STUDENT DOCTORAL Experiential Capstone Projects

WESTERN NEW ENGLAND UNIVERSITY COLLEGE of PHARMACY and HEALTH SCIENCES EDUCATE. ENGAGE. EMPOWER.



Dear WNE OTD Family and Friends:

We are excited to produce this second annual edition of EDUCATE-ENGAGE-EMPOWER to showcase our doctoral experiential capstone program and student projects. Our aim is to better familiarize you with our faculty, staff, and students so that you can continue to be a part of our endeavors.

The Doctoral Experiential (DEx) Capstone Project is a complex interrelated experiential and scholarly project that is coordinated by a student in collaboration with a university and community team. The purpose of the DEx Capstone is for students to apply the knowledge and skills gained during their OTD academic courses, labs, and fieldwork experiences in ways that challenge and perhaps transform the delivery of health, educational, and social services. Through designing and implementing a community experiential and a scholarly project that specifically responds to the needs of a population and setting, students experience the roles of reflective practitioner, transformative leader, and innovative designer.

Students complete 14 weeks (560 hours) of work with a community organization during the DEx Capstone. Community organizations include hospitals, clinics, schools, health care, social service, advocacy, or educational organizations. WNE OTD students work in small groups with a faculty mentor. Depending on the individually chosen topic, population, and setting, they work with one or more site mentors, content experts, or collaborators. While there, students learn about the population and setting, as well as the organization's strengths and challenges, and they participate in daily activities. Students also conduct a scholarly project designed to answer a question generated from a needs assessment, literature review, and collaboration with faculty, site, and peer mentors. The intention of both the community experiential and the scholarly project are to establish a meaning-ful connection between WNE and the community organization to improve health, education, and social services, and to explore potentially transformative roles for occupational therapists.

The following pages offer descriptions of our faculty mentors, acknowledge our community partners, and illustrate our 2024 student projects. We are so very grateful to all who engage with our program as educators, mentors, reviewers, and consultants. Thank you for your support and contribution to the community and to the profession of occupational therapy.

Setin Batour

Debra Latour, OT, PP-OTD, M.Ed., OTR, FAOTA Doctoral Capstone Coordinator

2024 WNE OTD Faculty Mentors and Mentorship Groups



Brittany Adams, OT, OTD, MS, OTR Lindsey Kiltonic, OT/s Rianna Lafleche, OT/s Molly Manning, OT/s Ryan Wolf OT/s



Erin Murray, OT, OTD, OTR Clara Davenport, OT/s Makayla Descault, OT/s Joseph Rodriguez, OT/s



Debra Latour, OT, PP-OTD, M.Ed., OTR, FAOTA Kara Fhon, OT/s Katy Maguire, OT/s Ivy Rivers, OT/s Anne Wepfer, OTD (2023)



Erin Wells, OT, OTD, MSOT, OTR Brian Buttrick, OT/s Mary Hall, OT/s Michelle Kennedy, OT/s Kimberley-Aaliyah Lahens, OTD (2023)

Thank you to our 2024 partnering sites and site mentors

Baystate Medical Center, Springfield, MA	Dr. Deepali Maheshwari, MD
Brainbot, Canada	Atty. Adam Shedletzky & Shelley Vaisberg, MSc OT
Conca Sports and Fitness	Stephen Conca, MS
Hampden-Wilbraham Regional School District	Tony Zaremba, M.Ed.
Handspring Clinical Services: NY, CO, UT	Laura Katzenberger, CP
House of Possibilities (HOPe)	Tom Unsworth
Jewish Community Center (JCC), Springfield, MA	Dorothy Linder, OTR
Kismet Brewing Company & Clocktown Brewing Company	Nicole Lavery, OTD, OTR
Single-Handed Solutions, LLC, Springfield, MA	
UMASS/ROTC	Captain Edward Trinidad

Thank you to our 2024 WNE site mentors

Brittany Adams, OT, OTD, MS, OTR Bridget Grim, MS Debra Latour, OT, PP-OTD, M.Ed., OTR, FAOTA Erin Wells, OT, OTD, MSOT, OTR

Thank you to our supportive staff

Justina Aubrey, Justin Eck, Stephanie Golas

Dr. Debra Latour, OT, OTD, M.Ed., OTR, FAOTA Associate Professor Doctoral Capstone Coordinator

Mentorship Interest Areas:

• 2025

- Upper Limb Absence and Telehealth
- Doctoral Capstone Site Mentor Resources
- 2026
- Expand the Unlimbited Wellness program to include a training manual for facilitators.
- Expand the Unlimbited Wellness program to include a peer support group for generalist OT practitioners serving this population in the community.
- Further develop the Telehealth Center as a Level 1 FWE opportunity.
- Further investigate and develop teaching and learning strategies and outcomes for doctoral capstone students.

Dr. Alexis Morin, OT, OTD, MOT, OTR Assistant Professor

Mentorship Interest Areas:

• 2025

- Developing resources and an evidence-based support group with an emphasis on coping strategies for family members of individuals with chronic mental illness.
- Developing an evidence-based support program/group for caregivers of family members with Dementia.
- Identifying needs and resources for occupational therapy students completing their Level II fieldwork and creating an evidence-based toolkit and resource guide (advocacy tools for students, mental health resources, stress management, etc.) to optimize students' overall fieldwork experiences and ability to advocate for their learning experience and mental health needs.
- Creation of a support group for caregivers of children with disabilities utilizing a strengths-based approach and evidence on "playfulness." Topic areas may include stress management, self-care, challenges with social participation, quality of sleep, and how to manage uncertainty.
- 2026
- OTs Emerging Role with First Responders (health promotion and prevention programs; ergonomics; mental and physical well-being).
- Resources and occupation-based groups for children, adolescents, and adults with a family member with a chronic illness (health promotion and prevention).
- Use of the Kawa Model to promote professional development and enhance client-centered practice across vulnerable/marginalized populations.
- Development of on and off campus resources (club, group, etc.) for current and former foster youth and/or those with a history of homelessness or actively homeless.
- Complementary and integrative (holistic) techniques to support clients' well-being in OT practice.

