

Program Review

Executive Summary

Occupational Therapy Assistant

Majors Reviewed:

- *Occupational Therapy Assistant, A.A.S. (OC)*
- *Applied Health Studies – Occupational Therapy Assistant, B.S. (in-program only) (BAO)*

April 2014



The associate-degree Occupational Therapy Assistant (OC) program admitted its first class in 1986. It has a strong history of success for graduates who have done well on the National Certification Exam and found productive employment in diverse areas of practice in health care, education and community services. Strengths are consistently cited as a diverse, experienced, knowledgeable, and caring faculty, a curriculum that keeps pace with current trends in the profession, physical facilities offering diverse equipment and supply, and abundant and diverse fieldwork experiences within the curriculum. The program has been consistently maintained full accreditation since 1987.

Evidence from national, state, and local resources demonstrate strong employment opportunities and a growing market over the next 10 years. Graduates provide valuable feedback via course evaluations. Fieldwork Educators represent a large and diverse group of clinicians who, through their roles of student supervision, act to communicate strength and weaknesses of student performance, knowledge, and skills. Additionally, the collaborative relationships established with these clinicians allow the Occupational Therapy Assistant program to keep abreast of current trends and issues in practice.

Accreditation standards demand specific objective data related to graduate outcomes, job placement, and employer satisfaction. Although the program receives a good bit of anecdotal information, objective data is more difficult to procure. Traditional survey formats have resulted in too small an *N* to be considered significant for any decision making. A focus group with fieldwork educators has been used since Spring 2011 to procure employer data. The program must devise a system to gain objective data regarding new graduate job placements.

Application and enrollment numbers have been steadily increasing. Enhanced recruitment efforts in addition to strong employment projections have resulted in growth of the applicant pool. Program admissions have accepted a full capacity of students over the last three years.

Increased enrollment, however, leads to a growing concern over the rapid rise in the number of level I and level II placements required. This demand places a severe strain on contracted sites, which are simultaneously struggling to maintain compliance with a growing number of governmental and reimbursement restrictions related to student supervision. Over one quarter of the program credits require fieldwork placements. This situation presents a serious threat to the integrity of the curriculum design.

Fiscal support for the program has been adequate, and students and graduates have consistently sited labs and equipment a positive aspect of the program. Some capital equipment, however, is showing wear, with many pieces of equipment spanning the 28-year history of the program. The program's Strategic Plan includes a replacement schedule to update the collection of wheelchairs.

An Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE) standard that has been part of a more generalized trend in health care is the enhancement of interdisciplinary exposures for students. Although the program has implemented several initiatives to address

this standard, a need remains for more diverse experiences in didactic and fieldwork aspects of the program.

Program attrition and many other student challenges are typically related to accountability, professional behavior, or interpersonal skills. The development of critical/administrative protocol has provided structure and has helped to resolve some issues of accountability. However, further development of interpersonal skills is needed, as “therapeutic use of self” is a critical skill set for occupational therapy assistant practitioners.

Recommendations

- Establish plans with the office of Assessment, Research & Planning to procure reliable and timely graduate and job placement data for adequate program evaluation.
- Expand SWOT analysis to produce more quantified data related to external threats to the fieldwork components of the curriculum.
- Ensure that fieldwork agreements are sufficient in scope and number to allow completion of graduation requirements.[ACOTE Standard B.10.8]
- Monitor guidelines for incoming class capacities to ensure compliance with the community resources available to meet program objectives.
- Develop a replacement schedule for equipment/major supplies. Replace wheelchairs (at least two per academic year) to provide updated equipment and more diverse technologies.
- Enhance interdisciplinary initiatives within didactic work and fieldwork experiences.
- Develop a system to ensure full student compliance with paperwork required for fieldwork placements.
- Explore and develop video technologies for student feedback related to clinical practice and interpersonal skills in courses like OCT204, OT Practice Skills.