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How Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Impacts Student Recruitment and Admission Practices Within Education: An Examination of the Department of Occupational Therapy at Western New England University

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How Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Impacts Student Recruitment and Admission
Practices Within Education:
An Examination of the Department of Occupational Therapy at Western New England
University

A Doctoral Experiential Capstone Project
Presented to the Faculty of Western New England University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Entry-Level Doctorate
in
Occupational Therapy

by
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July 2022

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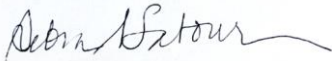
University Doctoral Experiential Capstone Project

By

Jahmel James, OT/s

July 2022

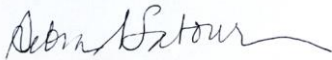
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July 27, 2022
Date

Acknowledgement

Nothing is possible without my family, God, and my village. I thank you all for continuing to support me, even when I didn't believe in myself. Thank you for uplifting me when I didn't think I could accomplish this task. To everyone who held me up during this process, I couldn't thank you more. To my faculty mentor, Dr. Latour, thank you for keeping me grounded. To Frank Howard Buntin, Sr., thank you for being a pioneer in the social injustice movement. Frank served as the President of the Springfield Branch of the NAACP. In many ways, Frank's resilience to fight for change within education inspired me on my own journey to carry out this project. Lastly, I want to thank my grandmother, Gloria for reminding me that the world is larger outside these project walls.

Abstract

According to Salvant, the field of occupational therapy is a historically white-female dominant profession (Salvant et al., 2021). Hence, diverse practitioners entering the field often face challenges regarding their race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexuality, and other obstacles. Due to the visibility of national and global issues pertaining to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, institutions have recognized the need to address and mitigate said concerns that do not foster a culture of unity within their respective communities. The Department of Occupational Therapy at Western New England University is committed to providing a learning environment where all students, faculty, and staff have an equal opportunity to thrive and succeed. Thus, this project seeks to understand the perceptions of students within the WNE Doctor of Occupational Therapy (OTD) program due to the norms and practices imposed by the profession's governing bodies. By examining the current trends for recruiting, admitting, and

retaining diverse candidates into the OTD program at Western New England University, this study aimed to explore the doctoral program's initiatives to support a diverse, equitable, and inclusive learning environment for faculty, staff, and its students; and examined the ways in which the doctoral program addresses traditionally underrepresented student concerns to improve the learning environment for all. The results of this project show there are opportunities to improve the current climate to give voice, value, and vision to this target population.

Key Words: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging, Justice, Discrimination, Students of Color, Underrepresented

Doctoral Experiential Overview

The Doctorial Experiential (DEx) Capstone is the culmination of everything the student has learned throughout their occupational therapy education, including applying the knowledge and skills gained during their OTD academic courses and their Level I and II fieldwork experiences (Doctoral experiential: ACOTE standards and description). The Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE) establishes the guidelines for entry-level OTD programs. According to the ACOTE the goal of the doctoral experiential component is to develop occupational therapists with advanced skills (those that are beyond a generalist level) (ACOTE, 2018). The 14-week Capstone project consists of two critical but separate components that illustrates a topic, community experiential element, and scholarly component. Throughout the 14-weeks, the student creates a comprehensive and balanced final product that provides support to a targeted population.

This DEx project focused on how diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB) impact student recruitment and admission practices within education in the occupational therapy profession. The student researcher's scholarly component examined the current trends for

recruiting, admitting, and retaining diverse candidates into the Doctor of Occupational Therapy program at Western New England University (WNE). The community experiential component exposed the occupational therapy profession to underrepresented students in the Springfield, Massachusetts area. Once approved by Western New England University Institutional Review Board (IRB), the student researcher administered an online survey to alumni, faculty/staff, and current students to develop a deeper understanding of the departmental climate, emphasizing diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging. The goals of this study are to explore the doctoral program's initiatives to support a diverse, equitable, and inclusive learning environment for faculty, staff, and its students; and examined the ways in which the doctoral program addresses traditionally underrepresented student concerns to improve the learning environment for all. In conjunction with Chicopee Public Schools and site consultant, Peta-Gaye Porter, Director of Healthcare Workforce Initiatives at MassHire Hampden County Workforce Board, the student researcher provided an in-depth presentation on the career path to becoming occupational therapists to students at Chicopee High School, Bellamy Middle School, and Dupont Memorial Middle School. The student researcher completed 16 class presentations and set up a presentation booth during one of the lunch periods at Chicopee High school. Additionally, in collaborating with the College of Pharmacy and Health Science Student Affairs at WNE, the researcher used promotional materials including flyers and participated in WNE's community events to help guide the presentation and expose traditionally underrepresented students to the occupational therapy profession.

Definitions

- A. Diversity** – “Diversity refers to all aspects of human difference, social identities, and social group difference, social identities, and social group differences, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, creed, color, sex, gender, identity, sexual identity, socioeconomic status, language, culture, national origin religion/ spirituality, age, (dis)ability, and military/veteran status, political perspective and associational preferences (*DEI definitions. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion - The University of Iowa*).”
- B. Equity** – “Equity refers to fair and just practices and policies that ensure all campus community members can thrive. Equity is different than equality in that equality implies treating everyone as if their experiences are exactly the same. Being equitable means acknowledging and addressing structural inequalities – historic and current – that advantage some and disadvantage others. Equal treatment results in equity only if everyone starts with equal access to opportunities (*DEI definitions. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion - The University of Iowa*).”
- C. Inclusion** – “Inclusion refers to campus community where all members are and feel respected, have a sense of belonging, and are able to participate and achieve to their potential. While diversity is essential, it is not sufficient. An institution can be both diverse and non-inclusive at the same time, thus a sustained practice of creating inclusive environments is necessary for success (*DEI definitions. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion - The University of Iowa*).”
- D. Belonging** – “The feeling of security and support when there is a sense of acceptance, inclusion, and identity for a member of a certain group. It is when an individual can bring their authentic self to work (Sense of Belonging | Cornell University Diversity and Inclusion).”

E. Justice – “Dismantling barriers to resources and opportunities in society so that all individuals & communities can live a full & dignified life. These barriers are essentially the “isms” in society: racism, classism, sexism, etc. (Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion - Public Lands Alliance).”

