

2025 Cohort Occupational Therapy Doctoral Capstone Abstracts



University of Central Arkansas

Macie Bowman

Doctoral Capstone: Friendship Without Barriers: Assessing the Impact of Buddy Programs on Social Inclusion

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Tina Mankey, EdD, OTR/L

Abstract: Friendship Without Barriers was developed to create meaningful opportunities for students with disabilities to build connections with their peers through intentional, inclusive programming. This capstone project focused on three components: assisting with the planning and implementation of the annual Buddy Picnic for Rogers Public Schools, organizing and hosting Rogers Unified Sports Camp for school-aged children, and developing the Friendship Without Barriers Buddy Program Manual to guide schools in establishing and implementing a buddy program.



Madalynn Bradley-Odom

Doctoral Capstone: Occupational Therapy's Role in Supporting Re-entry for Justice Involved Individuals Who Have a History of Traumatic Brain Injury

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Lorrie George-Paschal, PhD, OTR/L, ATP, CBIS

Abstract: Traumatic brain injury (TBI) rates are significantly higher among incarcerated individuals than in the general population. While estimates for the general population range from 8-12%, studies show that up to 60% or more of people who are incarcerated have experienced a TBI (Gorgens et al., 2021). This condition has been linked to barriers in community re-entry and increased risk for re-offending. Justice-involved individuals with a history of TBI often face more complex challenges than those without brain injuries. This capstone project explored how occupational therapy (OT) can support justice-involved women with TBI by providing screenings, psycho-educational support, and goal-setting tools that promote occupational engagement and community re-entry.



Caitlyn Brazil

Doctoral Capstone: Educating Families and Caregivers On Play Activities

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Deborah Gangluff, ScD, OTR/L

Abstract: The capstone experience aimed to develop educational resources for parents and caregivers that target play activities that are developmentally appropriate for their children. Pediatric therapy is one of the most prominent settings for occupational therapists working with a wide range of diagnosis. Establishing a resource to parents from the start through physicians is one of the ways to encourage pediatric development. This capstone project worked with physicians in the River valley at Millard Henry Clinic and River Valley Adolescents and Pediatrics to expand outreach to parents/caregivers. According to the CDC the increase in developmental delays from ages 3-17 has increased from 7.40% in 2019 to 8.56% in 2021 (Zablotsky et al., 2023). Therefore targeting ages birth to 3 years with these handouts would help to target the population and hopefully decrease the prevalence of developmental delays diagnosed after utilizing these resources. By developing these handouts and providing them to parents and caregivers in the River Valley, a need is being met within this community. This project has helped to educate and provide resources to pediatricians, therapists, and parents/caregivers on developmental play activities and developmental skills based on age.



Olivia Breazeale

Doctoral Capstone: Educating Faith-Based Communities on how to Accommodate and Care for Individuals with Diverse Needs

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Lorrie George-Paschal, PhD, OTR/L, ATP, CBIS

Abstract: This capstone project addressed the inclusion of individuals with diverse needs within faith-based communities through community collaboration, education, research, and advocacy. An exploratory sequential mixed-methods design was implemented to identify perceived gaps and needs related to inclusion and accommodation within faith-based communities in Arkansas. Data were collected through researcher-created surveys and responses were thematically analyzed to determine strengths, common barriers, and opportunities for growth. The resulting themes and subthemes guided the development of tailored educational resources aimed at equipping faith-based communities to better support individuals with diverse needs across the lifespan. These resources were distributed to participating faith-based community partners and later disseminated to an additional ten out-of-state communities through digital communication. Feedback on the perceived effectiveness of the resources was collected through a post-survey, which indicated high satisfaction and perceived accessibility and ease of implementation. This project was conducted under the supervision of faculty and expert mentors, emphasizing the role of occupational therapy in promoting meaningful participation and belonging for individuals with disabilities in faith-based community settings.



Victoria Buerer

Doctoral Capstone: Handling with Heart: Educating Healthcare Professionals and Students on Developmental Positioning Among Infants with Congenital Heart Disease (CHD)

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Deborah Gangluff, ScD, OTR/L

Abstract: Infants with complex congenital heart disease (CHD) are at increased risk for neurodevelopmental delays due to prolonged hospitalization, medical instability, and limited movement opportunities in intensive care settings. Developmental positioning is a foundational component of neuroprotective care, supporting self-regulation, motor development, and overall well-being in this high-risk population. This doctoral capstone project aimed to address gaps in clinical education and training related to developmental positioning for infants with CHD in neonatal and cardiac intensive care units (NICU/CVICU). Over a 14-week period, the student engaged in advanced clinical practice under expert mentorship, academic leadership, and applied research focused on developmental positioning education. Major outcomes included the development and implementation of two comprehensive educational modules paired with simulation-based lab experiences – one intraprofessionally among first-year occupational therapy (OT) students and the other interprofessionally involving OT, physical therapy (PT), and nursing students. These learning experiences were designed to enhance student knowledge, confidence, and clinical reasoning in applying neurodevelopmentally supportive positioning strategies for infants with CHD. Educational resources, including a developmental positioning guide, were created to further empower healthcare professional and student knowledge in this area. A mixed-methods research study was conducted alongside the educational experiences to evaluate knowledge carryover and student perspectives using pre/post knowledge assessments, the Infant Positioning Assessment Tool (IPAT), and post-surveys. medically complex infants collaboratively.



Nori Bunch

Doctoral Capstone: From Crisis to Care: Understanding the Role of Occupational Therapy in Humanitarian Aid

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Kelly Hartwick, PPOTD, OTR/L, CBIS

Abstract: This capstone project explored the role of occupational therapy (OT) in humanitarian aid through the development and delivery of educational modules for refugee stakeholders in Turkey. The student collaborated with interprofessional partners to create culturally responsive, trauma-informed materials focused on sensory integration and the promotion of occupational engagement among displaced groups facing occupational deprivation. Educational content was translated and adapted to reflect the lived experiences of refugees and their families, with an emphasis on accessible, low-cost strategies for supporting engagement. In addition to direct service, the student aimed to raise awareness among OT students and practitioners about the profession's relevance in global health and humanitarian aid. Through this experience, the student developed a deeper understanding of trauma-informed care and cultural humility, learning how to adapt occupational therapy practices to respectfully and effectively support individuals and communities impacted by displacement. By advocating for the occupational rights of refugees and promoting ethical, evidence-based approaches, this capstone highlighted the capacity of occupational therapy to restore dignity and support resilience in displaced populations through the promotion of meaningful occupational engagement.



Kateland Campbell

Doctoral Capstone: Vision in Focus: A Low Vision Guide for Occupational Therapy Practitioners

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Kelly Hartwick, PPOTD, OTR/L, CBIS

Abstract: A gap exists between the adult low vision population and the number of occupational therapy practitioners specialized or with general knowledge of low vision therapy and there are limited free and accessible resources available regarding low vision treatment (Kaldenberg et al., 2023). Research shows that occupational therapy is effective in increasing safety, independence, and occupational outcomes for adult clients (Fletcher et al., 2022). However, decreased confidence and competence limits generalized practitioner's effectiveness with treating the low vision client population (Kaldenberg et al., 2023). This project provides accurate generalized information regarding low vision diagnoses, assessments, and interventions to enhance client-centered care for adults and families affected by low vision impairment. Information was gained through literary readings, on-site clinical experiences, and other learning opportunities to ensure a comprehensive understanding of low vision treatment was utilized in education module creation. Education modules provided practitioners with a valuable resource for common age-related and neurologic low vision diagnoses, assessments, screening tools, and interventions for low vision treatment. Based on feedback from practitioners, the education modules were successful in increasing competence and confidence regarding low vision treatment making gains toward positive outcomes for adult low vision clients.



