Greetings from Dr. Lori Richards

Hello from the University of Utah Division of Occupational Therapy! The past couple of years has seen the continuation of strong Occupational Therapy educational programming. At the same time, there has been a great deal of change within the Division and the College of Health and many new and exciting things are happening.

The Masters of Occupational Therapy (MOT) program has continued to experience large numbers of highly qualified applicants and matriculated students continue to have some of the best Occupational Therapy education available. The Occupational Therapy Doctorate program has grown and we now consistently have approximately 20 students in the program. Interesting capstone projects have been nationally presented and published in major Occupational Therapy journals.

The Division has seen some change in faculty over the last couple of years. While it was sad to say good-bye to working daily with Liam Hesselbein, Lou Dunn, Donna Costa, Kasey Mitchell, and JoAnne Wright, they have each gone on to new and exciting positions either in other parts of the country or other venues within the Salt Lake Valley. Dr. Wright and Mr. Mitchell continue to have ties to the Division as adjunct faculty or by providing services at the Life Skills Clinic. Dr. Alex Terrill, a rehabilitation psychologist, joined the faculty last year. She is teaching the MOT research courses and has started research in positive psychology for depression with couples where one of the couple has had a stroke. Dr. Anne Kirby, OTR/L, joined the faculty this August. She teaches some of the MOT pediatrics curriculum and is starting research related to needs and experiences of families with youth with autism who are transitioning to adult roles. Dr. Heidi Woolley, OTR/L took over as Director of the Life Skills Clinic last year. She also teaches some of the MOT pediatrics curriculum. In addition to these faculty additions, Dr. Jeanette Koski, OTR/L, earned her Occupational Therapy Doctorate and capped it off by publishing her capstone research in the American Journal of Occupational Therapy’s Education Supplement this year.

The Life Skills Clinic has grown over 60% this past year. We now have 2 full-time occupational therapists, in addition to the Director, and several PRN therapists. A large percentage of the clientele of the Life Skills Clinic are pediatric clients that the therapists serve either by providing in-clinic therapy or providing therapy at their schools. We also see a number of adults with low vision where the therapy involves teaching them strategies for accomplishing daily activities and recommending modifications to their home environment for safety and function. Dr. Beth Cardell has a program of cognitive rehabilitation for adults with executive and other cognitive impairments. The Clinic now regularly takes occupational therapy and occupational therapy assistant fieldwork students. This year the pediatric content of the MOT curriculum was modified to allow the occupational therapy students weekly supervised experiences of providing therapy to Life Skills Clinic clients, in addition to their standard level I fieldwork.

The biggest change to the Division is yet to come. The arrival of the College of Health’s new Dean, Dr. David Perrin, in 2014 brought a mandate to restructure the College of Health. Last year the restructure plan was approved. As of July 1, 2016, Recreational Therapy will be joining with Occupational Therapy to become the Department of Occupational and Recreational Therapies. It is a reasonable and interesting merger as Recreational Therapy shares the same underlying philosophy as Occupational Therapy – that engagement in meaningful activities is critical to health – and, in fact, we were originally one profession. It will be an stimulating year as the Recreational Therapy faculty move to our building, we adjust to having an undergraduate curriculum in our department, and we recruit additional Recreational Therapy faculty to meet the needs of the undergraduate Recreational Therapy program and Recreational Therapy’s future growth in research and in providing graduate degrees.
Class of 2018
by Liza Young, 2018 Class President

As the next three years unfold, I take full responsibility as your SOTA President to remind all of us of the wonderful, naive energy we harnessed when we started and to push us to reach our story’s climax.

Most of all, I promise to work to provide an encouraging and supportive space to learn and collaborate. I have many ideas for SOTA, which I want to explore with your guidance and permission. It is my ultimate goal to create more awareness about Occupational Therapy within the university and our Salt Lake Community. This includes, but is certainly not limited to: tabling undergrad events, attending the grad fair and collaborating with other schools within the College of Health to teach the value of OT. I am also excited to work with the SOTA committee to bring OTs from the community to our cohort to discuss the endless possibilities within our field.

Of course, I am not in on this alone. I have a wonderful, and energetic team around me.