Dr. Erin Murray, OT, OTD, OTR Associate Professor

Mentorship Interest Areas:

- 2025
- Pain management interventions
 - Topical analgesics including CBD
 - Student/faculty with chronic pain and accessibility to campus buildings
 - Cupping
 - Ergonomic education/programming for pharmacy students/undergraduate students
- 2026
- Accessibility in Blake and around campus
- Ergonomic assessments of University faculty/staff
- Pain management
- Non-traditional OT modalities/interventions
- Overall graduate student performance

Dr. Erin Wells, OT, OTD, MSOT, OTR Assistant Professor Distance Learning Cohort Coordinator

Mentorship Interest Areas:

- 2025
- Improving occupational engagement for individuals with disabilities, including accessible playgrounds/community spaces
- Sexual education for persons with intellectual & developmental disabilities (I/DD)
- Assessing and addressing trauma for caregivers of those with disabilities, particularly parents
- 2026
- Projects focused primarily involving individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- Program development in endeavors such as creating life skills groups, adaptive baseball and aquatics programming, and assessing the physical accessibility of the WNE campus, etc.

Accessibility and Inclusion on the Western New England University Campus BRIAN BUTTRICK, ATC, OT/S

In the worlds of architecture and education, the term "universal design" shares a similar meaning: the conscious act of designing a space or lesson, specifically to be received and used by all types of people[2]. In architecture, this involves the use of proper ramps, automatic door openers, wide hallways, and other features to make a space inclusive for all. In academia, this is done by presenting information, designing assignments, and communicating with students in a manner that best fosters a well-rounded development. Per legal requirements, most institutions of higher learning have also created a department with the authority to grant accommodations, such as extra time on tests, modified assignments, and notation devices, to students with academic needs.

Unfortunately, these accommodations are almost always limited to academic assistance. There are no such accommodations to help individuals with other aspects of campus life such as getting to class, eating at the dining hall, and attending sports games. These daily life tasks become more difficult when one has a disability, especially on a campus hosting many 'historical' buildings that were not built to accommodate individuals with different needs. Struggles imposed by architectural barriers are considered one of the leading factors that result in high burnout and decreased extracurricular participation among this population[3]. While funding is often the stated reason for inaction, the lack of awareness and informed initiative are often what prevent businesses and organizations from truly making the first step toward space modification.

3rd year Doctor of Occupational Therapy student, Brian Buttrick, has taken this big step towards expediting the evolution of the Western New England University campus into a more inclusive space by completing a full-scale needs assessment focused on architectural accessibility. This needs assessment was comprised of two major parts. The first involved conducting an IRB-approved survey available to all WNE campus members to attain their current level of awareness, values, and perceptions of accessibility on campus. The second part involved an intensive physical analysis of the entire WNE property, including buildings, pathways, and sports fields, regarding architectural features that may present barriers for individuals with disabilities. To achieve this, Brian developed a new screening tool to act as a more functional and user-friendly adaptation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards for accessibility.[1]

As part of his 14-week-long capstone project, Brian partnered with the Office of Student Involvement and Connections (SIC), which also seeks to promote inclusion on campus and allow all students to participate fully in the college experience. With the SIC, Brian created and presented training materials to student leaders to help plan their events in a way that makes new students feel welcome and included during orientation. During the discussion, one student stated, "I always thought our campus was pretty good since it's mostly flat, but you just can't understand how many challenges there truly are unless it affects you."

Among other helpful resources such as grant writing tip sheets, training presentations, and the outline of potential student jobs on campus, Brian's main product of his research is an interactive 3D map of the WNE campus that highlights areas of good and poor accessibility. This campus map can be used by clubs and organizations to plan accessible events and be used by the University as a guide during the long-term endeavor to address noted accessibility barriers. These tools are intended to be used and revised by the University for many years, with the shared goal of making WNE an increasingly accessible and inclusive campus for everyone.

- 1. ADA.gov. (2012). Americans with disabilities act title III regulations. https://www.ada.gov/law-and-regs/regulations/title-iii-regulations/
- 2. Cornell University. (n.d.). Universal Design for Learning: Center for Teaching Innovation. https://teaching.cornell.edu/teaching-resources/designing-your-course/universal-design-learning
- 3. Thanh-Thanh, T., Pancer, M.S., Pratt M.W., Wintre, M.G., Birnie-Lefcovitch, S., Polivy, J., Adams, G. (2010). Helping out or hanging out: the features of involvement and how it relates to university adjustment. Higher Education, 60(3):343–355. doi:10.1007/ s10734-009-9303-0.



Barreling Down on Ergonomics to Improve Occupational Functioning: Exploration of an Ergonomic Program to Improve the Productivity and Quality of Life of Brewers CLARA JAYNE DAVENPORT, OT/S

Breweries have long been a gathering place for friends and families across America. Brewers have been mastering their craft since the days of Mesopotamia, and many cultures worldwide have deep-seated traditions related to the art of brewing and fermentation. In our current era, we have become more aware of how certain work conditions can cause or exacerbate chronic long-term pain and musculoskeletal disorders. Research aimed at improving efficiency and productivity by modifying work environments has been beneficial to some, but not all, areas of work. The occupation of brewing is no exception. Little research has been done on brewery staff, and ergonomics and few resources are available for this population.

In 2024, two occupational therapy doctorate students, Clara Davenport and Makayla Descault, at Western New England University (Springfield, Massachusetts) decided to research and establish an online ergonomic program for brewery employees with the guidance of site mentor Dr. Nicole Lavery and faculty mentor Dr. Erin Murray. Clara focused her ergonomic program on brewers who handle heavy machinery and engage in the brewing process. The ergonomics program is a critical step in improving the culture of safety and wellness for breweries to decrease injuries and, in turn, improve brewers' engagement in activities outside of work that may be impacted by these injuries. During a survey on ergonomics and brewing, an anonymous brewer summarized the problem well, stating, "Many breweries are small businesses that don't have to follow OSHA; they are also all laid out a little differently. A list of 'golden rules' that have applicability in different layouts with small underfunded teams would be very helpful. This is definitely an important subject."

