OT Program Update: Message from the OT Program Director

Joyce Salls, OTD, OTR/L, OT program director

Another busy year for the MOT and OTD programs at Chatham! Our MOT program’s onsite visit occurred in May and we received full ACOTE re-accreditation in August. A special thank you to all the fieldwork educators, students, and alumni who participated in the process and continue to enrich our program.

We are pleased to announce the addition of a new faculty member, Amy Mattila, MBA, MS, OTR/L who will join us on January 1, 2013. Amy received her MBA from the University of Phoenix and her MOT from Duquesne University. She comes to Chatham with a strong clinical background in mental health and management, and over six years of experience working as an occupational therapist in the United States Army. We are also delighted to announce that our program assistant, Debbie Juran, moved from part-time to full-time program assistant with our program as of July 1. Finally, due to growth of our OTD and Bridge programs, Dr. Ingrid Provident has assumed the position of OTD program coordinator.

In the fall, 40 new Master of Occupational Therapy students joined our program and 37 will be heading to fieldwork in January 2013. The majority of the articles in our newsletter are written by our second year MOT students as part of their Management and Leadership class, and highlight their numerous accomplishments in leadership and advocacy over the past year. Our OTD program graduated 19 students in December 2012, for a total of 103 graduates since opening in 2006. With our online format, OTD students enrolled in our program come from a variety of geographic areas – as close as Pittsburgh to as far as Hong Kong. Graduates of the OTD program are assuming leadership roles in their worksites, engaging in scholarly work, and embarking on new career opportunities as managers, entrepreneurs and academicians. We are also growing our Bridge to the OTD program, which provides an avenue for practitioners with a bachelor’s degree in occupational therapy to obtain their OTD degree at Chatham University. Fall 2012 saw its highest enrollment, with 15 new students.

In alignment with the Chatham University mission of global understanding and AOTA Centennial Vision of global connectedness, the OT program launched its first elective course this year, Global Health Perspectives. MOT students traveled to Ibarra, Ecuador, in the summer of 2012 to provide services in a homeless shelter and explore the culture of the region. The course was a big success, and will be repeated in the summer 2013. Additionally, a group of MOT and OTD students will be traveling to Kenya in the summer to work at Hekima Place, a home for girls who have been orphaned primarily by HIV/AIDS.

Read on to learn more about the happenings in our OT programs in 2012!

Chatham MOT Level 1 Community Fieldwork

Perry Aryee, OTS; Lauren Dirienzo, OTS; Annelies Layton, OTS; & Layla Rissi, OTS

What is the role of Occupational Therapy (OT) in a community setting? “Communities provide a unique and broad setting for occupational therapy practice. Communities refer to a person’s natural environment where the person works, plays, and performs other daily activities. OTs can facilitate or inhibit occupational engagement of those with and without disabilities” (Doll, 2010, p. 2). In the MOT program at Chatham University, students are given the opportunity to complete a Level 1 fieldwork in community organizations that do not have occupational therapists on staff. The role of OT in a community setting requires flexibility, creativity, and consultancy skills.

Level 1 community fieldwork provides OT students with an opportunity to not only help clients, but also to expand knowledge on how OT can be implemented in a community setting. Chatham University provides students with a variety of setting options, which include personal care homes, schools, community organizations and offices. As part of the community fieldwork...
experience, students complete a needs assessment of the designated fieldwork sites and implement programs based on those needs.

One group of students completed their fieldwork at the United Cerebral Palsy/Community Living And Support Services (UCP/CLASS). This organization focuses on community involvement, self-sufficiency, and dignity for all of their participants through a variety of programs. Though the organization’s name may lead one to believe they only serve individuals with cerebral palsy, they actually provide services for individuals with a variety of diagnoses. The OT students assigned to this site spent time at the main building where participants come to take classes. One of the observations made was that the main room had a lot of congestion due to wheelchairs, furniture, and unutilized space. To gather more information and come up with a possible solution, the students conducted interviews and surveys with participants and staff members. This information helped to pinpoint the biggest issues while also identifying what the staff and participants did not want to change. The main room was then rearranged to create a more open and efficient space. The end result was very positive, and the facility has kept the arrangement ever since.

Another fieldwork site, Temple Emanuel of South Hills, is an Early Childhood Development Center that provides programs to children of all abilities from 15 months of age up to kindergarten. Their philosophy is to emphasize the importance of each child as a unique and valued person, and provide an accepting environment in which children can grow and develop. They also encourage children to understand and express their feelings appropriately, as well as acquire a sense of confidence. Additionally, they support physical, emotional, social, and cognitive development, and encourage the children to learn respect and consideration for others of all backgrounds (Simon, 2012). While at the site, the OT students helped teachers during everyday activities, including cutting with scissors, prewriting skills, and tasks that enhance the child’s grasp. They also developed a pre-screening checklist for the teachers to use to determine which child might need extra help during different classroom activities. The checklist addresses pre-writing skills, pencil grasp, and scissor skills. A fun “take-home bag” was created to help families work on some of the skills addressed in the checklist at home.