Alysia Cashion

Doctoral Capstone: Milestones in Motion: Pediatric Respite Care & Community

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Ashley McClain, OTD, OTR/L

Abstract: This capstone project involved the creation and execution of an inclusive community initiative targeting the pediatric population in Cabot, Arkansas, and nearby areas. Developed through Milestones Pediatric Therapy Services, a local outpatient clinic, the program was designed to support both the therapeutic and social development of children and young adults with varying abilities, ranging from ages 2 to 21. The primary goals were to strengthen social interaction, enhance emotional and physical well-being, and cultivate a sense of belonging among participants and their families. The initiative featured three main components: structured respite care, Teen Night Out events, and monthly community gatherings. Respite sessions were divided into two groups, younger children aged 2 to 10 and older youth aged 10 to 21. These sessions were held monthly and included supervised activities such as games, crafts, free play, and dinner. The clinic provided access to specialized spaces including a sensory gym, indoor playground, and activity rooms. Teen Night Out offered a casual, peer-focused environment for individuals aged 11 to 21, where participants engaged in social activities including music, games, and shared meals. Community meetups were hosted at local parks and encouraged inclusive, outdoor play for all ages.



Brynn Castleberry

Doctoral Capstone: Routines and Reading: Parent Education, Research, and Resources Regarding Daily Routines in Children 2-5 Years of Age

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Lorrie George-Paschal, PhD, OTR/L, ATP, CBIS

Abstract: This capstone project examined the challenges and successes parents experience when implementing daily routines for children ages 2-5 years old and aimed to create supportive educational resources. Observations of children ages 0-5 years old at two local daycares and library story times provided insight into developmental abilities, routine participation, and their interactions with stories. One informal and five formal parent interviews were conducted to gather firsthand perspectives on routine-related challenges and strategies. Common themes were summarized in a written report to inform the project's resources. Guided by literature and interview research findings, the student developed and worked toward self-publishing an interactive children's book, *Monkey Around with Melvin*, to support morning routines. The book includes a dual-use visual schedule and checklist, with instructions for setup and use. Two evidence-based fact sheets were also created to educate parents on the benefits of early routine implementation and occupational therapy strategies to support their efforts in teaching routines. Overall, the project was designed to equip families with interactive, developmentally informed tools to support daily routines at home.

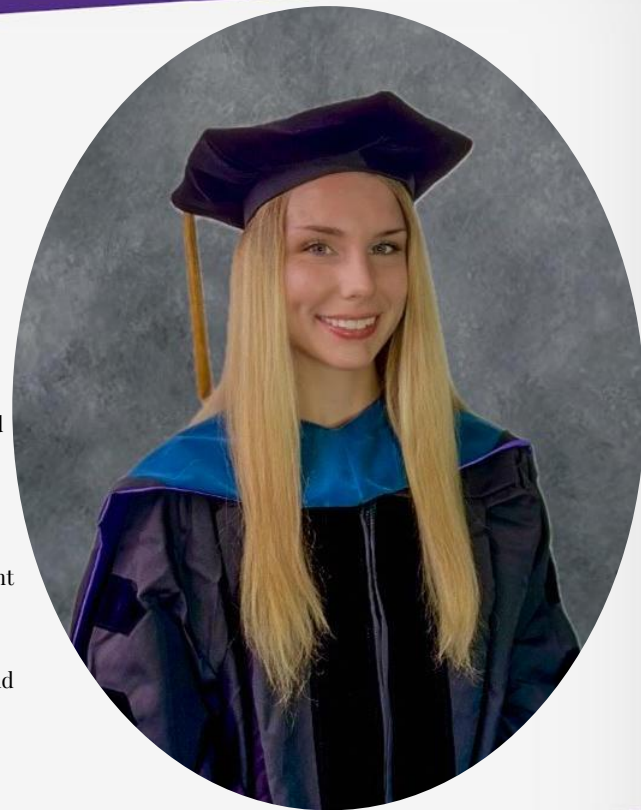


Ashley Chaplinski

Doctoral Capstone: Aquatic OT: Therapeutic Approaches for Children

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Chris Ryan, PPOTD, OTR/L

Abstract: Aquatic OT: Therapeutic Approaches for Children is a 14-week doctoral capstone project developed to explore and demonstrate the scope of occupational therapy (OT) within pediatric aquatic therapy and adaptive swim instruction. The student achieved this by promoting the use of aquatic therapy techniques and principles in the recreational swimming program at Conway Human Development Center (CHDC) and by hosting a Parent and Me Water Safety Class, as well as providing adaptive swim lessons under supervision. The student completed educational material related to aquatic therapy and adaptive swim and spent numerous hours observing and training with experienced aquatic physical therapists, occupational therapists, and speech therapists. The knowledge gained from these experiences was used to develop treatment plans for clients residing at the CHDC as well as a presentation demonstrating various interventions to be used in the pool by the CHDC recreation staff. The second part of this project was based at JaxKids Aquatics in Jacksonville, Florida. The student worked alongside an experienced aquatic physical therapist to incorporate occupational therapy techniques and strategies into existing physical therapy treatments. The student also helped implement a Parent and Me Water Safety Class to increase caregiver's confidence in supporting their children's safety and participation in aquatic environments. Parents participated in four classes where they were provided with hands-on experience and knowledge of essential water safety techniques and foundational swim skills. A pre and post survey were administered to participants to gauge the effectiveness of the course. The student also implemented adaptive swim lessons with direct supervision, further demonstrating the value of occupational therapy in aquatic settings for children with diverse developmental needs.



Brooke Church

Doctoral Capstone: Step by Step: A Guide to Inclusive Dance Education in Central Arkansas

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Chris Ryan, PPOTD, OTR/L

Abstract: This capstone project aimed to promote inclusion and accessibility in the performing arts through the development and implementation of Step by Step, an inclusive dance education program for children of all abilities. Grounded in occupational therapy principles and inclusive education strategies, the project focused on addressing participation barriers for children with disabilities in community-based dance settings. Over the course of 5 weeks, the program was implemented in partnership with a local dance studio, providing weekly adapted classes, one-on-one volunteer support, and a culminating performance that celebrated each dancer's growth and success. In addition to the program, a comprehensive resource guide was created to support dance educators, therapists, and volunteers in making movement more accessible. This guide includes practical tools for adapting choreography, structuring inclusive classes, and supporting dancers with a range of physical, sensory, and developmental needs. Outcomes were evaluated through observation, parent feedback, and volunteer reflections, which demonstrated increased confidence, social participation, and motor skill development among dancers, as well as increased knowledge and advocacy skills among volunteers. The project reinforced the importance of occupation-based community programming and highlighted the role occupational therapy can play in expanding access to meaningful leisure activities.



Shelby Coats

Doctoral Capstone: A More Excellent Way: Disability Ministry Education & Resources

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Ashley McClain, OTD, OTR/L

Abstract: Those with disabilities are significantly more likely to report loneliness and social isolation than their non-disabled peers, which can have negative physical effects (Emerson et al., 2021). Those with disabilities have often given up attending church due to barriers they experience, meanwhile, churches say they are not accessible due to not having anyone in their congregation who is disabled (Pridmore, 2006). Therefore, it is imperative that the Church takes proactive measures to ensure accessibility and inclusion in order for those with disabilities to better engage in the occupation of spirituality in the Christian Church. These proactive measures would not only improve the health and wellness of those with disabilities due to increased social participation, but they also align with the direct commands we have as Christians to bring every person into the body of Christ and show one another love (1 Corinthians 12: 18-26, 31; 1 Corinthians 13). This project sought to provide education and resources to church leaders and congregants about inclusion and accessibility in the Church for those with disabilities, and collaborate on steps that can be taken in their churches for change to occur over time. Inservice presentations and direct collaboration with church leaders and congregants allowed the project developer to create resource folders for churches based on their specified needs. This education and collaboration process helps create an environment of belonging for all people, as well as increase spiritual engagement for those with disabilities.