F. People of Color – A person of color is defined as “a person who is of a race other than white or who is of mixed race (Merriam-Webster, 2022).”

Background

There have been vast changes in the level of access to college for minority students since the 1960s, with very encouraging trends over much of this period (Orfield & Whitley, 2001). However, the persistent disparities in the United States graduate-level education have led scholars, policymakers, and research institutes to demand that colleges and universities increase their efforts to promote a greater diverse pool of prospective graduate students and to enroll more heterogeneous graduate student populations in their campuses. Yet amid an increasingly diverse society, the dearth of underrepresented minority students (i.e., Blacks, Hispanic/Latinx, and Native Americans) in a post-baccalaureate study is still one of the most pressing concerns for higher education scholars and practitioners (Griffin, Muñoz, & Espinosa, 2012).

Historically known as a predominately white, middle-class, female-dominated profession, the field of occupational therapy does not always promote diversity through student recruitment and/or hiring practices or know how to support traditionally underrepresented occupational therapists upon entering the workforce (Salvant et al., 2021). Being that diversity, inclusion, and equity are hot-button topics that have been circulating in the media due to the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing racial tensions throughout the United States, many employers and learning institutions have realized that they have been culpable in maintaining systems of

oppression for people of color and other traditionally marginalized groups. Occupational therapy programs at all levels, serve as the foundation for improving diversity in this profession and ultimately transforming the healthcare workforce. Throughout this paper, minorities will consist of males, Black Americans, the Latinx community, and Indigenous persons or those considered to be Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC). This research thus seeks to understand what methods Western New England University's Occupational Therapy Doctoral program has in place to support minority students and faculty.

How Diversity Impacts the Learning Environment

There is a large and growing body of research confirming that diversity improves learning and provides a net good for society (Gay, 2013). For starters, colleges and universities are substantially more diverse than they were in previous generations. In 1976, the year *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* was argued, only 10% of American college students were Black, 4% were Latinx, and 2% were Asian/Pacific Islander while a full 82% were White (Aud et al., 2010). By 2016, 14% of college students were Black, 19% were Latinx, 6% were Asian/Pacific Islander, and 56% were white, more closely matching the overall diversity of the U.S. population (Nat'l Center for Education Research, 2019). According to Taff, and Blash, roughly 80% of occupational therapists identify White non-Hispanic, while 5% are African American, and 4% are Hispanic (Taff & Blash, 2017). Similarly, occupational therapy education disparities mirror these statistics as about 77% of doctoral students identify as White, and roughly 91% identify as non-Hispanic. Additionally, approximately 78% of students enrolled in occupational therapy master's degree programs identify as White, and 90% identify as non-Hispanic (Brown et al., 2021). Yet, this data only highlights a portion of the systemic issues

around the lack of racial diversity among current occupational therapy students and professionals.

Although these statistics emphasize the lack of racial diversity amongst this population, these numbers should ideally reflect the true racial-ethnic makeup of the United States' population. However, because of the ongoing trends related to recruiting racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse candidates, the field of occupational therapy continues to remain the same, predominantly white.

How Race, Ethnicity, and Gender Affect Work Performance

Several studies have shown that the field of occupational therapy severely lacks gender and racial diversity among skilled workers, and “very little attention is paid to therapists and entry-level students from socially and culturally marginalized groups (Beagan & Chacala, p. 145, 2011).” Unamplified voices and unshared lived experiences may create misperceptions and inaccurate assumptions of others who are not of similar racial, social, or cultural backgrounds. Moreover, given the current demographic structure of this field, it becomes difficult for traditionally marginalized groups to navigate these spaces due to the ways in which institutions prioritize efforts for recruiting and retaining diverse talent. Beagan and Chacala also assert that “research shows there is almost no information about social class diversity within occupational therapy (Beagan & Chacala, p. 145, 2011). The latter suggests recruiting diverse students as well as hiring diverse occupational therapists in the workforce is almost nonexistent, which further aids in maintaining the status quo for this white female-dominant profession. If there are few minorities within occupational therapy, how then can employers (1) understand and provide care for diverse populations; and (2) provide support for diverse social, cultural, and racial groups in the workforce?

Regarding the daily stressors of this profession, race plays a key role in health outcomes for minorities in occupational therapy. “Racial and gender discrimination are risk factors for adverse mental health outcomes in the general population; however, the effects of discrimination on the mental health of healthcare workers need to be further explored, especially concerning competing stressors” (Hennein et al., p.1, 2021). One of the key tenets of this field is diversity, which does not solely encompass race. Thus, it is vital to understand how intersectionality affects one’s ability to not only thrive but survive while working in this profession. Due to the stigma around mental health in minority communities, the prevalence of seeking help or disclosing that one needs help is uncommon. Accordingly, these individuals are expected to perform at an exemplary level, while working with people who either do not share similar lived experiences or fully understand them, all while trying to manage one’s mental health. Some stressors may include homelife, racial and gender discrimination, anxiety, and depression, which have led to “impaired motor behavior, changes in cognitive functioning, and physiological change” (Norman & Tang, p. 5, 2016). Employers within the field of occupational therapy should therefore consider how to better serve minority employees to ensure the work culture recognizes, embraces, and celebrates the differences amongst everyone.

Diverse Hiring Practices

Diverse hiring practices promote inclusivity and diversity within occupational therapy institutions. Between 2013 and 2014 white faculty had seven times the representation of either Black or Hispanic staff at institutions of higher education. (U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2016). Scholars have determined that high attrition rates among diverse faculty are due to a lack of mentoring, a sense of isolation, and racist and hostile atmospheres on college campuses (Quezada & Louque, 2004). Students report a greater sense of belonging when their identities are represented by the

curriculum and faculty (U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2016). The University of Texas at Austin has implemented a three-pronged approach to recruit, train, and retain diverse staff, faculty, and leadership and address previously high turnover rates of diverse hires (U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2016). Such multifaceted approaches foster an inclusive environment in which diverse faculty can benefit institutions and student populations. Research shows that retention of diverse faculty can be enhanced through formal and informal mentoring, diversity activities, clear policies and procedures, and assistance and support, such as aid with housing, campus resources, and community services (Quedaza & Louque, 2004).