Orion Personal Care Home is another community fieldwork site where Chatham students have completed fieldwork in recent years. It is a personal care home, which cares for approximately 20-30 residents. One unique feature of Orion is the home-like setting, which simulates an actual home as much as possible. Residents spend their days eating meals, participating in various activities, receiving visitors, being attended to by medical staff and relaxing. Many of the residents are experiencing the effects of dementia, so it is a priority to make the residents feel at home, and provide them with activities to keep their minds active. Based on the needs assessment, the OT students at this site engaged the residents in a variety of group activities aimed at improving function, quality of life, and preserving their dignity. These activities included baking cookies, listening to music, playing games, doing artwork, enjoying the company of pets, and doing light exercises. Students implemented range of motion activities, provided cues for proper positioning, and encouraged independence with feeding. Additionally, the students provided suggestions to the manager and staff regarding assistive devices, proper transfer techniques, and preventing safety hazards.

In closing, community fieldwork provides OT students with an opportunity to work in settings that do not have occupational therapists and use their creativity and problem solving skills to develop meaningful occupation-based programs. It is an important component of the MOT curriculum as it ties in all elements of the person, environment and occupation, with a focus on population-based services. Above all, it stresses one of the most important qualities an OT should have: flexibility.

References
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2012 Publications
Salls, J., Provident, I., & Dolhi C. (2012). Outcomes of an online post professional doctorate degree in occupational therapy. The Internet Journal of Allied Health Sciences and Practice, 10(2).


2012 Presentations
Salls, J., & Bucey, J. Finding our Niche in RtI: A Natural OT Fit, POTA Conference, Lancaster, PA, September 29, 2012


Provident, I., Dolhi, C., Bednarsi, J., Barton, R. Consultant role for Promoting OT in your Community. POTA Conference, Lancaster, PA, September 2012

Provident, I., Summer Camp: Level I Community Wellness Fieldwork Opportunity, POTA Conference, Lancaster, PA, September 2012


2012 Fieldwork Appreciation Event
Cathi Dolhi, OTD, OTR/L, FAOTA

The MOT program was pleased to host Dr. E. Adel Herge as the keynote speaker at our Third Annual Fieldwork Educator Appreciation Event on November 15, 2012. Dr. Herge received her post-baccalaureate certificate and master of science degree from Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia and her Doctorate in Occupational Therapy from Chatham University. She currently serves as assistant professor and director of the combined BS/MS Occupational Therapy program at Thomas Jefferson University.

Dr. Herge’s presentation titled, Bridging the Evidence Gap: The Role of Fieldwork Students, included a review of the literature related to the use of evidence in occupational therapy and identified common barriers to using the literature to inform practice. In addition, Dr. Herge engaged the participants in a discussion related to how occupational therapy fieldwork students can help OT practitioners search for, locate, and analyze the evidence to inform their practice. Attendees identified areas of inquiry that were related to their practice and brainstormed how occupational therapy students might assist them in integrating current evidence on those topics into their settings.

OTD Student Publications

The American Occupational Therapy Association’s (AOTA) Centennial Vision states, “By the year 2017, we envision that occupational therapy is a... globally connected and diverse workforce meeting society’s occupational needs.” The Chatham University Master of Occupational Therapy (MOT) classes of 2013 and 2014 are helping to achieve this mission. Students in both classes represent various places, educational backgrounds, and work experiences. The 37-member class of 2013 comes from 2 countries and 8 U.S. states. The 40-member class of 2014 brings even more diversity, representing two countries and nine states from as far away as Washington and Colorado. Likewise, the students’ undergraduate majors vary dramatically, and are illustrated in the word cloud to the right. Previous work experiences also bring uniqueness to each class. Prior to starting OT school, the class of 2013 worked in various fields including: lobbying, education, graphic design, rehabilitation and therapeutic support services, research, event planning, and retail. Their experiences include serving in the U.S. Navy, and working for organizations such as AmeriCorps and U.S. Department of the Treasury. The work experiences of the class of 2014 include hospitality service, medical interpretation, personal training, research, special education, and childcare.

Both classes are further contributing to the Centennial Vision of global connectedness through previous international travel and study abroad experiences. Members of the class of 2013 have spent time on six continents, in countries including Australia, Brazil, Indonesia, Iraq, and Morocco. The class of 2014 has also covered the globe in their travels to many countries including: Cambodia, Ireland, Guatemala, Nigeria, and Italy. The rich and varied backgrounds of the MOT classes of 2013 and 2014 will help AOTA in realizing their goal of “a globally connected and diverse workforce.” As new graduates from Chatham University, we hope to use our experiences to strengthen and expand the OT profession!
On Wednesday September 12, 2012, the Chatham Master of Occupational Therapy Class of 2013 participated in the American Occupational Therapy Association’s (AOTA) National Backpack Awareness Day. Backpack Awareness day is held annually on the third Wednesday of September. AOTA, occupational therapy (OT) practitioners, educators, and OT students teach students, parents, educators, administrators, and community members how to prevent pain and injury that may arise from carrying heavy backpacks and/or bags. Proper backpack use can encourage overall back health across the lifespan.