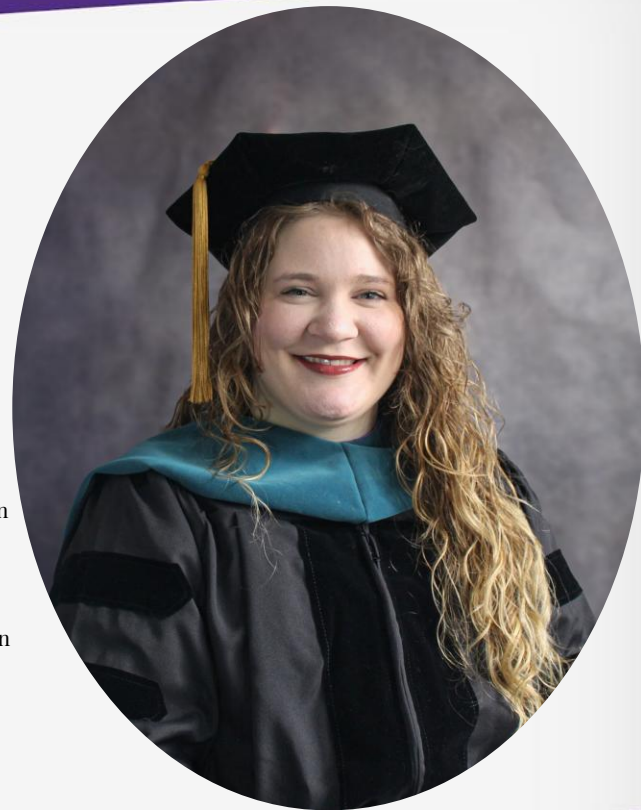


Lilly Daugherty

Doctoral Capstone: Promoting Aging in Place Using Assistive Technology and Caregiver Involvement

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Chris Ryan, PPOTD, OTR/L

Abstract: This capstone project involved a collaboration between an occupational therapy doctoral student and the Increasing Capabilities Access Network (ICAN) to promote the use of assistive technology (AT) among older adults in the Little Rock area and expand the public awareness of ICAN. The initiative included providing AT resources, demonstrations, and training at the Green House Cottages of Poplar Grove, a skilled nursing facility, as well as presentations to various senior centers and caregiver support groups. The student developed resident occupational profiles, evaluated AT needs, and delivered education and training to both residents and their families. Surveys given to the residents assessed perceptions of AT's value and confidence in its use. Additionally, the student gained clinical experience in AT evaluation by observing a certified Assistive Technology Practitioner at the Veterans Affairs center in North Little Rock. Data analysis revealed statistically significant results in residents' knowledge of assistive technology (AT), suggesting an increase in their understanding of the topic. However, no statistically significant changes were observed in their perceived value of AT, confidence in using AT, or confidence in locating AT resources. Findings and recommendations were shared with ICAN program director and facility therapy director. The project aimed to enhance resident confidence in AT use, increase awareness of ICAN as a resource, and establish a sustainable AT outreach model for older adult communities.



Anna Claire Davanzo

Doctoral Capstone: Occupational Therapists Unique Role in Lactation, Infant Feeding, and Maternal Postpartum Care

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Deborah Gangluff, ScD, OTR/L

Abstract: The purpose of this project was to expand personal knowledge within lactation, infant feeding, and maternal health. The experience consisted of self study, development of a resource binder with educational materials for a variety of audiences, completion of lactation certification, and observation hours. A total of thirty-three resource items were developed for students, interested professionals, clients, and families. The personal notes folder was developed to organize resources created and gathered throughout the self study opportunities. The finished product is a digital resource binder with guides on infant feeding, lactation, and maternal care for the previously mentioned audiences. Lactation counselor courses were completed through The Healthy Children's Project Inc, Center for Breastfeeding and a certification exam taken through The Academy of Lactation Policy and Practice. Fourteen and a half hours of observation were completed at Pediatric Therapy and Lactation in Conway, AR with sessions focused on infant feeding and lactation. Occupational therapy relevance was addressed through development of advanced practice skills, education and clinical skills in an emerging practice area that demonstrated a gap in care and knowledge.



Sarah Eskola

Doctoral Capstone: Teen Brain Injury Support Group: Unlocking Potential Through Social Participation

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Deborah Gangluff, ScD, OTR/L

Abstract: This capstone project focused on the development of a support group for adolescents with brain injury, viewed through the lens of social participation. The primary emphasis was on program development, with additional focus on leadership, advocacy, and advanced clinical practice. Advanced clinical practice included hands-on experience at NeuroRestorative Timber Ridge, where the student provided occupational therapy interventions to individuals with brain injuries. As part of this experience, the student also accumulated hours toward the Certified Brain Injury Specialist (CBIS) credential, which she plans to pursue after the completion of the capstone. A major outcome of the project was the creation of a student volunteer guide, designed to support future facilitation of the group. The support group was hosted at the University of Central Arkansas Interprofessional Teaching Center and included five total sessions. Three adolescents and their parents participated, with two adolescents attending consistently. Each session was structured around evidence-based social activities tailored to the unique needs of adolescents with brain injury. Additionally, guest speakers were invited to contribute to the experience and enrich learning opportunities for both teens and their families.



Jillian Harris

Doctoral Capstone: Transition Roadmap: Rehabilitation to Home for Adult after Brain Injury

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Lorrie George-Paschal, PhD, OTR/L, ATP, CBIS

Abstract: This capstone project explored the role of occupational therapy (OT) in supporting individuals with traumatic brain injury (TBI) during the transition from rehabilitation to home. In partnership with the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS), I developed the Rehabilitation Roadmap. It is an online, region-specific guide connecting patients and caregivers to resources such as assistive technology, transportation, support groups, and substance abuse services. A needs assessment revealed major gaps in access to care, especially for individuals with co-occurring mental health or substance use disorders. I also contributed to research using the UAMS SHARE registry, identifying patterns in TBI-related rehospitalizations and disparities in care. This project highlights OT's essential role in promoting recovery and long-term wellness through individualized, community-based support. By improving access to information and emphasizing holistic care, this work aims to reduce barriers and improve quality of life for TBI survivors and their families across Arkansas.



Caroline Hart

Doctoral Capstone: Promoting Independence: Integrating Occupational Therapy, Universal Design, and Home Adaptations for Aging in Place

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Chris Ryan, PPOTD, OTR/L

Abstract: As the aging population continues to grow, so does the need for accessible, supportive home environments that enable older adults to age in place. This doctoral capstone project focused on enhancing the Occupational Therapy (OT) House at the University of Central Arkansas by integrating principles of universal design and assistive technology to promote independence, safety, and functionality for aging individuals. Guided by the Person-Environment-Occupation-Performance (PEOP) model, the project addressed environmental barriers to occupational performance by implementing both cosmetic modifications, as well as the installation of low and high tech adaptive equipment. In addition to physical updates, a self-guided training program was developed for students, faculty, and visitors to increase awareness and knowledge about home adaptations, aging in place, and the role of occupational therapy in supporting independence across the lifespan. The training materials included visual guides, written instructions, and hands-on opportunities to explore adaptive equipment throughout the OT house. Informal interviews with key informants in OT, universal design, and assistive technology helped inform both the design and educational components of the project. This capstone not only improved the OT House as a demonstration and learning space, but also provided a sustainable model for interdisciplinary education and community engagement. By equipping future healthcare professionals with hands-on experience and practical knowledge, this project aims to impact client outcomes far beyond the university setting, ultimately supporting more people in their goal to age safely and confidently in place.



Jacob Holloway

Doctoral Capstone: Health & Wellness Group for Adults with Intellectual Disabilities: Facilitating Healthy Living

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Ashley McClain, OTD, OTR/L

Abstract: The purpose of this capstone project was to increase opportunities for health and wellness education and participation while also providing social interaction opportunities through a team dynamic for an underserved population- adults with intellectual disabilities. Outcomes of the program were aimed at increasing knowledge of aspects related to health and wellness, increasing physical fitness, increasing opportunity for participation in physical activity, and increasing opportunity for social interaction for all participants. The program, titled 'Health and Wellness Group for Adults with ID: Facilitating Healthy Living', was designed as an 8-week opportunity for participants to learn about various topic areas related to health and wellness. It also provided participants the opportunity to engage in physical activities. Each week, participants met to learn from a presentation (education module) given by the program coordinator followed by a physical activity relating to the presentation topic area. The education module topics presented during the program included: nutrition basics, stress management, injury prevention, workout basics, safe technology use, teamwork/collaboration, healthy sleep habits, and flexibility/mobility. The physical activities completed during the program included: pickleball, hiking, bowling, group workout, mini golf, game night, kickball, and disc golf. The group held their final meeting on the ninth week, where they had an award ceremony and dinner.



