

2026 Cohort Occupational Therapy Doctoral Capstone Abstracts



University of Central Arkansas

Allie Abide

Doctoral Capstone: To OT and Beyond!: A Story on Advocacy

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

Abstract: This capstone project provided education to children and adults on the role of occupational therapy and advocated for the role of occupational therapy. Library and school-based story times were utilized with demonstrations of the role of occupational therapy. Children were educated about the role of occupational therapy during a school-wide career day. Three formal parent interviews were conducted to gain insight on the process and understanding of the role of occupational therapy. Common themes were analyzed and synthesized into a parent guide. Grounded by research, the student created “The Capeless Hero.” “The Capeless Hero” is a children’s book that educates the reader on the role of occupational therapy throughout the lifespan. The purpose of the children’s book is to educate children and caregivers on the role of occupational therapy through storytelling. Additionally, the role of occupational therapy is advocated through the book and website development.

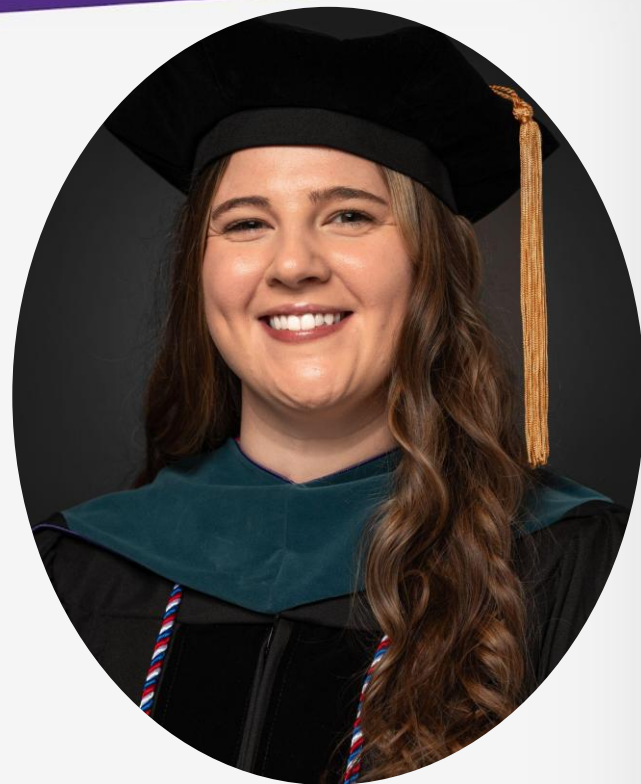


Madeline Allsup

Doctoral Capstone: Breaking Occupational Barriers: Advancing Access, Advocacy, and Spiritual Integration for Homeless and Impoverished Individuals

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

Abstract: This capstone project explored occupational therapy (OT) involvement for individuals experiencing homelessness and poverty, specifically in Conway, Arkansas, with an additional focus on OT's role with spirituality as both a client and environmental factor. The project aimed to decrease barriers to occupational engagement by increasing access to resources through providing education and increasing advocacy efforts for these individuals. These efforts were completed through the creation and implications of a screening tool guided by the Kawa model, OT educational handouts and resources, the Breaking Occupational Therapy Barriers podcast series published on Spotify, and a student-led interprofessional block party. The screening tool was developed to identify barriers impacting occupational engagement and to guide advocacy and educational efforts throughout the project. The educational handouts and resources were created to increase access to local resources and promote engagement in meaningful everyday activities. The podcast series emphasized OT's role when working with individuals experiencing homelessness and poverty and highlighted a variety of interdisciplinary perspectives. The interprofessional block party showcased all educational materials developed throughout the capstone experience and emphasized the importance of local and community resources for individuals experiencing homelessness and poverty in Conway, Arkansas,



Mackenzie Anderson

Doctoral Capstone: Receiving Reprieve: Providing Respite Care Services for Informal Caregivers Across the Lifespan

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

Abstract: This capstone project explored and addressed the gap in respite care services for informal caregivers across the lifespan in North Central Arkansas. Respite care is an essential service for caregivers that allows relief or breaks in order to take time to care for one's own mental health needs in order to provide the utmost quality care. Rural communities are often areas desolate in resources that may be considered additional or extra, putting the caregivers within these communities at high risk of burnout, which has shown to lead to decreased quality of care and potential abuse/neglect. Over a 14-week period, this student responded to a need in a rural area in North Central Arkansas by providing opportunities for community-based and in-home respite care services for caregivers of individuals ranging in age and abilities. Additional significant outcomes of this project included the creation of volunteer opportunities for youth in North Central Arkansas, the creation of program social media pages to share resources and promote events, a caregiver resource guide available in both digital and print formats, and an adaptive cookbook with picture recipes designed to increase participation and independence in daily living activities and decrease caregiver burden. Through the creation and implementation of a much needed program in rural Arkansas, the student enhanced her ability to advocate for the underserved while further developing the leadership skills necessary to start a community-based initiative from the ground up.



Brooke Belchar

Doctoral Capstone: Advanced Clinical Practice in Neurorehabilitation:
Education Application

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

Abstract: The overarching goal of this capstone project was to develop a centralized location of comprehensive neurological education resources for occupational therapy (OT) students, practitioners, clients and caregivers with a focus on advanced clinical practice and education. The project consisted of a website organized into two primary topics: acquired brain injury (ABI) and spinal cord injury (SCI), with ABI further divided into stroke and traumatic brain injury (TBI). Each module provided essential information about the condition, commonly used assessments, interventions, and resources for client/caregivers. In addition, this capstone was designed to support the student's development of advanced clinical skills in a variety of practice settings, with a focus on working with individuals with neurological disorders. Through immersive clinical experiences at CHI St. Vincent Sherwood Rehabilitation Hospital, Baptist Health, and Vanderbilt Stallworth Rehabilitation Hospital the student refined skills in assessment, intervention planning, and client and caregiver education. To further enhance professional competency in neurorehabilitation, the student prepared for the Certified Brain Injury Specialist (CBIS) examination and explored educational content to develop education modules and enhance learning. Furthermore, this project sought to bridge the gap between students' knowledge and confidence utilizing the Occupational Therapy Practice Framework (OTPF) as a guiding document to apply the OT process to clients who have neurological disorders through development of a comprehensive neurological educational website for clients, caregivers, OT students and practitioners.



Aria Bolman

Doctoral Capstone: Resilient Living: A Trauma-Informed Wellness Toolkit for Vulnerable Adults

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

Abstract: This doctoral capstone project focused on the development, refinement, and dissemination of Resilient Living, a trauma-informed occupational therapy wellness toolkit designed to support adults experiencing chronic stress, trauma exposure, housing instability, major life transitions, and reintegration challenges. Vulnerable adult populations—including veterans, individuals accessing transitional housing programs, and adults navigating instability—frequently experience disrupted routines, emotional dysregulation, and barriers to meaningful occupational participation. The purpose of this project was to create an accessible, low-barrier, occupation-centered toolkit grounded in trauma-informed care, Polyvagal Theory, the Self-Reg Framework, the Person-Environment-Occupation (PEO) Model, and the Occupational Therapy Practice Framework (OTPF-4). Toolkit development occurred over a 14-week doctoral capstone experience and followed an iterative, evidence-informed program development process. Activities included comprehensive literature review, mentor collaboration, consistent professional reflection, community engagement, CEU completion, structured content drafting, health literacy refinement, and creation of both general adult and veteran-specific toolkit materials. The project also incorporated dissemination planning, provider education resources, and implementation support to enhance sustainability across community settings.



Breanna Boyett

Doctoral Capstone: Bridging the Gap: The Role of Occupational Therapy in Pelvic Floor Dysfunction and Its Impact on Mothers

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

Abstract: Pelvic floor dysfunction (PFD) is a prevalent concern among women, particularly during pregnancy and the postpartum period; however, many women experience limited access to education, resources, and preventative strategies. Wu et al. (2019) described that “one in every three American women present with a pelvic health disorder, and the number of those diagnosed is projected to nearly double by 2050,” highlighting the growing need for increased awareness and accessible interventions (para. 2). This doctoral capstone project focused on increasing education and advocacy for pelvic floor health while advancing clinical practice through specialized training in pregnancy and postpartum rehabilitation. The project was implemented at Empower Physical Therapy, an outpatient therapy clinic located in Shelbyville, Kentucky. The purpose of this initiative was to address gaps in pelvic floor education by providing women with accessible resources and an evidence-based pelvic floor exercise class designed to improve awareness, confidence, and self-management strategies. Community outreach efforts included the development and distribution of educational flyers to local medical offices and promotion of the event through social media and word-of-mouth. A complimentary pelvic floor health seminar was conducted for women across the lifespan, with an emphasis on mothers and women preparing for pregnancy. Participants received educational materials addressing pelvic floor anatomy, common dysfunctions, breathing mechanics, exercise strategies, bladder and bowel health, postpartum recovery, and available therapy resources.