Groups of Chatham students shared their knowledge at three area elementary schools; St. Joseph’s Catholic School in Verona, St. Bonaventure Catholic School in Shaler, and Ellis School in Shadyside. The students presented to fourth and fifth graders about backpack safety. Each presentation included properly packing backpacks, properly wearing backpacks, weighing backpacks, and other general backpack safety knowledge. Each of the three groups presented their Backpack Day information in a unique way.

At St. Joseph’s School, the theme included carnival type stations with Chatham students representing popular teen pop stars; Carly Rae Jepsen, Taylor Swift, Joe Jonas, and Justin Bieber leading the way. The students were divided into groups with a pop star leader. The groups visited stations and learned different aspects of backpack safety at each station. The presentation concluded with a star dance off. “Carly Rae Jepsen” won because she wore her backpack properly with all necessary components in place. This fun presentation provided students with the ability to demonstrate their knowledge by engaging in a pop quiz. Students showed great enthusiasm by initiating a dance party and receiving autographs from their favorite teen pop stars!

At St. Bonaventure, the theme highlighted the Olympics where students were able to root for different teams while watching a relay race. One team packed and wore their backpack properly while the other two teams packed and wore their backpacks incorrectly. Following the race, students were asked questions regarding the ways the backpacks were arranged and the person following all the proper guidelines won the race.

At the Ellis School, the students were presented with an “America’s Next Top Model Backpack” theme. The presentation began with the “models” explaining the proper way to wear their backpack. Once all information was completed, the runway show began. Each model presented their own backpack and explained to the students how their backpack was wrong. The runway show was interactive with the students showing a “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” and then voting on who they thought should win the show. “Dancing Dolly” won the show, as she was the only one who wore her backpack properly. She then engaged the students in a parade around the gymnasium in celebration.

Overall, the presentations were fun and interactive while teaching fourth and fifth graders about backpack safety. Backpack awareness becomes even more important as the number of books students are required to carry to school increases in middle and high school. Incorporating backpack awareness strategies into our daily routine can prevent back pain and strain for a lifetime.

Photo from St. Joseph School’s Backpack Day
Piecing Together the Fabric of Occupational Therapy at POTA
Devon Cogley, OTS; Gabrielle Ross, OTS; Kylie Ruud, OTS; Rachel Sachs, OTS

Chatham’s Master of Occupational Therapy Class of 2013 recently completed multi-semester evidence-based projects on various emerging areas of practice topics. After months of hard work and preparation, our efforts culminated in posters and presentations at the Pennsylvania Occupational Therapy Association (POTA) Conference this fall.

Project Development and Student Preparation
Poster and presentation topics were selected by the faculty at the end of the first semester of the program. The final poster titles were: Efficacy of Response to Interventions: A Literature Review; Occupational Science in Retirement: It’s Never Too Late; Brain Injury: A Journey Beyond Occupational Deprivation; Occupational Needs of Homeless Individuals: A Literature Review; Tai Chi and Cancer: Enabling Occupational Balance; Weighted Vests: Weighing the Evidence; Upper Extremity Prosthetic User Priorities and Occupational Therapy; and Lived Experience of United States Army Occupational Therapy. The final presentation titles were: International Fieldwork: Incorporating a Global Experience into Practice; and Elderly Women and Meal Preparation: A Pilot Study.

Posters and presentations were developed during the summer and beginning of the second fall semester. Presentation groups conducted their own research or analyzed research done by a professor to create their PowerPoints. Poster groups used an original template to begin the design process. Information was edited, and a photo and color scheme was selected. After numerous faculty and peer reviews, the posters went off to the printers! Once the presentations and posters were finalized, we headed to Lancaster, Pennsylvania to present at the POTA State Conference.

The POTA Conference Experience
The 35th Annual POTA Conference was held at the Lancaster County Convention Center in Lancaster, Pennsylvania on September 28 and 29, 2012. Eight groups of Chatham students presented during the poster sessions and two groups presented PowerPoint presentations. Through the experience of presenting, we came to realize we were all competent authorities on our topic and that our posters looked very professional. We became actively engaged in conversing and educating about these new and emerging areas in occupational therapy. The Chatham faculty also presented several topics at the conference.

The conference concluded with a bittersweet send-off of Chatham’s own Cathy Dolhi, who was stepping down from her throne as POTA President.