Males in Occupational Therapy

Occupational therapists are expected to serve diverse populations, and to AOTA's Centennial Vision, "we envision that occupational therapy is a powerful, widely recognized, science-driven, and evidence-based profession with a globally connected and diverse workforce meeting society's occupational needs" (AOTA, p. 614, 2007). However, a large discrepancy still exists between male and female occupational therapists. According to the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA), approximately 92% of U.S. therapists identified as women (AOTA, 2012). Although recruitment efforts have been made, there are very few advancements in the hiring and retention of males throughout the occupational therapy profession.

The Need for Diverse Student Recruitment

Although recruitment of a diverse occupational therapy workforce to meet the needs of a multicultural society is essential to this profession, race and ethnicity are only one component of this misrepresentation in the occupational therapy field. The underrepresented student community faces numerous barriers that hinder acceptance and success within these programs,

including lack of diversity in faculty and students, academic preparation before entering the program, and financial concerns. All these variables directly impact the retention of minorities into these programs.

Recruitment and retention efforts that have been deemed successful are “enrichment programs for preprofessional students, bridge programs, social support groups, mentorship programs, tutoring, academic workshops, financial support, and remediation programs to promote an inclusive educational environment (Brown et al., 2021). While recruitment and retention are critical components of the diverse landscape, findings indicate that more work is needed to optimize the experiences of minority residents. Focusing on obtaining higher numbers of minorities without addressing the challenges that minorities encounter in the workplace will likely result in continued disparities.

Current American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) Policies on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB)

To become a licensed occupational therapist, one must graduate with a bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution of higher education. Once admitted into an accredited doctoral or master level program, one must complete all required coursework and fieldwork. Postgraduates will be eligible to apply for the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy (NBCOT) upon graduation, and obtain state licensing, which is needed to practice. Unlike many other healthcare occupations, occupational therapy is one of the few professions that assist people across the lifespan doing what they want and need through a therapeutic approach for daily activities (AOTA, 2016). Two of the fundamental elements of this profession have become diversity and inclusion, as it reflects the ability to sustain and build growth. The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) Centennial Vision states, “Occupational therapy

maximizes health, well-being, and quality of life for all people, populations, and communities through effective solutions that facilitate participation in everyday living” (AOTA, 2016). However, these discussions of diversity are not new to OT, as the scope of practice has an outreach to all populations.

These concerns originate with the current vision and policies of the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE), as the standards only mention diversity and cultural differences as terms expected students should be aware of entering the field. There have been several revisions to these documents to incorporate diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging terms. However, after a careful analysis of these documents, there appears to be no clear definition of what diversity and cultural differences means, and said revisions are simply not enough.

The Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE) has implemented requirements for accredited programs to “describe the efforts of the program to recruit a diverse student population” (CAPTE, 2022). To mitigate further confusion, the ACOTE should thus require occupational therapy programs to document efforts of recruitment practices for traditionally underrepresented students. The latter suggests that there is still a need to promote diversity throughout OT education.

Western New England as a Case Study

Although Western New England University’s (WNE) occupational therapy program is relatively new compared to neighboring programs, as they gained its accreditation in December 2019, there has always been a vision of creating a culture of inclusivity. In fact, WNE’s occupational therapy mission is to remain

“committed to developing and sustaining a professional education program that will contribute to the global healthcare workforce of the future. By supporting a professional faculty who combine practice expertise, teaching excellence, and a commitment to scholarship, the academic division is positioned to deliver an innovative entry-level doctoral program that prepares its graduates to be transformative agents of change in the healthcare marketplace of today and tomorrow” (Mission & Philosophy, 2022).

The establishment of organizations such as the Coalition of Occupational Therapy Advocates for Diversity (COTAD) has helped combat the systemic trends within the program and subsequently the profession. Similarly, the Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (J.E.D.I) initiative at Western New England University was created to “focus on the advancement of social justice, diversity and scholarship to create a campus culture that supports all members of the community with a strong sense of belonging and as one of the pillars of the New Traditional University” (Justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion, 2022). Moreover, other groups such as the Black Student Union, Feminists Unite, International Club, and Gender and Sexuality Alliance were established to support traditionally marginalized groups at WNE. Nevertheless, this project explores the ways in which recruitment and admission of diverse students in a doctoral occupational therapy program benefits the profession based on experiences and intersectionality of societal characteristics, which include, but are not limited to race, gender, and socioeconomic status. Western New England University’s Department of Occupational Therapy was thus selected as a case study to explore ways the department has been successful at creating a culture that exemplifies diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging; and to determine whether students of color and other traditionally underrepresented students shared similar experiences.

Methodology

General Overview

The researcher of this study analyzed data from current students, faculty, staff, and alumni in Western New England University's (WNE) Department of Occupational Therapy to evaluate the effectiveness of the department's efforts in creating a diverse, equitable, and inclusive learning/working environments for all. The goals of the study were to explore the doctoral program's initiatives to support a diverse, equitable, and inclusive learning environment for faculty, staff, and its students; and examined the ways in which the doctoral program addresses traditionally underrepresented student concerns to improve the learning environment for all.

The questions on the survey were developed based on the Western New England University's Department of Occupational Therapy's current cultural climate and themes developed from student researcher's literature review. The survey asked respondents about experiences related to their own identity and sense of belonging, which provided insight on the current diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging practices amongst the faculty and student body in the occupational therapy department.

Study Population

The study population consisted of current students, faculty, staff, and alumni in the Department of Occupational Therapy at Western New England University. The researcher was given a directory from the Department of Occupational Therapy that included contact information such as names and email addresses. The departmental directory list contained information for approximately 91 students enrolled in WNE's Department of Occupational Therapy. One email was sent to each individual on the list, provided that the necessary contact

information was given. To avoid duplicate responses, the researcher limited the responses to one submission per each individual who received the online survey link.

The Internet Survey

For the sake of anonymity, this survey was conducted via the internet using Google Forms. This platform was used to develop, distribute, and collect data for this study. The survey consisted of three sections: Justice, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging. Each of the categories tackle a different component of DEIB as it relates to the WNE climate. Before agreeing to take the survey, participants read and agreed to the consent form, which included the purpose of the study and statement of confidentiality.