Shayla Brammer

Doctoral Capstone: Exploring Circus Arts as a Therapeutic Approach for Occupational Therapy

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

Abstract: This capstone explored circus inspired activities as occupation-based interventions to promote motivation, participation, engagement, and well being across the lifespan. Circus arts represent an emerging area of occupational therapy (OT) practice that incorporates movement based, expressive activities to support physical, cognitive, and social participation. Rather than emphasizing performance training, this project demonstrated how OT practitioners can analyze, adapt, and grade circus inspired activities to address participants' abilities, needs, and interests. The capstone was implemented in community-based settings: a pediatric summer program serving children with developmental disabilities and an independent living community for older adults. Activities included scarf and ribbon movements, balance challenges, balloon activities, bean bag and ring toss games, reaching tasks, and movement experiences. Activities were modified to promote accessibility, safety, inclusion, and participation among individuals with various needs. Participant responses, clinical observations, staff feedback, mood ratings, and session reflections were used to evaluate activity implementation. Outcomes demonstrated participant engagement, social interaction, confidence, movement, and opportunities to practice skills related to functional performance. Feedback supported the relevance of circus inspired activities within community-based OT programming. Developed educational resources included a website, resource toolkit, and YouTube miniseries to assist OT practitioners and students with incorporating circus inspired activities into practice.

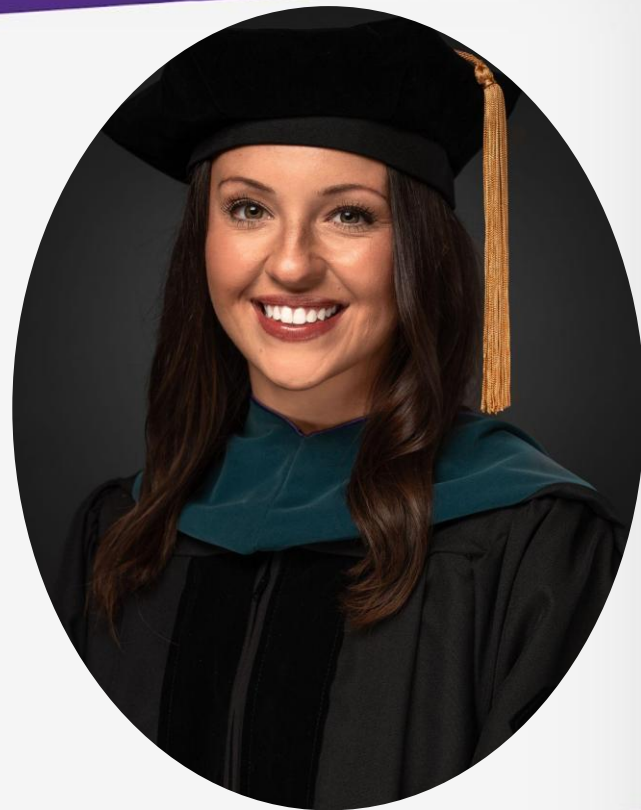


Olivia Briney

Doctoral Capstone: Beyond the Ball: Addressing Occupational Therapy's Role in Prevention and Rehabilitation of Injury in the Overhead Athlete

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

Abstract: Overuse injuries of the shoulder and elbow are highly prevalent among overhead athletes and frequently limit athletic performance, participation, and long-term health. This doctoral capstone project aimed to develop, implement, and evaluate an evidence-based injury prevention and performance education program and functional movement screenings for high school baseball and softball athletes across Arkansas and neighboring states. A comprehensive needs assessment was conducted with orthopedic surgeons, occupational therapists, coaches, current and former collegiate and professional athletes, and other experienced professionals. Information gathered from these stakeholders guided program development and supported the selection of high school overhead athletes as the primary target population. The completed project included development of standardized functional screening tools for overhead athletes, delivery of interactive educational programming, creation of evidence-based educational resources for athletes and coaches, and dissemination of sustainable injury prevention materials. Educational programming emphasized workload management, identifying common conditions associated with overhead movement, throwing mechanics, warm-up and recovery strategies, mobility, functional strengthening, and early recognition of injury. Program effectiveness was evaluated through athlete pre- and post-surveys, coach and athletic training student feedback, screening findings, mentor evaluations, and reflective documentation completed throughout implementation.



Lauren Carter

Doctoral Capstone: Optimizing Patient Education Through Physical and Digital Resources in the Inpatient Rehabilitation Setting

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

Abstract: This doctoral capstone project, “Optimizing Patient Education through Physical and Digital Resources in the Inpatient Rehabilitation Setting,” addressed the need for clear, accessible, and standardized patient and caregiver education within inpatient rehabilitation facilities. A needs assessment revealed inconsistent access to educational materials, moderate confidence in patient retention, and strong interest in resources written at accessible reading levels with visual support. Over the course of the experience, sixty four patient education materials were developed, covering topics such as cognition, durable medical equipment, adaptive strategies, caregiver support, home safety, and diagnosis-specific education. Each handout was designed using health literacy principles and refined through iterative feedback from clinical mentors and an external editor to ensure clarity, readability, and cultural appropriateness. Finalized materials were compiled into a structured physical binder and a digital resource folder to support long-term accessibility for therapists. Implementation occurred through two in-service presentations, followed by evaluation using therapist surveys and qualitative interviews. Results demonstrated strong support for the project’s effectiveness: all respondents reported improved patient and caregiver understanding, with 90% rating clarity and health-literacy level as excellent. Therapists described the binder as extremely useful and indicated high likelihood of continued use. Overall, the project delivered a lasting, therapist-friendly system that improves patient education and supports safer, more confident discharge planning.



Morgan Cassels

Doctoral Capstone: More Than a Memory: An Inclusive Guide to Care for Individuals Living with Alzheimer's Disease or Related Dementia (ADRD)

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

Abstract: Alzheimer's disease and related dementias (ADRD) represent a growing public health concern with significant implications for individuals, caregivers, and healthcare systems. Despite the expanding scope of occupational therapy in dementia-care, gaps persist in public awareness, caregiver education, and healthcare professionals' confidence in addressing ADRD across the disease continuum. The intention of this doctoral capstone project centered around the promotion of occupational therapy within this population, interprofessional collaboration, and supporting caregivers through education and advocacy. Over the course of 14 weeks, the student was immersed in advanced clinical practice experiences, academic leadership and advocacy, and research tailored to education on ADRD. The primary outcomes resulting from this capstone project included the development and application of three individualized educational modules. One module was created for a first-year occupational therapy cohort to explore approaches to neurodegenerative diseases and another module was developed to support interprofessional education (OT, PT, SLP students) within dementia-care. The final module, designed for caregivers of PLWD, explored disease progression, caregiving strategies, and the use of occupations in everyday life. Informational resources were developed and distributed with population-specific content to further enhance each continuous learning experience.

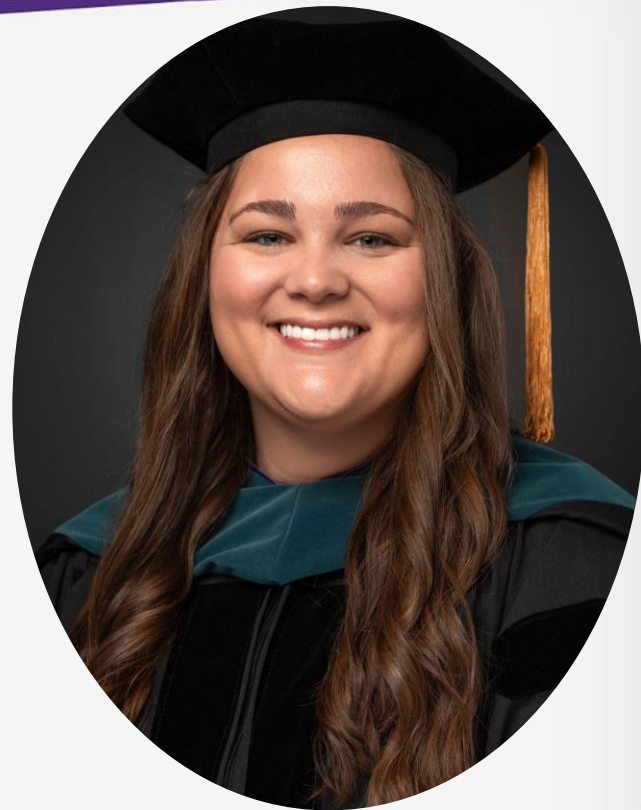


Olivia Clark

Doctoral Capstone: Primitive Reflex Integration in Pediatric Occupational Therapy: Therapists' Perspectives and Clinical Applications

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

Abstract: This capstone project examined pediatric occupational therapists' perspectives on primitive reflex integration (PRI), an under-researched and often controversial intervention within pediatric occupational therapy. Although there is limited evidence that supports PRI as an intervention method, some clinicians report positive clinical outcomes, prompting the need to better understand how therapists reason through decisions to include or omit PRI in practice. A sequential mixed-methods design guided this research. Quantitative data was collected via a survey sent to pediatric occupational therapists in Arkansas, capturing familiarity with PRI, perceived effectiveness, and frequency of use. Qualitative data was then gathered through semi-structured interviews with a portion of survey respondents to expand on their decision-making process. Quantitative findings indicated that therapists who perceived PRI as more effective tended to use it more frequently. Qualitative findings revealed that therapists' reasoning was more nuanced than originally hypothesized. Rather than aligning with a single category of clinical reasoning, participants described diverse influences, including client factors, contextual constraints, and perceived occupational relevance. Across interviews, therapists emphasized the challenge of balancing limited generalizability of existing evidence with the ambiguity of pediatric practice, where clinical presentations are often complex and diverse.

