



Sacred Heart
UNIVERSITY
OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

Occupational Therapy Newsletter SUMMER 2023

Letter from Department Chair and Program Director

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

I am delighted to share with you the latest summer newsletter from the Department of Occupational Therapy at Sacred Heart University. You will find highlights of recent program developments, events, and student and faculty news.



In this issue we showcase students' participation in service-learning and community engagement. Faculty are deeply committed to service-learning as a pedagogical approach to teaching and learning. The contextualized and active learning experiences offer students true 'learning through doing.' You will also read about a recent special Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion event that took place for the OT students, faculty, and staff. This is one example of an initiative to foster inclusive excellence, diversity, equity and belonging.

Congratulations to our PY2 students on their Commencement. We wish you much success in the coming weeks on your final Level II Fieldwork education and NBCOT exams.

As a department, we are engaged in an exciting and full summer semester. I look forward to celebrating your continued accomplishments, collaborations, and scholarship.

Dr. Sharon McCloskey
Department Chair and Program Director

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Service Learning

Service-Learning (SL) experiences are an integral part of the OT Curriculum at Sacred Heart University. We value service-learning as a high impact pedagogical strategy. The SL experiences allow students to apply knowledge, theory, and practical skills to situations of community engagement and practice. Through these experiences our students gain professional confidence and competence in working with others, applying their knowledge of the occupational therapy process, and engage in occupation-based practice to meet the needs of diverse client populations.

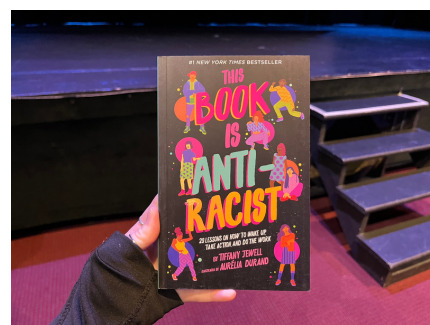
During the spring and summer trimesters, the first-year OT students engaged in service-learning experiences across a variety of local community organizations. The SL experiences involved the development and implementation of evidence-based, client-centered strategies, and interventions (under the guidance and supervision of the OT faculty). Some of the local community sites included:

- **Bridge House** - A clubhouse for adults living with mental illness in Bridgeport, CT. The OT students implemented therapeutic group activities and interventions to address health and wellness, such as exercise and stretching, chair yoga, healthy nutrition, daily routines, etc. [Click here to read more.](#)
- **Thomas Merton Center** - A community center for unhoused individuals to provide meals and showers and create a space where people can share, belong, and respect others in a judgment free zone. [Click here to read more.](#)
- **Fairfield Commission on disAbility** - The Commission aims to foster an inclusive and fulfilling environment in Fairfield, where individuals with disabilities are able to actively participate and contribute as valued members of the community. The OT students worked with the Commission and were featured on the Commission website for a survey the students conducted. [Click here to read more.](#)

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Diversity encompasses acceptance and respect for the full range of human differences. On May 3rd the PY1 OT students, faculty, and staff attended a workshop titled Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: A Bridge to Belonging. This training was delivered as part of an ACT Grant Award and facilitated by Dr. Sharon McCloskey and Dr. Christina Gunther. The occupational therapy faculty at Sacred Heart University have intentionally designed curricula to enhance students' knowledge and development in the areas of cultural awareness, sensitivity, competence, and cultural humility (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998), to meet the increasing needs of diverse clients from a variety of cultural and diverse backgrounds.

The training program was designed to augment the OT curriculum. The purpose of the learning was to increase participants' cultural awareness, emphasizing the importance of acknowledging and appreciating differences among others. Participants were encouraged to foster conversations about diversity and bring attention to unconscious biases in a safe and trusting context. This event is one example of a program initiative to foster inclusive excellence and support students skill development and knowledge of diversity, equity and belonging.



AOTA Inspire 2023

Student Participation at AOTA Inspire Conference, April 2023

The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) Conference stands as the premiere global assembly of occupational therapy professionals. This year's conference was held in Kansas City, MO. This significant event presents a valuable platform for expanding knowledge in various areas, including practice, professional matters, emerging trends, and more. SHU OT students enthusiastically participated in sessions, engaged with industry expositions, and established connections with esteemed professionals. Notably, numerous students were fortunate to receive giveaways, such as complimentary NBCOT exam study packets and free NBCOT exam vouchers.

Highlights included the expo as well as the incredible keynote speaker, John O'Leary. He moved the audience with his personal experience of being a burn victim at the age of 9. John was inspirational to all.