Sarah Holloway

Doctoral Capstone: Unity in Action: Launching a Special Olympics Club and Unified Flag Football Program at the University of Central Arkansas

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Deborah Gangluff, ScD, OTR/L

Abstract: This project falls under the capstone category of project development, with a secondary focus on advocacy and leadership. A needs assessment and literature review revealed a need for increased unified flag football opportunities in Central Arkansas, as well as greater engagement from University of Central Arkansas (UCA) students in Special Olympics initiatives. This project aimed to provide all resources necessary to launch a unified flag football league beginning in September at UCA, along with a fully student-run Special Olympics club. These programs allow individuals with and without intellectual disabilities to engage in sports together, fostering community and inclusivity on UCA's campus while also offering leadership and volunteer opportunities for college students. The project applies the Person-Environment-Occupation model by focusing on the interaction between Special Olympic athletes, UCA's intramural facility, and the occupation of flag football, examining how these elements support meaningful participation and performance. Key components include recruiting and educating UCA students, creating training materials for participants, and organizing fundraising events for a local unified team. Evaluation of these efforts showed that a significant number of students were recruited to serve as club leaders and unified partners, and the fundraising goal was exceeded. This project also incorporated personal and professional learning objectives by building advocacy and leadership skills, deepening clinical knowledge of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and obtaining certification to coach multiple Special Olympics sports. Together, these efforts promote inclusive recreation, foster student leadership, and support sport participation for people with disabilities both on campus and in the community.



Robyn Johnson-Breytenbach

Doctoral Capstone: Breaking Barriers and Building Bridges:
Education, Advocacy and Partnership for UCA Bears with Disabilities

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Ashley McClain, OTD, OTR/L

Abstract: This capstone project is centered on promoting inclusivity and long-term support for students registered with the Office of Accessibility Resources and Services (OARS) at the University of Central Arkansas (UCA). Rather than framing disability as a problem, the project challenges the barriers created by systems and environments that fail to accommodate diverse needs. Highlighting the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), creating educational resources for students and creating a potential RSO hopes to shift the narrative from individual limitation to systemic change.

A key initiative of the project involves the creation of a proposed Registered Student Organization (RSO) designed to build a sustainable bridge between UCA's Occupational Therapy Doctorate (OTD) program and the OARS office. This partnership aims to foster collaborative advocacy, shared resources, and improved active learning and communication among students, faculty, and staff. In addition, a comprehensive resource guide was developed to assist current students with disabilities in navigating academic and campus life. The guide includes practical information, support strategies, and educational content about the most common disabilities present in postsecondary institutions across Central Arkansas. To further support inclusive practices, the project also incorporates personal professional development through completion of an adaptive fitness certification. This training will support collaboration with the Thomas C. Courtway Student Recreation Center to promote accessible fitness programming. The ultimate goal is to cultivate a more inclusive campus environment, one where accessibility is embedded into institutional culture and all students are given equitable opportunities to feel seen, understood, succeed, thrive, and fully participate in university life.



Mariah Keathley

Doctoral Capstone: Beyond the Court: Using Basketball and Mentorship to Develop Life Skills in Youth

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Ashley McClain, OTD, OTR/L

Abstract: This doctoral capstone project aimed to address the need for structured life skills education and mentorship among youth residing in foster care. Implemented at the Northwest Arkansas Children's Shelter in Bentonville, Arkansas, the project focused on children ages 13 to 17 who are preparing to transition into adulthood. Drawing from the therapeutic potential of team sports, a basketball-centered program was developed to teach ten essential life skills: identity, resilience, communication, social and relationship skills, leadership, routines and responsibilities, teamwork, financial literacy, emotional regulation, and job readiness. These skills were delivered through a combination of paper-based and interactive activities, real-life simulations, and basketball-related games. Guided by the Person-Environment-Occupation-Performance (PEOP) model, the program emphasized the dynamic interaction between each child's personal abilities, environmental supports, and occupational engagement to promote meaningful participation and skill development. The program successfully provided participants with foundational knowledge in each skill area while fostering personal growth and social development. Observations during implementation revealed the strong impact of sport-based engagement and mentorship on this population. Through this experience, the doctoral capstone student gained valuable insights into trauma-informed care, leadership, adaptability, and the critical role of life skills education in occupational therapy practice for adolescents in foster care.



Lauren Kemp-Harrison

Doctoral Capstone: Rural Home Health Resource: Fostering Aging in Place and Access to Treatment in Rural Arkansas

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Kelly Hartwick, PPOTD, OTR/L, CBIS

Abstract: This capstone project aimed to promote aging in place and access to occupational therapy services in rural Arkansas, with emphasis on education, advocacy, and advanced clinical practice. A comprehensive needs assessment discovered limited access to adult specialized occupational therapists in DeWitt, Arkansas, with all therapists commuting from another county. Local home care agencies offer respite care but are unable to provide therapy services due to limited access. Partnership with Conway Regional Home Health and Elite Home Health provided a well-rounded experience that furthered understanding in supporting individuals within their natural environment. Through hands-on experiences and evidence-based practice, a resource binder was produced to educate clients, caregivers, and home care staff on conditions, home exercise programs, orthopedic precautions, home modifications, activities of daily living adaptations, caregiver support, and local resources. These handouts act as an educational guide to assist individuals with aging in place, without requiring an occupational therapist. Additionally, presentations were made to local physicians, high school students, and a church group to educate on occupational therapy's role in adult healthcare and how to advocate for services. Based on feedback from pre- and post-tests completed by physicians and staff at DeWitt 1st Choice Home Care, the project was successful, and resources will be utilized with clients. Through the creation of the resource binder and discussions with local community members, a rural Arkansas community now has access to resources they have strived for, promoting aging in place and access to quality services.



Atlee Lambert

Doctoral Capstone: The Influence of Human Occupation on Longevity and Happiness in Centenarians of The Blue Zones

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Deborah Gangluff, ScD, OTR/L

Abstract: This capstone project explored how human occupation influences longevity and happiness in centenarians living within the Blue Zones, known for long life expectancy and well-being. This project was a phenomenological study that examined how everyday occupations, habits, routines, and roles contributed to longevity. The research focused on Nicoya, Costa Rica, and Sardinia, Italy; identifying common themes and patterns of the lifestyles in both cultures of centenarians and their perspective on longevity and happiness. This project included sixteen direct 30-60 minute semi-structured interviews that provided personal insights and lived experiences into how occupation supported well-being and longevity. Utilizing the Power 9 Principles, OT domains, and theory to create the guiding interview questions for this project. These findings showed patterns seen in the research and helped connect themes to lived experiences through two different cultures of the blue zones.

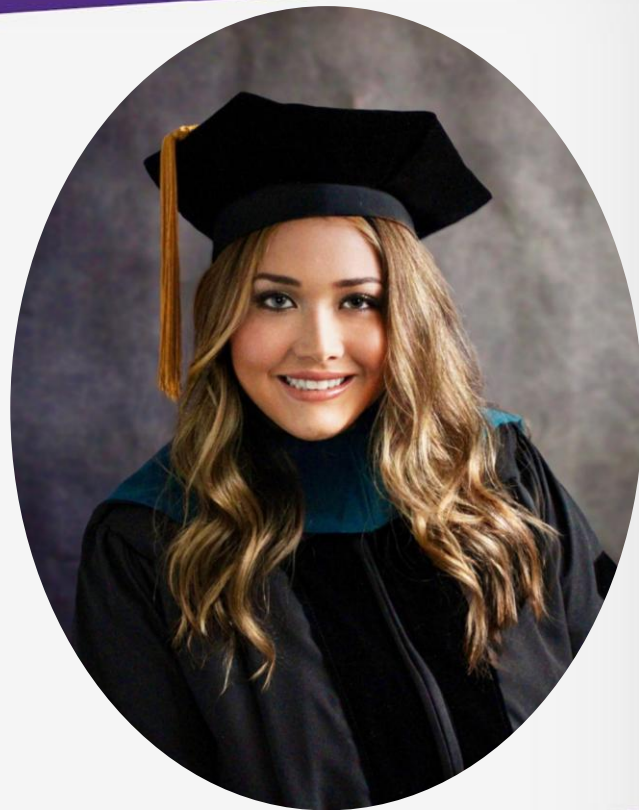


Lauren Lennon

Doctoral Capstone: Promoting Inclusive Learning Environments through Enhanced Understanding of Sensory Processing Disorders in Educational Settings

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Deborah Gangluff, ScD, OTR/L

Abstract: This doctoral capstone project aimed to increase awareness and education of Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) among early childhood educators and direct support professionals (DSPs) to improve student regulation, engagement, and participation. The project was implemented across ten classrooms at Grow Learning Centre and two at Building Bridges, through observation, collaboration with occupational therapists, and individualized classroom adaptations. Four SPD education modules were developed in English and Spanish, with the English version narrated for accessibility. Topics included an introduction to SPD, classroom adaptations, the Alert Program for self-regulation, and collaboration strategies. Visual supports such as schedules, token boards, first/then visuals, and calming tools were provided, along with a digital SPD Resource Notebook. Due to the SPD modules being completed at a later date, pre- and post-test data were not yet available; however, qualitative feedback was obtained via a structured evaluation form developed by the student to assess the program's effectiveness. Qualitative feedback indicated improved understanding, increased use of sensory strategies, and increased confidence among educators. Observations showed increased student engagement, smoother transitions, and reduced behaviors when sensory supports were used on a consistent basis. This capstone emphasizes the important role that occupational therapy can play in providing educators with strategies to develop inclusive, sensory-aware learning environments. It also emphasizes the need for interdisciplinary teamwork in optimizing educational outcomes for children with sensory processing difficulties.