Based on the survey results, Clara and her research partner found a statistically significant correlation between experiencing pain and injuries sustained while working at a brewery and occupational deficits such as dressing and mobility difficulties due to work-related pain. There is also a statistically significant correlation between environmental factors and work-



related pain or injury. A task analysis completed with participating breweries found that keg and grain lifting were at high to very high risk of resulting in a musculoskeletal disorder based on the result of the Rapid Entire Body Assessment. Using this information, Clara created an ergonomic educational program for brewers that outlined the basics of ergonomics, environmental adaptations, and preventative strategies. The ergonomic program was designed to be accessible online to reach a larger audience and to accommodate brewery employees' unconventional work and break schedules. The program was created using Edapp by Safety Culture, which is a free application for educational programs. The ergonomic program takes approximately 30 minutes to complete and can be accessed via mobile device, tablet, or computer. A pretest and post-test survey was included to assess changes in participants' understanding of ergonomics, takeaways from the ergonomic program, and the likelihood of applying this information to their work in the future.

The results of the ergonomic program pre-test and post-test survey showed an increase in understanding of proper body mechanics and new skills learned relating to environmental adaptations and preventative exercises. Based on these results, the researchers will connect with organizations to host the ergonomic program on their websites to continue educating brewery employees, which will reduce the likelihood of developing musculoskeletal disorders. The research completed here shows that ergonomic programs have the potential to be a low-cost preventative strategy to reduce work-related injuries, and in turn, improve the daily lives of brewery employees outside of work. However, more work must be done to establish long-term ergonomic programs in breweries.



Barreling Down on Ergonomics: Reducing Work-Related Pain in the Brewing Industry MAKAYLA DESCAULT, OT/S

The free educational program "Barreling Down on Ergonomics" was created by third-year occupational therapy students Makayla Descault and Clara Davenport, in order to help reduce workrelated pain and injury among brewery workers around the world. As occupational therapists, they recognize the long-term impact that workrelated tasks can have on the body.

"As a previous server in the industry, I understand the workload and expectations of the workers, especially the aches and strain felt on the body after a long day" said Descault. The educational program provides strategies to help reduce the risk for musculoskeletal injuries as well as envi-

ronmental adaptations to improve proper body mechanics both for brewers and front-of-house staff. "This is something I've truly never thought about in the work environment," said one brewer who completed the program. "This is a project that could have a very strong impact on our industry."

The program consists of three lessons: Ergonomics 101, Environmental Adaptations, and Preventative Strategies, and can all be completed via an online application. "I wanted to create a program that was easily accessible but also applied to the unique environments of breweries," Descault said. "Talking with brewers and bartenders, many of them are surprised to learn the opportunities and recommendations that we can provide for them as occupational therapists. My hope is that the educational program will continue to be used in breweries, not only as a reference but also as a tool to increase ergonomic knowledge among workers, to help increase productivity in the workplace and improve overall quality of life."



Empowering the upper limb absence population toward improved health and quality of life Design created on Canva Platform

Unlimbited Wellness[©]: Peer Support for Psychosocial Wellness in Limb-Different Families KARA FHON. OT/S

Kara Fhon is a third-year Doctor of Occupational Therapy student at Western New England University. Upon graduating in 2017 from Rhode Island College with a bachelor's degree in psychology and behavioral neuroscience, Kara began her career in the mental health (MH) field. She developed a profound passion for MH while working with adolescents, adults, and geriatrics on inpatient units in psychiatric hospitals throughout Rhode Island and Massachusetts. In preparation for the capstone, Kara had an epiphany that she wanted to include a MH component due to her professional experience.

Telehealth (TH) has served as a bridge to access healthcare for patients and providers. The Unlimbited Wellness[®] program is a TH program that aims to address current health care needs experienced by a population of individuals with upper-limb difference (ULD) and the challenges of accessing comprehensive specialized care. TH provides the opportunity to bring people closer to direct healthcare access (Latour, 2019). As Kara began to lay the groundwork for her capstone project, she completed a TH educational course on Upper Limb Prosthetic Rehabilitation for Occupational Therapy (OT) Practice: Professional Education Mini-Course. This mini course provided an overview on understanding the industry and population, technology, evaluation, and interventions and resources for upper limb prosthetic rehabilitation. In addition, research by Persaud et al. (2023) found a growing unmet demand for mental health and psychosocial support, and a lack of opportunities provided for children and families to express their thoughts and feelings.

The focus of Kara's capstone project was surveying parents of children aged 3 to 8 years with an ULD on creating a safe, supportive peer network. As an underserved population with limited resources available to them, Kara sought to learn about parents' perceptions of their child with an ULD related to their MH. Kara collaborated with Single-Handed Solutions, LLC to create four modules for the Unlimbited Wellness[®] TH program. The aim of the modules was for parents to provide feedback on their child's perceptions about body image/self-esteem, social interaction/peer relationships, family dynamics/support, and psychosocial interventions/support services, and how these affect their child's MH. In a session with one parent, she expressed having a difficult time opening up and stated, "this is a new experience" for her and her son, and she had to "face the fact of dealing with reality" as this was her "new normal."

Kara joined forces with Laura Katzenberger, CP, from Handspring to revise their Rehabilitation page to provide information on OT and the Upper Limb Rehabilitation Process on the Handspring website. Handspring is an ensemble of highly knowledgeable medical professionals who provide a holistic approach for patients needing specialized care in upper and lower limb prosthetic rehabilitation. Kara and Laura collaborated to better describe the OT role and interventions postamputation. Kara traveled to Blythedale Children's Hospital (Valhalla, NY) with Laura and observed her fit a child with his first body-powered prosthesis alongside his team of OTs and mother. Through this experience, Kara recognized the importance of access to a prosthesis at a young age. Following this, she interviewed the parents of an adult who had been fitted for a prosthesis at a young age. This emphasized Kara's understanding of the importance of prosthesis use throughout the lifespan. The mom's advice to parents of children with ULD was to "be open, be honest," and the dad's advice for the children was "if you want to do it, you can do it."