Question Categories

Another addition to the survey were several open-ended questions that asked about subjective experiences while in the program. Below are two examples of the questions asked:

- “In what ways do you believe the WNE OTD’s program values justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion, as well as a sense of belonging for students?”
- “What changes would you like to see incorporated by the Department to increase diversity efforts as it relates to recruiting, admitting, and retaining underrepresented students, faculty, and staff?”

These responses added to the picture of cultural norms and practices within the Department of Occupational Therapy by giving respondents an opportunity to voice opinions on issues that were asked in the survey and needed further elaboration. These comments also added qualitative substance to the quantitative data, helping to clarify connections between issues of DEIB practices within this department.

Survey Distribution

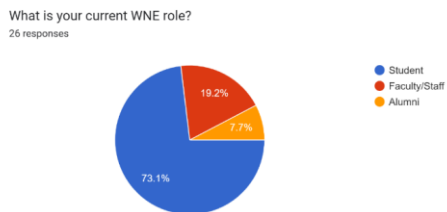
The survey was distributed from the researcher's Western New England University account, permitting him to send reminder emails to all respondents who had not submitted the survey. The survey was administered on June 01, 2022, and sent to current students, faculty, staff, and alumni in the Department of Occupational Therapy via email. Three follow-up reminders were sent to the community and closed on 06/22/2022.

Response Rate

Out of the 100 current students, faculty, staff, and alumni surveyed, 26 responded.

I. Results

The results provide a snapshot of the need for a more diverse community at WNE OTD program. Moreover, the results generated by this study will help the Department of Occupational Therapy at Western New England University develop and improve programs that aim to eliminate bias and discrimination in the recruitment and admission and/or hiring of their students, faculty, and staff and create a culture of belongingness.



Of the 26 respondents 19 are students, 5 are Faculty, and 2 are Alumni.

WNE role	Racial Identity				
	Asian or Asian American	Black or African American	Hispanic or Latino	White or Caucasian	Grand Total
Alumni	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	100.00%
Faculty/Staff	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	100.00%
Student	15.79%	5.26%	5.26%	73.68%	100.00%
Grand Total	11.54%	3.85%	3.85%	80.77%	100.00%

Based on participants' role and racial identity, 3 respondents identified as Asian or Asian American, 1 respondent identified as Black or African American, 1 identified as Hispanic or Latino, and 14 respondents identified as White or Caucasian. Respondents who indicated they were faculty/staff and alumni all identified as White or Caucasian.

WNE OTD role	WNE OTD community values JEDIB				Grand Total
	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree	
Alumni	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Faculty/Staff	40.00%	0.00%	20.00%	40.00%	100.00%
Student	57.89%	21.05%	10.53%	10.53%	100.00%
Grand Total	57.69%	15.38%	11.54%	15.38%	100.00%

Based on the participants' role and perceived value of Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and belonging at WNE OTD program, 2 students strongly agree, 11 agree, 4 disagree. For faculty/staff, 1 respondent strongly agree, agree, and replied neutral to this question. One hundred percent of Alumni surveyed agreed.

WNE ROLES	Belonging in WNEOTD			Grand Total
	Always	Sometimes	Usually	
Alumni	0.00%	50.00%	50.00%	100.00%
Faculty/Staff	40.00%	0.00%	60.00%	100.00%
Student	26.32%	21.05%	52.63%	100.00%
Grand Total	26.92%	19.23%	53.85%	100.00%

Based on WNE roles and respondents' feeling a sense of belonging at WNE OTD program of the 26 participants, 5 students feel this way always, 4 feel this way sometimes, and

10 usually feel like they belong. For faculty/staff members, 2 indicated they always feel a sense of being, while 3 indicated usually do. One alum responded that they sometimes feel a sense of belonging, and one indicated they usually feel a sense of belonging.

WNE role	Diverse Student Population					Grand Total
	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly agree	Strongly Disagree	
Alumni	0.00%	50.00%	50.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Faculty/Staff	20.00%	20.00%	20.00%	20.00%	20.00%	100.00%
Student	26.32%	47.37%	26.32%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Grand Total	23.08%	42.31%	26.92%	3.85%	3.85%	100.00%

Based on WNE role and feeling of WNE OTD program reflecting a diverse student

population, of the 26 respondents, 5 students agreed and 9 disagreed. One of alumni disagreed and one responded neutral.

WNE roles	Diverse faculty				
	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly disagree	Grand Total
Alumni	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Faculty/Staff	40.00%	20.00%	20.00%	20.00%	100.00%
Student	21.05%	36.84%	21.05%	21.05%	100.00%
Grand Total	23.08%	38.46%	19.23%	19.23%	100.00%

Based on WNE role and feeling of WNE OTD program reflecting a diverse faculty and

staff of the 26 respondents 4 students agreed, 7 disagreed, 4 feel neutral, and 2 strongly disagreed. Two faculty and staff members agreed, while the other three faculty/staff members strongly disagreed, disagreed, and feel neutral, respectively. The 2 alumni disagreed.

Racial identity	Belonging			Grand Total
	Always	Sometimes	Usually	
Asian or Asian American	66.67%	33.33%	0.00%	100.00%
Black or African American	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	100.00%
Hispanic or Latino	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	100.00%
White or Caucasian	23.81%	19.05%	57.14%	100.00%
Grand Total	26.92%	19.23%	53.85%	100.00%

Based on racial identity and a sense of belonging, 2 respondents who identified as Asian or Asian American always feel this way, while 1 respondent sometimes feel this way. The 1 participant that identified as Black or African American usually feels a sense of belonging. For the participants that identified as White or Caucasian, 5 respondents feel this was always, 4 sometimes do, and 12 usually do. The 1 participant that identified as Hispanic or Latino usually feels a sense of belonging.

Racial identity	Victim of discriminatory practice at WNE OTD			Grand Total
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	
Asian or Asian American	66.67%	0.00%	33.33%	100.00%
Black or African American	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Hispanic or Latino	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
White or Caucasian	76.19%	14.29%	9.52%	100.00%
Grand Total	73.08%	15.38%	11.54%	100.00%

Based on racial identity and experiences of discriminatory practices in Western New England University's Occupational Therapy Doctoral program, of the 26 respondents, 2 who identified as Asian or Asian American never experienced this, while 1 said they sometimes have. The 1 participant that identified as Black or African American rarely encountered these experiences. While 16 White or Caucasians respondents have never been a victim of discriminatory practices, 3 indicated they rarely have, and 2 said they sometimes have. The 1 participant that identified as Hispanic or Latino has never encountered these experiences in WNE's OTD.

