THE COLLEGE OF ST. SCHOLASTICA
Program in Occupational Therapy

CURRICULUM DESIGN
THE PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE MODEL
Leadership
Administration and Supervision
Policy and Politics
Non-traditional Service Delivery Models
Education
Collaborative Intervention
Funding and Reimbursement

Professional Context

Student

Practice

Fieldwork Experiences

Clinical Application

Pediatric OT
Gerontic OT
Neurorehabilitation OT
Documentation
Psychosocial OT
Motor Functioning
Assessment & Intervention

Respect
Hospitality
Community
Stewardship
Love of Learning

Professional Terminology
Anatomy/Physiology
Chemistry
Physics
Pathophysiology
Abnormal Psychology
Human Development
Statistics
Research

Practitioner Skills
Professional Ethics

Life Span Occup. Perf.
Neuroscience
Functional Anatomy
Foundations of OT

Graduate Level Skills
Applied Research
Presentation
Critical Decision Making
Critical Analysis of OT Practice
Professional Development

Practice Theory and Skills

Foundation Learning

Research

Community
CURRICULUM DESIGN

A. Introduction
The curriculum is designed to prepare students in the model of a professional practitioner (Figure 1). The model includes specific practice skills, the advanced skills to effectively integrate and apply their profession in a wide variety of known contexts and adapt to the changing variables of new contexts. The emphasis in the Professional Practice Model is to both “know about” and to “know how” (Kielhofner, 2004, p. 14; Mattingly & Fleming, 1994). This focus has guided both the content and learning strategies used in the curriculum. The professional practitioner also contributes to their profession through critical inquiry resulting in evidence-based opinion; application, analysis and articulation of clinical reasoning; investigation of questions through research processes; and sharing acquired knowledge. Finally, the conception of professional practice inherently demands a commitment to lifelong learning and direct involvement in the structures and processes of one's profession. These global concepts are reflected in the student learning outcomes. The content, methods and support services to achieve the standards for an accredited occupational therapy program are integrated into and serve as the internal criteria for the curriculum design (ACOTE).

B. General Principles
The curriculum is practice-based, focusing on functional outcomes for clients across a diverse spectrum of populations, practice delivery models, and environmental contexts. Given this backdrop, the curriculum is based on theoretical foundations but is clinically driven. The Department of Occupational Therapy has a strong working relationship with the practice community, involving practitioners in teaching, consultation, clinical education and research. Faculty members also maintain visible clinical ties to remain practice focused and to have pragmatic underpinnings for curricular changes to prepare students for future practice. The collaboration between faculty and clinicians goes both ways in that faculty share new research, theoretical constructs, and assessment and intervention strategies with the clinicians with whom they work.

Students engage in “real-time”, active learning experiences in classroom, clinic and community settings. Material is integrally linked with previous and subsequent course work, and culminates in a capstone course that demands critical analysis of multiple practice and global professional issues. Learning constructs present and promote practice that is occupation focused, outcome driven and evidence-based. Intervention is most often multi- or interdisciplinary, and must include a process to adjust to the diverse contexts presented by clients.

The overall learning design advances in a manner consistent with the hierarchy of learning objectives from knowledge to application to problem solving (Krathwohl, 1964). As the entire curriculum moves in this direction, so does each course within the curriculum. The learning demands associated with each course are at increasingly higher levels, as are the demands on the student to integrate material in progressively complex ways. The progression of content and teaching methodology follows this progressive sequence across the curriculum, as well as within each course. The sequence goes more quickly and an increasingly proportionate amount of course time is spent on the higher level processes, as students progress through the curriculum.
The teaching philosophies and methods used by faculty represent an integration of pedagogical and andragogical views depending on the content, nature of the learning objectives, the learners’ experience, and place in the curriculum (Knowles, 1970, 1973, 1984, 1998). The methods used clearly reflect a contemporary paradigm for higher education that transforms the principles of adult learning into a student-centered model of teaching that demands active learner involvement (Smith and Waller, 1997). Examples of methods within the paradigm for higher education include active learning, student choices in selecting the learning activity or content of the learning project, collaborative learning between student and instructor, problem-based learning, learning through dialogue, peer teaching, directed service learning, and multiple forms of assessment. Narrative and experience, as well as reductionism, are viewed as legitimate epistemologies.

C. Description
The curriculum design is made up of four components (See figure). The center of the curriculum design identifies “Practitioner Skills.” The right side of the triangle represents foundation learning, the base identifies transitional courses, the practice courses are on the left side and the apex of the triangle is clinical application. Within the triangle are the basic values of the College and the Occupational Therapy Code of Ethics of the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA). The second component includes those concepts critical to “Professional Context”, the top of the diagram. Third are the skills and professional characteristics inherent in “Graduate Level Skills” (bottom of the diagram). The reciprocal arrows comprise the fourth component, the four sources of information and influence that interact with the curriculum; the “Students”, the changing content of “Practice”, “Research” and the shifting changes in client and “Community” needs dictated by demographic and system changes.