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- Persaud, D., Hutchison, T., Anthony, S. J., Davidge, K. M., Clarke, H. M., & Ho, E. S. (2023). Mental health and psychosocial support for children with upper limb musculoskeletal conditions. Journal of Hand Surgery (European Volume), 17531934231214138.

Bridging Gaps: The Development of OTP Lead Group Sessions for Transition Schools BY MARY HALL, OT/S

Growing up in a family where disabilities were common, I learned from a young age that not everyone had the same abilities. However, as I got older, I started to see the barriers and lack of support my family would receive. This realization began my pursuit to understand the lived experience of individuals with disabilities. When I was deciding on a Doctoral Experiential (DEx) topic, my sisters were starting to attend transition school, so I decided to research the role of occupational therapy practitioners (OTP) in this setting. My research led me to an interesting discovery: there is little occupational therapy (OT) involvement in schools beyond middle school. Knowing the scope of practice of OTPs, I decided to address this gap in my DEx project.

As a result, I created and implemented a program called World Seekers. This name reflects the core belief that individuals with disabilities seek to go out in the world and connect with their community, just like everyone else. World Seekers aims to create programming and group sessions that support individuals with disabilities transitioning to the community or employment post-education by fostering skills development and providing tools for students to use when they leave formal education and transition into jobs or community involvement. During development, I actively sought feedback from teachers, staff, and parents to identify topics of concern to ensure I addressed the students' barriers when planning and implementing group sessions.



During the inaugural run of World Seekers, I ran six sessions with the students attending Hampden-Wilbraham Regional School District Transition School. These sessions covered a comprehensive range of topics, including safety, self-advocacy, forming connections, professionalism, workplace options, using scripts for important tasks or discussions, the importance of non-preferred activities, and personal boundaries. This wide range of topics ensures that the students get the chance to develop a well-rounded set of skills and knowledge, preparing them for a successful transition to the community.

Anthony Zaremba, the transition teacher, reflected, "Mary has a passion for helping others, and it shows. The topics that Mary taught the class were not only extremely relevant, but even more so was the connection that she had with the young adults. Mary was able to emphasize the importance of each of the different skills that she taught them and how they would be beneficial in the workplace."

According to faculty mentor Dr. Erin Wells, "Mary's project aims to remove barriers and improve access for students with disabilities who deserve to feel excited and encouraged about their futures after graduation. Her work to encourage selfadvocacy and self-efficacy in the wonderful young adults she is working with will serve as a catalyst for successful connections in the community."

The joy I found in helping these young adults grow and explore their gifts and place in the world is unparalleled. Knowing that each of them will soon face a period of significant change as they transition, I am proud to have been a part of the team guiding them. Yet, even as these young adults set off on their journey, the work of World Seekers is not done. The program has great promise and opportunity to advocate for the emerging and continued role of OTPs within transition schools and the transition process. To encourage the continuation and expansion of World Seekers, I have carefully crafted a robust program sustainability plan and look forward to seeing continued progress and impacts.

Implementing a Sensory-Friendly Adaptive Aquatics Program at the Springfield Jewish Community Center for Children with Intellectual and/or Developmental Disabilities MICHELLE KENNEDY, OT/S

Drowning is the leading cause of death for children 1-4 years old. There are 22 nonfatal drownings per day, which can result in long-term health problems [1]. Dayna Harvey, the owner and creator of Waiting Whales, said in an interview, "Children with autism are at a 160- times greater risk of drowning than neurotypical children. While summertime is when most drownings happen, those on the autism spectrum typically drown in bodies of water near their homes in the afternoon hours after wandering. Even a bathtub poses a threat" [2]. An additional study showed that of 1,412 of those who have fatally drowned, 16.3% had a physical disability" [3].

My name is Michelle Kennedy. I am a third-year Doctor of Occupational Therapy (OTD) student at Western New England University. After reading the current drowning statistics, many emotions overwhelmed me. As a certified lifeguard and water safety instructor (WSI) for the past 9 years with a passion for adaptive swimming, I wanted to contribute my knowledge and experiences in aquatics to those in need. When the opportunity arose to complete a capstone project in a community facility that filled a gap in care, I knew providing an adaptive swim program for children with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (IDD) and their caregivers was needed. I hoped to create a sensory-friendly adaptive swim program with children between the ages of 2-9 years old along with their caregivers that had a focus on safety in and around any aquatic setting, comfort in the water, and sensory strategies that the caregivers could learn and continue to build swimming skills for their children.

While working at the Springfield Jewish Community Center (JCC) as a lifeguard and adaptive swim instructor, I was introduced to Dorothy Linder. Dorothy is an occupational therapist and the director of the Kehillah Program at the JCC who provided me with the opportunity to create a sensory-friendly adaptive swim program there. The program successfully ran for 5 weeks. Sessions were provided on Monday for children between the ages of 2-5 and Friday for children between the ages of 5-9; all sessions were 45 minutes long. Each caregiver was required to complete a short fpre- and post-event survey regarding safety, comfort, and sensory difficulties to gain feedback on the program itself. Caregiver feedback from the proaram was outstanding, with a caregiver responding, "I thought the program was extremely helpful; it helped my son and gave me tools to help him continue his journey to becoming a great swimmer!" A client-centered occupational therapy approach



was used when creating weekly lesson plans for each session. Each lesson plan provides a detailed outline of the activity, teaching objectives, equipment required, and ways to adapt each activity for children with IDD. Athough each child in the adaptive aquatics group was different, similar equipment was provided and adapted for each child to use appropriately and safely to reach basic swimming milestones.

The 14-week doctoral capstone experience has provided me with opportunities to network with community facilities, as well as share how occupational therapy can be presented in an aquatic setting. Providing the knowledge and safety skills for children and caregivers in the unlikely event a child was to run or fall into the pool has been truly rewarding. Caregivers reported, "The program was a great introduction to pool safety and getting comfortable in the water (for adults and kids)!" "A great program providing a safe environment to learn basic swim skills and water safety."

