

## Misericordia University Occupational Therapy Department

### CURRICULUM DESIGN

#### **The Design**

A liberal arts education provides the essential academic foundation for Occupational Therapy education at Misericordia University. Within the Occupational Therapy curriculum, our students learn to analyze situations critically, think logically, employ scientific methodology appropriately, express themselves clearly and persuasively in both oral and written media, consider the numerous dimensions of the person during intervention including the physical, psychological, social, cultural, historical, and spiritual components, appreciate the arts and use them in their work, and follow a standard of ethical conduct in their personal and professional lives. These abilities are critical for laying the foundation for the student for transition to an entry level OT practitioner. As students progress through the five-year educational process, they are also socialized into the profession. This involves actively participating in professional organizations, becoming advocates for consumers, and developing a commitment to lifelong learning.

The manner in which the Occupational Therapy curriculum is delivered is complex. The curriculum design reflects the mission and philosophy of the Occupational Therapy Department and University as well as the philosophy of the profession.

This curriculum is designed on beliefs the Occupational Therapy faculty hold in regard to professional education. We hold that these beliefs are in accordance with our philosophy and reflect the program mission and are well incorporated into learning modules and program objectives. These include the following concepts:

- A solid foundation in the liberal arts and in normal growth and development allows for a thorough understanding of the dimensions of human performance.
- The development of knowledge occurs in a sequential process beginning with basic concepts and techniques and progressing to increasingly more complex constructs and application of these concepts and constructs in practice.
- Individuals construct knowledge based on their unique interpretation of meaningful experiences. Faculty can encourage the construction of knowledge by setting the stage for meaningful interactions, reflections, and experiences (Howard et al., 2000), however students are the architects of their own learning.
- Skills of inquiry, critical reasoning, and problem solving are essential professional behaviors for practicing occupational therapists.
- Continuous examination and definition of one's own values and attitudes are critical steps in the growth and development of professional behaviors and ethical practice.
- Development of interpersonal skills and an appreciation of the value of collaboration must be integral to all learning experiences.

The Occupational Therapy curriculum is designed in such a way as to reflect the values and intent of the profession. Students enter the program at two levels, each based on whether the student applies to the weekday five-year program or the three and a half year weekend program.

Upon entry to the professional sequence of coursework, students follow a structured, integrated sequence of learning experiences that will prepare them to become entry-level occupational therapists. Based upon the profession's philosophy, the University and Program mission, the educational outcome goals of the curriculum, which includes both didactic and fieldwork components (Level I and Level II), provide a learning experience such that: Graduates of the Misericordia University Occupational Therapy Program will meet the following:

### **Occupational Therapy Program Curricular Goals**

1. Demonstrate skills necessary to participate in designing and implementing a beginning-level research project.
2. Describe the process an occupational therapist would use to engage in evidence based practice (EBP).
3. Demonstrate the usage of evidence based practice.
4. Recognize and respect the significance that incorporating EBP has for individual OT practitioners when interacting with their clients.
5. Demonstrate and analyze the role and importance of participation in occupation throughout the life span.
6. Assess client needs via an occupational profile and an occupational performance analysis.
7. Identify, analyze, and apply major tenets from the discipline of occupational science.
8. Plan and implement occupation-based occupational therapy intervention programs that are culturally relevant, reflective of current occupational therapy practice, and supported with appropriate theoretical perspectives.
9. Design and critique programs that promote access to occupational therapy and provide services for individuals, groups, and populations, especially the underserved.
10. Demonstrate management and leadership skills that are applicable to a variety of practice settings.
11. Design creative and entrepreneurial ideas for occupational therapy services.
12. Demonstrate skilled collaboration and consultation when dealing with others in the community.
13. Evaluate the process for securing potential funding for pilot, start-up and on-going programs for occupational therapy.
14. Discuss and evaluate ongoing professional development to ensure a level of practice consistent with current and accepted standards.
15. Discuss major historical events and their influence on occupational therapy theory, models, and practice.

Three themes provide the overarching structure to the curriculum design. These themes were developed by the faculty following a full curricular review considering years of student feedback, program outcomes, and consideration of the new standards and centennial vision. These themes are:

### ***Occupation Focused Practice***

Features of occupation focused practice include the ability to collaboratively determine the meaning and purpose of an individual's occupational profile, identify needs and priorities, and construct a plan of motivating therapeutic activities. This process, infused with occupations, reflects best practice and results in a more meaningful lifestyle.