A quick blurb about our SOTA Class of 2018:

• Rachel Langer is our VP. When she isn’t enjoying her morning (and sometimes afternoon) cup of coffee, she is planning her wedding or at the gym.
• Melissa Zepeda is our Secretary. A California native, who converted from being a swimmer to a runner when she moved here last year.
• Allie Ritchie and Hannah McCord are our Treasures and received their undergraduate degrees at the U.
• Anna Lundgren is our Historian. Her creativity will no-doubt be a valuable asset to our tribe.
• Rachel Fisher is the ASD and our class Canadian. She is also a certified yoga instructor.
• Megan Johnson, Samantha Adams, and Whitney Hutchings create the OT SAC.
• Abby Call and Andie Campbell are our resident Public Relations experts.

Friends, peers, colleagues, cohort - we are at the start of something wonderful.

We are at the prelude and our story is about to unravel.

I am ready to share our successes (and tackle our failures), as we grow collectively and individually in the days to come. Greatness is ahead - dissections, fieldwork experience, discovering our OT niche - and together we’ll emerge to share our passion and to help others.

Potato Extravaganza
by Brynnan Halsey, 2017

This year the University of Utah OT class of 2017 conducted their 2nd annual potato extravaganza fundraiser. We have been fortunate that one of our classmates, Abbie Beutler, hails from an Idaho potato farm and her father donates potatoes for us to sell. We sell 50 pound bags for $20 dollars. Last year we sold 98 bags. This year we sold 133. Selling the potatoes is the easy part, while getting them down to SLC from Dayton, Idaho and delivering them is another story. Transportation of the precious cargo fell on the shoulders of potatoes and how everyone makes an effort to sell as many potatoes as they can. There is a lot of teamwork that takes place to make this a successful event for our class. Our first year, this event provided a great bonding experience for us and continues to a do so today. We are very thankful to the Beutler Farms for their generous donation of potatoes and to all the individuals who bought potatoes to make this a successful event. We cannot wait to see how many we can sell next year.

Abbie’s younger brother. Things were going smoothly until the turbo in the truck died while attempting to climb a hill. After a stop at a mechanic shop and another mountain climbed, the potatoes were on their way.

After a 1 ½ hour delay, the potatoes arrived. We became a human assembly line to load potatoes in different cars in order to disperse them across the valley. One classmate sold 37 bags that were headed down to Vernal, UT. Last year one bag made it all the way to Billings, MT.

This has been an awesome fundraising opportunity for us. It is amazing how excited the class gets to sell the
OT in Maternity Health Services

by Steven Elzinga, 2014

I am currently working on developing occupational therapy maternity health services. The idea started as a third year OT student in fall, 2013 when Jeanette Koski helped me establish a fieldwork connection between U of U OT department and Josette Dorius, manager of the U Baby Team. The U Baby Team covers home health nurse care manager visits for women with Healthy U/Medicaid insurance, which includes high-risk pregnancy because the U of U Hospital has a newborn intensive care unit (NICU) and high-risk obstetric physicians. For my underserved population project that semester, I added OT services for high-risk pregnancy bed rest as co-visits with U Baby Team nurse care managers.

High-risk pregnancy means any pregnancy which is at risk for preterm birth or low birth weight, indicating NICU admission. Related diagnoses include early labor, incompetent cervix, multiples (twins/triplets), severe nausea, gestational diabetes, hypertension/preeclampsia, etc. Doctors may prescribe bed rest/activity restriction precautions for high-risk pregnancy. High-risk symptoms that impact daily activities include poor standing/activity tolerance, pain in pelvic girdle or low back, fatigue, stress/tension, limited balance/range of motion, and fall risk. Other conditions that can make pregnancy difficult include disabilities such as multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, prosthetic limb, etc.

My OT services in fall, 2013 included evaluating prioritized daily activities, recommending and issuing medical equipment and educating its safe use. I also provided community/internet resources for support groups, prognosis education, equipment donors, childcare, disability parking pass etc. Future services will include educating mindfulness relaxation, proper body mechanics, energy conservation, and strengthening/endurance exercises.

The outcomes’ highlight was that for one maternity client, with the addition of OT compared to standard high risk care alone of previous pregnancy, she reported 5 weeks increased pregnancy duration and 7 weeks decreased NICU stay. Other outcomes were that high risk symptoms of global pain and stress had an average decrease of 1.5/5 points. The average decrease in discomfort from contractions/standing during daily activities was by 1/5 points. Another highlight was that women reported an average increase of 5/10 points on the Canadian Occupational Performance Measure daily activities’ performance satisfaction including showering, getting to doctor’s appointments, and simple meal preparation.

