OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ASSISTANT CURRICULUM DESIGN

The design of the content, scope, and course sequencing for the Occupational Therapy Assistant ("OTA") curriculum combines the mission of the OTA program, the mission of Brightwood Career Institute, and the philosophic beliefs of the OTA program faculty.

Many frames of reference were used to guide the development of the OTA program just as the field of occupational therapy encompasses many frames of reference to define and develop the scope of its practice. The major premises of the OTA program were designed around the Human Occupation Frame of Reference by Kielhofner & Burke, Role Acquisition Frame of Reference by Mosey, and the developmental theories in general. Bloom’s Taxonomy provides a developmental model, which guides student learning within three increasingly complex learning domains.

CENTRAL THEMES
The program curriculum is organized around three central themes:

- **Occupation**
  As stated in the program’s philosophy, each person defines his/her uniqueness and individuality through the roles chosen to participate in, or occupation. The students will be able to utilize past role experiences when learning and applying new knowledge related to occupational therapy. Through engagement in occupation, each student will bring different components into the program and build upon them to become an occupational therapy practitioner.

- **Function**
  Function is viewed by the faculty as an essential theme of utilizing functional activities and is introduced early in the classroom and emphasized throughout the program. Students are taught to recognize the worth and dignity of all people and to understand how each individual grows and adapts through functional activities. In the fieldwork experience, this theme is integrated into practice.

- **Role Acquisition**
  The final theme which is present throughout the curriculum is that of role acquisition. Role acquisition reflects the idea that individuals enter the OTA program as students and leave as entry-level occupational therapy assistants. The students must learn what is required to perform the role of an occupational therapy assistant including professional behavior, which is addressed throughout the curriculum. The OTA program curriculum is designed to teach the entry-level skills in a sequence that allows for optimal learning.
The themes are consistent with the OTA program’s mission of preparing students to provide quality occupational therapy services and Brightwood Career Institute provides the job skills necessary for success in the workplace. This includes the technical skills required of the OTA, as well as critical thinking, effective communication skills, and the ability to apply those skills as a cooperative member of the interdisciplinary team.

Each of the themes of the curriculum design is present throughout the entire OTA program. The elementary skills necessary for occupational therapy are introduced early in the program so that the students can build on this foundation. Brightwood Career Institute believes that the students must become competent in certain key areas such as ethics, communication, and documentation. Because of the drive to produce competent OTAs, these areas, as well as others, are addressed and taught many times during the program for continual reinforcement. The program is designed to ensure competence, skill and role acquisition in all areas of occupational therapy.

Teaching/Learning activities are designed to promote the acquisition of critical thinking skills, team behavior, and the ability to continue learning on one’s own. These are integrated throughout the program and include cooperative learning, student projects, case studies, and extensive class participation. In addition, community outings and guest lecturers are utilized to provide enhanced learning and growth.

**EDUCATIONAL GOALS**

Seven educational goals were developed in conjunction with the OTA program goals and Brightwood Career Institute’s mission:

1. **Educational Goal: Prepare graduates for professional success.**
   The curriculum and instructional strategies are competency-based. Techniques used in the classroom and extensive fieldwork experiences are planned to allow students maximum opportunities to apply the knowledge and skills required by occupational therapy practitioners with ongoing feedback and support.

2. **Education Goal: Encourage the enhancement of self-esteem and other career success.**
   The courses are sequenced so that concepts build upon one another, moving to increasingly higher levels in the cognitive and affective domains. This sequencing provides students with the opportunity for mastery and enhances their chances for professional success and positive self-esteem. Level I Fieldwork is completed at the end of the coursework which allows the students to apply all they have learned.

3. **Educational Goal: Employ adult learning theory.**
   General education courses form the foundation for professional study. In accordance with the principles of adult learning theory, courses are designed to build on previously acquired knowledge and experience. For example, *Fundamentals of*
Occupational Therapy is taught before students take Principles of Occupational Therapy with Children.

4. Education Goal: Encourage sensitivity to cultural and ethnic diversity. Critical issues in contemporary American society, which form the physical and ethical environment in which the practitioner will work, influence the selection of program content. Introduction to Sociology is included to prepare graduates with the knowledge and skills to most effectively and empathetically work with cultural diversities.

5. Education Goal: Provide opportunities for the student to succeed academically. Adults generally learn best when their classroom experiences seem relevant and match their professional expectation. Volunteering, service learning, and community outings are introduced throughout the program so that students will have “real-life” observations to provide a background for subsequent classroom study.