Mackenzie Kay Maltbia

Doctoral Capstone: Assessment and Evaluation in Post-Cardiac Patients: A Clinical Guideline for Entry-Level Occupational Therapists

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Brandy Pate, PPOTD, OTR/L, CBIS, Low Vision Certification

Abstract: Assessment and Evaluation in Post-Cardiac Patients: A Clinical Guideline for Entry-Level Occupational Therapists was a doctoral capstone project centered on advanced clinical skills, advocacy, and education, inspired by the unexpected loss of the capstone student's mother to cardiac-related complications. Profound grief became the catalyst for examining the intersection of occupational therapy and cardiovascular health, highlighting the critical need for greater inclusion, awareness, advocacy, and accessibility of occupational therapy services in post-cardiac care. The project investigated the persistent underutilization and underrepresentation of occupational therapy in cardiovascular recovery and aimed to elevate its role through the creation of an evidence-based clinical guideline designed for entry-level practitioners. Through a multi-dimensional framework that included literature synthesis, a needs assessment involving cardiac survivors and occupational therapists with cardiovascular experience, observational experiences in the acute care setting, and the creation of publicly accessible educational resources, the project delivered both a professional clinical guideline and multimedia tools aimed at supporting practitioners and patients. These resources promoted interdisciplinary collaboration, expanded awareness of occupational therapy's scope in cardiac rehabilitation, and advocated for a more holistic, client-centered approach to cardiovascular care.



Braden Meredith

Doctoral Capstone: Occupational Justice for Individuals in Hospice Care: Empowering Reminiscence

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Ashley McClain, OTD, OTR/L

Abstract: As the average life expectancy increases in conjunction with medical advances, an increasing number of individuals are living with disabilities. The focus of healthcare professionals need then turn to how to increase quality of life to match the increase in quantity of life. This capstone project explored how participation in craft activities improved quality of life and promoted occupational justice for individuals in hospice care. Over the fourteen week experience, the student found that it was not the crafts themselves that improved quality of life but the consistent socialization that was associated with them. This conclusion was reinforced by relevant literature and insights gained through an online course in end-of-life care offered by the University of Arkansas – Fort Smith. The student investigated the role occupational therapists could play in end-of-life care, and she discovered that the biggest barriers to practicing in this setting are role confusion and reimbursement issues. Furthermore, the student looked into how patient deaths impact medical professionals, finding that a supportive environment and personalized ritual are effective coping strategies in mitigating compassion fatigue and burnout.



Emily Moore

Doctoral Capstone: Fostering Advocacy in Occupational Therapy:
Advancing Research, Education, and Professional Engagement

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Ashley McClain, OTD, OTR/L

Abstract: Policy has wide-ranging impacts on the field of occupational therapy (Mahaffey et al., 2015). Because of this impact, advocacy on behalf of the profession of occupational therapy is vital to not only advance the profession, but also promote the well-being of individuals who receive occupational therapy services (Kirsh, 2015; Gibbs & Stoffel, 2022). Although occupational justice is central to occupational therapy, many occupational therapy practitioners do not engage in systems-level advocacy due a variety of factors such as lack of confidence (Rahimaly et al., 2019; Bailliard et al., 2020). The aim of the capstone project was to promote involvement in advocacy in occupational therapy and contribute to occupational therapy research literature. The outcomes of the project included completed research and a written report about occupational therapy and occupational therapy student perceptions of advocacy, an educational resource outlining professional advocacy in occupational therapy provided to advocacy organizations, and resources about the U.S. healthcare system provided for family education. Student personal learning was pursued and attained through the completion of five policy and advocacy-related courses and the synthesization of resources regarding legislation and advocacy impacting occupational therapy practice. Student personal involvement in advocacy was increased through an ambassadorship with the American Occupational Therapy Political Action Committee (AOTPA) and attending the Student Practitioners for Advocacy, Reform, and Knowledge (SPARK) Virtual Hill Week. Dissemination of research and education of occupational therapy practitioners and students on the importance of advocacy was achieved through a poster presentation at the state conference and results of research provided to stakeholders.

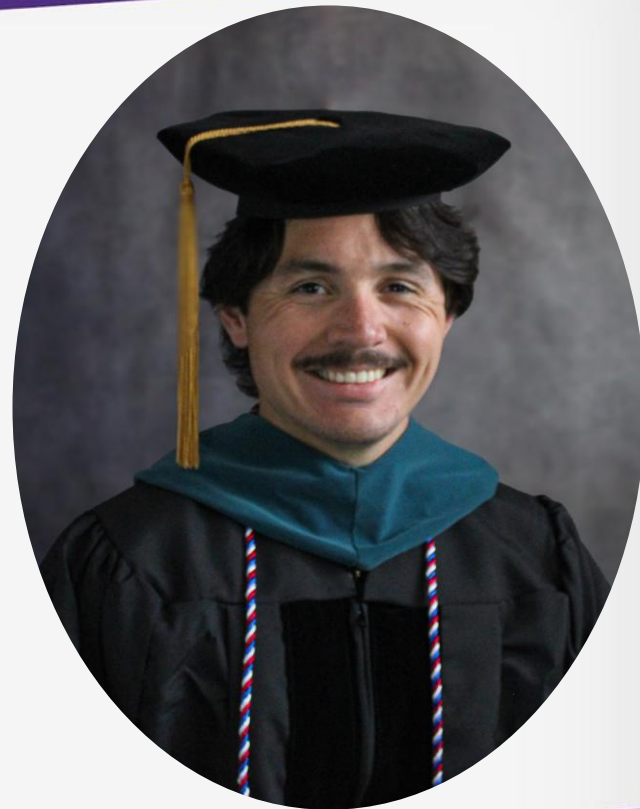


Alejandro Neri

Doctoral Capstone: OT Toolkit: Guide to OT in the ICU

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Kelly Hartwick, PPOTD, OTR/L, CBIS

Abstract: The American Council Of Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE) states that the purpose of a doctoral capstone experience is to "provide an in-depth exposure to one or more of the following: clinical practice skills, research skills, administration, leadership, program and policy development, advocacy, education, and theory development" (2018, p. 44). An in-depth literature review and needs assessment was conducted and indicated the need for a resource guide to be developed for occupational therapy students, entry-level practitioners, and practitioners new to the ICU. This doctoral capstone aimed to enhance the confidence and competence of occupational therapy students and practitioners when working in the ICU. The core goal of this capstone was to support improved outcomes for both clients and practitioners in the ICU setting. Grounded in the Person, Environment, Occupational Performance (PEOP) Model, which focuses on the internal factors of a client while also taking the external factors into consideration that impact an individual's performance, this project aimed to maximize patient motivation inside the ICU to in turn maximize positive outcomes of hospital stays (Baum & Christiansen, 2005). Evaluation of the feedback given by a OT professor, OT student, and several OT practitioners determined that resources guide the student developed "helpful" to "very helpful" and everyone who responded to the survey indicated that they would recommend it to someone else. The project implemented personal and professional development dimensions by advancing clinical practice in the ICU setting. These efforts collectively contributed to enhance quality of care and support provided to patients inside the ICU.



Alyssa Netherlain

Doctoral Capstone: Program and Process Evaluation of ACTS Jr.