The entire POTA conference was an invaluable experience. The weekend was filled with exciting and interesting activities and lectures. All of the MOT students felt honored and gratified to have participated in this professional experience.

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The Journey of Emilia Solinto OTD, OTR/L

Kyra Bradley, OTS; Rivka Cohen-Melamed, OTS; Danielle Karhut, OTS; Brent Porter, OTS

Dr. Emilia Solinto is a 2004 graduate of Chatham’s MOT program and a 2002 graduate of Chatham with an undergraduate degree in psychology and a minor in biology. Additionally, Emilia received her post Professional Doctorate in Occupational Therapy from Chatham in 2007. When asked about her experience at Chatham, Emilia replied: “It’s not every day you receive the support, like the support I received at Chatham. They have a top notch program that wants their students to succeed.” She was awarded the Albert Schweitzer Fellowship where she developed a program, sibs play, for siblings of children with special needs at the former Center of Creative Play. Since completing her education at Chatham, Emilia has completed a Level I and Level 2 Clinical Mentorship at the Sensory-Processing Foundation and has also developed a program for children with special needs at the former Center of Creative Play in New York this past May. The clinic offers occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech-language pathology services. The clinic also provides a wide variety of programs including social skills groups, gross motor groups, sensory motor groups, infant development groups, parent education workshops, and educator/administrator presentations. Emilia is committed to life-long learning and has completed several continuing education courses. She is currently certified in Therapeutic Listening: Listening With the Whole Body, Picky Eaters vs. Problem Feeders: SOS Approach to Feeding, Astronaut Training: Vestibular Habilitation from the Core, and Handwriting Without Tears. Emilia stated that she always had a special place in her heart for pediatrics because her brother has special needs. She enjoys the planning, creativity, and play that goes into therapy with children. Emilia is still happy to this day with her decision to specialize in pediatric occupational therapy.

Emilia hopes to teach sometime in the future, expand her practice, and become more involved with research. Emilia stated that she is inspired to get up every morning and do something she loves while gaining the satisfaction of knowing what we do as occupational therapists works. Moreover, she enjoys making a difference in the lives of the children that she works with.

Emilia said, “I believe a piece of it that comes from inside me, that’s innate. I don’t know how to describe it. I have this passion and love for it and I feel lucky that I found something I love so much. I’m having fun with what I do for a living!”

We thank Emilia for sharing her journey and for her contributions to the OT profession. She is an inspiration to us and we are proud that she is alumna of the Chatham University OT programs!

MORE: Integrating the Mouth with Sensory and Postural Function, and has completed continuing education courses in The Wilbarger Therapressure Program, Sensory Defensiveness: A Comprehensive Treatment Approach, Therapeutic Listening: Listening With the Whole Body, Picky Eaters vs. Problem Feeders: SOS Approach to Feeding, Astronaut Training: Vestibular Habilitation from the Core, and Handwriting Without Tears. Emilia stated that she always had a special place in her heart for pediatrics because her brother has special needs. She enjoys the planning, creativity, and play that goes into therapy with children. Emilia is still happy to this day with her decision to specialize in pediatric occupational therapy.

Cathy Dolhi, continued

OTS: What were your responsibilities as president?
CD: “The overarching responsibility of the President of POTA is to represent the organization and its members in a variety of venues – local, state, and national. I also see the President as being responsible for facilitating the momentum of POTA and OT practice across Pennsylvania.”

OTS: What was the most rewarding part during your term as president?
CD: “One of the most exciting parts was recognizing and being a part of the enthusiasm and energy among OT practitioners as well as OT students in Pennsylvania. In addition, the leadership development activities that the board has engaged in over the past 4 years, has really helped POTA to move forward.”

OTS: How was it working simultaneously as a faculty member at Chatham University and serving as POTA’s President?
CD: “I think the position was advantageous for me as a faculty member. I met numerous practitioners across the state who have since become fieldwork educators for Chatham students. One played off another. It is also hard for students to not be a member of POTA, considering my role, which is ok (she smirks).”

OTS: Any additional comments that you would like to make?
CD: “I really am very appreciative of the support and cooperation from students and faculty at Chatham University, as well as the practitioners across the state during my term as president.”

A special thank you to Cathy Dolhi for agreeing to provide her perspective as former POTA President in this interview for the 2012 OT Newsletter.
Jim Burns received the best advice from his father, a former Marine, who encouraged him to attend graduate school before enlisting in the US Army. He made sure to tell his son to embrace this opportunity to further his education since he, and the majority of his family, never had the opportunity to attend graduate school.

Jim graduated from Chatham University’s MOT program in 1998 and recently received an alumni award for his accomplishments. Currently, Jim is the Iraq Army Medical Department Chief of Occupational Therapy (OT). We had the pleasure of speaking with Jim about his accomplishments, experiences and the positive difference he has made in the lives of others throughout his career as an OT.

