

Mission of the Occupational Therapy Assistant Program

The mission of the Occupational Therapy Assistant Program at the North Dakota State College of Science (NDSCS) is to prepare students for entry level practice as generalist occupational therapy assistants. The OTA program is designed to provide its students with the professional attitudes and competence required to function as entry-level occupational therapy assistants as delineated in the American Occupational Therapy Association's (AOTA's) Guidelines for Supervision, Roles, and Responsibilities During the Delivery of OT Services document (edited 2009). It is also designed to provide them with the knowledge necessary to pass the national certification exam.

The occupational therapy assistant program shares the North Dakota State College of Science's mission and goals to "deliver learner focused education through a unique and evolving collegiate experience." These goals are exemplified by the practice: "Where Students Learn by Doing."

Philosophy of the Occupational Therapy Assistant Program

The philosophy of the NDSCS OTA program reflects that of AOTA philosophy that defines Occupational Therapy as a profession based on occupations and the belief that engagement in meaningful occupations is essential for well-being (American Occupational Therapy Association, 2002.; Christiansen, Backman, Little, & Nguyen, 1999; Law, Polatajko, Baptiste, & Townsend, 1997; Wilcock, 1998).

"Engagement in occupation" is the overarching outcome of the occupational therapy process. Client performance in activities or occupations that are meaningful and purposeful to the person is the ultimate goal of occupational therapy practitioners.

As occupational therapy practitioners, we believe that people are unified wholes and deserve to be treated holistically. As the human being develops, there is continual interaction between the person and the environment which constantly produces changes and reaction in both the person and the environment. As this interaction with the environment continues, the person acquires skills, values and habits which affect mastery of the environment so that unique attributes of strength or weakness develop. The innate pattern of human activity follows a developmental sequence which guides and influences growth and development. This maturation process allows for the uniqueness of the individual; the stage of development influences activity; the activity is affected by the environment; and the environment enhances the individual's outcomes. As new roles are assumed, new skills and interests are developed. And finally, each person calls upon a set of skills, both learned and innate, in order to engage in occupational performance. As practitioners, we consider their roles in their communities and respect their cultural backgrounds as well as other contexts that influence their lives.

As occupational therapy educators, the NDSCS OTA faculty advocates the use of occupation to facilitate health promoting growth, change, and/or adaptation. One model of practice that incorporates this concept is the Person-Environment-Occupation (PEO) framework. This model addresses the interaction of the person, his or her environment, and the activities and tasks that allow them to fulfill his or her everyday occupations. The Occupational Therapy Assistant Program will prepare a diverse population of students to become competent practitioners that can compete in evolving areas of practice; apply principles of critical thinking and analysis; and who value occupation as it supports meaningful

participation in life, global health, community service, and lifelong learning. The philosophy of the OTA program reflects the values of the college. These values are:

- Learning:*** *We engage the campus community in a lifelong learning environment inside and outside the classroom.*
- Integrity:*** *We work with others and conduct ourselves in a respectful, ethical, honest, and trusting manner.*
- Flexibility:*** *We consider ideas from all sources and adapt to the needs of our patrons.*
- Excellence:*** *We deliver superior programs and services that distinguish the college from its peers*

The means and end of occupational therapy is client performance in occupational or activities that are meaningful and purposeful to the person. The theoretic constructs of the profession guide clinical reasoning, selection of activity, choice of service delivery model, and mode of interaction with the individual. Appropriate and competent use of theoretical constructs involves consideration of the strengths and needs of the individual, characteristics of the activity or task, constraints and resources of the environment, and standards of the service delivery system.

The Learning Process and How Students Learn

The program incorporates the principles of adult learning for explaining its educational philosophy (Knowles 1984). The student's learning needs are best met when each student's uniqueness, abilities, learning styles, cultural background, and previous knowledge and life experiences are recognized and respected. Students learn when a need to learn is perceived. Therefore, every effort is made to help the student perceive the relevance of the particular subject matter and how this knowledge and skill will be used as an occupational therapy assistant. The aim of the program's curriculum is to assist students to become self-directed learners. The instructor serves as a facilitator who leads the students into an active learning process. The faculty seeks to role model those professional attitudes, values, and behaviors appropriate to a health care professional and instill in students the value and need for life-long learning in order to be a competent practitioner.

The occupation of the student is education. Likely any other occupation a person engages in, it is influenced by the environment (context) in which the learning takes place. This includes, but is not limited to, the physical space, social, including rapport with educators and fellow students, temporal, and virtual environment. A positive environment enhances the quality of student learning.

Curriculum Design

The NDSCS OTA Program's curriculum design is based on a systems theory using the Person-Environment-Occupation Model of Occupational Performance (Baum & Law, 1997; Christiansen & Baum, 1997; Law, Cooper, Strong, Stewart, Rigby & Letts, 1996, 1999). Systems theory recognizes the constant interplay between individuals and their environments. The Person-Environment-Occupation Model has been adapted for our curriculum and is strongly reflected in the philosophy of the NDSCS OTA Program.

This model seeks to develop student understanding of self, promote self-efficacy, self-satisfaction and competence in one's occupational performance. This model serves as the basis for the foundation and sequencing of the course content within the OTA program.