Another area with potential for OT services program development is with typical pregnancy. Typical pregnancy symptoms that impact daily activities include low back pain, fatigue, stress/tension, limited balance/range of motion, and fall risk. In the fall, 2014 my colleague Phil Lamoreaux, then a third year OT student, did his underserved population project for typical maternity clients with low back pain and fatigue at Valley Obstetric clinic. Phil’s services included evaluating prioritized daily activities, educating proper body mechanics, core strengthening exercises, and energy conservation which were followed up by very positive outcomes. Mothers with OT intervention reported significant decrease in low back pain and fatigue in daily activities. Concerning the energy level for activity tolerance one mother felt during the day, she reported “I just feel like I can do more!”

For future development, I will soon be starting a job as an occupational therapist with Community Nursing Services (CNS) home health in Salt Lake City. The CNS therapy director Janel Wangsvick has offered to support developing OT maternity health services. It is exciting that CNS nurses are already treating pregnancy clients who are on bed rest because of intravenous treatment for severe nausea. After I complete my home health OT training, I hope to begin working with existing CNS pregnancy clients and to seek referrals from the U Baby Team and other maternal health teams, therapists, and obstetric physicians from hospitals that cover high-risk pregnancy and NICU such as IMC, U of U, UVRMC, and Davis. At a hospital, where a woman may be admitted with pregnancy complications, occupational therapists can request referrals to evaluate, treat and provide discharge recommendations for home health OT.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you are interested in helping develop OT maternity health services including high-risk pregnancy bed rest, please email me at: sbelzinga@gmail.com
Student Research

Academic educators in occupational therapy departments along with OT fieldwork educators provide education and training for students to become competent OT practitioners. It is essential that only students who meet competency criteria become OT practitioners, and yet in many disciplines, including OT, underperforming students sometimes pass courses or fieldwork. Johnny Downard, Bretton Moosman, Ben Ostler, Jessica Pratt, Cheyanna Robinson, Wendi Rock, Aubri Squire, and Jessica Wahl (class of 2015) developed a survey and performed data collection to determine what factors might contribute to failure to fail an underperforming OT student. After analyzing the data Wendi Rock and Jessica Wahl, along with faculty mentors Dr. Beth Cardell and Dr. Jeanette Koski presented the results at the AOTA Education Summit in Denver Colorado. Results were similar for OT academic educators and fieldwork educators as reasons why underperforming students passed courses or FW and those included: difficulty proving concerns were valid, vague procedural guidelines as far as failure criteria, and giving students the benefit of the doubt. Wendi and Jessica, under the direction of their faculty mentors, are currently working on writing up the findings and practice implications for potential publication.

Field Work Corner

Level I and II fieldwork is an essential part of the preparation for OT student to become professionals and many practitioners are willing and ready to become fieldwork educators. So why are there shortages of fieldwork placements in the United States? One reason cited by many OT’s is the pressure to meet productivity standards within certain settings. This practical challenge of educating students while maintaining productivity levels are cited as reasons not to provide level I and/or level II education by not only facility administrators but also at times by potential OT fieldwork educators. There has been very little empirical evidence to support the claim that providing OT student internships affects productivity, however a recent important study has been done by Rebecca Ozelie, Janet Janow, Corinne Kreutz, Mary Kate Mulry, and Ashley Penkala (2015). These researchers analyzed several factors related to student supervision and productivity measurements and were able to demonstrate that of the 109 fieldwork educators sampled in several practice settings there was no statistically significant change in reported productivity during level II student training. This study has important implications for practitioners who want to take level II students, but need to assist administration in understanding the impact of having a student program. For more information, please see the reference below.

Faculty Publications

Beth Cardell


Anne Kirby


Jeanette Koski


Pollie Price


Lorie Richards


Adluru, G., Adluru, N., Moeller, S., Richards, L., DiBella, E. Simultaneous multi-slice


Yda Smith

Smith, Y.J. (in press). Fostering Cultural Awareness through Fieldwork with People from a Refugee Background, in S. Wells, R. Black, & J. Gupta (Eds.), Culture & Occupation (3rd Edition).


Alex Terrill


Lifestyle Modification Group for Lymphedema and Obesity Results in Significant Positive Outcomes

OTD student Leslyn Keith presented a poster on her research findings regarding lifestyle modification for people with lymphedema and obesity at The NIH symposium entitled, “The Third Circulation: Lymphatics as Regulators of Health and Disease.” The symposium was held in Rockville, MD Sept. 29-30. Keith and Lori Richards worked on the study together. For more information see the link to the website: http://palladianpartners.cvent.com/events/the-third-circulation-lymphatics-as-regulators-in-health-and-disease-symposium/event-summary-5cff457965864d5ea713454d7905374c.aspx.