6. Education Goal: Develop critical thinking ability. Health practitioners must be decision-makers, and the curriculum and instructional strategies are designed to provide students with opportunities to apply critical thinking skills in situations which may be found in practice. Various practicals, mock clinics, opportunities for analysis of patient performance and interdisciplinary team meetings are completed to prepare students for working as an OTA.

7. Education Goal: Uphold the values of occupational therapy and advocate for the profession. To continue to promote the fundamental idea of occupational therapy as a means to improve one’s quality of life, students must graduate with the belief that they are the responsible for instilling this idea in others. Students are taught to define and promote occupational therapy as a vital and integral part of treatment, as well as to commit to lifelong learning and advocacy for the field.

**COURSE SEQUENCING**

Each quarter of the OTA program was designed using the three central themes, occupation, function, and role acquisition, and the six educational goals listed above. Utilizing Bloom’s Taxonomy, each quarter provides students with various learning opportunities to fully integrate each theme and reach every goal:

First Quarter:

A sound foundation for occupational therapy is established through courses in communication, anatomy & physiology, and psychology. Occupational therapy is introduced to the students as the beginning of a focus on occupation and function.
Cognitive:
- Define and comprehend occupational therapy and its foundational concepts. Recognize the various roles of the treatment team, including occupational therapy assistants and occupational therapists.
- Define essential concepts in psychology.
- Analyze and comprehend various body systems, including the skeletal system.

Affective:
- Participate in a service learning project to understand the relationship between occupational therapy and the needs of the community.
- Participate in a clinical volunteer assignment to complete basic observation skills, communication skills, and professionalism skills.

Psychomotor:
- Demonstrate critical thinking skills in analyzing crafts for therapeutic purpose.
- Identify and select functional activities, adapt activities, and determine cultural considerations through a case study.
- Display and identify various joint positions during a range of motion practical.

Second Quarter:
Normal human development, cultural issues, diversity factors, health and welfare issues, and lifestyle choices are addressed through general education courses. Musculoskeletal and neuroanatomical systems are taught in Anatomy and Physiology II. Play is introduced as the primary occupation in the pediatric population.

Cognitive:
- Identify normal human development.
- Explain cultural issues, diversity factors, health and welfare issues, and lifestyle choices.
- Define and comprehend muscle origin, insertion, and function.
- Identify and analyze play as the primary occupation in the pediatric population, as well as distinguish disruptions which may interrupt the adaptation process.

Affective:
- Participate in class activities such as simulation of various pediatric diagnostic features and the effects of feeding on each.
- Recognize that family and caregivers are essential components of the treatment plan through a mock interview.
Psychomotor:
- Perform a fifteen-minute mock clinical, where student provides intervention focused on a skill-based activity and a goal-based activity.
- Modifies and adapts treatment plans through several case study scenarios.

Third Quarter:
Adult disabilities and disruptions to the adaptation process are introduced. Therapeutic use of self is formally assessed in multiple situations.

Cognitive:
- Analyze a treatment session and prepare a SOAP note based on the session.
- Comprehend and explain adult disabilities and disruptions to the adaptation process.
- Analyze and interpret results from various assessment tools.

Affective:
- Demonstrate the belief that treating patients with dignity and respect is a necessary and integral component to occupational therapy and treatment implementation.
- Detect and respond to both non-verbal and verbal communication skills during practicals and mock clinical through effective therapeutic use of self-skills and rapport building.

Psychomotor:
- Demonstrate learned skills through various practicals including: range of motion, edema, functional muscle testing, transfers, and dressing.
- Integrate information learned throughout all classes to organize and perform a thirty-minute mock clinical, where student provides patient intervention through both goal-based ADL activities, as well as adjunctive and enabling activities.

Fourth Quarter:
Communication and therapeutic use of self-skills are assessed in multiple situations to allow further development. The Group Dynamics course provides an opportunity to design and lead groups and assume the OTA role. Treatment of psychosocial dysfunction in the focus of the occupational therapy classes offered during the fourth quarter.

Cognitive:
- Identify the various roles of members during group interactions.
- Describe the group process, including the benefits of occupational therapy intervention when provided in a group setting.
- Analyze various psychosocial diagnoses, and the role of occupational therapy with each.
Affective:
- Participate in community outings to several types of psychosocial treatment settings.
- Demonstrate the ability to utilize therapeutic use of self with a variety of psychosocial diagnoses in order achieve optimal therapeutic implementation.