Jim reports that he enjoyed his time at Chatham and valued the opportunity to give multiple presentations as a student in the MOT program. Looking back, he stated that he did not realize how much he would be presenting once he began practicing as an OT, and the practice he gained as a student made him more comfortable presenting himself as a professional to staff, colleagues, patients, and families.

Jim became interested in OT when he was in high school. At that time, one of his friends suffered a traumatic brain injury while at the naval academy and was transferred to Ohio State for rehabilitative care. While at Ohio State, Jim visited his friend once a week and supported him through his therapy sessions. He noticed how much improvement his friend made from one week to the next. After completing many volunteer hours, his interest in OT solidified.

Once Jim graduated from Chatham’s MOT program, he began working at a civilian nursing home and outpatient clinic. The Army was not taking OTs and PTs from the outside at this time, so he entered through an internship program. He started in Combat Arms in the Army Corps of Engineers branch for three years and put his OT career on hold. At the end of his three-year commitment, he made a branch transfer to Army Medical Specialist Corps where he worked as a certified hand therapist.

Jim is also an active scholar. In 2007 he published an article in OT Practice entitled “OT Leads the Way: A Child’s Triumph in War Torn Iraq,” and in 2011 he co-authored a chapter on the management of combat stress cases. He has presented at AOTA conference both in Philadelphia and in Long Beach, California.

When asked about his most memorable moment as an OT, Jim described his time working in Iraq on a detainee healthcare mission. Jim mainly worked on combat stress care for soldiers and detainees who suffered gun shot wounds during the war. Both nurses and military police were overwhelmed and thankful for the work the OT’s did with the detainees at the center. The military police were thankful the OT’s educated them and the detainees on transfer techniques to make transporting easier. Jim also noted that the detainees at the center often harassed the female nurses. As a result, he started an inpatient OT program that provided counseling and a “listen, learn, and comply” program. In this program, Jim simply informed the detainees what their role was as a patient. He explained that they had to listen to the directive of all medical personnel regardless of gender. In addition, they had to learn about their conditions and comply with what was asked of them since they were essentially prisoners of war. This initiative worked wonders and was greatly appreciated by everyone involved in the center.

Before completing the interview, Jim shared some advice for new and future OT graduates. He explained the importance of being open and receptive to a position in a new, unexpected area. He followed this advice as a new graduate and can now look back at the past fourteen years and say he has no regrets with the decisions he made. Jim is a role model and leader in the OT profession and takes pride in his job and the difference he makes in the world. We are proud to call him an alumnus of the Chatham University Master of Occupational Therapy program and thank him for his service to our country and our profession!
On Monday, September 24, twenty-five Chatham University Master of Occupational Therapy students and one faculty member attended the American Occupational Therapy Association Capitol Hill Day in Washington D.C. Over 600 students, practitioners, and educators from all across the United States gathered to support and advocate for the profession of OT.

The day began with an overview of the issues to be discussed with our representatives in Washington. This year, advocacy focused on the following topics:

- Occupational Therapy: Part of the Health Care Solution
- Occupational Therapy: Medicare Home Health
- Legislation to allow occupational therapy to perform the initial evaluation in Home Health
- Occupational Therapy in Mental Health
- Adding Occupational Therapy to the Federal definition of “Behavioral and Mental Health Professional”
- The Medicare Part B Therapy Caps
- Repealing the Medicare Part B Therapy Caps

Following a brief review of the aforementioned topics, the group dispersed to meet with their state representatives. Some had set up meetings, and others took part in drop in sessions. It was an incredible gift to be able to advocate for issues that will make a difference in the occupational therapy profession.

Students reported that Capitol Hill Day was a very positive learning experience and that it was extremely rewarding to participate in advocacy. Below is one student’s personal account of her trip to DC & AOTA’s Capitol Hill Day.

The day is Sunday, September 23, 2012. A carpool of three bright eyed Chatham occupational therapy students arrived at the MegaBus stop downtown at 6:30 a.m. to meet fellow Chatham occupational therapy students and their professor, Joyce Salls. Just after 7:00 a.m. we boarded the bus and were off to our nation’s capital. We arrived in DC at 1:00 p.m. As a class, we were fortunate to have among us a graduate of George Washington University, Caitlin Speece. With her guidance we navigated the Metro (public transportation) safely to our hotel, the Westin Washington, DC city center. Upon arriving to the hotel we quickly got coffee and began our exploration. Caitlin guided us several blocks down 16th street, until we came across the White House. After several pictures were taken, we ventured to the National Mall, home of the Lincoln Memorial and World War II Memorial. Everyone dispersed for dinner and some students took the opportunity to meet-up with friends or family in the DC area.