The design will be described beginning with the central components within the triangle, “Practitioner Skills”.

D. Practitioner Skills
The College of St. Scholastica’s mission is to provide intellectual and moral preparation for responsible living and meaningful work (St. Scholastica 2011-2013 College Catalog, p. 7). The College is further based on the Benedictine values. The values of respect, hospitality, community, stewardship, and love of learning, together with the Occupational Therapy Code of Ethics of the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) constitute a rich core of beliefs and principles to guide the educational process as well as practitioner decisions. These values are frequently referenced and applied throughout the curriculum. Stemming from the Core Values, the foundation learning, transitional concepts, practice courses and clinical applications constitute the core of practitioner skills.

E. Foundation Learning
The student begins with a foundation in general education, the social and physical sciences: specific prerequisites include Medical Terminology, Anatomy and Physiology, General and Life Span Development Psychology, Sociology, Statistics and Research Methods. Abnormal Psychology, Pathophysiology and Physics are recommended. The prerequisites are taken along with a strong liberal arts component defined by the College’s Pathways requirements.
Each of the courses listed is taken prior to entry into the Occupational Therapy Program.

F. Transitional Learning
Four courses offered in the professional curriculum have been referred to as transitional courses: Foundations of Occupational Therapy (OTH 5501), Life Span Occupational Performance (OTH 5502), Functional Anatomy (OTH 5505) and Neuroscience (OTH 5515). These courses build on the foundational learning courses, yet they present a new level of learning that begins to translate prerequisite concepts into occupational therapy practice theories, concepts and principles. Foundations of Occupational Therapy and Life Span Occupational Performance provide introductory information that serves as a foundation upon which to build throughout the curriculum. Foundations of Occupational Therapy includes information regarding the historical roots of the profession, an introduction to basic theoretical concepts that are part of the profession, an introduction to the occupational therapy process, and current trends within the profession and health care in general. Life Span Occupational Performance introduces means of assessment and treatment frequently used in clinical settings and the process of activity analysis. This course also considers the application of activity analysis to other areas, such as work, play/leisure, and daily living activities. Functional Anatomy builds upon the prerequisite anatomy and physiology as an advanced anatomy course with cadaver dissection, lecture, case analysis, peer teaching and applied lab. Neuroscience continues the advanced study of anatomy and neuroanatomy to prepare the students to study assessment and intervention in the practice courses.

G. Practice Theory and Skills
The practice courses present intervention strategies for a broad spectrum of diagnoses and occupational performance deficits. Motor Functioning (OTH 5503) builds upon the concepts of normal development studied in developmental psychology and focuses on role occupations, motor development, and occupations at various stages of development with special emphasis on the first year of life. Assessment and Intervention (OTH 5504) introduces basic practice skills that are used in all the subsequent practice courses. Psychosocial Occupational Therapy (OTH 5522) not only covers material related to clinical practice in mental health settings, but also stresses the importance of psychological issues across the life span and as an important aspect of therapy in other areas of practice. Biomechanical Occupational Therapy (OTH 5521) covers assessment and intervention for orthopedic and systemic disorders by occupational therapy practitioners. Neurorehabilitation in Occupational Therapy (OTH 6523), Gerontic Occupational Therapy (OTH 6524) and Pediatric Occupational Therapy (OTH 6525) continue to investigate assessment and intervention strategies for populations commonly seen in practice. Finally, Documentation (OTH 5544) is included in the practice component of the design to acknowledge the critical need to accurately and effectively articulate client needs, skilled intervention strategies and client outcomes.

H. Clinical Applications
Students are introduced to clinical practice early in the curriculum and it is integrated throughout the two years. There are seven clinical applications that occur throughout and at the end of the didactic components of occupational therapy. First, several courses include in-classroom or site-visit experiences to reinforce concepts and to serve as sources for learning related to the content
of the host course. Second, there are three Level I Fieldwork experiences scheduled off-site at three different intervals across the curriculum, one during the first year, a second during the summer between the first and second year and a third during the second year, plus two Level I Fieldwork experiences at the on-site clinic at the College. The Level I Fieldwork experiences are collaboratively directed by a faculty member and the clinical fieldwork supervisor. The experiences are also evaluated and analyzed during in-class time with respect to the learning outcomes and content being introduced in parallel practice courses. The third level comes at the end of the Occupational Therapy Program when students complete their Level II Fieldwork experiences.