Psychomotor:
- Implement occupational therapy treatment in the group setting by creating, applying, and adapting activities to various psychosocial diagnoses.
- Administer and interpret results of assessment tools commonly utilized with psychosocial populations.

Fifth Quarter:
Completing the didactic coursework are the occupational therapy classes dealing with the mature adult. The student must apply all previously learned material to the geriatric population. To further prepare the students for actual job skills, an Ethics and Management in Occupational Therapy course and career planning course are required. Level I Fieldwork is also completed, allowing students to utilize information learned throughout completed courses during experiences in a clinical setting. Following a forty-five minute mock clinic, students participate in a mock staffing meeting with a doctor in order to report the patient’s status and projected treatment plan.

Cognitive:
- Demonstrate critical thinking and analysis with writing skills through preparation of a resume, as well as documentation of treatment sessions through a SOAP note.
- Organize and implement a teaching presentation on various topics related to the geriatric population, teaching classmates during a hands-on lab activity.

Affective:
- During a therapeutic cooking group, assume the role of a supervising therapist or a patient with multiple diagnoses throughout the preparation and consumption of the meal.
- Advocate and promote occupational therapy as a vital health profession with a focus on increasing independence and quality of life.

Psychomotor:
- As a group, design, prepare, and manage a fundraiser for a selected charity.
- Participate in Home Safe Home, evaluating the homes of seniors who may be at a risk for falls or hazards, determining suggestions for improvement, and composing a plan for the suggestions.
- Integrate information learned throughout all classes to organize and perform a forty-five minute mock clinical, incorporating treatment activities, adaptation, problem solving, and therapeutic use of self.
- Participate in an interdisciplinary team meeting, analyzing patient performance, reporting outcomes, and answering asked questions to a “doctor”.
- Assume the role of a student therapist while completing Level I Fieldwork rotations in both a physical setting and psychosocial treatment setting.

Sixth Quarter:
The final quarter of the program is devoted solely to Level II Fieldwork. The themes of the curriculum are fully integrated as students relate classroom work to practical settings.

Students are also required to collaborate with other health care providers and supervisors in the field. There is an integration of general education, anatomy and physiology, and technical knowledge of the previous quarters into entry-level competency.

**Cognitive:**
- Understand the use of occupation-based interventions to enhance client roles and health and wellness.
- Assist in the application, analysis, and documentation of the occupational therapy process from screening to discharge of patients, utilizing critical thinking, problem solving, and clinical reasoning.
- Integrate the use of purposeful activity and occupation-based interventions in order to support client participation.

**Affective:**
- Demonstrate the ability to question concepts and research topics to enhance knowledge.
- Recognize professional behaviors as foundational to the profession of occupational therapy.

**Psychomotor:**
- Utilize intrapersonal and interpersonal skills when interacting with patients, peers, and members of the treatment team during the occupational therapy process.
- Utilize clinical reasoning, clinical thinking, and problem solving skills when determining appropriate interventions in order to support client participation in occupations.
- Adapt the environment to support client participation in occupations.
PROGRAM OUTCOMES
Upon completion of the OTA program at Brightwood Career Institute, the graduate will:

1. Interact with others in a nonjudgmental manner, respecting the worth and dignity of all persons and their ability to use intellect and free will through the life span.
2. Apply theoretical knowledge of natural, behavioral, and social sciences to the art and science of occupational therapy practice.
3. Apply the theoretical knowledge of the art and science of occupational therapy to the professional practice of clinical settings.
4. Use effective verbal and written communication skills.
5. Utilize the occupational therapy process as a collaborative, scientific, problem-solving method of meeting the holistic needs of the client.
6. Develop, implement, and evaluate individualized treatment plans to address actual or potential client needs.
7. Collaborate as a member of the health care team to assist the client in promoting, achieving, and maintaining optimal health.
8. Act as a leader, manager, role model, and client advocate to improve occupational performance deficits.
9. Practice the profession of occupational therapy based on ethical principles and legal standards.
10. Accept responsibility as an adult learner to use critical thinking strategies for continued growth and learning.
11. Display flexibility in adapting to the changing realities of the health care environment, the expanding role of the occupational therapy assistant, and the resulting impact on clients.
12. Value responsibility to society as a member of the occupational therapy profession and to continue professional growth and advocacy in the occupational therapy field.
13. Demonstrate the skills needed to assume the role of an entry-level occupational therapy assistant.
14. Receive an Associate in Specialized Technology degree.
15. Be appropriately prepared to successfully complete the certification examination.