AOTA’s Capitol Hill Day began at 7:30 a.m. on Monday, September 24. Professor Salls helped us prepare for the adventure that awaited us! AOTA’s Capitol Hill Day is an event put on by the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA). Occupational therapy practitioners and students from across the country come together in Washington, DC to meet with their elected officials to discuss key legislative issues affecting occupational therapy practice. We came with the intention of making a difference, in the lives of clients of occupational therapy and for the profession of occupational therapy!

Being from the state of Michigan, I was with other attendees who also elect their officials in Michigan. I was with another student of occupational therapy that attends Virginia Commonwealth University and 3 occupational therapy practitioners. The practitioners took vacation days to come to AOTA’s Capitol Hill Day because as individuals they felt strongly about the issues. We met with staff members from both Michigan members of congress and two representatives. I felt prepared to speak about the issues and I felt as if the staff listened to us. The entire experience of being at AOTA’s Capitol Hill made me feel proud and inspired. I was proud of myself for advocating for things I believe in. I was proud to be part of my national professional organization. I was proud of my fellow students for advocating. I was inspired by the practitioners that took time off work to come advocate. I was inspired by the number of people in attendance. I was inspired by being there at Capitol Hill. Capitol Hill is where the law making magic happens.

After all the magic was over, I took myself on a stroll of the beautiful United States Botanical Gardens. I grabbed a lunch to go on the way back to the hotel. We traveled back to meet the MegaBus and were on our way back to Pittsburgh. It was two days of waking up way too early, but the days were filled with exploration, pride, inspiration, and magic.
Occupational Therapy Open House

Lyndsay Laxton, OTS; Kayla Marghella, OTS; Angela Tipton, OTS; Amy Toth, OTS

On November 15, 2012 the Chatham Master of Occupational Therapy program presented its annual Open House event at Chatham Eastside to over 90 attendees. This year’s theme was “Creating Environments for Sustainable Living & Learning.” The event highlighted how occupational therapists create environments that allow people of all ages and abilities to interact with their surroundings. The nine interactive stations are described below:

Universal Design for the Home

This station was located in the OT apartment and focused on demonstrating the benefits of universal design for sustaining one’s ability to live in their home environment. The primary goal of this station was to give participants a chance to experience the impact of age related deficits on occupational performance, learn ways to modify the task or environment to promote aging in place, and identify resources that enable sustained participation in occupations to age in place. Participants were provided the opportunity to experience simulated impairments such as arthritis or visual deficits when performing common household tasks. In the kitchen, participants were asked to peel vegetables and make pierogies using a variety of equipment and adapted techniques derived from the principles of universal design. In the bedroom and bathroom of the apartment, participants navigated the environment with a simulated impairment to experience how universal design is beneficial in all rooms of the house. They were also provided with information pertaining to the seven principles of universal design, and shown a video which depicted a home remodeled according to the principles to emphasize how they could incorporate universal design into their own homes.

Universal Design for Learning

The goal of this station was to provide an interactive experience to participants illustrating the value of universal design in a school setting and the benefit to students of all age and ability levels. Participants were also able to experiment with different tools used in the classroom such as various pencil grips and types of paper. All of the activities promoted sustaining mental health through the occupation of social interaction and a positive student role.

Outdoor Community Spaces

This station showcased how occupational therapists can be instrumental in providing strategies that allow individuals to sustain participation in meaningful outdoor activities including gardening and playgrounds. Demonstrations were provided to illustrate how OTs can work with clients to adapt a task or the environment to find the best way to promote engagement in outdoor occupations. The gardening exhibition featured raised and vertical gardens. Raised gardens allow individuals to remain in a seated position, prevent bending, and encourage energy conservation/work simplification techniques. Vertical gardens allow for home bound individuals to remain involved in the typically outdoor occupation of gardening by allowing them to create and maintain a garden that can be hung on a wall indoors. Both gardening activities are beneficial for working with children and may be used in school settings.

The students collaborated with occupational therapist Ingrid Kanics of Inclusive Design Services, LLC to provide information related to creating playground environments, which focus on inclusive play environments for children of all ages and ability levels. Incorporating sensory elements into the design of playground equipment was emphasized, as it beneficial to all children, especially the growing number of individuals who struggle with sensory processing disorders. Participants were provided with brochures, CDs, and videos pertaining to creating playgrounds and other outdoor community spaces.

Sensory Environments

This station allowed participants to take an interactive tour through the senses. It was divided into five separate areas showcasing the wide-variety of ways that occupational therapists help individuals explore and create sensory environments to sustain their optimal level of functioning. At the Movement sub-station, par-
Participants had the opportunity to try out hammock and platform swings, a trampoline, and a body sock. While visiting the Adapted Classroom, visitors could test alternative seating, fidget toys and a weighted vest. Moving on to the Five Senses Exploration area, attendees could engage in five activities that highlight the use of each sense such as smelling lavender oil, which has a calming effect, or eating crunchy foods, which is used for alerting clients. Next, individuals could visit the Quiet Corner, and relax on a beanbag and listen to soothing music in order to calm the senses. Finally, attendees were able to visit a makeshift Snoezelen Room for a failure-free environment that is used to help individuals learn to modulate their senses.