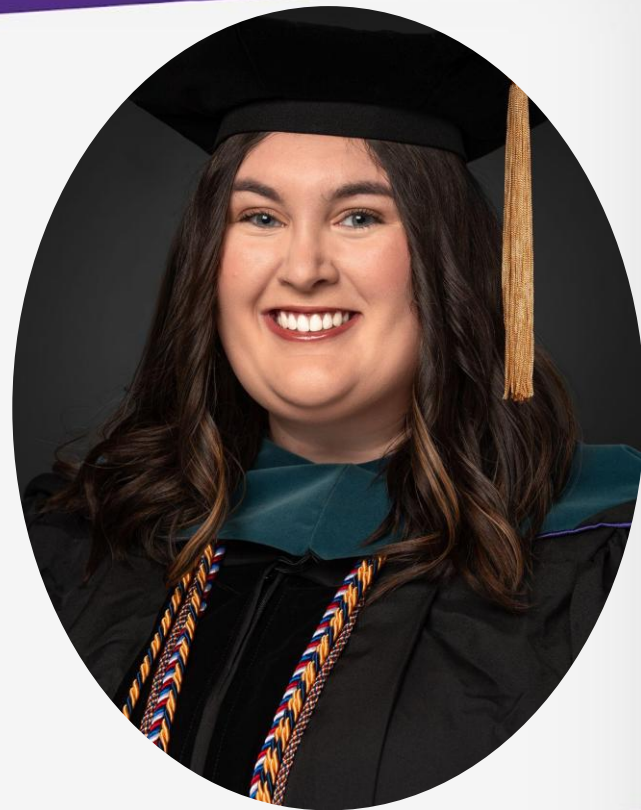


Courtney Clawson

Doctoral Capstone: From IEP to Independence: Rethinking Assistive Technology in Post-High School Transitions

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

Abstract: From IEP to Independence: Rethinking Assistive Technology in Post-High School Transitions examined the development, implementation, and dissemination of assistive technology (AT) resources designed to support students transitioning into higher education. The project focused on creating accessible, practical tools, including a website, instructional videos, and low-and high-tech handouts. It aimed to increase awareness and understanding of AT services available through statewide organizations. The work was informed by hands-on experiences at the Increasing Capabilities Access Network (iCAN), where direct observation, device demonstrations, and collaboration with AT professionals strengthened the accuracy and relevance of the materials produced. The project also incorporated professional communication with the Arkansas Department of Education to ensure alignment with educational needs and expectations. Throughout the process, iterative editing, reflection, and feedback guided the refinement of each resource. The final products were disseminated through digital platforms and presentations to peers and educators, demonstrating the project's emphasis on accessibility, clarity, and practical application

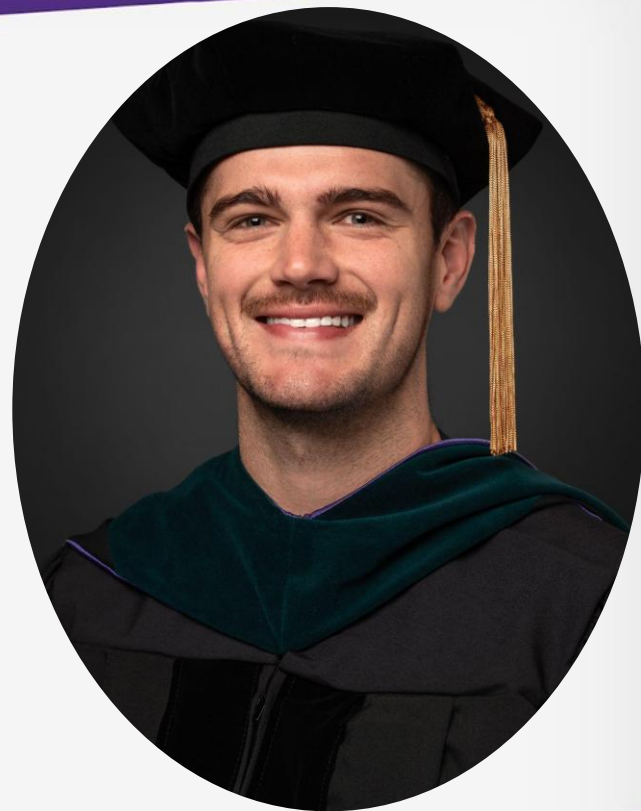


Colby Cobb

Doctoral Capstone: In Good Hands

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

Abstract: The doctoral capstone project, “In Good Hands,” was designed to build confidence and competency in the hand therapy field of occupational therapy through educational initiatives and advanced clinical practice experiences. This capstone blended hands-on concepts with online research to solidify my own knowledge while also providing educational opportunities for occupational therapy students interested in hand therapy. To address the need for increased exposure and confidence within the field, this project continued the In Good Hands student hand therapy conference and educational Instagram page while introducing the In Good Hands Therapy Podcast. The educational Instagram platform provided research-based content regarding upper extremity conditions, including symptoms, etiology, therapy protocols, and outcomes related to condition progression. Additionally, the student hand therapy conference provided students with exposure to certified hand therapists, orthotic fabrication, and anatomical education through a gross anatomy cadaver lab experience. The conference included 24 student participants from Arkansas-based occupational therapy and occupational therapy assistant programs, with survey results indicating that 100% of respondents reported increased interest in hand therapy, increased knowledge of the field, and increased confidence in hand therapy following participation. The advanced clinical practice component provided significant opportunities to develop treatment skills, clinical reasoning, evaluation techniques, and splinting abilities within the hand therapy setting.



Lauren Corley

Doctoral Capstone: Transforming Outcomes Through Access: The Case for a Specialized Disorders of Consciousness Rehabilitation Program in Arkansas

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

Abstract: Disorders of Consciousness (DoC), including coma, vegetative state, and minimally conscious state, require specialized, interdisciplinary rehabilitation to optimize recovery. Despite evidence supporting improved outcomes through early, intensive rehabilitation, Arkansas currently lacks a specialized DoC rehabilitation program, requiring many families to seek care out of state. The purpose of this doctoral capstone project was to support the future development of a specialized DoC program in Arkansas by increasing education, awareness, and clinical preparedness among healthcare professionals and occupational therapy students. A needs assessment, consisting of stakeholder interviews and healthcare provider surveys, identified significant gaps in specialized services, provider education, and access to evidence-based rehabilitation. In response, evidence-based educational resources, including handouts and a comprehensive resource binder, were developed for Arkansas Children's Hospital to support its pursuit of CARF accreditation for a DoC specialty program. Educational modules were also created and presented to University of Central Arkansas occupational therapy students to strengthen foundational knowledge of DoC assessment and intervention prior to clinical fieldwork. Project findings were disseminated through presentations at the Arkansas Occupational Therapy Association Annual Conference and the University of Central Arkansas Research Symposium.



Alivia Cormell

Doctoral Capstone: Bridging the Gap: Understanding Female ADHD and Empowering Communities Through Education

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

Abstract: The capstone project, Bridging the Gap: Understanding Female ADHD and Empowering Communities Through Education, aimed to increase awareness of female ADHD while promoting advocacy through targeted educational initiatives within Central Arkansas. To support this goal, a comprehensive resource guide was developed to provide evidence-based information on the unique presentation of ADHD in females, barriers to diagnosis, available supports, and strategies for educators, families, and community members. In addition, educational modules were created to improve understanding of female ADHD and encourage early recognition and appropriate intervention. These materials were designed to be practical, accessible, and applicable across educational and community settings. As part of the advocacy portion of the project, an educational presentation was delivered to educators within Conway Public Schools. The presentation focused on recognizing the distinct characteristics of ADHD in girls, understanding the impact of missed or delayed diagnosis, and implementing supportive classroom practices. By equipping educators with current knowledge and practical resources, the project sought to strengthen advocacy efforts and improve outcomes for female students with ADHD. This capstone demonstrates the value of education in addressing disparities in ADHD recognition among females and highlights the importance of community partnerships in fostering awareness, early identification, and equitable access to support.



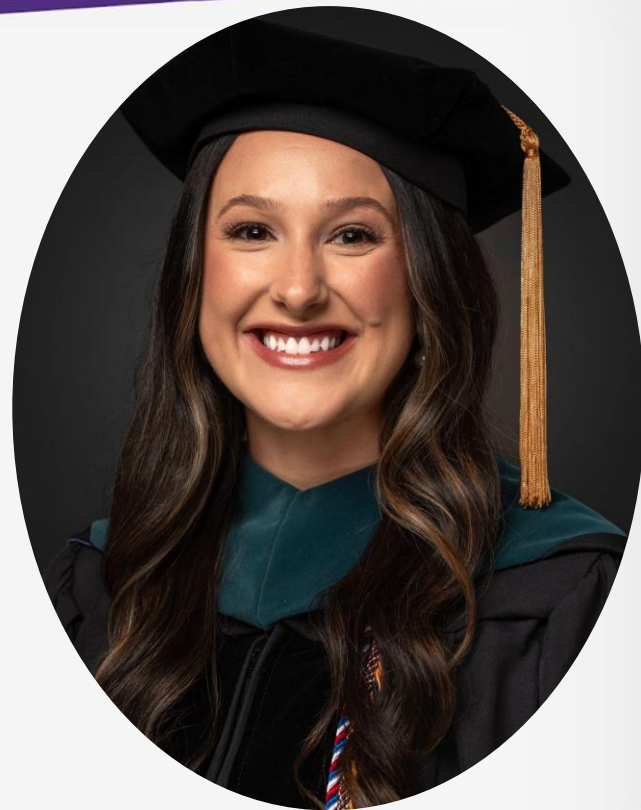
Gracie Dickson

Doctoral Capstone: Beyond the Diagnosis: Empowering Pediatric Oncology Patients Through Occupational Therapy

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

Abstract: Pediatric cancer affects approximately 15,000 children and adolescents each year in the United States, and research shows that treatment can significantly disrupt children's cognitive, emotional, and physical development, with challenges emerging during treatment and often persisting into survivorship (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024; Brand et al., 2017; Marusak et al., 2017). Caregivers frequently report uncertainty and feel inadequately prepared to support their child's developmental and coping needs, highlighting the need for accessible, developmentally informed, and trauma-sensitive resources (Bernstein et al., 2024).