Our curriculum is developed to foster an understanding and appreciation of:

- a) the role of occupation throughout the life span
- b) how occupation is used as a means and an end in occupational therapy practice
- c) the value of occupation based assessment and intervention
- d) how the focus on occupational performance improves therapeutic outcomes

### ***Evidence Based Practice***

Evidence based practice is a collaborative process between therapist and client in which the best available research evidence, in combination with the therapist's clinical experience, is reviewed to determine the most appropriate therapeutic options that support the client's occupational goals. Essential to this is the therapist's ability to recognize and respect the significance that EBP will have for the profession, as well as for the client.

### ***Community Initiative***

Community initiatives help to increase access to occupational therapy services for all individuals, groups and populations, especially those underserved. We prepare students to work in emerging practice areas and community settings as well as weekday settings. We desire to instill in our students leadership characteristics for service to the community, including an entrepreneurial spirit, skilled interdisciplinary collaboration and the ability to identify funding resources.

In order to meet our curricular goals, the sequence of coursework is delivered using a progressive approach. This sequence covers five areas: Liberal Arts & Foundational Knowledge, Individual Development and Occupation, Professional & Community Initiatives, Clinical Performance, Reasoning & Application, and Research & EBP: Strengthening our Knowledge Base. The five interwoven sequences of education are described in more detail below.

### **Sequence I Liberal Arts and Foundational Knowledge (Core, Cognate, OT 312, OT 313)**

Students establish the foundation of knowledge through the completion of all liberal arts core courses, BIO 211 and 212: Anatomy and Physiology, OT 312 Functional Anatomy, and OT 313 Applied Neuroscience. The science foundation provides a basis for clinical expertise regarding knowledge of body structures and functions. The liberal arts provide a broad foundation upon which to build the student's professional education. Required courses in psychology and psychopathology provide a further basis from which the student can begin to understand the interaction between the individual, their environment, and occupation. OT 312 and OT 313 are placed after sequence II in the curriculum to reinforce the student's ability to apply this knowledge in Sequences III and IV.

**Sequence II Individual Development , Environment and Occupation (OT 205, 220, 221, 275, 320, 330, 335)**

Students are introduced to the concepts of human growth and development through the two-course sequence exploring Human Development (OT 220 and OT 221) and concurrently the theories and analysis of Occupations from the perspective of self and other (OT 205, 275). OT 335 provides a thorough investigation of the influences that the environment may have on occupational performance, and OT 330 introduces the students to the many models and frames of reference that may be used to guide the development of a comprehensive and holistic approach to the client. OT 320 promotes students' understanding of impairments and disabilities and their potential influences on occupational performance.

**Sequence III Professional and Community Initiatives (OT 103, OT 410, 570, 630)**

Students learn the importance of developing professional behaviors and the application of these behaviors to develop individual therapeutic relationships and leadership skills in the community. Professional Behaviors are introduced in OT 103, where broad issues about the profession, such as its' standards, ethics and vision for the future are discussed. The Community Based Practice course (OT 410) provides less structured opportunities for students to create occupational opportunities in non-weekday settings, and to take an active role in the development of their learning. OT 570 assists the student in acquiring the weekday management and supervisory skills necessary in many of today's practice environments, as well as the leadership capacities for entrepreneurial work. OT 630, as a culminating course, requires students to investigate the professional Issues and Trends in the profession that will challenge and motivate them as they enter into practice as entry level therapists.

**Sequence IV Clinical Performance, Reasoning and Application (OT 405, 407, 510, 511, 512, 601, 602)**

The development of clinical skills begins in OT 405 and OT 407 where students acquire general competencies in conducting an occupation centered evaluation and assessment process and attain the entry-level clinical skills that are required to progress through the intervention series in upcoming semesters. The Intervention Series, OT 510, 511 and 512, provide the students with opportunities to integrate prior levels of learning to construct intervention for a variety of clients with an occupation and evidence based approach derived from theoretical principles. The final application of this sequence occurs during the student's Level II FW experiences (OT 601 and 602).

**Sequence V Research and EBP – Strengthening our Knowledge Base (OT 520, 433, 690, 695)**

While basic bibliographic, search and information literacy are introduced early throughout the curriculum, the essence of the research series begins in OT 520 where students learn about qualitative and quantitative research designs, grants, and the research process. OT 690 and OT 695 require them to develop a research proposal from start to finish, design a study, collect data, and analyze and present results. OT 433 addresses the evidence based practice component, where students complete an individual EBP review throughout the semester.