Universal Design for the Workplace

The goal of this station was to educate visitors on different ways to sustain productivity in the workplace by addressing the principles of ergonomics, the impact of improper ergonomic design on one’s ability to engage in occupation, and the importance of incorporating proper body mechanics and ergonomic design into one’s own work space. In addition, visitors were offered ways to utilize household items to achieve proper body mechanics and avoid high costs associated with purchasing ergonomic equipment. These goals were obtained through engaging participants in both sitting and standing interactive workstations. At the sitting workstation, visitors were able to describe their personal workstation and then sit down at the station to identify and remediate any problems they were currently experiencing at their personal workstation. At the standing workstation, visitors were able to complete light, medium, and heavy work tasks at different surface heights to gain an understanding of the impact of surface height on task performance.

Technology: Environments that Support Active Participation

This station educated participants on the use of technology to promote active participation in the environment for all individuals, with or without disability. From an occupational therapy perspective, technology can be adapted to assist individuals to complete daily tasks at home and can also be used within the clinic as part of the client’s treatment protocol. The technology station consisted of five substations including: Xbox Kinect Dance Central, low technology and universally designed devices, iPad and apps, PlayStation Guitar Hero, and Apple TV. The Xbox Kinect substation included the Dance Central video game to allow participants to actively engage in a whole body experience. The low technology substation included environmental control units (ECUs), switches, and other universally designed communication devices that provide access to individuals of all abilities. The iPad substation introduced participants to different apps that can be universally utilized for communication. The PlayStation substation included the Guitar Hero video game to allow participants to actively engage in a fun, fine motor activity in a section of the room using the projector screens. Finally, the Apple TV substation allowed participants to experience the benefits of viewing entertainment on an enlarged screen.

Occupational Therapy in Scandinavia

While at this station, participants experienced a glimpse into the culture of Scandinavia through snacks, demographic information, and the native pastime of knitting. Attendees learned about the prevalence of occupational therapy practitioners and students within the 5 countries of Scandinavia. Participants were also able to learn adaptive techniques to prevent fatigue in individuals who enjoy knitting but may experience symptoms of arthritis. The hands-on portion of this station gave individuals the opportunity to learn a knitting pattern using lightweight knitting needles or a loom and learn proper ergonomics while knitting.
Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA) Summer Camp 2012

Ashley Barbish, OTS, Joshua Olexa, OTS, Dr. Ingrid Provident, OTR/L

Chatham’s Master of Occupational Therapy (MOT) program includes a community-based fieldwork experience in which students advocate for the importance of occupational therapy (OT) at sites that currently do not offer OT services. The MOT students have the opportunity to work in groups with many different community sites in the Pittsburgh area. This was the first year that Chatham students had the opportunity to work with the Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA), which is a nonprofit health agency dedicated to curing muscular dystrophy, to complete their fieldwork experience. Two MOT students chose the opportunity to work with the MDA. As part of their experience they attend a week long MDA summer camp in August and continued to work with the agency into the fall term, with mentorship and supervision from Dr. Ingrid Provident, OTR/L.

Each year the MDA hosts a summer camp for MDA participants ages 6-17. The 2012 Pittsburgh MDA summer camp hosted 43 campers. Each camper is paired with a volunteer counselor for the week. The MOT students were volunteer counselors and were responsible for the safety and well-being of the camper with whom they were paired. Volunteer counselors work one-on-one with campers around the clock, providing the care, close supervision, and attention to the campers’ physical and emotional needs. Volunteer counselors put their camper’s interests and needs before their own and view their camper as the focus of the week. Volunteer counselors also assist with the care of campers in his/her cabin, group and camp wide. In addition to the counselor responsibilities, the MOT students used their observation skills to document needs for environmental modifications that would allow campers to improve their functional performance.

The Pittsburgh MDA summer camp is held at Camp Kon-O-Kwee which is a YMCA summer camp for children and is located along the Connoquenessing Creek, five miles west of Zelienople, Pennsylvania. The cost of MDA summer camp is $800 per camper. Due to generous MDA sponsors, there is no charge to families for their child to attend MDA summer camp.

During the annual MDA camp, campers are provided with an opportunity to interact with their peers and experience the feeling of being in the majority, rather than in the minority, for an entire week. MDA camp offers campers access to an environment where they can participate in activities they may never have been able to take part in previously. MDA camp allows campers an opportunity to maximize function within an environment that promotes independence, while allowing the camper to set aside all signs and symptoms associated with neuromuscular disease for an entire week. Camp activities include arts and crafts, swimming, fishing, carnival night, campfire, rock climbing, games, water zone, animal show, and many more. All of the meals for camp are donated by various sponsors such as Texas Roadhouse, Elephant Castle, and Tall Cedars.