This doctoral capstone project addressed this gap through education and program development within pediatric oncology. Educational materials were created to support parents, caregivers, and providers of children diagnosed with cancer, and program development included trauma-sensitive therapeutic play kits designed to promote coping, emotional regulation, developmental engagement, and caregiver-child connection across hospital, home, and community environments.



Allie Dolan

Doctoral Capstone: Abriendo Las Puertas: Increasing Access for the Hispanic Population

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

Abstract: This capstone project centered on educating and advocating for the Hispanic population in Central Arkansas. The aim of this project was to use educational resources and advocacy efforts through community outreach to achieve this goal. The project was composed of educational social media about occupational therapy topics, the social media had 35 educational posts. The Facebook account has 66 followers and the Instagram account has 78 followers. An educational resource website was created to share occupational therapy information, as well as an Amazon wishlist with developmentally appropriate toys that are recommended by occupational therapists. This website has reached 129 people over the course of the 14 week capstone experience. These resources were all created in Spanish and English, this is to help educate the Hispanic population and/or Spanish speaking population on occupational therapy. All of the resources were evidence-based and revolved around increasing quality of life for the client. Central to this capstone project was a community health fair that was held in July at a local event center that focuses on serving the Hispanic community. There were 39 participants and 12 vendors/organizations that participated and helped to make an impact on the community. Over the course of the capstone process, the capstone student's Spanish proficiency was increased across the board in order to help with continued advocacy and increased access.

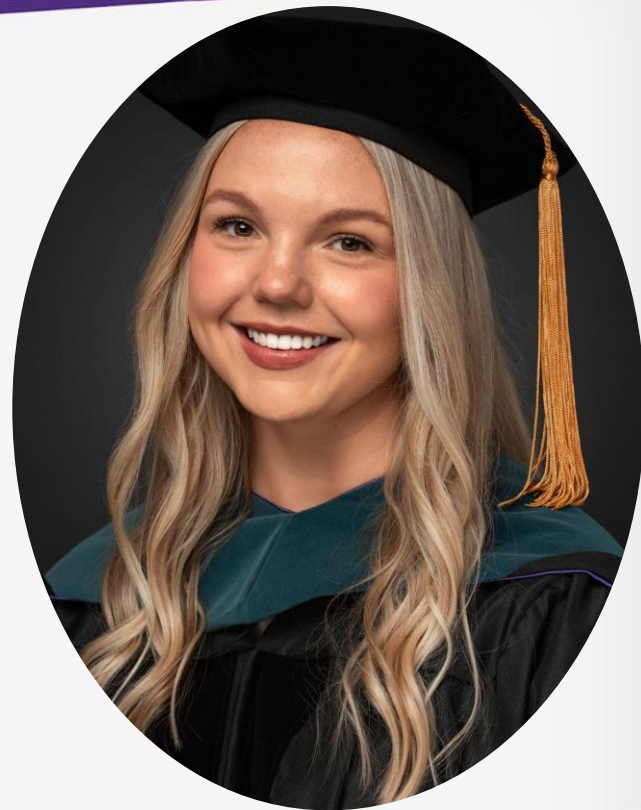


Emily Hamilton

Doctoral Capstone: Equipping and Empowering: An Occupational Therapy Toolkit for Supporting Preschoolers Facing Adversity, Specifically Those in the Foster Care System

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

Abstract: Equipping and Empowering was a capstone project examining the confidence levels of early childhood therapists, teachers, and foster caregivers working with preschool-aged children who had experienced adversity. The project aimed to strengthen understanding of trauma-informed care and therapeutic approaches while creating health-literate educational resources for individuals serving children from birth to six years old. A needs assessment using Google Surveys revealed limited confidence in supporting children who had faced adversity, especially those involved in the foster care system. Findings also showed that caregivers often lacked clear, accessible information about therapy and its purpose, while therapists lacked foundational knowledge of foster care legalities and therapy planning within that context. Given the survey results, educational materials were developed to support early childhood professionals and caregivers and to address gaps in knowledge. These resources included physical handouts created in Canva, a health-literate website, a binder-style resource guide, and an in-service delivered to an Occupational Therapy Assistant program. All materials were written at a fifth-grade reading level and offered in Spanish to ensure accessibility for the target audience and broader community. Materials were disseminated to Southwest Pediatric Therapy, Grow Learning Centre, The Call in Hot Springs, and the Occupational Therapy Assistant program at Arkansas Tech University, with additional virtual resources shared with foster organizations and therapy clinics in Central Arkansas. Evaluation results demonstrated increased clarity, confidence, and perceived usefulness among recipients.



Kyler Harris

Doctoral Capstone: Pom-Poms and Possibilities

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

Abstract: This capstone project consisted of designing and implementing an inclusive extracurricular cheerleading program, Pom-Poms and Possibilities, for the residents at Conway Human Development Center (CHDC). CHDC is a residential facility for children and adults with severe and profound intellectual and developmental disabilities. This was a five-week program with an eight-week planning phase that aimed to increase confidence, social participation, and positive behaviors of the participants. This program gave the residents a chance to express themselves through the occupation of cheerleading, while targeting valuable life skills that enhance overall independence. This five-week program consisted of practices and a final performance for the participants to showcase the materials they learned to family, friends, CHDC staff, and residents. An adapted cheer, chant, and dance routine were created and taught to the participants. This program also served as a volunteer opportunity for high school and college students in the Central Arkansas area. Volunteers were recruited, and a training was created to educate them on inclusive extracurricular activities, while also teaching the rules and expectations of the program. The volunteers and CHDC staff assisted with practices and performed with the participants in the final performance. The program's outcomes were evaluated through verbal feedback, midterm and final capstone evaluation forms, volunteer training pre- and post-test, and evaluation surveys sent out to CHDC staff and volunteers following the completion of the final performance. Pom-Poms and Possibilities was an effective program that increased the confidence of the participants, increased peer interaction, and increased positive behaviors among the residents. The outcomes showed that this program was sustainable and will likely continue to positively impact the residents at CHDC in the future.

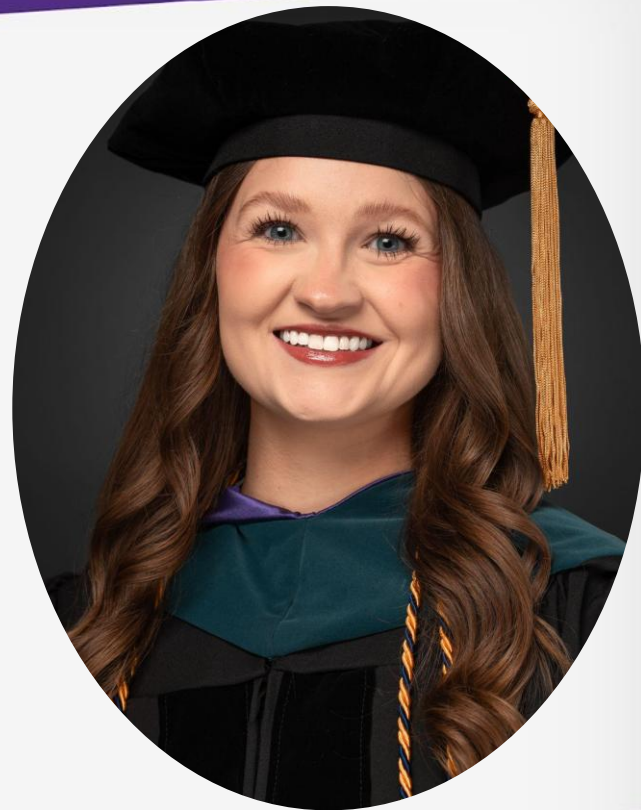


Kelley Hayes

Doctoral Capstone: Strength After Breast Cancer – An Oncology Rehabilitation Program

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

Abstract: The purpose of this capstone project was to develop and implement an evidenced-based Strength After Breast Cancer (SABC) program at CARTI Cancer Center. The Strength After Breast Cancer program, developed by Dr. Kathryn Schmitz, is an evidence-based progressive resistance training program to improve strength and overall well-being in breast cancer survivors while promoting safe participation in exercise (Schmitz, 2015). Prior to implementation, Arkansas lacked a structured program directly tailored and designed to meet the needs of breast cancer survivors. This capstone project was developed to address that gap by establishing the SABC program for survivors in central Arkansas. The student worked alongside CARTI Cancer Center's lymphedema team to coordinate all planning, marketing, implementation, and evaluation of the six-week SABC program. Educational resources were also developed to enhance patient education within both the lymphedema clinic and the SABC program. Preparation for implementation included on-site clinical experiences, continued education courses, and attendance at the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) conference to ensure a comprehensive understanding and knowledge in oncology rehabilitation and lymphedema treatment. Based on feedback from CARTI's clinical team, the capstone student's mentors, and SABC participants, the program was well received and successful.