Racial identity	Change who I am to fit in				Grand Total
	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree	
Asian or Asian American	66.67%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
Black or African American	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%

Hispanic or Latino	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%
White or Caucasian	9.52%	80.95%	4.76%	4.76%	100.00%
Grand Total	23.08%	69.23%	3.85%	3.85%	100.00%

Based on racial identity and changing who you are to fit into the WNE OTD program, 2 respondents that identified as Asian or American agreed, while 1 disagreed. All the participants that identified as Black or African American agreed. For participants that identified as White or Caucasian, 2 agreed; 17 disagreed, and 1 felt neutral. The 1 participant that identified as Hispanic or Latino also agreed.

Discussion

Despite the tremendous growth within the occupational therapy profession over the years, there is a drastic need for this field to identify diversity and inclusion as notions that have meaningful implications for the sustainability and prominence of the profession (Taff & Blash, 2017). This is not to say that diversity and inclusion are not heavily embedded into this profession. However, these terms are more often used in relation to ethics with an emphasis on client relations, and rarely applied in the day to day working environment. The diversity needed for OT to thrive must therefore derive from the institutions in which these young professionals are being molded by improving student recruitment efforts.

The participants in this study varied in age, race, socio-political views, and current role within the Department of Occupational Therapy at Western New England University. While these are key factors to consider when examining diverse populations in educational and workplace settings, there are other components worth exploring to get a richer understanding of the current climate and culture with this program.

When thinking about where institutions often recruit its potential students, most often, there are student fairs and other initiatives to gauge prospects. Because only two out of five OTD

Admissions Committee members participated in this study, the results do not provide an in-depth analysis of the typical recruiting efforts. However, the responses do suggest various concerns around where recruitment occurs (such as metropolitan, suburban, and rural communities) and systemic trends (like maintaining the status quo to sustain a homogenous profession) within occupational therapy. The results also indicated that more efforts are needed to retain and recruit underrepresented students. As one respondent noted, “Many of my cohort members come from very similar demographics and backgrounds, and, during the first semester of our program, we lost quite a few POC students.” It is important to understand that having a similar type of student does not help support OT’s vision to increase diversity amongst professionals, and it also does not aid in the classroom setting. So, how should institutions address this discrepancy moving forward? The answer is not as straightforward as one may think, and it will require diligence at the institutional level. Studies such as this one, provide an opportunity to shed light on systemic issues that students face, but action is also required.

Nevertheless, although the sample size of this specific population, i.e., the Admissions Committee, was relatively small, it is still vital that OT education programs utilize best efforts to ensure that students from all backgrounds have equal access to obtaining professional degrees, which starts at the recruiting stage. Most participants in this study expressed the need for recruitment practices that promote a more diverse community among students and staff because institutions mold students for this profession and faculty and staff should be expected to prepare students for a world outside the classroom. Similarly, all 26 participants reported being U.S citizens, which indicates there is a recruitment gap and diversity amongst international students and faculty is severely lacking. According to Taff, and Blash’s study, they highlight the AOTA Faculty Workforce 2010 Survey that indicates faculty ethnicity (OTD, MSOT, and OTA) was

89% White, 3% African American, and 2% Hispanic (Taff & Blash, 2017). Hence, there is an opportunity to seek qualified faculty hires and budding professionals. Moreover, one respondent stated, “there is a need for more recruitment and engagement in the LOCAL communities.” This assertion seems to address the lack of efforts to engage the Springfield community, which has a high Hispanic/Latinx and Black community (Massachusetts School and District Profiles, 2022). If the department aims to increase the overall visibility of this program, it should start by doing so within the community, and expanding its outreach to other traditionally marginalized communities. Doing so, could lead to a more diverse applicant pool, and help the current trajectory of OT as it relates to gender, class, and race.

Racial identity was another element examined in this study. Of the 26 participants, 21 participants did not perceive themselves to be a person of color; 21 identified as white; while the other 5 identified as Black or African American, Hispanic or Latinx, Asian or Asian American. Within that data, all five staff and faculty members, which include those on the OTD committee and faculty, racially identified as White, non-Hispanic, and 19 identified as white. As mentioned previously, the AOTA’s 2010 Survey on Faculty Workforce provides a general breakdown of racial diversity, suggesting occupational therapists racially identify as white (Taff & Blash, 2017). Accordingly, these statistics provide insight on the current racial inequities within the field of OT, which further supports the notion that his profession is predominantly white.

When analyzing age, most participants reported being below the age of 31 years of age, with 10 participants indicating they were between ages 19 and 25 and 12 between the ages of 26 and 30 years.

Another key finding in this study is that respondents assert that diversity should be celebrated as an opportunity to absorb the differences among people instead of being

exclusionary and pointing out said differences. Diversity in this study was defined as “the condition of having or being composed of differing elements: variety especially the inclusion of people of different races, cultures, etc. in a group or organization (Merriam-Webster, 2022). Of those surveyed, only 2 participants disagreed with this definition. Because individuals understand diversity to mean a multitude of epithets, it is likely that the respondents’ comprehension of this word is particular to their lived experiences. Sometimes lived experiences are overlooked in educational settings because the emphasis is on pedagogy rather, which unfortunately fails to see the person first. Hence, people are likely to thrive when they feel comfortable, happy, and have a sense of belonging. Therefore, belonging is essential in any learning and/or working environment so that the members of the community feel valued, seen, and supported. The latter sentiment was prevalent throughout this study, and findings suggest that belonging is needed on a systemic level.

Of the questions asked, the most pertinent information obtained from this research relates to individual belonging and justice at the institutional level. Seven of respondents always feel a sense of belonging, while 14 respondents usually feel sense of belonging in the WNE OTD community. However, when the participants were asked about the feeling of changing who they are to fit in with the majority, 18 disagreed, while 6 agreed. The notion that individuals feel the need to assimilate or conform to fit in speaks the inability to fully be appreciated or welcomed for who they truly are. There is a history of assimilation within the United States education system, which strips minorities of their identities and/or forces them to mold to a certain standard. This finding is important to note because it suggests that even if a community is welcoming, there is this sense of needing to change to fit in with the majority, which is traditionally white and middle-class.