For more information about this conference [click here](#).



Faculty Presentations at AOTA



Dr. Lola Halperin's presentation was titled, "Unconditional Positive Regard, Limit Setting, Radical Acceptance versus Change and All That Jazz: Serving Clients with Challenging Personalities." Dr. Halperin reported that the presentation went very well, and was delighted to see some of our faculty and students in the audience! Dr. Halperin's second presentation was a workshop, which she co-presented with Dr. Amiya Waldman-Levi from Yeshiva University, titled, "Developing and Ensuring Intervention Adherence of Group-Based OT Programs." A fidelity checklist for group-based OT programs was shared with participants.

As a committee member of the Rehabilitation and Disability Special Interest Committee, Dr. Amanda Wheeler led the session titled "Conversations that Matter: Promoting Professional Competency & Advocacy Across the Continuum of Care Rooted in the Medical Model." Dr. Wheeler facilitated a conversation with AOTA members from across the country who practice within the medical model to help brainstorm opportunities for competency resources as well as for advocacy within the profession. The conversation generated great ideas for development of future AOTA resources including mentoring programs and clinician toolkits.



Faculty Highlights

ConnOTA Conference Presentations

Professor Lola Halperin, Ed.D., OTR/L

Dr. Lola Halperin presented a session that provided important information about and practical suggestions for approaching both observant and secular Jewish clients in a culturally sensitive manner. The importance of cultural humility and recognizing and addressing racial trauma among diverse populations was addressed during this presentation as well.



Professor Ellen Martino, OTD, OTR/L

Professor Martino's presentation was titled "Integrating Occupational Therapy in the preschool classroom to support kindergarten readiness using an evidence-based and collaborative approach." The presentation included explanation of the high expectations for handwriting in kindergarten, why children may struggle to meet these expectations, and how to help children develop and improve the fine motor and visual motor skills they need for kindergarten readiness.



Professor Sheelagh Schlegel, Dr.H.Sc., MPH, OTR/L, CHES, CAPS

Professor Schlegel's short session was to outline the importance of driving simulation and how OTs working with adults can prepare clients to begin or return to driving. The short session also reviewed the pilot study that is taking place at The College of Health Professions, Sacred Heart University. In this mixed-methods study, clients who have been referred to the SHU Driving Simulator Clinic by their health care professionals, are assessed using pre- and post-test measures, before and after an 8-week driving simulation program.



Women's Health Center Opened in June by OT Faculty

Jaimee Hegge and Amanda Wheeler Start SHU & You

Dr. Jaimee Hegge, OTD, OTR/L, CKTP, Clinical Assistant Professor and Dr. Amanda Wheeler, PhD, OTR/L, CLT, Assistant Professor officially opened for women's health occupational therapy services June 1st at the Center for Healthcare Education. Jaimee and Amanda are passionate about this initiative and recognize the need for the services being offered based on personal and clinical experiences. The mission of the center is to connect women with limited financial and supportive resources within the greater Bridgeport/Fairfield area with accessible quality occupational therapy services including breast cancer rehabilitation, lymphedema surveillance for women who have undergone breast cancer treatment, and pelvic floor education and treatment for women with pelvic dysfunction.

Women seen at the Center receive a comprehensive assessment and education by Jaimee and Amanda who specialize in the management of breast cancer rehabilitation, lymphedema, and pelvic health. Occupational therapy students gain exposure to these highly specialized practice areas by observing and assisting during occupational therapy visits. All occupational therapy services are provided free of charge.



Jaimee Betts Hegge, OTD, OTR/L



Amanda Wheeler, Ph.D., OTR/L

Commencement Celebrations

Annual Pinning Ceremony

Congratulations to the PY2 students on the annual pinning event, May 13, 2023. The evening prior to Commencement, students and their families were warmly received by Dean Iversen, Dr. McCloskey, faculty, and staff. This ceremony holds great significance as it marks the official entry of occupational therapy graduates into the profession. Through the symbolic act of 'pinning,' students symbolize their transition from theoretical learning to practical application in clinical settings. The pinning ceremony, a cherished tradition in healthcare, was enjoyed by family and friends.



Commencement Ceremony, May 14, 2023

**Congratulations to the Graduates of the Class of 2023!
Best of Luck on the NBCOT!**



Blessing of the Hands

On May 11, 2023 the College of Health Professions held its inaugural Blessing of the Hands Ceremony. This symbolic act serves as a reminder for aspiring healthcare practitioners to unfailingly administer compassionate care with their hands.