Katherine Hill

Doctoral Capstone: Seeing Beyond Barriers: Expanding Pediatric Performance in Arkansas Public Education

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

Abstract: Pediatric students with low vision often encounter barriers that impact their participation and performance within the classroom (Marques, 2025). Occupational therapists play an important role in supporting these students through evidence-based interventions, assistive technology, environmental modifications, and collaboration with the education team. This capstone project focused on increasing accessibility to pediatric low vision resources and improving education for school-based therapists and educators, therapists, and administrators throughout Arkansas. Information was gained through a comprehensive literature review, needs assessment, advanced clinical immersion at the Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind, and multiple Arkansas public schools. This capstone project was developed through collaboration with state organizations, and continuing education opportunities to develop a greater understanding of pediatric low vision and current best practices. Throughout the capstone experience, 18 educational resources and resource guides were created to provide information on pediatric low vision conditions, classroom environmental modifications, assistive technology, intervention strategies, and state and local resources available for students with low vision. These resources were shared with therapists and educators through presentations and educational meetings across participating schools. Based on feedback from participants, the resources increased understanding of pediatric low vision, improved confidence in implementing classroom accommodations and intervention strategies, and supported greater accessibility and participation for students with low vision within Arkansas public schools.



Sumner Huerkamp

Doctoral Capstone: Aging in Arkansas: Advocating for Aging-in-Place Initiatives and Empowering Occupational Therapy Students Through Legislative Action within the State of Arkansas

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

Abstract: As the older adult population in the United States continues to grow, aging in place (AIP) has become an increasingly important healthcare priority. Occupational therapy (OT) promotes successful AIP by supporting functional independence, environmental accessibility, and participation in meaningful occupations. However, legislative and reimbursement barriers continue to limit access to preventative services and home modifications. Advocacy is a fundamental responsibility of occupational therapy practitioners, yet many students and practitioners report limited confidence and preparedness to engage in legislative advocacy. The purpose of this doctoral capstone project was to empower OT and occupational therapy assistant (OTA) students to become confident advocates while increasing awareness of OT's role in legislative advocacy and aging-in-place initiatives throughout Arkansas. Project outcomes included the creation of the inaugural OT at the AR Capitol advocacy event for the 2027 legislative session by establishing the framework to support future implementation by the Arkansas Occupational Therapy Association (AROTA). Seven advocacy presentations were delivered to OT and OTA programs across Arkansas, and an advocacy resource guide was developed and distributed to equip students with practical tools for lifelong advocacy. Additional activities included legislative outreach with state policymakers, presentations at the state conference, completion of the Certified Aging-in-Place Specialist (CAPS) designation, and participation in community-based home assessments.

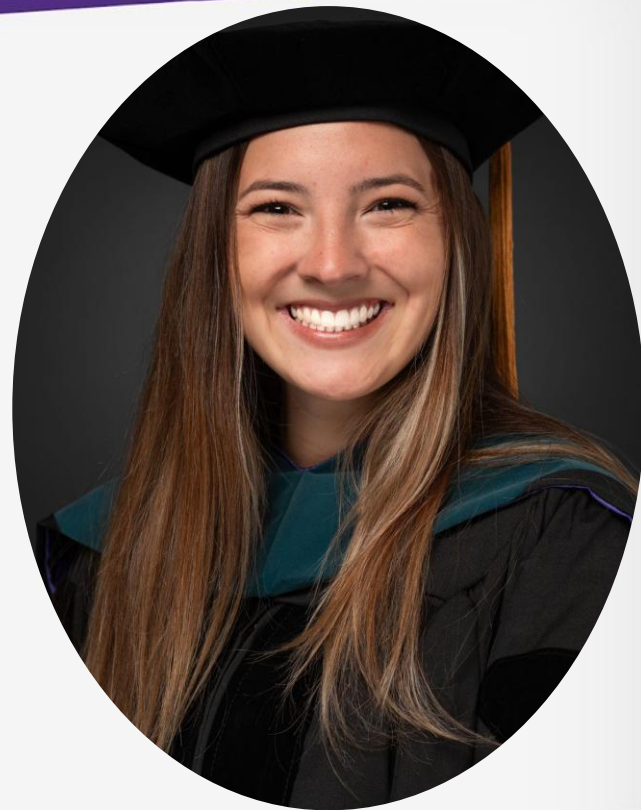


Savannah Irons

Doctoral Capstone: Beyond Barriers: EveryBody Moves

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

Abstract: Children and young adults with disabilities participate in physical activity at rates below recommended levels and often less frequently than their peers, limiting opportunities for physical, social, and emotional development. Beyond Barriers: EveryBody Moves was an inclusive sports and physical activity program developed and implemented at Camp Aldersgate in Little Rock, Arkansas. This doctoral capstone project aimed to improve campers' confidence, motivation, and perceived ability related to continued physical activity participation through inclusive activities tailored to the needs of each camp population. Activities were adapted for campers with diverse physical, developmental, sensory, communication, and medical needs. Program components included adapted sports, movement-based warm-ups, cool-down stretches, educational resources, and strategies for grading activities to promote meaningful participation. The program was evaluated using standard and adapted pre- and post-program surveys, cabin leader feedback forms, observations, and verbal feedback. A total of 142 pre-survey responses and 39 post-survey responses were collected. Standard survey results demonstrated increases in confidence, motivation, and perceived ability following program participation. Observations and verbal feedback also indicated strong camper engagement, effective use of individualized adaptations, and increased opportunities for success, autonomy, and inclusion. Although post-survey response rates were limited, findings suggest that inclusive, occupation-based sports programming can support positive physical activity experiences for individuals with varying abilities. The project also produced sustainable resources to support the program's longevity and replication within Camp Aldersgate's existing structure.

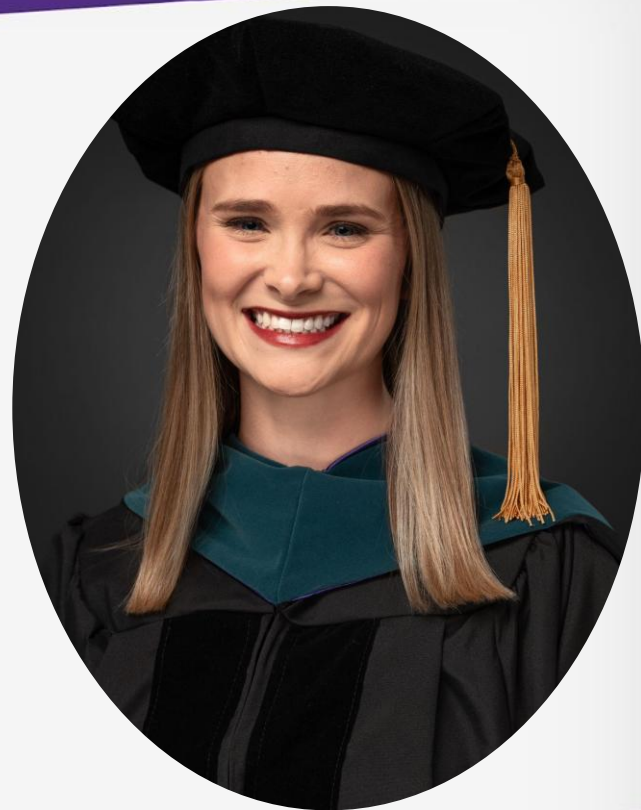


Olivia Janski

Doctoral Capstone: Prepared to Parent: The Case for OT in Perinatal Health

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

Abstract: This capstone project examined gaps in postpartum care and piloted an occupational therapy-informed parenting readiness program within an OB/GYN clinic. Maternal mortality and morbidity data highlighted significant postpartum risks, unmet physical and psychosocial needs, and limited integration of occupational therapy in maternal health services (AMMRC, 2024; Hoyert, 2025). A comprehensive screening tool was developed to assess caregiver confidence, physical recovery, infant care skills, home environment safety, and psychosocial support. Across an eight-week implementation period, 131 fully completed screenings were collected, revealing consistent needs in physical recovery and support, stress, and safety. Although most mothers scored within low-risk ranges, qualitative comments frequently identified concerns not captured numerically, underscoring the importance of combining quantitative and qualitative interpretation. Twenty-nine mothers qualified for consultation, and 16 accepted services, demonstrating feasibility and receptiveness to occupational therapy involvement. Interventions included education, environmental recommendations, resource navigation, and role-transition support. Additional project components included development of a resource binder, educational handouts, social media outreach, and leadership reflection. Findings indicated that occupational therapy meaningfully addressed postpartum challenges, enhanced maternal confidence, and supported safe, sustainable engagement in infant care and daily occupations. The project provided preliminary evidence for establishing occupational therapy as a permanent service line within maternal health settings and outlined next steps for billing, referral processes, and program sustainability.