The NDSCS OTA Program offers three curriculum options, which include the traditional two-year degree, a three-year option and a dual degree (Occupational Therapy Assistant and Mental Health Care Associate) option. Although general education courses are offered concurrently with OTA technical courses in the traditional two-year option, online or face to face format, it is the first semester that these courses are closely scheduled. These courses focus on knowledge and skill acquisition embedded in the liberal arts and sciences including communication, critical thinking and problem solving, human growth and development, human behavior, and structure and function of the human body.

OTA academic coursework and practical skills are synergistically integrated into the curriculum. The first technical courses offered in the curriculum focus on foundational OT concepts and basic practice skills of the OTA. Introduced in the first semester OTA courses are the core values of the profession (altruism, equality, freedom, justice, dignity, truth, and prudence), professional behavior and attitudes. In these first year courses, the threads of the OTA program, which include cultural competence, ethics, documentation, safety and task analysis, are also introduced. As students progress through the program, these curriculum threads are integrated into all OTA course content. Occupation as the core concept of occupational therapy is introduced and emphasized in OTA 101, Introduction into Occupational Therapy, through historical perspectives, current domains of practice, and theoretical and practice models. Other OTA introductory courses use generalization to serve as a common background in which students build on logical sequential learning. These two courses are Medical Terminology (OTA 120) and Introduction into Muscle Function (OTA 111). Introductory OTA lab courses (OTA 121, 141) provide opportunity for students to develop an understanding of occupational performance issues and analysis including, therapeutic use of self, the teaching-learning process, the relationship between the nature of occupation, occupational function and dysfunction, the OT process, and awareness of therapeutic assessment and interventions linked to occupational performance.

As students gain an appreciation for fundamental OT concepts, process, and interventions, the curriculum is designed so that students take courses that help them gain an understanding of the components of occupational behavior, or "why we do what we do." The components of the areas of occupation, ADL, IADL, education work, play, leisure, and social participation are studied, analyzed and evaluated through courses that are related to specific domain areas. Engagement in occupation-based learning activities throughout the OTA curriculum affords opportunity for students to achieve competence and satisfaction in their occupational performances. During the spring semester of the first year students practice written communication skills of the documentation process in OTA 112 utilizing professional language of the Practice Framework. During the spring semester of the first year and fall semester of the second year the students transition into courses that focus on physical dysfunction (OTA 113), behavioral health (OTA 102, 215), pediatrics (OTA 214), the older adult (OTA 218), community models of practice (OTA 219). These areas of practice include, but are not limited to: Aging in Place, Driver assessments and training programs, Community health and wellness, Ergonomics, Technology and assistive device programming, Adult day care programs, Hospice, Community based mental health programs, Early Intervention programs, and Home Health. Throughout these two semesters, students are provided various

opportunities to interact with diverse populations in the community through outreach services, where the OTA program threads continue to be emphasized and practiced.

The PEO model provides a foundation for application to practice, as students need to use clinical reasoning and analysis to evaluate occupational performance and to plan and implement treatment intervention strategies. This is accomplished through participation in competency-based Level I Fieldwork experiences (OTA 152 and OTA 253) as well as Level II Experiences (OTA 254 and OTA 255) in medical, school, and community settings. In preparation for Level I and Level II Fieldwork Experiences and the changing dynamics of the health care system, students enroll in OTA 216 and 217. In these two courses, selected learning activities focus on maximizing student performance and professional behavior in tasks and activities related to his or her future occupational role as an entry-level occupational therapy assistant. Finally, at the conclusion of the OTA program, the students make one last connection to each other and the academic institution through the OTA 256 Seminar class. In addition to being a support system, this course contributes to the mastery of learning through clinical reasoning skills and prepares the student to transition to entry-level practice. Application of theory and skills, professional relationships, standards of practice, core values, and contemporary issues related to the real practice world are primary topics of discussion. In addition, the faculty engages students in a practice certification exam and reviews with students the licensure and certification process.

NDSCS OTA Learning Outcomes based on the ACOTE Standards

1. Demonstrate skills and competencies required of a generalist in an entry level occupational therapy assistant position. (B.1.7, B.9.8)
2. Demonstrate professional behaviors and attitudes that are congruent with AOTA Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice. (B.9.1)
3. Identify and articulate the roles of the OT and OTA in the occupational therapy process. (B.4.4, B.6.3, B.9.8)
4. Demonstrate the principles in analysis and application used in OT intervention in the spectrum of human occupation. (B.2.7, B.5.3)
5. Understand and communicate concepts related to occupation, purposeful activities and how these relate to OT intervention. (B.2.2, B.5.1)
6. Document OT services to ensure accountability of service provision and to meet reimbursement services. (B.4.6, B.5.27, B. 7.5)
7. Demonstrate an understanding of the Occupational Therapy Code of Ethics, values, Standards of Practices and legal responsibilities appropriate for safe entry level occupational therapy assistant practice. (B.3.3, B.9.1)
8. Incorporate knowledge of multicultural perspectives to meet the needs of diverse populations. (B.1.7, B. 4.3)

9. Use critical thinking skills integrating evidenced-based research and knowledge from the sciences, arts and Occupational Therapy Practice Framework in developing a holistic and client-centered occupational therapy assistant practice. (B.1.2, B.3.2, B.8.1)
10. Value life-long learning and the need to keep current with best practice. (B.7.10, B.8.1)

In addition, the learning outcomes identified in the General Education components will be further strengthened.

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