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Occupational Therapy and Artificial Intelligence: A Collaborative Approach to Improve Quality of Life Recovering from Concussion LINDSEY KILTONIC, OT/S

The CDC estimates 5.3 million Americans experience longterm or lifelong difficulties with activities of daily living following concussion [1]. After accumulating multiple life-altering concussions and being formally diagnosed with post-concussion syndrome (PCS), Lindsey Kiltonic devoted her doctoral capstone project to those experiencing post-concussion symptoms (i.e., sensitivity to light or noise, headache, slowed reactions or thinking, irritability, difficulty with sleep, and depression). Concussion symptoms can vary, and each concussion should be treated uniquely. Lindsey met weekly with individuals through the student-run pro bono clinic at Western New England University, the BEAR PAW Center (BPC). Here, Lindsey provided functional rehabilitation and concussion expertise in person and virtually on Zoom.

All clients were over 18 years of age, had sustained a concussion within the past five years, and had access to an Android or Google smartphone for daily use with Brainbot, an artificial intelligence (AI) app for tracking and managing concussion symptoms. The purpose of this project was to examine the effectiveness of holistic, occupational therapy (OT) services combined with Brainbot in relation to overall increased quality of life. Lindsey's lifelong and personal mission is to spread awareness and help make this invisible injury become visible. In preparation for her doctoral capstone project, Kiltonic completed an online concussion course, ImPACT Trained Occupational Therapist. Through this course, she learned the mechanics of concussion, clinical trajectories, the role of OT

<image>

with concussions, and various interventions including vision and vestibular therapy. Various eye exercises, problem solving and gradation of challenging tasks, establishing proper sleep hygiene, and balance exercises were some evidence-based interventions utilized during the BPC sessions.

When asked about the OT services provided, one participant wrote, "Lindsey really cared about improving my sleep. She worked really hard to find a solution, and her personal experience with a concussion helped achieve all my personal goals." Another participant stated, "Lindsey was able to use her knowledge as well as external tools to help provide me with individualized therapy sessions that helped me get back to day-to-day life without experiencing symptoms. I would still be getting headaches if it wasn't for Lindsey."

After completing her capstone project, Lindsey has increased insight into concussions and the impact they have on daily tasks. Concussion management can look different depending on the person; however, Lindsey has gained a wealth of knowledge and increased empathy for the various repercussions clients face post-concussion. With this, Lindsey will use these skills in future practice as an OT. Healing from concussion is not a linear process; however, it does get better with time in addition to a support system and a concussion management team. "These clients changed my life. I understood what they were going through. Treating these individuals has been healing to my own recovery."

References:

1. Wheeler, S. (2021). Occupational Therapy Post Concussion Interventions [powerpoint slide 8]. ImPACT Applications, Inc.

Cultivating Leaders in Care: Establishing an Intercollegiate Occupational Therapy Student Leadership Society RIANNA LAFLECHE, OT/S

Nationally, there are 278 accredited Occupational Therapy (OT) schools across the United States (US)[1]. The Student Occupational Therapy Association (SOTA) and Pi Theta Epsilon (PTE) are the only two student organizations that exist universally across US-based OT schools; however, there is not an inclusive society to solely develop leadership skills in future practitioners. SOTA works to increase student knowledge of OT through professional, educational, and social events[2]. PTE serves as a society to promote research and scholarship, not leadership development[3].

Rianna LaFleche, a third-year entry level Doctor of Occupational Therapy student at Western New England University (WNE) has developed an inclusive, intercollegiate student occupational therapy leadership society over the past 14 weeks. The aim of this project was to create an inclusive, intercollegiate, student leadership society that does not require a specific grade point average, thus providing further leadership opportunities to all graduate OT students. Throughout her undergraduate and graduate school career, Rianna held



numerous roles through student organizations that inspired her interest in leadership and student development.

Over the course of 14 weeks, Rianna collaborated with professionals within Occupational Therapy Department, such as OT Leaders and Legacies Society, Pharmacy and Law to further inform the development of this society. She has collaborated with students from WNE and surrounding institutions, including Bay Path University and Springfield College, to develop a handbook of policies and procedures for the existing society and future societies. This was accomplished through a servant leadership model, prioritizing the needs of the students. To best support the launch of this society, Rianna has also spent significant time increasing her knowledge in leadership and management skills through continuing education courses. She earned a Mindful Leader badge through the American Occupational Therapy Association "Mindful Path to Leadership" course. This course, among others, further informed the process for a servant leadership model.

Students were asked what kinds of leadership opportunities they would benefit from to develop their leadership skills. Students reported "more professional development," "attending more talks (Ted Talks, public speakers, etc)," and "guest lecturers" to name a few. This sparked the need for the OT Student Leadership Society to host an event to provide students with opportunities that are not typically provided through academic programs. Event participants viewed a podcast hosted by Sarah Lyon entitled "Leadership and OT." Lyon is the business owner of OT Potential and joined the leadership society for an amazing Q&A followed by the podcast viewing. This successful event will set the groundwork for future professional development events to be held through the society along with other established societies in the future.

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Perceptions of Pediatric Therapists on Neurodiversity and Treatment Planning for the Autistic Population KIMBERLEY-AALIYAH LAHENS, OT/s

Did you know that neurodiversity acknowledges the absence of an "average" brain in society? Did you also know that it highlights natural differences in how people learn, think, perceive, and process information (Genovese & Butler, 2023)? The neurodiversity perspective redefines autism as a neurological difference rather than a disorder, focusing on strengths and opposing the idea of a cure. While neurodivergence is a component of human neurodiversity, it also encompasses conditions beyond autism (Genovese & Butler, 2023; Kornblau & Robertson, 2021).