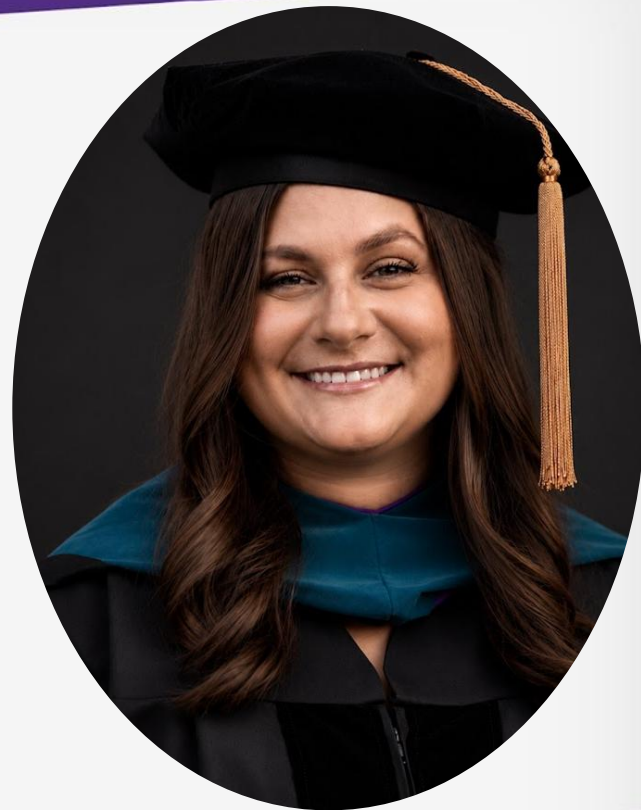


Madison Kaut

Doctoral Capstone: Every Child Can Flip: Promoting Inclusion Through an Adaptive Gymnastics Program

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

Abstract: Community-based recreational opportunities for children with disabilities remain limited due to insufficient adaptive programming, inadequate staff training, and a lack of individualized support. This doctoral capstone project developed, implemented, and evaluated the Every Child Can Flip! Adaptive Gymnastics Program, an occupational therapy-informed initiative designed to enhance participation, confidence, motor development, social interaction, and independence, while establishing sustainable resources for Jacksonville Gymnastics. Program development was informed by a community needs assessment, literature review, mentor collaboration, clinical experiences, and current evidence. Over a 15-week capstone period, an Inclusive Coaching and Volunteer Handbook, volunteer training materials, themed lesson plans, evaluation tools, marketing materials, communication resources, and program implementation guides were created. Ninety-one athletes participated in the six-week program, supported by twenty-seven trained volunteers. Program evaluation indicated improvements in athlete participation, confidence, communication, social interaction, independence, and overall engagement. Volunteers reported increased confidence in supporting children with disabilities, and parents expressed high satisfaction with the program, noting meaningful improvements in their children's participation and confidence. The resources developed provide Jacksonville Gymnastics with a sustainable framework for ongoing adaptive gymnastics programming and underscore the role of occupational therapy in advancing inclusive community-based recreation.

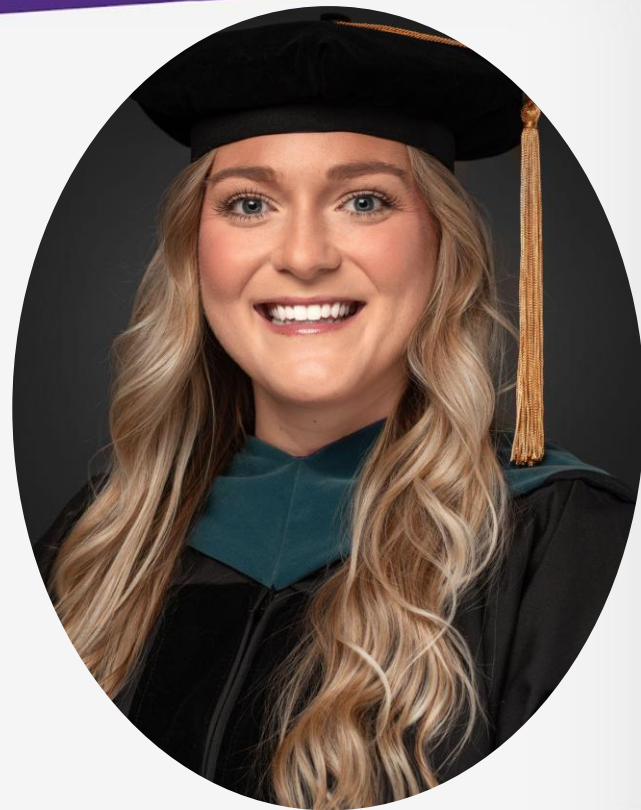


Callie Kennedy

Doctoral Capstone: Enhancing Occupational Therapy Practice: An In-Service Approach to Education on Interventions for Low Vision and Neurological Conditions

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

Abstract: Vision impairments following acquired brain injury (ABI) are frequently underrecognized despite their significant impact on occupational performance, safety, and independence. Occupational therapy (OT) practitioners play a critical role in identifying and addressing impairments; however, clinicians report limited confidence and access to resources for intervention. The purpose of this doctoral capstone project was to enhance practitioners' knowledge and confidence in implementing evidence-based low vision interventions for adults with neurological conditions in acute care and inpatient rehabilitation settings. The capstone project involved an extensive review of current literature, collaboration with low vision specialists, and the development of educational resources tailored to clinical practice. Project deliverables included comprehensive in-service presentations, quick-referenced intervention guides, educational handouts, and low vision intervention kits designed for use in hospital settings. Educational sessions were disseminated to OT and PT practitioners across multiple hospitals, with participant feedback collected to evaluate the effectiveness and clinical applicability of the resources. Overall outcomes demonstrated increased knowledge, confidence, and awareness of visual impairments associated with ABI. Participants reported the educational materials were relevant, practical, and applicable to patient care.

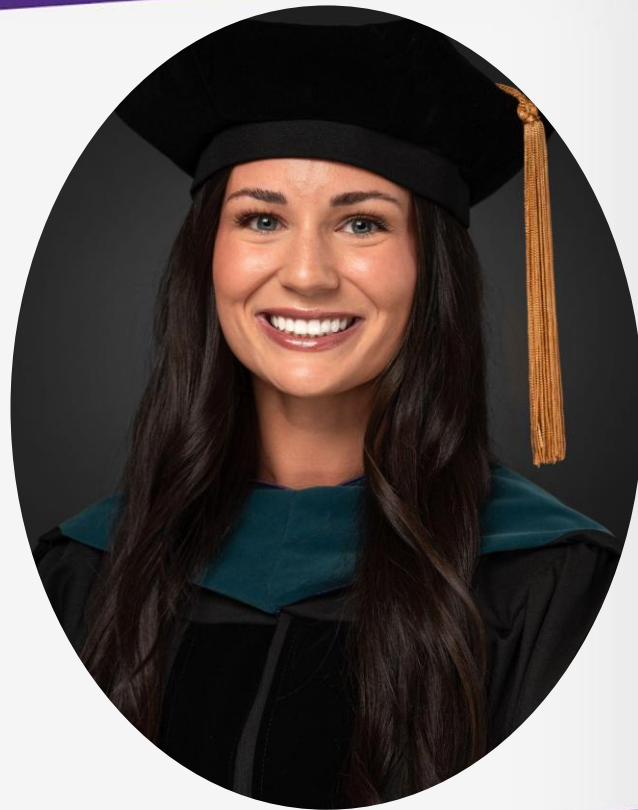


Hayley Knowles

Doctoral Capstone: Dance for All: Inclusion Expansion Project

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

Abstract: A fundamental principle of the occupational therapy profession is to promote inclusion, accessibility, and equitable opportunities for participation among individuals of all abilities. Occupational therapists play an important role in identifying and addressing barriers that limit participation in meaningful occupations, including community-based activities such as dance. This doctoral capstone project aimed to promote disability inclusion and enhance accessibility within community dance programs by supporting the expansion and long-term sustainability of the Step By Step Dance Program in Arkansas. The project focused on developing sustainable organizational resources while increasing the capacity of dance instructors to provide inclusive programming for children with disabilities. This included the development of a comprehensive nonprofit guide to assist Step By Step in navigating the process of obtaining and maintaining nonprofit status, as well as a grant funding resource guide to support future funding opportunities and organizational growth. Additionally, inclusive dance education materials were created to provide dance instructors with evidence-informed knowledge, practical strategies, and adaptive techniques to foster welcoming and accessible learning environments for dancers of all abilities. These educational resources were implemented through in-service training sessions with local dance studio staff to increase awareness and confidence in supporting diverse learners. Project outcomes were evaluated through participant surveys designed to assess the organization, clarity, effectiveness, and practical application of the nonprofit guide, grant funding guide, and inclusive dance education materials. The resources developed through this project are intended to support the continued growth and sustainability of Step By Step while encouraging greater accessibility and inclusion within Arkansas dance communities.



Eniandrius Levine

Doctoral Capstone: Empowering Youth for Early Success

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

Abstract: E.Y.E.S. (Empowering Youth for Early Success): Advancing Early Childhood Development and School Readiness Through an Occupational Therapy Lens is an occupational therapy doctoral capstone project developed to support early childhood educators and families in fostering healthy child development and school readiness through evidence-based, occupation-centered practices. Implemented in partnership with Conway Cradle Care and First Presbyterian Church Summer Camp, the project focused on increasing educator knowledge, enhancing classroom environments, promoting early identification of developmental concerns, and improving children's participation in everyday routines. Program activities included classroom observations, staff education, environmental consultation, family engagement, and the development of sustainable resources such as developmental milestone handouts, classroom toolkits, visual supports, professional learning modules, and a digital resource library. Throughout the capstone experience, classroom observations, teacher interviews, and staff needs assessments identified transitions, emotional regulation, challenging behaviors, developmental milestones, sensory supports, and school readiness as priority areas for professional development and classroom support. These findings guided the creation of evidence-based educational resources tailored to the needs of both partnering sites. Project outcomes included the completion and dissemination of educator and family resource materials, implementation of classroom support strategies, development of an online resource library to promote continued access to materials, and the transfer of all project resources to partnering organizations to support long-term sustainability. Feedback from educators helped refine project materials and demonstrated the practical value of occupational therapy consultation within early childhood settings.