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Deborah Gangluff, ScD, OTR/L

Abstract: This capstone project presents a comprehensive evaluation of ACTS Jr., a community-based improvisational theater program in which children of all abilities, known as performers, participate. Guided by the Occupational Adaptation (OA) model, this project assessed effectiveness and implementation across three program locations: Conway, Little Rock, and Russellville. Study participants included current and past performers, volunteers, parents, and directors. A mixed methods approach incorporated surveys with parents and volunteers and interviews with performers and directors. A thematic analysis of the interviews revealed overarching themes. Performer interviews consisted of creative expression, areas for improvement, and personal development. Director interviews, primarily highlighting barriers, included volunteer recruitment and retention, volunteer quality, limited parent support, implementation disconnect, inconsistent performance locations, and disorganized or insufficient storage space. Findings informed recommendations to streamline processes and support program sustainability. These included consistent use of a shared Google Drive for materials, implementation of a storage inventory system, improved volunteer recruitment, and increased parental engagement through an informational video, and annual parent meetings. Survey results indicated overall satisfaction with the program, leadership and support from the directors, and a positive impact on the performers' quality of life. The primary reasons for volunteers and performers discontinuing were graduation, completion of required volunteer hours, time constraints, or aging out of the program, rather than dissatisfaction. Lastly, parents, volunteers, and directors rated the program's benefit to performers in seven areas: social participation, teamwork, cognitive skills, adaptive behavior, sensory processing and organization, motor planning, and self-confidence. Responses ranged from "somewhat dissatisfied" to "very satisfied."



Kaylee Potts

Doctoral Capstone: "THINK BIG" : Increasing awareness of LSVT BIG

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Brandy Pate, PPOTD, OTR/L, CBIS, Low Vision Certification

Abstract: This capstone project aimed to enhance community engagement and improve quality of life for individuals living with Parkinson's disease in Central Arkansas, specifically in the Conway area. To achieve this, the project developed and implemented recurring Parkinson's Workshop Days at the McGee Center, a local community facility. These workshops served as an outreach and support initiative for individuals with Parkinson's disease, their caregivers, and family members—offering a blend of physical activity, social interaction, and education. Exercises were rooted in the principles of Lee Silverman Voice Treatment (LSVT) BIG, emphasizing large-amplitude movements, balance training, and functional mobility. The goal was to support daily function, encourage long-term participation in exercise, and improve occupational performance. The Parkinson's Workshop Days also offered opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration and advanced clinical experience in the application of LSVT BIG. Educational and promotional materials were created to increase community awareness, provide caregivers with helpful resources, and guide participants through exercises at home. The program design prioritized accessibility, engagement, and long-term sustainability to support ongoing community benefit. The outcomes of this capstone demonstrate that structured, LSVT BIG-based programming, combined with accessible education and supportive resources, can positively influence occupational performance in individuals with Parkinson's disease. Additionally, the project highlighted the potential of community-based programs to strengthen social support systems and promote wellness through meaningful activity and interaction. The success of the Parkinson's Workshop Days suggests potential for continued program development and broader implementation to meet community needs.



Whitley Price

Doctoral Capstone: Occupational Therapy's Role in Acquired and Traumatic Brain Injury: Education and Clinical Guide

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Brandy Pate, PPOTD, OTR/L, CBIS, Low Vision Certification

Abstract: This doctoral capstone project, Occupational Therapy's Role in Acquired and Traumatic Brain Injury: Education and Clinical Guide, focused on education, advocacy, and advanced clinical practice. The primary goal was to enhance the knowledge and competency among current occupational therapy students regarding traumatic brain injuries (TBI) and commonly encountered neurological conditions, while also providing educational support to patients and caregivers in inpatient rehabilitation settings. A comprehensive literature review highlighted challenges related to limited access to inpatient rehabilitation and the increasing demand on caregivers during community reintegration. In response, educational materials were developed to prepare students for the demands of the inpatient rehabilitation setting, and educational pamphlets were developed to enhance caregiver knowledge and competency. Additionally, this student developed a comprehensive teaching module about neurological disorders to educate current occupational therapy students about their vital role in the rehabilitation process to promote occupational engagement, adaptation, and improved quality of life following a traumatic event. For personal knowledge and advanced clinical practice, the Provisional Certified Brain Injury Specialist Certification (PCBIS) was obtained during this experience.



Shelby Reynolds

Doctoral Capstone: The Future of Occupational Therapy: Engaging the Next Generation with Multimedia Approaches

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Chris Ryan, PPOTD, OTR/L

Abstract: The Future of Occupational Therapy: Engaging the Next Generation with Multimedia Approaches was a capstone project focused on education and advocacy in the field of occupational therapy (OT). The primary goal was to raise awareness of the profession and inspire high school and undergraduate college students to consider OT as a career. A secondary objective was to promote the University of Central Arkansas (UCA) Doctor of Occupational Therapy (OTD) program as a strong academic option. The project featured two key components: digital outreach and in-person education. For the digital outreach, a TikTok account was created and managed over a 14-week period.

Forty educational and engaging videos were posted, tailored to younger audiences and covering topics such as the OT profession and student life. The account grew to 501 followers, and the most popular video received over 44,400 views, demonstrating strong engagement within the target demographic. The in-person education component included presentations to 401 high school students across central Arkansas, along with sessions for 17 UCA college students, both virtually and in person. These presentations highlighted the role of occupational therapists, practice settings, educational path to becoming an OT, and the UCA OTD program. To ensure sustainability, additional videos were created and uploaded to the UCA OT department's website for continued recruitment and advocacy.



Kamryn Rodgers

Doctoral Capstone: Bridges to Healing: Supporting Growth and Participation for Kids and Teens

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Chris Ryan, PPOTD, OTR/L

Abstract: The Bridges to Healing project consisted of three parts, (1) the personal growth and learning of the project executer, (2) weekly group sessions with teens in a residential facility with an emphasis on sensory regulation and occupation, and (3) resource binders for the residential facility and the local Call organization. The goal of the capstone project was to implement a program for sensory regulation and occupational exploration for teens in residential facilities that do not receive the adequate learning opportunities, care, and access to experiences secondary to a limiting environment and traumatic backgrounds. There was limited ability to evaluate the effectiveness of this program in creating occupational exploration and regulation due to the turnover rate of both staff and participants in the residential home throughout the 14 weeks.



Sarah Sagar

Doctoral Capstone: From Rehab to Home: Virtual Tool for Safe Aging in Place

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Brandy Pate, PPOTD, OTR/L, CBIS, Low Vision Certification

Abstract: The project From Rehab to Home: Virtual Assessments for Safe Aging in Place addressed the growing need for accessible, at-home safety evaluations to support older adults transitioning from inpatient rehabilitation to independent living. A website was developed to serve as a virtual resource, offering guidance by room, on adaptive equipment designed to promote safety, accessibility, and aging in place. The site was organized by household spaces, such as the bathroom, bedroom, kitchen, and entryway, and included detailed information and direct links for purchasing or learning more about each recommended product. Each piece of equipment was selected to reduce fall risk, support independence, and accommodate physical limitations common among individuals post-rehabilitation. To improve clinical performance, the website also featured a secure image upload. This allowed users, caregivers, or clinicians to submit photographs of specific areas of the home presenting safety concerns. This feature enabled occupational therapists and other professionals to assess the environment remotely and provide recommendations without requiring an in person visit. The integration of visual data supported more accurate, individualized suggestions for environmental modifications, bridging the gap between clinical discharge and home safety implementation. Overall, this virtual tool aimed to streamline the transition from inpatient care to home, empower users with reliable safety solutions, and reduce barriers to access for individuals unable to participate in traditional in home evaluations. The project demonstrated the potential of technology-driven interventions in occupational therapy to promote aging in place and improve outcomes for individuals at risk of injury following discharge.