As part of the community-based fieldwork experience, the MOT students completed an organizational agency profile on the summer camp and MDA, conducted a needs assessment, and designed a program plan based on the needs of the MDA staff and campers. Implementing the program plan is likely to take place during MDA Summer Camp 2013. The program plan will focus primarily on the dynamic interaction of the camper, the camp environment, and the camper’s activities. More specifically, the program plan will suggest making environmental modifications at camp, making use of various assistive devices or alternative strategies, and differentiating activities for different age groups. This program plan is delivered to empower youngsters and make MDA summer camp the best week of the year for them. We are grateful to have been a part of this unique opportunity and to share this experience with the wonderful campers.

Interprofessional Education (IPE) Update

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During the past year, Chatham faculty members from various health science professions (occupational therapy, physical therapy, physician assistant, counseling psychology, and nursing) continued to expand student awareness and participation in IPE events. The faculty developed an IPE curriculum specific to the students enrolled in the health science programs at Chatham. The duration of the new IPE curriculum spans two years and culminates in each participating student receiving a certificate in IPE.

The new curriculum began in September with a kick-off event held in the Chatham Athletic and Fitness Center. Susan Meyer, PhD, associate dean, School of Pharmacy, University of Pittsburgh spoke to an audience that consisted of 300 health science students from Chatham and Shadyside School of Nursing. Dr. Meyer was an instrumental member of the professional committee that created the national IPE curriculum last May. After the brief overview of IPE, the students, who were seated in a mixed group of individuals from the various professional programs, introduced themselves and planned a meeting date for a two-hour IPE case session.

The IPE curriculum consists of several themes. These themes range from: 1) Roles/Responsibilities for Collaborative Practice, 2) Interprofessional Teamwork and Team-Based Care, 3) Interprofessional Communication, and 4) Values/Ethics for Interprofessional Practice. Throughout the next three semesters, the interprofessional student groups will partake in service learning and two Moodle-based collaborations that reflect the curricular themes. To date, student feedback has been positive and students report a sense of excitement about continuing through the curriculum.
This year, the Chatham OT program launched its first elective course, Global Health Perspectives, which gave recent graduates a ten day experience providing OT services in Ibarra, Ecuador. Appropriately named for the equator that passes through it, the Spanish-speaking country of Ecuador sits in the northwest pocket of South America, encompassing three distinct regions. Ibarra is nestled in the Sierra region, approximately two hours north of the country’s capital, Quito. The public healthcare system is available to Ecuador’s citizens at a very low cost, however many times the price paid compromises quality. As a developing country, Ecuador struggles to provide resources for many healthcare services. The elective course provided students with a hands-on experience within the confines of a different healthcare system.

Five students, accompanied by Professor Joyce Salls, director of the MOT program at Chatham University, participated in the trip to Ecuador. The students worked with Elaine Keane MS, OTR/L, founder and executive director of CRECER (meaning to grow in Spanish), an organization in Ecuador whose mission is to “promote increased access to health care services in under-served regions of Ecuador.” Elaine regularly takes COTA students to Ecuador for international fieldwork, and was very welcoming to Chatham’s MOT students.

The trip began in Quito, with opportunities for sightseeing and cultural immersion in the capital, and en route to Ibarra. In Ibarra, the students worked at a facility named “El Hernandad del Siervo Sufriente,” (The Brotherhood of the Suffering Saint), which essentially operates as a homeless shelter. The population at the facility included people of all ages and ability levels. As a result the OT students were given opportunities to work on a variety of skills with the residents including positioning, feeding, play, sensory activities, among many other interventions.

Completing fieldwork in Ecuador has given OT students a chance to immerse themselves in another culture while practicing OT skills. Overall, the trip to Ecuador was a wonderful and life-changing experience for all involved. One of the students had the following to say about her experience:

“Traveling to Ecuador was an amazing adventure and I’m so glad Joyce gave me that ‘extra push’ to experience it...first time out of the country! It was amazing to see how quickly I was able to form lasting bonds with the people we worked with, just through body language/gestures and my limited Spanish skills. The people are so wonderful; when you see the smiles on their faces and share in their laughter each day – you know you are making a difference in their lives. This whole experience was the epitome of what occupational therapy truly is and made me feel so proud to know I’ll be doing this for the rest of my life.”

Due to the excellent reception and results of this international experience, the Global Health Perspective course is expanding next year to include both a return trip to Ecuador and a trip to Kenya. In Kenya, students will volunteer for the first two weeks at an orphanage for girls outside of Nairobi founded by Pittsburgh native Kate Fletcher. The final week will be spent touring the area. Additionally, the Ecuador trip will now be offered to the first year MOT students as a community fieldwork experience, and will take place in August of 2013. Not only do these international experiences fulfill the mission of Chatham University, they also reflect the AOTA centennial vision of building a “diverse, globally connected workforce.”