Margaret Matthews

Doctoral Capstone: Treating CVA the Right Way: A Guide to Treating Stroke Patients in Acute Care

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

Abstract: This capstone project addressed the significant need for improved stroke prevention education and rehabilitation resources in the United States. With stroke remaining a leading cause of disability, the project aimed to enhance preparedness among occupational therapy students and practitioners working with clients post-stroke, particularly within the acute care setting. Emphasis was placed on evidence-based practice, mental health, and low-vision needs commonly experienced by this population. To strengthen advanced clinical practice skills, the student completed preparation for the Provisional Certified Brain Injury Specialist (PCBIS) certification, including review of the Essential Brain Injury Guide, completion of its study companion, and development of study materials. Clinical reasoning was further developed through direct observation of occupational therapists treating neurological clients in acute care. Daily reflection, communication with clinicians, and analysis of evaluation and intervention methods informed the creation of educational resources for therapists, students, stroke survivors, and care partners. Evidence-based interventions and acute care treatment strategies were delivered through resource guides, an in-service presentation, and social media outreach via the @nextstepneuro Instagram page, which accumulated 70 followers and over 8,000 views. Community education on stroke signs, symptoms, and prevention was also provided. The in-service delivered at Baptist Health Little Rock received highly positive feedback, demonstrating strong impact on therapist knowledge and fieldwork student preparedness. Overall, this project advanced clinical competency, advocacy, and educational support for stroke rehabilitation in acute care.



Amberlie Ming

Doctoral Capstone: Every Body, Every Mind, Every Soul: An OT-Led Ministry Initiative Supporting Participation of Children with Special Needs in Faith-Based Settings

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

Abstract: This capstone project addressed the need for increased accessibility and inclusivity within faith-based settings. Guided by the Person-Environment-Occupation-Performance model, the project aimed to enhance access to spiritual occupations by developing and implementing an occupational therapy-informed special needs program at Butterfield Church in Van Buren, Arkansas. Through environmental modifications, curriculum adaptation, and comprehensive education of the church body, the project established a sustainable model for inclusive spiritual engagement. Two rooms were remodeled- a sensory friendly classroom and a destimulation space and two years of curriculum were adapted using The Adapted Way. Structured lesson plans were created to support diverse learning needs and styles. In-service training equipped church staff, volunteers, and frontline personnel with strategies for disability inclusion, regulation, and communication. This project fostered an environment of belonging, increased opportunities for spiritual engagement, and provided families with meaningful support. The resulting program model is sustainable, replicable, and designed to promote accessibility, inclusion, and full participation for children with disabilities and their families in faith-based settings.



Kennedy Phillips

Doctoral Capstone: Prompting Positive Interactions and Perspectives for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

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

Abstract: When many people hear the term Human Development Center, they often think negatively or have little understanding of the individuals who live there. These misconceptions directly impact these residential communities, as many overlook the meaningful lives, strengths, and occupational performance of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Prompting Positive Interactions and Perspectives for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities was a 14-week doctoral capstone project that was implemented at the Conway Human Development Center (CHDC) to promote positive perspectives through group occupational therapy intervention sessions. Twenty therapeutic group sessions were implemented throughout this project. Intervention topics included sensory regulation, social skills, adaptive summer/leisure activities, animal therapy, and movement. Individual and group participation outcomes were documented using attendance records, observation checklists, and rating scales to evaluate overall engagement. This project demonstrated increased resident engagement and positive participation throughout all the group sessions. It also provided CHDC with resources such as session plans, intervention materials, and documentation tools to support the continued use of group-structured occupational therapy sessions. While program development and sustainability were a huge part of this project, another part was to challenge misconceptions by highlighting the abilities and meaningful occupations of individuals with IDD. This project emphasized the important role occupational therapy plays in fostering inclusion, participation, and a greater appreciation for the lives of individuals living in residential community care settings.



Kamyia Robinson

Doctoral Capstone: A Balanced Journey to Fall Prevention:
Safeguarding Inpatient Rehab. Patients

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

Abstract: The doctoral capstone, A Balanced Journey to Fall Prevention: Safeguarding Inpatient Rehab Patients, aimed to increase patient knowledge, confidence, and engagement in fall prevention strategies during inpatient rehabilitation. A review of the literature identified falls as a leading cause of injury, hospitalization, and loss of independence among older adults. A needs assessment conducted within an inpatient rehabilitation facility revealed opportunities to improve patient education related to fall risk factors, safe mobility, activities of daily living (ADLs), body mechanics, and medication management. To address these needs, a four-session fall prevention program was developed and implemented at Encompass Rehabilitation. The program included four educational themes: Balance and Strength, ADL and Durable Medical Equipment (DME) Safety, Safe Body Mechanics, and Medication Management. Each session incorporated interactive learning activities designed to promote participation and practical application of fall prevention strategies. Activities included balloon boxing for balance awareness, an ADL scavenger hunt and relay race to promote performance of daily activities and use of adaptive equipment, a multi-position ball mobility circuit to practice safe body mechanics, and medication-management sorting tasks to reinforce cognitive organizational skills related to medication safety. Educational handouts accompanied each session to support learning carryover and encourage safe behaviors following discharge. Pre- and post-program surveys were administered to evaluate changes in patient knowledge, confidence, and perceived safety.



Bailey Ryan

Doctoral Capstone: Beyond the Pain: CRPS Support Community

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

Abstract: Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS) is a chronic pain condition that can significantly affect physical function, emotional well-being, and participation in meaningful daily activities. Despite its impact, many individuals with CRPS report limited access to reliable education, resources, and support. The purpose of this capstone project was to promote education and advocacy for individuals living with CRPS by developing evidence-based resources that increase awareness, improve understanding of the condition, and support self-management. A comprehensive literature review, healthcare provider interviews, and patient surveys were conducted to identify educational needs and preferred methods of receiving information. Findings indicated that participants preferred accessible, online educational resources over an in-person support group due to barriers such as work schedules, medical appointments, transportation, and fatigue. In response, the Beyond the Pain: CRPS Support Community Facebook page was created to provide evidence-based educational content, occupational therapy interventions, pain management strategies, coping techniques, community resources, and patient advocacy information. The project emphasized increasing awareness of CRPS, empowering individuals to advocate for their healthcare needs, and improving access to trustworthy educational materials. This capstone highlights the role of occupational therapy in health education, chronic pain advocacy, and promoting participation and quality of life through accessible, patient-centered resources.



Lorynn Saxton

Doctoral Capstone: From NICU to Home: Increasing Caregiver Confidence & Competence with Infant Oral Feeding

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

Abstract: This capstone project aimed to increase clinical knowledge and experience in achieving the Certified Lactation Counselor (CLC) certification and develop an online support group for NICU mothers addressing a gap in maternal support and clinical practice. The support group was designed to increase maternal mental health and their confidence and competence in infant oral feeding skills. To achieve this aim, the student utilized needs assessments and interviews of caregivers and healthcare professionals of NICU infants, clinical experiences in Little Rock and Jonesboro, Arkansas, listening to and reflecting on NICU related podcasts for program development and implementation, and a literature review focusing on key themes of: NICU infants, caregiver mental health, occupational therapy in the NICU setting, cleft lip/palate, congenital heart defects, and neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS)/neonatal opioid withdrawal syndrome (NOWS). The student then applied for and completed the CLC course created and hosted by the Healthy Children Project, Inc. Center for Breastfeeding. Once completed, the student then studied for and completed the CLC exam created by the Academy of Lactation Policy and Practice (ALPP). Using all of the knowledge and clinical experience learned, the student prepared resources and educational materials organizing the online support group. This project supports the field of occupational therapy by providing and addressing mental health services through maternal support, clearing a path for occupational therapy to “sit at the table” in perinatal and NICU care, and expanding our scope of practice in lactation counseling, co-occupations of motherhood and feeding, and the maternal role transition.



Miah Schultz

Doctoral Capstone: Opening Doors to the Outdoors: Re-engaging with Outdoor Recreation Following Traumatic Brain Injury and Spinal Cord Injury

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

Abstract: This doctoral capstone project, “Opening Doors to the Outdoors: Re-engaging with Outdoor Recreation Following Traumatic Brain Injury and/or Spinal Cord Injury,” examined the role of outdoor recreation as a meaningful occupation for individuals with traumatic brain injury (TBI) and/or spinal cord injury (SCI). The project addressed the gap between rehabilitation and sustained engagement in leisure by exploring the perceived importance, accessibility, and integration of outdoor recreation among individuals with TBI and/or SCI. Through direct clinical and community-based experiences, the student conducted independent research on leisure participation, applied clinical reasoning related to assistive technology and adaptive equipment, and facilitated an outdoor recreation session designed for this population. Additionally, the project included the development and implementation of a spinal disorder–specific staff training at Camp Aldersgate to strengthen community support for adaptive recreation. From a community practice perspective, the project analyzed successful models of adaptive recreation programs and identified strategies to enhance accessibility and promote sustainable leisure initiatives for individuals with disabilities. Clinically, the capstone supported the development of advanced practice competencies in addressing leisure as a meaningful occupation and reinforced the role of occupational therapy in promoting participation.