My journey into exploring neurodiversity concepts began with a profound lack of personal awareness and knowledge. As I delved deeper into neurodiversity-related literature and resources, my interest evolved, revealing various neurodiverse conditions and their strengths and challenges. This transformative journey led me to deliver my in-service presentation, titled "Understanding Neurodiversity: Through an Autistic Lens," during my Level II Fieldwork at Children's Specialized Hospital's (CSH) Outpatient Center in Union, NJ. Inspired by this eye-opening experience and the research conducted, I embarked on a 14-week doctoral experiential capstone project, partnering again with CSH Union to further explore the application of neurodiversity concepts in a pediatric setting. The nature of my DEx capstone project examined outpatient pediatric providers' perspectives on neurodiversity concepts and their impact on treatment and evaluation planning for individuals within the autistic population. Ultimately, my goal was to create educational materials to enhance the research site's support for neurodiversity.

The research sought the expertise and insights from licensed providers in outpatient pediatric rehabilitation services from occupational therapy (OT), physical therapy (PT), speechlanguage pathology (SLP), psychology, psychiatry, and social work who are currently working at any of the 11 Children's Specialized Hospital Outpatient Centers across New Jersey. An online survey consisting of mixed closed-ended questions (i.e., multiple-choice, Likert scale) and open-ended questions was employed via convenience sampling using internal mass email communication at the research site for recruitment. The information gathered covered provider demographics, perspectives on neurodiversity, approach to treatment planning and evaluations, strategies for family education, and perceptions regarding professional development supporting neurodiverse individuals.

A total of 38 participants across disciplines of OT, PT, SLP, and psychology completed the survey, contributing to the advancement of knowledge in this vital area. One respondent defined neurodiversity as "differences in brain engagement and experiences that shape each individual." Another described

neurodiversity: "Every person's neurological system is unique like a snowflake." Interestingly, despite participants' high confidence level in neurodiversity concepts and integrated concepts in practice, some expressed limitations in translating neurodiversity concepts to parents/ families of autistic individuals during treatment and evaluation sessions. Some participants responded "no" when asked if they educate families on neurodiversity,





with one saying, "I do not specifically know enough to provide enough information."

Through extensive literature reviews and data analysis, my DEx experience yielded valuable scholarly products: a literature review, an online educational module with universal design principles, and a combined annotated bibliographycritical appraisal document, all available online. These resources reveal gaps in neurodiversity understanding, barriers to inclusive treatments, perception-driven care disparities, and tpressing need for better educational support for neurodiverse individuals.

My exploration of neurodiversity has deepened my understanding and emphasized the importance of fostering acceptance, inclusivity, and support for neurodiverse individuals. The path forward involves ongoing collaboration, research, and education to celebrate and accommodate each person's unique neurological system, much like the diverse beauty of snowflakes in a winter storm

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Adult Day Health Providers Try Mindfulness to Reduce Stress



BY KATY MAGUIRE

The House of Possibilities (HOPe) in Easton, Massachusetts, is an adult day health center staffed by compassionate health providers. These providers care for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). These individuals have varying degrees of ability and have unique needs. Adult day health care providers are responsible for providing opportunities for their clients to learn; socialize; develop hobbies;

and gain self-help , problem-solving, and independent living skills. These health providers do this while keeping their clients safe and administering medications as needed.

Staff at HOPe expressed that while stressful, the job is rewarding. One staff member said, "I look forward to coming to work every day, even though it stresses me out sometimes." Another stated, "I like my co-workers. That makes coming to work easy." As part of her Doctoral Experiential (DEx) Capstone Project, Katy Maguire created a survey that the staff participated in earlier this summer. Respondents to the survey expressed their satisfaction with their job overall because they found it rewarding to work with the IDD population. Responses also indicated that the staff enjoy working with one another and depend on each other to get through the day. Unfortunately, however, the job is not without its challenges. Survey respondents also indicated that they experience stress at work for reasons that often have nothing to do with direct client care. Most expressed that they did not feel their mental health needs were being addressed or supported. For this reason, Katy created a mindfulness program that was implemented for four weeks. As part of the mindfulness program, HOPe staff were guided through mindfulness exercises at the start of their workday. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with staff expressing that mindfulness effectively managed their stress. One participant shared, "I really needed this [mindfulness meditation] today. It helped me clear my mind and start the day on a positive note."

The staff at HOPe also expressed their gratitude for the management's understanding of their mental health needs and its impact on their ability to provide quality care. "I never realized how much we needed mental health support until now," one respondent shared. Another staff member expressed the hope that mental health would be given the same importance as physical health, suggesting that mental health days could benefit the workplace.

Overall, the response to mindfulness groups at HOPe was positive. Participants expressed their need for mental health support and were grateful to HOPe management teams for recognizing it. Many participants said they would continue to exercise mindfulness before beginning the work day. As a future occupational therapy practitioner, the DEx Capstone Project proved to be an invaluable experience for Katy. This program development as a part of the DEx Capstone Project will inform future community involvement initiatives, and expertise gained through the process will provide an opportunity to act as a consultant for adult day health centers.

The Inspired Minds Expansion: The Effectiveness of a Functional Support Group on The Mood of Clients With Neurological Impairments BY MOLLY MANNING, OT/S

When searching for Occupational Therapy programs, Molly Manning discovered Western New England University's student organization, Inspired Minds, a crafting group aimed to enhance the quality of life of survivors of traumatic brain injury. Now, Molly Manning is a third-year Doctor of Occupational Therapy (OTD) student with a strong passion for research related to occupational therapy's role in supporting individuals with neurological diagnoses.

In preparation for her doctoral capstone project, Manning has spent time reviewing student organization manuals, conducting research, and reading articles related to her target populations in preparation for working with participants. Manning's passion for working with clients with neurological conditions began when serving as co-president for Inspired Minds. At the time, finding participants was one significant challenge which Manning would later be able to address in her capstone project. While on level two fieldwork, Manning had the opportunity to learn at Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital on the Traumatic Brain Injury unit. Here she was able to gain skills and knowledge that helped prepare herself further in working with this population. Manning believes her research and occupational therapy lens will help in bridging the gaps in care experienced by individuals with neurological conditions. Inspired Minds provides opportunities for development of social skills, cognitive skills, as well as physical skills such as fine motor skills for survivors of traumatic brain injuries (TBI). Motivated by her desire to develop and expand a program that would empower individuals with neurological conditions, Manning's doctoral project aims to improve the mood of participants through participation in these functional support group sessions. Through a simple participant-completed survey after each group session, Manning could better understand how the support group sessions are impacting mood and ultimately quality of life for each participant.