When looking at different forms of injustices, 9 of respondents experienced some form of discrimination, racism, or bias while at WNE, including sexism, racism, disability discrimination, ableism, ethnic origin discrimination, and ageism. One respondent indicated that they had experienced microaggressions and forms of tokenism during their time in the OTD program. While instances of injustice are essential when analyzing the overall climate structure in any institution, what is more important is whether individuals feel comfortable disclosing these experiences to faculty and staff. In this study, only 2 of respondents revealed that they did not feel comfortable expressing their concerns to departmental faculty, and a huge component of feeling supported is having a sense that both faculty and staff are fully equipped to assist and handle any issue, especially as it pertains to traditionally underrepresented students. Findings show only 8 of the respondents agreed with a sense of preparedness from faculty and staff on handling issues of discrimination, while 5 disagreed. Exactly 13 respondents were unsure if faculty was prepared to navigate these conversations. This could be attributed to the lack of participants that identified as an underrepresented students in this survey, or it could be due to the perception of the OTD faculty as not being diverse. Thus, it is essential that routine training is provided to faculty members, so they are adequately prepared for situations when students disclose instances of discrimination they have faced within the community.

Justice is prevalent in all questions asked, as it helps gauge and understand the issues related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (JDEIB) practices in the OTD department. Acknowledging the flaws within the system will only bring effective changes to help support the field in its entirety. As mentioned previously, it is crucial for faculty and staff to be equipped with handling issues related to students from diverse backgrounds, as approximately half of the

respondents unsure if faculty members possess the necessary tools to manage these seemingly more complex concerns. Below is comment from a respondent mirroring the latter sentiment.

“I understand the balancing act; we are OTD students...this needs to be a priority, but I also think that utilizing a little bit of OT, maybe analyzing expectations and student roles, and the PEOP model can help highlight how different expectations can affect students in vastly different ways and what might be an expectation and a minor inconvenience for a faculty member can be a major obstacle for a student especially given different SES, backgrounds, and experiences.”

The Person, Environment, Occupation, and Performance (PEOP) model is defined as, a model that highlights occupational performance as its molded by the interactions among person, environment, and occupations (Cole & Tufano, 2008). In this study, the PEOP model highlights the complexity of person-occupation-environment as it relates to a client-centered approach when evaluating the student holistically. Thus, the PEOP model is applicable to this study because it recognizes factors that may impact students' ability to performance given environmental characteristics. Accordingly, this model can be adopted within the context of educational settings when offering support to students.

Moving forward, most respondents want there to be an emphasis on empathic teaching and trauma-informed strategies, and well as have mandatory attendance at COTAD events for both students and faculty. Respondents assert that “COTAD provides an opportunity for students to learn about diversity,” and “[the] group has implemented several useful programs for the Occupational Therapy Doctoral (OTD) program focusing on justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. Hence, the consensus among the 17 participants that provided explanations around ways to address concerns within the OTD community is that the Coalition of Occupational

Therapy Advocates for Diversity (COTAD) Chapter at Western New England University is highly valued based on the opportunities provided to students to discuss diversity and inclusion.

The results of this study speak to individual experiences, which are often overlooked in educational settings; provide an in-depth analysis on the current practices within the Department of Occupational Therapy at Western New England University; and highlight the factors that make the department welcoming. This study also reveals there is a great need to promote the field of occupational therapy to minorities because the opportunity is there, but the efforts, however, may not reflect the former. Lastly, the findings show there is always room for improvement.

Limitations

One of the biggest concerns of this study was the sample size. Because only 26 out of the 100 individuals recruited for this study participated, provides a small baseline regarding the current climate in the Department of Occupational Therapy at WNE. Additionally, only two current OTD committee board members out of the five participated in this study, so the inferences and perspectives on current practices and procedures for student recruitment is based on less than half of the committee members. Moreover, the survey should have included a question on gender identity. With more than 80% of occupational therapists being women, this is also a component of diversity that needs to be addressed. Lastly, another limitation would be the types of questions asked. Asking participants about their knowledge of national statistics and understanding of ACOTE Standards can help gauge how informed the community is with the current policies.

Conclusion

As the scope of the occupational therapy practice is predicated on inclusion, empathy, and the ability to hone therapeutic use of self, there is also a sense of urgency in considering the lived experiences and struggles of traditionally underrepresented students. As the recent Black Lives Matter Movement has forced society to take a deeper look at the years of misrepresentation, oppression, and invisibility on a societal level, there is also the need to answer the question, “Am I doing enough?” This question is geared toward the action steps needed to make the changes to increase diversity within the field of occupational therapy. Exposure, recruitment, admission, and retention of traditionally marginalized students are the key components for the occupational therapy field to thrive moving forward. Thus, more needs to be accomplished. Otherwise, conversations on this topic will continue to manifest and take precedence over action in the field of occupational therapy.

In preparation to my DEx Activities

ATA Conference

The researcher earned the opportunity to attend the ATA2022 Annual Conference & Expo in Boston, MA. During the three-day event, the researcher attended presentations and workshops that focused on the practical applications of telehealth including preventative and primary care to behavioral health and other areas of specialty care. The conference aided in the student researchers understanding of telehealth and administering such services to students in the educational setting.

COTAD DEIB Survey

During the fall semester of 2021 semester, the student researcher served as a panelist for a WNE COTAD event focused on systematic racism in healthcare. As a participant, the researcher used their therapeutic use of self in sharing lived experiences in the educational setting. Additionally, a pilot survey was administered in preparation for my upcoming DEx Capstone project. The purpose of administering this study was to explore DEI in the workplace and educational setting.

There were 12 respondents, 11 students, and 1 professor. 8 respondents identified as White, 2 Multiracial or Multiethnic, and 1 Hispanic or Latino and Asian. 5 respondents have experienced discrimination at their learning institution or workplace, including ageism, gender discrimination, and racism. However, 11 of the respondents believe there are procedures or policies to investigate discriminatory practices. The majority feel comfortable with these measures.