Jordan Shepherd

Doctoral Capstone: Promoting Mental Health and Inclusion for Neurodivergent First-Year Students: An Educational Toolkit
Advocating for Occupational Therapy Integration in Campus Wellness Services

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

Abstract: Undergraduate School Survival Skills Toolkit is an occupational therapy-informed doctoral capstone project developed to support first-year undergraduate students, particularly neurodiverse students and those with differing abilities, during their transition to higher education. As identified through a comprehensive literature review, stakeholder needs assessment, and collaboration with the University of Central Arkansas Office of Accessibility Resources and Services (OARS), students often experience challenges related to executive functioning, self-advocacy, mental health, occupational balance, sensory regulation, and navigating campus resources. This capstone project focused on the areas of education and advocacy through the development of sustainable, evidence-based resources designed to promote student success, participation, well-being, and inclusion. Throughout the doctoral capstone experience, the student collaborated with faculty, site, and expert mentors while participating in campus outreach activities, professional development opportunities, and stakeholder engagement to better understand the needs of first-year undergraduate students. Guided by the Model of Human Occupation (MOHO) and current evidence-based literature, the student developed the Undergraduate School Survival Skills Toolkit, a comprehensive collection of occupational therapy-informed educational resources designed to promote successful transition to college.

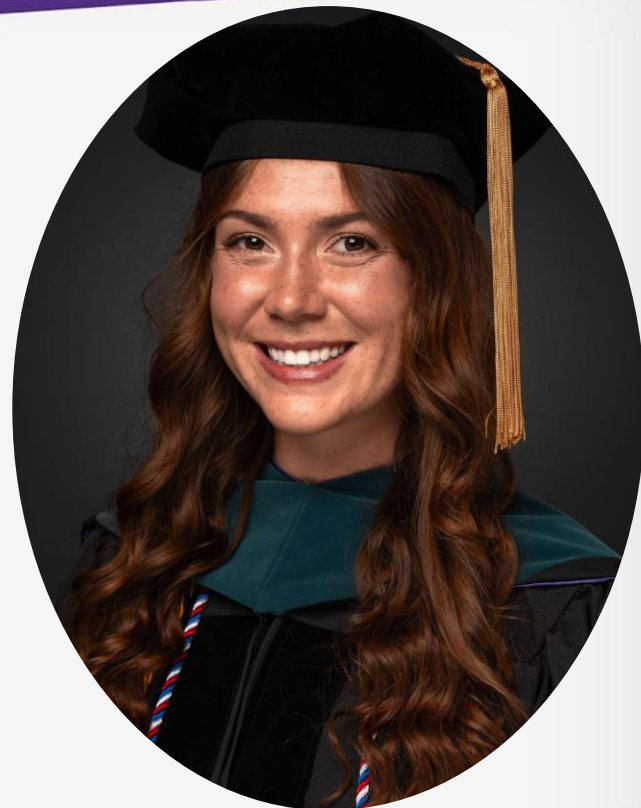


Kelly Smith

Doctoral Capstone: OT Learning and Living: Fast Facts for Practice & Tools to Promote Healthier Work-Life Balance

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

Abstract: Burnout among occupational therapy students (OTS) is a growing concern with symptoms such as exhaustion, emotional detachment, and reduced self-efficacy threatening quality of life (Bullock et al., 2017). Limited literature reflects the unique experiences of OTS and few programs have implemented or sustained wellness initiatives, despite the profession's foundational focus on occupational balance (Brim et al., 2025; Chapman et al., 2025; Smallfield et al., 2022). This doctoral capstone project addressed these gaps by examining burnout prevalence and impact among OTS and developing a dual-purpose initiative designed to strengthen both clinical readiness and personal well-being. A national research study explored burnout levels, symptoms, barriers, and support needs among OTS. Findings revealed widespread burnout, strong associations with reduced occupational balance, and consistently reported experiences across groups which directly informed targeted program interventions implemented in response. An academic notebook was created in collaboration with community practitioners to support clinical preparedness. An eight-week Burnout Prevention Program was hosted, featuring microlessons on time management, habit formation, stress-management, sustainability mindsets, meaningful reflection, and more. Finally, "Joy Labs," interactive leisure-based events promoted social connection and restorative occupation. Program effectiveness was evaluated and results demonstrated improvements across life domains, with participants showing nearly double the gains of non-participants. Feedback highlighted increased awareness, improved balance, strengthened coping strategies, and meaningful community connection. These outcomes demonstrated that this dual-purpose initiative effectively supported resilience, occupational balance, and professional readiness, fulfilling the project's purpose of enhancing both academic competence and personal well-being in OTS.



Skylar Vickers

Doctoral Capstone: Sleep is an Occupation

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

Abstract: Sleep is an Occupation was developed as part of a University of Central Arkansas Occupational Therapy Capstone project to address the growing need for accessible, evidence-based sleep education for families of children with diverse developmental profiles. Throughout the capstone, the student obtained certifications in pediatric sleep consulting and special needs sleep consulting, allowing for the integration of specialized, family-centered strategies into community outreach. A social media platform was used to deliver nine sleep hygiene tips designed for broad community engagement and accessibility. In addition, 25 individualized handouts were created for neurotypical children ages 0–8, and seven diagnosis-specific handouts were developed to support families navigating attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autism spectrum disorder, sensory processing disorder, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, anxiety disorders, and obsessive-compulsive disorder. These resources emphasized sensory-informed routines, environmental modifications, and whole-child regulation strategies. Eight families received one-on-one sleep instruction tailored to their child's unique needs, focusing on responsive methods that honor family values and developmental differences. A community Zoom session provided an open forum for questions related to sleep challenges, allowing families to receive individualized guidance. Through this session, three families were provided customized handouts based on their child's age, along with resources for heavy work, calming activities, and sleep nutrition to support nighttime regulation. Overall, Sleep is an Occupation demonstrated the value of occupational therapy in addressing pediatric sleep through education, sensory-based strategies, and family-centered intervention, highlighting sustainable pathways for future student involvement and community impact.



Ashlyn Walker

Doctoral Capstone: Beyond Body Mechanics: An Educational Workshop to Enhance Safe Patient Handling Competence Among Healthcare Students

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

Abstract: Healthcare workers face high rates of work-related musculoskeletal disorders, with patient handling tasks posing the single greatest risk for chronic pain and career-ending disabilities. Traditional training relies heavily on body mechanics alone, failing to adequately prepare healthcare students for the unpredictable demands of clinical practice. To address this gap, this doctoral capstone project developed, executed, and evaluated "Beyond Body Mechanics," an evidence-based educational curriculum designed to enhance safe patient handling competence and confidence through ergonomics, active learning, and assistive technology. The capstone student completed 12.75 hours of advanced clinical practice and expert mentorship at Baptist Health Medical Center in Conway, Arkansas, observing real-time decision-making and transfer protocols to inform curriculum design. Guided by the Biomechanical Frame of Reference, Ergonomics, and Constructivist Learning Theory, two structured, interactive workshops were implemented, including an interprofessional pilot and a course-integrated session for first-year occupational therapy students, combining lecture modules with hands-on practice using Hoyer lifts, gait belts, and slide boards. Program evaluation utilized pre- and post-assessments to measure quantitative confidence and competence changes, alongside qualitative feedback. Results revealed significant increases in overall student confidence, with notable gains across all individual skill subscales. Objective clinical competence scores improved post-test, with every participant demonstrating increased self-efficacy. Qualitative findings emphasized major gains in operating mechanical lifts. This project validates interactive, simulation-based safe patient handling education in elevating student preparedness and fostering clinical safety.



Sarah Wilson

Doctoral Capstone: The Write Keys: The Effects of Piano Lessons as an Occupation Based Strategy to Promote Braille Writing Efficiency

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

Abstract: “The Write Keys” is a research-based capstone project designed to explore the effect of piano lessons on braille writing efficiency. This hypothesis is based on shared skills required between the two activities such as finger dexterity, bimanual coordination, and pattern memorization. Participants completed the Canadian Occupational Performance Measure (COPM) and the researcher-developed Test of Braille Writing Efficiency before and after 7 weeks of piano lessons. Piano lessons were implemented using occupational therapy-based tactile modifications. Results of the study revealed a positive correlation between piano skills, braille writing efficiency, and perceived performance in daily activities for 3/3 participants. Additionally, the project addressed education for the capstone student and other occupational therapists. Education in this project centered on braille literacy, cultural competency, and resources for the blind. The student completed basic braille courses from Hadley School for the Blind and created a Braille Fact Sheet to share with other occupational therapists. The student increased cultural competency and knowledge of resources for the blind through a variety of learning experiences. Immersive experiences included visiting community resources, listening to blind culture podcasts, and attending social events sponsored by World Services for the Blind or Arkansas School for the Deaf and Blind. A guide including community resources, assistive technology, and etiquette related to the blind community was created to share the knowledge learned through these experiences with other occupational therapists. The capstone project created rich learning experiences centered on client relationships and meaningful activities, thus preparing the student for entry into occupational therapy practice.