Although Inspired Minds is an existing organization within the OTD program, the collaboration with the Mental Health Association (MHA) was an initiative led by Manning, allowing the group sessions to relocate to MHA's Resource Center. This was a significant move for the Inspired Minds organization because it is easily accessible to the group members and provides access to a larger group of potential members who are in need of these services. Benefits if this group can include increased knowledge about the services available as well as services still needed for this population. Research has highlighted the benefits of crafting groups and support groups. Some complications that follow a traumatic brain injury include difficulties with fine and gross motor skills and social skills. Craft activities can help with reflection and create a safe space for potential failure. Failing safely allows for an exploration of emotions and can be therapeutic. After just one functional support group, session participants reflected, "I had a really fun time with you guys, and I'm looking forward to next week," "You guys were great helping us understand because it's hard for me to understand people because of my condition," and "Excellent, I feel really good now," when referring to their mood post-session. Manning believes her capstone project will enhance the quality of life in individuals with neurological diagnoses.



Assessing Attitudes, Knowledge, and Practices of the Community Regarding Pelvic Floor Health BY IVY RIVERS

Pelvic floor disorders (PFD) represent a prevalent yet often overlooked health concern among women, stemming from damage or weakening of pelvic floor muscles. These disorders include a range of conditions such as lacerations, urinary and anal incontinence, prolapse, persistent pain, and discomfort during intercourse.

Pelvic floor disorders encompass a range of conditions affecting the muscles, ligaments, and connective tissues in the pelvic region, often resulting in symptoms such as urinary incontinence, pelvic pain, and sexual dysfunction. Sixty percent of postpartum patients experience one or more pelvic floor disorders following childbirth. Moreover, a substantial proportion, ranging from 8% to 25%, continue to endure persistent symptoms for a year or more after delivery, as reported by Dr. Deepali Maheshwari of Baystate Health. Despite their prevalence and known impact on quality of life, PFDs remain unknown, underreported, and stigmatized, which hinders access to appropriate care and support.

In an effort to shed light on an overlooked women's health concern, a student from Western New England University conducted an online survey to gauge the community's understanding of pelvic floor health. The results of the survey reveal a startling lack of awareness and education surrounding pelvic floor disorders (PFDs), highlighting the massive need for improved public health initiatives.

Ivy Rivers, a third-year Doctor of Occupational Therapy student, initiated the survey as part of her research project of assessing attitudes, knowledge, and practices of the community regarding pelvic floor health. Utilizing online platforms and public spaces frequented by women, the survey reached a diverse number of residents ranging from 18-45 years old who had delivered a baby at some point in their life. Ivy is also involved with a quality improvement project with Baystate Health that is closely monitoring pelvic floor symptoms.

The findings of the survey underscore a concerning trend: a significant portion of the Springfield population lacks basic knowledge about pelvic floor health. Many participants admitted to being unaware of PFDs, having little knowledge, having no community resources, or knowing of any preventative measures for pelvic floor health. Many participants expressed their frustration over the scarcity of accessible information, especially following childbirth.

With the public health impact of untreated PFDs present throughout the community, women bear the brunt of this neglect, facing barriers to seeking help due to the lack of



awareness and resources. Addressing this gap in knowledge and awareness is key to improving the health and well-being of Springfield MA residents. Ivy is hoping to help with public health initiatives aimed at increasing education about pelvic floor health, including preventive measures and awareness, which are urgently needed. She is working to create educational material in the form of pamphlets that can be provided to postpartum patients from their healthcare providers. Through collaborative efforts between healthcare professionals, stakeholders, and community leaders, Springfield and surrounding communities can take meaningful strides towards addressing this neglected public health issue.

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Preventing wounded warriors: Addressing gaps in education of joint protection strategies for the ROTC JOSEPH RODRIGUEZ, OT/S



Injuries to the joints of the body frequently occur to cadets enrolled within the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC). Upwards of half of all ROTC cadets experience joint-related injuries every year. These preventable injuries interrupt the process of preparing to become an officer in the United States military. What is currently being done about this? A third-year student enrolled within Western New England University's (WNE) Doctor of Occupational Therapy (OTD) program has decided to tackle this problem head on as part of their 14-week long Doctoral Experiential (DEx) Capstone Project. Joseph Rodriguez, who is a veteran of the United States Marine Corps, is working with the UMASS cadre leadership to create the Preventing Wounded Warriors program in order to educate cadets how to prevent these types of injuries.

The inception of this program began before Joseph's third year within the OTD program at WNE, as he witnessed firsthand how injuries to the joints impacted the lives his fellow Marines and the cohesion of his platoon. Joseph would later visit the Northampton Veteran Affairs (VA) hospital and would see the long-term effects of not understanding ways to prevent joint-related injuries. Interviewing the ROTC leadership at WNE, he learned that they "...do not currently have an injury-prevention program that even focuses on exercise for the cadets," as mentioned by one captain in the U.S. Army. Not wanting to set those cadets within their ROTC programs on a path to becoming injured veterans at the VA, the idea of the Preventing Wounded Warriors program was born. The population that this program intends to serve are all cadets enrolled within the UMASS Amherst cadre and their respective ROTC programs. This ends up servicing not just UMASS Amherst, but all of their 12 membership schools in western Massachusetts. To do this, Joseph created a 4-week long program where participants would spend 1 hour a week learning in person or online about leadership and joint-injury prevention.

At the start of the first class, the participants would take a test and survey to measure their current knowledge, as well as their current confidence levels on how to prevent injuries in themselves and others. Throughout their classes, participants learned joint-injury prevention within multiple environments and for all occupational domains. One participant mentioned at the end of one class that, "This stuff that's taught relates to real life, like how to pack and fit a rucksack for a long hike. We weren't taught that by our leadership, but we have a hike tomorrow. It's good to know how to save my back and knees – I'm quite fond of them."