The participants were asked about how they wish to be supported in learning institutions and by employers moving forward:

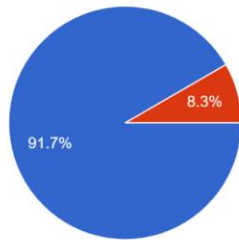
- “With respect and equal opportunities.”
- "More panels about diversity that do not sugarcoat the reality of racism and the disparities that are derived from it;" and
- “Being available to hear concerns, actively listening, responsive behavior that includes fair investigating, communication and education for all.”

These results prompted me to continue investigating methods to improve diversity in the occupational therapy profession.

Results

What is your role?

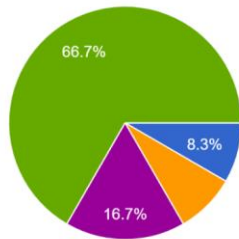
12 responses



- Student
- Professor
- Healthcare Worker in Practice

What is your race or ethnicity

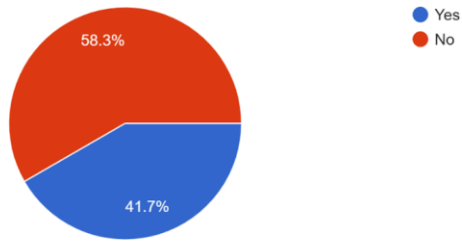
12 responses



- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Middle Eastern or North African
- Multiracial or Multiethnic
- Native American or Alaska Native
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- White
- Another race or ethnicity, please describe below

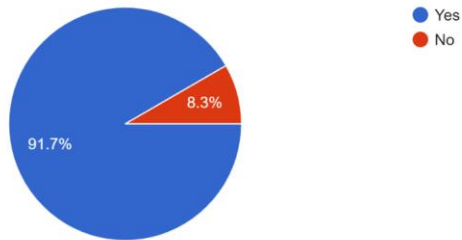
Have you ever experienced any form of discrimination or racism at your learning institution or workplace?

12 responses



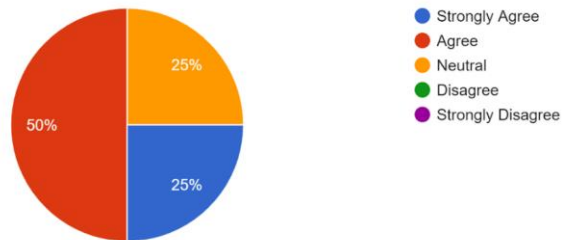
Are there procedures and/or policies in place to investigate discriminatory practices?

12 responses



Do you feel your school or workplace values diversity?

12 responses



Learning Objectives

The following learning objectives were addressed throughout the course of the doctoral experiential capstone project:

The student will

1. Work collaboratively with health careers instructors at Chicopee Public Schools to develop resources (Posters for classrooms) to increase the exposure of occupational therapy among traditionally underrepresented students.
2. Carry out a presentation to traditionally underrepresented students in Chicopee Public Schools on a career path in occupational therapy. After the presentation, researcher will allow question and answer discussions for students.
3. Demonstrate proficiency and professionalism with the use of zoom meetings and in-person presentations.
4. Embody all aspects of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) in presenting and working towards a final capstone project completion.

5. Allow traditionally marginalized students to share thoughts and gauge interest into the field of occupational therapy during question-and-answer discussions following the presentation.
6. *Work with Chicopee Public Schools in finding ways to expand the current healthcare track into high schools for students interested in other professions including occupational therapy.*
7. Provide an accessible copy of the experiential component and final findings to Western New England University and Chicopee Public Schools.
8. Maintain a daily reflective journal to explore and highlight areas of growth while conducting the experiential component.
9. Query healthcare coordinators on transitional programs for students interested in health care career paths and find out possible solutions to expand to other healthcare careers.
10. Query students on prior knowledge of occupational therapy and provide learning resources to help crystalize comprehension and opportunities.
11. Create an informative fact sheet on occupational therapy for traditionally underrepresented students in Chicopee Public Schools.
12. Collaborate with the OTD department and Chicopee Public Schools to develop to increase exposure to the Occupational Therapy profession through a mentorship program, for traditionally underrepresented students.

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Appendices

a. Appendix 1. The Internet Survey

What is your role?

- Student
- Faculty/Staff
- Alumni

Are you a part of the OTD admission Subcommittee?

- Yes
- No

In what setting does the department typically recruit?

- Rural
- Small Cities
- Metropolitan
- All of above

How long have you been at the University's Department of OT?

- 0- 6 months
- 6 months - 1 year
- 1-2 years
- 3-4 years
- 5+ years

What is your current age in years?

- 19 -25 years
- 25- 30
- 30-35
- 35-40
- 40+

What is your racial identity?

- White or Caucasian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Asian or Asian American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- Multiracial

Are you a U.S. Citizen?

- Yes
- No

Which of the following best describes you?

Native English speaker
English as second language
English as third language

Rate your self- perceived proficiency with the English language?
I feel competent speaking, reading, and writing in English
I feel comfortable speaking, reading, and writing in English
I feel confident speaking, reading, and writing in English

How would you describe your views about social policy?
Far Left
Liberal
Moderate
Conservative
Far Right
Non-Affiliate

How would you describe your views about government spending?
Far Left
Liberal
Moderate
Conservative
Far Right
Non-Affiliate

How would you describe your overall political views?
Far Left
Liberal
Moderate
Conservative
Far Right
Non-Affiliate

What does diversity mean to you?

The WNE OTD community values justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion, as well as a sense of belonging. Do you believe this to be true?
Agree
Neutral
Disagree
Strongly Disagree

Diversity is defined as, “the condition of having or being composed of differing elements: variety especially: the inclusion of people of different races, cultures, etc. in a group or organization”
Strongly Agree
Agree

Neutral
Disagree
Strongly Disagree

If you disagree, please state why. (Open ended)

Overall, how effective has the OTD been in helping advance student diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging for students, faculty, and staff?

Exceeded expectations
Met expectations
Below expectations

In what ways do you believe the WNE OTD's program values justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion, as well as a sense of belonging for students?

Are there individuals that look like you and/or identify with you in WNE's OTD program?

Strongly agree
Agree
Neutral
Disagree
Strongly Disagree

Overall, how much do you feel you belong in WNE's OTD?