Student Activities

Occupational Therapy Month, April 2023



Occupational Therapy (OT) Month, as recognized by the American Occupational Therapy Association, is a dedicated time to honor and promote the field of occupational therapy and its contributions to improving individuals' lives. Sacred Heart University's MSOT program celebrated OT Month by hosting a spirit week, organizing coffee fundraisers for their global service learning trips, inviting guest speakers to share insights, and encouraging students to share personal stories about what OT means to them and why they chose this profession.

What OT Means To Me, from OT Students

"Bringing back meaning into people's lives and putting genuine smiles back on their faces."

"OT means the opportunity to make a positive impact on someone's life no matter how big or small."

"Occupational therapy is a career that never deems anything impossible."

Congratulations to Brianna Zelman!

Congratulations to PY2 Brianna Zelman on receiving the ConnOTA Emerging Leader Award at the Spring 2023 ConnOTA Conference on March 24, 2023.

The ConnOTA Emerging Leader Award recognizes students of occupational therapy or novice practitioners who have demonstrated outstanding leadership within the profession of OT. Brianna Zelman is a second-year student in the Master of Science in Occupational Therapy Program at Sacred Heart University currently completing her last Level II Fieldwork placement. During her first year as an MSOT student, Brianna was elected by her peers as the president of the Pi Theta Epsilon (PTE) Honor Society chapter at SHU. As president, she collaborated with the members of the executive board to organize fundraising activities, design scholarly events and activities, and plan annual chapter events. Brianna is a highly organized individual who is committed to excellence in the occupational therapy practice. In addition to serving in PTE, Brianna is also an active member of the Coalition of Occupational Therapists Advocating for Diversity (COTAD) and the Student Occupational Therapy Association (SOTA) during her time at Sacred Heart University.



Pi Theta Epsilon



First trimester students enrolled in the Sacred Heart Occupational Therapy program are invited to apply to Pi Theta Epsilon (PTE) highlighting their academic achievements. The primary objectives of PTE is to acknowledge and promote academic excellence, fostering the progress of the occupational therapy field through scholarly articles, and facilitate information exchange and collaboration among students in scholarly pursuits. Congratulations to the latest inductees of PTE!

Recently elected executive board of PTE are below:

President: Cassandra Dwight
Secretary: Melanie Brothers



Treasurer: Sofia Bramante
Vice President: Jenna Zabaneh

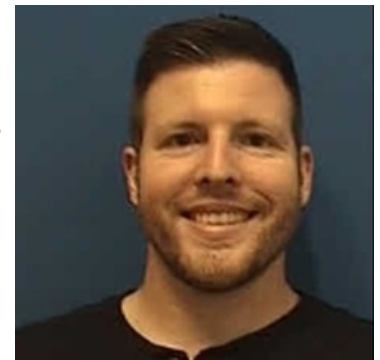
Alumni Spotlights



Emily Morgan, MS, OTR/L
Amanda Wirth, PT, DPT

SHU Alumna Emily Morgan, MS, OTR/L, and her collaborator Amanda Wirth, PT, DPT presented, “Keep Them Off Their Toes: A Collaborative Approach to Evaluation and Treatment of Sensory-Based Idiopathic Toe Walkers,” on June 13, 2023. Emily and Amanda currently work at NYU Langone Orthopedic Hospital at the Rusk Rehabilitation Unit in the Pediatric Outpatient Department. Their study explored pediatric clients of at least 2 years of age, diagnosed with idiopathic toe walking (ITW), and specifically looked at the developmental implications and sensory processing deficits that may result from ITW. Their recommendations for treatment are based on the successful outcomes in their department. Thank you to Emily and Amanda for their wonderful and insightful presentation.

Evan Peck, MS, OTR/L graduated from the SHU OT program 2020. Evan is an occupational therapist at St. Vincent's Behavioral Health Center in Westport, Connecticut. In April 2023, Evan spoke to the Pi Theta Epsilon chapter at Sacred Heart University about working in an acute mental health setting. He provided information about running groups, treatment planning, and considerations for a variety of conditions.



Evan Peck, MS, OTR/L



Contact Us

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From the Editor



I want to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Rebeca Giorgio, Department Coordinator, for her invaluable guidance and support in creating this edition of the newsletter. I would also like to extend thanks to the faculty and students of the OT Department for their outstanding contributions.

On behalf of Dr. Sharon McCloskey, Chair and Program Director, Rebeca Giorgio, and myself, we sincerely appreciate your readership.

Fiona Buckley, OTS



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