I. Professional Context
The portion of the design titled “Professional Context” includes a diverse set of concepts and skills the practitioner needs related to program development, working with payers, advocating their services, influencing public policy, administering and leading within different service delivery models and developing professional relationships. Some of these concepts are integrated into courses throughout the curriculum. One of the concepts, for example, “education” is included as a learning method in numerous courses; students learn from each other and the teaching process is a primary part of the evaluation. Students also learn principles of adult learning, theories of client education and how to use these principles in planning client intervention. Leadership Issues (OTH 6545) and Administration and Supervision (OTH 6543) are designed to increase knowledge in the supervisory, managerial and entrepreneurial aspects of practice.

J. Graduate Level Skills
In addition to the practitioner skills and the context for practice, it is critical to meet the intent of graduate education. Graduate education, in addition to providing an in-depth level of content in a specialized area of study, is designed to teach students how to learn, to formulate evidence-based opinions through critical inquiry, to contribute to their profession, and to do this within the context of professional values.

The occupational therapy curriculum provides the students with an in-depth level of content.

In terms of learning how to learn, the curriculum challenges students to engage in independent, collaborative, and investigative learning processes. One of the final courses in the curriculum, Critical Analysis (OTH 6546) requires students to identify a challenging professional question and apply a critical inquiry process to that issue. The goal is to develop an evidence-based opinion about a multi-perspective topic. The overall intent is that students will continue to investigate professional questions ranging from client related queries to their own professional development.

A strong element of graduate education at The College of St. Scholastica relates to ethics and decision making. To this end, students are introduced to experiences that are intended to expand and clarify self-knowledge, to apply concepts of spirituality, and to analyze problems and synthesize solutions based on professional ethics. Ethics based decision making is strongly integrated throughout the curriculum.
Finally, graduate students are expected to make the transition of learning about a profession to contributing to the profession. With an entry-level master's degree this transition will naturally be at an introductory stage. Students are, however, involved in a range of learning experiences designed to promote scholarly activity. They complete a capstone research project. The research process is framed in three sequenced courses, beginning in the first year. Through Research I (OTH 5331), Research II (OTH 6332) and Research III (OTH 6333) students explore a topic, select a research focus, develop a proposal and with the guidance of a Department of Occupational Therapy faculty member, carry out an exploratory or applied research project. The research process involves planning for and budgeting resources as well as presenting the research when completed.

K. Curriculum Input

There are four major sources of reciprocal communication with Department of Occupational Therapy faculty; students, the practice community, research and changing community needs. Students provide a constant source of feedback during the professional occupational therapy training. Perceptions of satisfaction regarding teaching and evaluation methods make up the bulk of this information. This information is used to make internal course changes. At the completion of their Level II Fieldwork experiences students complete an evaluation of the curriculum as it relates to the immediately completed fieldwork experience. The Level II Fieldwork evaluations are also an important source of data. Students are surveyed one year after graduating. This provides valuable information as to strengths of their learning and areas where they felt inadequately prepared. Once again, the survey results are analyzed for patterns.

Faculty members maintain active roles with the professional community. Whether through conferences, ongoing clinical practices, professional liaisons with service organizations, or clinical visits, the goal is to maintain an updated knowledge of current practice within specific domains. The Academic Fieldwork Coordinator conducts regular clinical visits and the Department of Occupational Therapy invites fieldwork supervisors to offer their recommendations in a focus group format.

Faculty members keep abreast of related research on an ongoing basis. When evidence dictates, individual course and/or curriculum changes are made. As research informs practice, it informs education.

Finally, the Department of Occupational Therapy must remain alert to changes in the population, as well as health trends and needs that emerge or are projected, based on demographic and environmental changes. A contemporary example of such a change is the changing life expectancy and projected growth of the geriatric population.

Each of these sources is an important input to evaluate the curriculum. The curriculum design, in turn, will guide the adoption of changes.

L. Curriculum Decisions

The curriculum design is a plan for selecting and placing occupational therapy content. This curriculum design reflects the Department of Occupational Therapy philosophy regarding occupational therapy as a profession and the outcomes of a professional education in
occupational therapy. The design describes a process and does not intend to limit the scope of theories and models of occupational therapy practice addressed and included in the curriculum.

Curriculum decisions then are based on several factors. Content must be consistent with the standards for an accredited educational program (ACOTE). Content must contribute to practitioner skills; professional context or the advanced skills that define graduate learning. Within those broad categories there should be evidence from the students, the practice community, research and/or changing community needs to justify the addition or reduction. The various internal assessment processes in place may indicate the need for methodological changes within the curriculum. Once new content is determined, learning objectives and teaching methods must be compatible and directed to a level of learning appropriate to the place in the curriculum, the course, previous levels of related learning and intended outcomes.

References


College of St. Scholastica. (undated) *The college of St. Scholastica values from the Benedictine heritage*. Duluth, MN: Author.