Taylor Schwaller

Doctoral Capstone: Low-Vision: Early Detection and Intervention Planning Following a Brain Injury

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Brandy Pate, PPOTD, OTR/L, CBIS, Low Vision Certification

Abstract: Patients with brain injuries often experienced a variety of visual changes that were difficult for medical professionals to differentiate from other cognitive or functional deficits (Warren, 2011). These injuries commonly included stroke and traumatic brain injury (TBI), which frequently resulted in vision impairments that significantly impacted independence, safety, and participation in daily occupations. Despite their prevalence, these changes were often overlooked or misattributed to other neurologic factors. The purpose of this doctoral capstone experience was to provide occupational therapy practitioners in outpatient, inpatient, and acute care settings with the knowledge, resources, and confidence necessary to better identify and address vision changes following brain injury. This capstone focused on education, advocacy, and the development of advanced clinical skills. Quick screening tools were created to assist practitioners in recognizing common post-brain injury visual impairments, including visual field cuts, oculomotor dysfunction, visual neglect and inattention, reduced acuity, and contrast sensitivity loss. In addition, patient-friendly educational materials and intervention resources were developed to support both therapists and individuals with low vision. Multiple in-services were delivered across practice settings to increase awareness, promote interdisciplinary collaboration, and improve clinical decision-making regarding visual deficits after brain injury. Practitioners provided positive feedback on the in-services, screening tools, and patient resources, noting increased confidence in addressing visual changes within their caseloads. This project demonstrated that targeted education and accessible clinical tools enhanced the identification and management of post-brain injury vision impairments. By improving practitioner knowledge and resource availability, this capstone experience aimed to support better functional outcomes and quality of life for individuals with brain injuries.



Amber Scott

Doctoral Capstone: What's Your Approach: Promoting Inclusive Education at the Boys and Girls Club of Faulkner County

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Tina Mankey, EdD, OTR/L

Abstract: Boys & Girls Club of Faulkner County is committed to being the premier youth development program, providing a safe and welcoming environment where club members are respected and valued. Yakovleva et al. (2021) found a “lack of staff for psychological and pedagogical support of children with disabilities, as well as unpreparedness of the administration, teachers, and educators to interact with children with disabilities” (p.2). What's Your Approach: Promoting Inclusive Education at the Boys and Girls Club of Faulkner County, a capstone experience aimed at equipping staff in supporting club members with disabilities. Suppose staff focuses on youth development and knowledge about disabilities and issues related to disabilities. By developing a training program for staff, it will increase knowledge and competence in the following areas: building positive relationships, navigating emotions, redirecting maladaptive behaviors, implementing classroom culture and management, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), social-emotional development, and adapting the environment to meet the needs of club members with disabilities. This project emphasizes advocacy, program development, and leadership to enhance the facilities' use of inclusive education practices. By educating staff on implementing inclusive education practices, the facility improves all club members' ability to learn, participate, and achieve overall positive outcomes. This paper highlights the development of training modules, the outcome of training, and sustainability efforts to ensure the continuation of an inclusive environment.



Megan Sides

Doctoral Capstone: Heart & Home Caregiver Education

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Ashley McClain, OTD, OTR/L

Abstract: This capstone project, Heart & Home Caregiver Education, aimed to provide supplemental materials and education to caregivers in preparation for assuming the care of their loved ones. According to the National Alliance for Caregiving (2020), there are more than 40 million caregivers who provide unpaid, informal care to their loved ones. Many of these caregivers received little to no education before assuming the care of their loved one and often feel dismissed, underprepared, and overwhelmed (Callister et al., 2020). The primary objective of this project was to develop free, accessible modules covering a wide range of home care topics such as medication management, safe transfers, and medical device management. An organized Google Drive was created to serve as a one-stop resource center for caregivers to get the information they need in an easy-to-read, user-friendly format. The link to this drive was shared with clinics across the U.S. to be utilized in caregiver education. Instagram and Facebook pages were also created to share infographics, handouts, resource guides, and “crash courses” on various conditions and home care topics. Additionally, the student partnered with Home Therapy Solutions, ND to host weekly virtual caregiver education workshops on various home care topics. Presentation topics included “Mobility, Assistive, and Medical Device Management”, “Community Mobility, Driving, and Safety Outside The Home”, “Fall Prevention”, and “Caregiver and Care Recipient Mental Health”. These workshops were recorded and will be utilized by the clinic for caregiver education.



Allison Strayhorn

Doctoral Capstone: The Further Development of the Conway Brain Injury Community Program: An Occupational Adaptation Approach to Interprofessional Collaboration

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Lorrie George-Paschal, PhD, OTR/L, ATP, CBIS

Abstract: This capstone project emphasized advanced clinical practice, leadership, research, and interprofessional collaboration through multiple initiatives. These included planning and leading the Conway Brain Injury Community (CBIC), completion of the Provisional Certified Brain Injury Specialist (PCBIS), and the development of an interprofessional education opportunity between occupational therapy (OT) and speech-language pathology (SLP) students. Advanced clinical experience was gained through client experiences at Conway Regional Rehabilitation, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) Outpatient Clinic, Camp Aldersgate, and Baptist Health Rehabilitation Institute. Knowledge gained from these experiences informed the co-creation of an interprofessional learning experience for University of Central Arkansas students within the CBIC framework. Additionally, a mixed-methods research study was conducted to evaluate the perceived effectiveness of the CBIC in supporting members' progress toward self-identified goals, using the theoretical framework of occupational adaptation (OA).



Lauryn Swaffar

Doctoral Capstone: Work Readiness Program for Those With Intellectual Disabilities

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Lorrie George-Paschal, PhD, OTR/L, ATP, CBIS

Abstract: This capstone addressed the transition into the workforce for those with intellectual disabilities. Transitioning into the workplace and broader community remains a significant challenge for individuals with intellectual disabilities, particularly in central Arkansas where few structured work readiness programs exist. This project addresses a critical gap by designing and implementing a client-centered work readiness program at Easterseals in Little Rock, Arkansas. Grounded in the principles of occupational adaptation (OA), the program emphasizes autonomy, personal mastery, and community integration. Drawing from literature and needs assessments, including feedback from families of individuals with intellectual disabilities, the program targets skill-building aligned with participants' interests and offers opportunities for real-world practice and expert feedback. Through collaboration with Easterseals staff and community partners, this initiative not only supports individuals in preparing for employment but also fosters meaningful community connections and promotes occupational success. The project also serves as a valuable learning experience in program development and implementation to better serve this population in future practice.



Ellie Traeger

Doctoral Capstone: Hand-In-Hand: Empowering OT Students Through Educational Opportunities in Hand Therapy

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Brandy Pate, PPOTD, OTR/L, CBIS, Low Vision Certification

Abstract: The doctoral capstone project, “Hand-In-Hand: Empowering OT Students Through Educational Opportunities in Hand Therapy”, aimed to support Arkansas-based occupational therapy students interested in hand therapy. A scoping literature review revealed a gap between the limited hand therapy content in academic curricula and student readiness for hand therapy experiences. A needs assessment survey further identified low confidence levels and a lack of exposure as barriers to student interest in pursuing hand therapy. To address these challenges, this project expanded on a previously implemented capstone by launching a virtual student hand therapy study group through the Arkansas Hand Therapy Society. Monthly meetings provided students with engagement and access to other students with various experiences, as well as practicing clinicians. Additionally, a statewide student hand therapy conference was organized, offering hands-on learning, mentorship opportunities, and exposure to clinical tools and techniques. To increase access to hand therapy content, an educational social media platform was developed to deliver content on common upper extremity conditions, highlight upcoming events, and foster student networking and engagement. This multi-faceted project provided students with varied and accessible educational opportunities, aiming to increase confidence, knowledge, and interest in hand therapy as a career path. Rooted in advocacy, education, and advanced clinical practice, this project aimed to bridge gaps in student exposure to hand therapy.



Micah Troxler

Doctoral Capstone: Empowering Educators and Caregivers for Students with Brain Injuries: An Education and Resource Program

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Tina Mankey, EdD, OTR/L

Abstract: This capstone project aimed to improve educational outcomes for students returning to school after a brain injury by enhancing educators' understanding of brain injury and equipping them with practical strategies for classroom support. It also sought to provide caregivers with accessible resources to help them navigate the process of their child returning to school following a brain injury. The project focused on the development and delivery of evidence-based training modules for Arkansas educators. These modules addressed key topics including basic brain anatomy, types and symptoms of brain injury, the return-to-learn process, academic accommodations, and real-life case studies that reflect the diverse needs of students. The project also included the creation of a caregiver-friendly Individualized Education Program (IEP) resource guide, along with supplemental handouts and tools designed to strengthen communication and collaboration between schools and families. Collaboration with experienced mentors was a critical part of this project's development. Guidance and feedback were provided by Dr. Tina Mankey, Claudia Moran, and Bethany Compton, all of whom bring extensive expertise in school-based therapy and working with students who have sustained brain injuries. Their insights helped ensure the content was both clinically accurate and practically relevant for school personnel. The materials created through this doctoral capstone project have been and will continue to be disseminated and offered to schools across the state of Arkansas. This project underscores the critical need for targeted brain injury education in schools and offers a sustainable, scalable model to support students, families, and educators alike.