At the end for all the participating groups, the data showed that the participants demonstrated a significant jump in knowledge with joint-related information and injury prevention as well as consistent improvement in their own confidence to prevent injuries in themselves and others. Participants found it convenient to be able to participate in this program online, as their locations often made it difficult to commute to classes in person at times. It is Joseph's aim that the current success of this program will be used as a resource to help create more knowledgeable and confident ROTC cadets within UMASS Amherst's ROTC membership schools and prepare them as military officer candidates.

Teaching, Learning, and Upper Limb Absence BY ANNE WEPFER, OT/S

Western New England University doctoral candidate, Anne Wepfer, OT/s, completed her Doctoral Experiential (DEx) Project with foci on upper limb absence (ULA), prosthetic technology, research, and teaching. Following her literature review, she discovered a disturbing lack of resources available for people living with ULA to access quality education about their condition. Her passion for education and research and her drive to empower others, particularly people who are part of underserved populations, led her to a multi-faceted DEx project driven by the following question: How can the gaps in care for individuals with ULA be addressed through research, teaching, and learning?

She was asked to contribute to a learning management system (LMS) for Fillauer LLC, a prosthetic manufacturing company, which would provide a resource for their stakeholders to develop a deeper understanding of devices, technology, and training. Her contributions included eight course modules about certain electronic prosthetic devices. These courses allow patients and clinicians alike to further understand the technology, the needs of the user, and how to use the device functionally.

Fillauer expressed interest in obtaining a White Paper that covered the various levels of ULA and devices available for prosthetic intervention. Wepfer took this opportunity to create a document where the body of knowledge surrounding ULA and prosthetic intervention would be synthesized and provide readers with an in-depth look at ULA. Wepfer created this White Paper to provide her with a deeper understanding of the ULA population and to help stakeholders better understand the ULA community. Per the evidence found in the literature review, Wepfer and Fillauer noted there was a gap in research regarding water exposure to prosthetic devices and how that affects the user's daily life participation. Fillauer expressed interest in and support for additional inquiry that led Anne to perform a study entitled "Impact of Water Damage on Electronic Terminal Device Use During Valued Occupations." Wepfer created a survey and disseminated the survey to Fillauer prosthetists, and, to add greater scope, also shared the survey with an ULA rehabilitation clinic, Handspring LLC. The results from this study are valuable for improving the quality of life for prosthesis users. Fillauer concurred by stating that this project "will have tremendous benefit for understanding the true needs of the user."

Teaching was the next aspect of Wepfer's DEx project. After discovering that some students in the earlier stages of the WNE Doctor of Occupational Therapy (OTD) program were struggling with scholarly writing and literature review, she offered her expertise in this area to provide a weekly Scholarly Writing Workshop for the second-year OTD students. Each meeting included lectures about specific facets of scholarly writing followed by group discussion. Sessions covered literature review, grammar, word choice, sentence structure, synthesis, and readability. She planned a pre/post survey for the participants of the workshop to assess the efficacy of the program.

Wepfer was asked about her reasoning behind the DEx project and its many facets. "I am very passionate about accessible, quality healthcare, education for all, and the freedom to pursue self-expression. The right knowledge can expand a person's world and transform their life. I love learning, writing, research, and serving underserved populations. My DEx concentrated all of these passions into one effort."

Occupational Therapy Integration in Fitness Centers: Bridging Health and Wellness through Comprehensive Care BY RYAN WOLF, OT/S

In an effort to integrate occupational therapy (OT) principles into fitness routines and advance the understanding of the OT role within fitness centers, Ryan Wolf, an occupational therapy student from Western New England University, undertook a 14-week capstone project at Conca Sport and Fitness in West Springfield, Massachusetts. His project focuses on introducing tailored OT services and developing an adaptive fitness program for individuals with developmental disabilities in collaboration with the gym's owner, Steve Conca, and strength and conditioning coach, Dave Albert.

Ryan's primary goal has been to demonstrate the potential of integrating OT into a fitness center and enhancing overall well-being in non-traditional environments. Initially defined by an employee as "training and exercises to help someone's ability to do everyday tasks or activities," Ryan emphasizes, "It's much more comprehensive; it's about providing holistic care that addresses the entirety of a person, regardless of physical, mental, or emotional challenges, ensuring they receive the specialized care they deserve and can independently participate in meaningful occupations they believe are important." This initiative not only highlights OT's transformative potential in non-traditional settings but also inspires inclusive and personalized approaches to health and fitness.

During his time at Conca Sport and Fitness, Ryan collaborated with Dave Albert to develop an inclusive and adaptive fitness program tailored for individuals with developmental disabilities. Throughout this collaboration, Ryan introduced Dave to occupational therapy principles and concepts, enriching his understanding of how these could be integrated into personal training sessions. This mutual exchange allowed Dave and Ryan to establish a productive relationship, discussing various strategies and components essential for effective implementation. Reflecting on their collaboration, Dave expressed appreciation, stating, "Thanks for the extra help. These are things that I have been trying to do since you have educated me on some of the things that [client's name] needs."

In addition to developing an adaptive fitness program, Ryan has extended his assistance to members of Conca Sport and Fitness in necessary areas of health and well-being typically overlooked in conventional fitness centers. Ryan has supported individuals with stress management, time management, sleep hygiene, meal preparation, and the creation of functional home exercise programs tailored for injury recovery and rehabilitation. Emphasizing all these components, Ryan underscores their impact on overall well-being. He views the fitness center as an "ideal environment to highlight the significance



of addressing these areas, emphasizing that holistic health encompasses more than just physical fitness."

In his efforts to establish occupational therapy as a standard practice within fitness centers, Ryan has developed a framework specifically designed for integrating occupational therapy into fitness settings. This framework serves as a tool for fitness centers to evaluate the significance of occupational therapy and consider hiring occupational therapists as part of their interprofessional team. By advocating for the inclusion of occupational therapy, Ryan aims to enhance fitness centers' ability to effectively address the diverse needs of all individuals.





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