

## 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 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.

## **NDSCS OTA Program Curriculum Design**

The NDSCS OTA Program's curriculum design is based on systems theory models using Kielhofner's Model of Human Occupation (MOHO) and the Person-Environment-Occupation-Performance (PEOP) Model which is based on the philosophical concepts of the occupational therapy profession.

The OTA program evolves from Kielhofner's Model of Human Occupation (MOHO), as it guides the development of both the student and OTA coursework. MOHO addresses volition, habituation, and performance systems. It relates to students as they show interest in the occupational therapy profession and are motivated to complete all the admission requirements (volition system), develop new habits related to study skills and time management (habituation system), and demonstrate skills and competencies required of a generalist occupational therapy assistant (performance system).

A systems perspective views the person, environment, and the occupational performance as a whole, each part related to, and impacting the others. The PEOP focus on the person (intrinsic factors) and the environment (extrinsic factors) and how they relate to occupational performance and participation. Occupational performance results from the dynamic relationship between people, their occupations and roles, and the environments in which they live, work and play.

Occupational therapy theory, practice and research has increasingly emphasized the transactional relationship between person, environment and occupation. In order to achieve occupational participation, a person must demonstrate competence in occupational performance. The NDSCS OTA program prepares students to become competent practitioners and life-long learners who value occupation as it supports meaningful participation in life and community service.

These models serve as the basis for the foundation and sequencing of the course content within the OTA program. The NDSCS OTA Program offers the traditional two-year program, and a three-year 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 year 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, roles, and basic practice skills of the OTA. The Occupational Therapy Practice Framework is used to guide how courses and content are organized and presented. The OTPF also guides the methods for evaluating student performance. Understanding the components of occupational participation and behavior is an integral component of the teaching and learning process that is presented throughout the curriculum. Occupation is embedded in all coursework and the student's ability to apply concepts of occupation to evidence-based, client-centered, occupation-based interventions is assessed throughout the OTA curriculum. During the first semester, students continue to explore the occupational therapy profession and work on OTA program admission requirements. In this semester, the core values of the profession (altruism, equality, freedom, justice, dignity, truth, and prudence) and professional behavior and attitudes are introduced. In these first year courses, the threads of the OTA program, which include:

- therapeutic use of self
- knowledge and skills for clinical practice
- effective communication
- professionalism
- understanding occupation

are 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 105) and Introduction into Muscle Function (OTA 110). Introductory OTA lab courses (OTA 102, 111) 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 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, 213), behavioral health (OTA 115, 215), pediatrics (OTA 114, 214), the older adult (OTA 218), professional issues and scholarship (OTA 216), and community models of practice (OTA 219). These areas of practice include, but are not limited to: Children and Youth, Health and Wellness, Productive Aging, Rehabilitation and Disability, Work and Industry, and Behavioral Health. In the third semester, students enroll in a one credit Simulation Lab (OTA 217) where they practice and reinforce their knowledge and skills for clinical practice.

Throughout these two semesters, students are provided various opportunities to interact with diverse populations in the community through outreach services and partnerships where the OTA program threads continue to be emphasized and practiced. The PEOP 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 151 and OTA 252). Students get the opportunity to identify their interests in the selection of Level II FW placement (OTA 254, OTA 255). Level II Experiences (OTA 254 and OTA 255) take place 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 253. 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 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 using a variety of study tools.

**NDSCS OTA Program Objectives  
Based on the ACOTE Standards**

**PROGRAM OUTCOMES**

1. Students admitted will successfully complete the competency-based OTA Program and earn an Associate in Applied Science Degree in Occupational Therapy in order to be eligible for the process of certification and licensure.
2. Graduates of the Occupational Therapy Assistant Program will successfully complete the NBCOT Certification Examination.
3. Graduates of the Occupational Therapy Assistant Program will be successfully employed following graduation.
4. Graduates will assume responsibility for their own professional development and continued competence. (B.7.2., B.7.4.)

**IDENTIFIED STUDENT OUTCOMES:**

1. Demonstrate accurate and effective oral and written communication skills. (Curriculum Design Thread) (B.4.23.)
2. Understand and communicate concepts related to occupation, purposeful activities and how these relate to OT intervention. (Curriculum Design Thread) (B.3.2., B.3.3.)
3. Integrate therapeutic use of self into practice. (Curriculum Design Thread) (B.4.1.)
4. Demonstrate behaviors necessary for personal and professional conduct as identified in the *AOTA Code of Ethics* and other official OT documents. (Curriculum Design Thread) (B.7.1.)
5. Identify and articulate the roles of the OT and OTA in the occupational therapy process. (B.4.24.)
6. Demonstrate the principles in an analysis, synthesis, and application used in OT intervention in the spectrum of human occupation. (B.3.2., B.3.6., B.4.3.)
7. Demonstrate clinical reasoning to select and implement interventions to support participation in occupations. (B.4.2., B.4.3., B.4.10.)
8. Document OT services to ensure accountability of service provision and to meet reimbursement services. (B.4.29.)
9. Incorporate knowledge of multicultural perspectives to meet the needs of diverse populations. (B.1.2.)
10. Access and use professional literature to make sound decisions in cooperation with an occupational therapist. (B.6.1., B.6.3.)
11. Demonstrate the clinical skills and proficiency in all relevant practice areas necessary to fulfill the role as an entry-level occupational therapy assistant. (B.4.25)

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

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