Olivia Tuggle

Doctoral Capstone: Go Home, Stay Home, & Stay Healthy: Educational Modules to Decrease Readmissions After Inpatient Rehabilitation and/or Acute Care

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Kelly Hartwick, PPOTD, OTR/L, CBIS

Abstract: This doctoral capstone project aimed to reduce readmission rates by improving post-discharge care through an occupational therapy lens by focusing on education, advocacy, and advanced practice. A needs assessment survey sent to hospitals in Arkansas, Missouri, and Nebraska identified major contributors to readmissions, including poor caregiver education, inadequate home modifications, and a lack of interdisciplinary coordination. Results indicated a strong need for occupational therapy-driven discharge education. Guided by the Person-Environment-Occupation-Performance (PEOP) model, the student developed a seven-part educational module and resource binder that focused on the role of occupational therapy in discharge planning. Modules included: an introduction to occupational therapy and readmissions, fall prevention strategies, home exercise programs, and community resource guides for four Arkansas counties. The project also included over 28 days of immersive clinical training, three continuing education courses, four books, and 25 podcasts to strengthen clinical knowledge. Overall, this project demonstrates the vital role of occupational therapy in promoting safe transitions home, supporting patients and caregivers through education, and ultimately reducing preventable hospital readmissions.



Claire Wallin

Doctoral Capstone: Graduate Student Resources: Mental Health & Occupational Balance

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Tina Mankey, EdD, OTR/L

Abstract: Several studies emphasize the commonality of poor mental health and occupational imbalance (or work/life imbalance) in the graduate student population, which highlight the importance of beneficial strategies and resources being readily available to students. The focus of this capstone is on creating beneficial graduate student resources addressing mental health and occupational balance based upon feedback and data collected from the graduate student population from the University of Central Arkansas. The research conducted through this project indicated the need for various resources ranging from stress management techniques to financial tips. Findings from this capstone project indicated that 70% of participants were moderately stressed, 64% felt moderate occupational balance, while 23% felt low occupational (or work/life) balance. With roots in mental health, the occupational therapy profession has a role in addressing the graduate student population's wellbeing alongside occupational balance through useful evidence-based strategies and tips. As a result of data collection and use of evidence based research, twenty-five topics addressing stress/anxiety, occupational balance, depression/burnout, and tips for success were created to aid the graduate student population. These resources have been shared with various program directors and successfully uploaded to the University of Central Arkansas' graduate student website to be accessible to everyone. Feedback from graduate students emphasizes that the wellness resources are beneficial and helpful to graduate students with topic suggestions for resources to be addressed in the future.



Lauren Ward

Doctoral Capstone: Sense-ational Sundays: Creating an Inclusive Worship Environment for Individuals with Sensory Differences

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Chris Ryan, PPOTD, OTR/L

Abstract: This capstone project aimed to promote inclusion and participation for individuals with sensory processing differences within a church community setting. In collaboration with Cedar Heights Baptist Church (CHBC), the student developed and implemented a sensory support system to enhance awareness, accessibility, and engagement across ministries within the church. Key components included the creation of a multi-module volunteer training program, featuring recorded videos and embedded quizzes, which addressed topics such as sensory processing, dysregulation, and compassionate communication. To ensure evidence-informed content, the student engaged in self-directed learning through continuing education coursework, podcasts, professional observations, and a formal communication training workshop. In addition to the development of a training course, the student provided ongoing consultation and real-time support during ministry events, modeled sensory strategies for volunteers, and collaborated with families and staff to tailor approaches to individual needs. A detailed sensory room proposal was designed to serve as a calming, regulation-focused space, with plans in place for future implementation pending budget approval. Evaluation methods included informal observations, volunteer surveys, quiz assessments, and mentor supervision feedback. This project demonstrated the practical application of occupational therapy principles in a non-clinical, faith-based setting, highlighting the value of collaboration, adaptability, and advocacy. Outcomes included increased volunteer confidence, strengthened community relationships, and broader awareness of the importance of sensory inclusion. The project also served as a potential model for similar efforts in other church or community contexts.



Abigail Webb

Doctoral Capstone: The Role of Occupations in Neurological Rehabilitation: Exploring Neuroplasticity, Occupational Adaptation and Interventions

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Lorrie George-Paschal, PhD, OTR/L, ATP, CBIS

Abstract: Neurological impairments are a leading cause of long-term disability worldwide, placing significant emotional, physical, and financial burdens on individuals, families, and healthcare systems. Among these, acquired brain injury (ABI) affects millions each year and poses unique challenges to rehabilitation, occupational participation, and occupational performance. This capstone project explored the integration of neuroplasticity principles, occupational engagement, and evidence-based interventions within the context of neurological rehabilitation and Occupational Adaptation. Over 14 weeks, the occupational therapy student engaged in advanced clinical practice, community engagement, and interactions with individuals affected by brain injury in a post-acute brain injury rehabilitation facility and community settings. The project also emphasized professional and personal education, involving the development and delivery of educational materials, including newsletters, a neurorehabilitation guide, and presentations, for practitioners, students, and caregivers. Through this experience, the student successfully obtained Provisional Certified Brain Injury Specialist (PCBIS) status and contributed to the promotion of best practices in Occupational Therapy (OT) neurorehabilitation. Overall, this project served to explore and emphasize the role of OT in facilitating recovery and participation following ABI through holistic, occupation-based, educational, evidence-informed approaches.



Kendra Woods-Garmon

Doctoral Capstone: Navigating an “iPad Kid” Generation: Evaluating Influences and Occupational Therapy’s Role in Preschool-Aged Children’s Increased Screen Time

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Deborah Gangluff, ScD, OTR/L

Abstract: With the dramatic rise in technology and digital media, a growing body of research highlights the negative effects of excessive screen time on children between the ages of three and six from numerous professionals across healthcare and education. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends limiting screen time for this age group to no more than one hour per day, ensuring that it does not interfere with essential healthy habits such as sleep, physical activity, and face-to-face interaction. Despite these recommendations, many children significantly exceed the suggested screen time limit, and a lack of awareness contributes to this overuse. This study explores the social and contextual factors—such as family dynamics, routines, and screen use in schools—that influence the increase in screen time. It also examines the perceptions of parents, teachers, and healthcare professionals regarding the developmental impacts of screen overexposure. The results from this study was used to develop an educational resource guide. This guide includes recommended screen time limits, summarizes current research, outlines typical developmental milestones, and offers practical alternatives to screen-based activities. This research directly relates to occupational therapy by supporting children's engagement in their primary occupations: play, learning, and participation in daily routines at home and school to promote healthy development.



Jordan Wray

Doctoral Capstone: Improving Outdoor Recreation Opportunities for Individuals with Physical Impairments

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Kelly Hartwick, PPOTD, OTR/L, CBIS

Abstract: The purpose of this capstone project was to develop and implement an adaptive outdoor recreation program in conjunction with the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission. Outdoor recreation, specifically adaptive outdoor recreation, is a meaningful occupation that provides numerous positive mental and physical health benefits for individuals who participate in it (Blinde & McClung, 1997; Dorsch et al., 2016). Arkansas lacks adequate programming for inclusive and adaptive outdoor recreation to meet the needs of its diverse and rural populations. This capstone project was developed to fill that gap by providing programming to fit the needs for individuals with disabilities. This capstone project was able to develop and implement 4 events through collaboration with community partners, develop adaptive programming that will continue to be built upon within the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, and allow the student opportunities for specialized learning within diverse settings and with multiple populations. The student created, organized, and implemented inclusive events, worked with multiple organizations to consult on adaptive recreation, and led one-on-one treatment for occupation centered outcomes. Along with this, the student was able to personally grow and learn about community-based programming and leadership through reading, listening, and meeting with and volunteering for many other professionals and passionate advocates. The growth potential for this program is highlighted by the variety of contexts and organizations in which the capstone student was able to contribute.

