see with physical motion and proprioception. Likewise, cooking—I am a big foodie—is also multisensory. What you hear, smell, and feel can all affect what you taste and how you enjoy the experience. I love trying out new restaurants and wine-tasting. I like to challenge myself to learn new cooking skills and techniques. My family and friends have certainly reaped the benefits of this hobby.

MY LONGER-TERM GOAL is a vibrant, independently funded research program with trainees concerned with understanding the neurophysiology that facilitates audiovisual speech processing across the lifespan. Or, if this whole science thing doesn't work out, I'll open a bed and breakfast with my partner! —

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