Always
Usually
Sometimes
Rarely
Never

WNE's OTD reflects a diverse student population.

Strongly agree
Agree
Neutral
Disagree
Strongly Disagree

WNE's OTD reflects a diverse faculty and staff.

Strongly agree
Agree
Neutral
Disagree
Strongly disagree

How satisfied are you with the current recruiting and admitting practices for underrepresented? students into the WNE OTD program?

Very satisfied
Satisfied
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
Dissatisfied
Very dissatisfied

Have you ever experienced any form of discrimination, racism, or bias in your current role in WNE's OTD program?

Strongly agree
Agree
Neutral
Disagree
Strongly Disagree

If yes, do you feel comfortable disclosing these concerns? If no, write N/A.

The WNE OTD's program's faculty and staff are equipped with handling issues as they relate to underrepresented students.

Strongly agree
Agree
Neutral
Disagree
Strongly disagree

Prior to coming to WNE's OTD, how often did you interact with people from backgrounds different than yours?

Always
Usually
Sometimes
Rarely
Never

Your close friend group includes:

White or Caucasian
Black or African American
Hispanic or Latino
Asian or Asian American
American Indian or Alaska Native
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
Multiracial

During your experience at the WNE OTD's program, how often do you interact with individuals with backgrounds different than yours outside the classroom?

Always
Usually
Sometimes

Rarely
Never

In general, I feel comfortable collaborating with individuals from backgrounds different than mine.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

In general, I openly and actively engage with individuals whose backgrounds differ from mine.

Every day

A few times a week

A few times a month

Once a month

In general, I feel that I have to change who I am in order to fit in with the majority

Strongly agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

In general, the Department's climate is accepting of who I am.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

A person of color is defined as "a person who is of a race other than white or who is of mixed race"

Given the information above, do you perceive yourself as a person of color

Yes

No

I have been a victim of discriminatory practices by individuals in the Department.

Always

Usually

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

What form of discrimination have you experience in the OTD department at WNE?

Sexism

Racism
Disability Discrimination or Ableism
Ethnic origin discrimination
Sexual Orientation
Ageism
Other (Please specify)
None

I feel or have feel comfortable sharing instances of discrimination with faculty and staff in the
Department.

Always
Usually
Sometimes
Rarely
Never

I have received adequate support from this Department when voicing issues or concerns pertaining to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

Always
Usually
Sometimes
Rarely
Never

What changes would you like to see incorporated by the Department to increase diversity efforts as it relates to recruiting, admitting, and retaining underrepresented students, faculty, and staff?

How would you like to be supported by WNE's OTD moving forward?

b. Appendix 2. Participant Consent and Information Form

Western New England University
College of Pharmacy & Health Sciences
Informed Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a web-based online survey entitled How Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Impacts Student Recruitment and Admission Practices Within Education: An Examination of the Department of Occupational Therapy at Western New England University, that explores the efficacy of the doctoral program's initiatives to support a diverse, equitable, and inclusive learning environment for faculty, staff, and its students. This is a research project being conducted by Jahmel James, an Occupational therapy doctoral student at Western New England University (WNEU)

College of Pharmacy & Health Sciences. It should take approximately 25 minutes to complete.

BENEFITS

You will receive no direct benefits from participating in this research study. However, your responses may help us learn more about identifying, informing, and improving faculty, staff, and student support and practices in Western New England's Doctor of Occupational Therapy Program.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may refuse to take part in the research or exit the survey at any time without penalty. You are free to decline to answer any particular question you do not wish to answer for any reason.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your survey answers will be sent to a link at Google Forms where data will be stored in a password-protected electronic format for at least three years. Google Forms does not collect identifying information such as your name, email address, or IP address. Therefore, your responses will remain anonymous. No one will be able to identify you or your answers, and no one will know whether or not you participated in the study.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact my research supervisor, Professor Dr. Debra Latour via phone at 413.782.1449 and via email at debra.latour@wne.edu or Jahmel James via phone at 917.443.4199 and via email at Jahmel.james@wne.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns about the "rights of research subjects," you may contact Dr. Jessica Outhouse, Chair of the Institutional Review Board, at 413-796-2325, jessica.outhouse@wne.edu, or Dr. Diptiman Bose, College of Pharmacy & Health Sciences, Member of the Institutional Review Board, at diptiman.bose@wne.edu or 413-796-2442. This research project has been reviewed and approved by the Western New England University Institutional Review Board.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below. You may print a copy of this consent form for your records. Clicking on the "Agree" button indicates that:

- You have read the above information
- You voluntarily agree to participate
- You are 18 years of age or older
- You are a member of faculty, staff, alumni, or current student of the OTD

department at WNE

c. Appendix 3. Understanding DEI in Workplace and Educational Settings

What is your role?

Student
Professor
Healthcare Worker in Practice
Other:

What is your race or ethnicity?

Asian
Black or African American
Hispanic or Latino
Middle Eastern or North African
Multiracial or Multiethnic
Native American or Alaska Native
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
White
Another race or ethnicity, please describe below

Are there individuals that look like you and/or identify with you in your working or learning environment?

Yes

NO

Have you ever felt marginalized in your workplace/school as a result of your race?

Yes

No

Have you ever experienced any form of discrimination or racism at your learning institution or workplace?

Yes

No

If yes, do you feel comfortable disclosing these concerns? If no, write N/A. (Short Answer Response)

Are there procedures and/or policies in place to investigate discriminatory practices?

Yes

No

How many times have you disclosed your concerns to your employer or learning institution?

1

2

3

4+

Do you feel comfortable with the current methods used to address these concerns, why or why not? (Short Answer Response)

How would you like for instances of discrimination to be handled by administrators at your learning institution or workplace? (Short Answer Response)

Do you feel your school or workplace values diversity?

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

In what ways? (Short Answer Response)

What does diversity mean to you? (Short Answer Response)

How would you like to be supported by your learning institution or employer moving forward?
(Short Answer Response)

d. Appendix 4. ATA Certificate



e. Appendix 5. Poster for Chicopee Public School

Path To Occupational Therapy

Educational Goals

1. Graduate from Highschool

2. 4 year undergraduate degree

3. 2 to 2.5 year Occupational Therapy Master Program

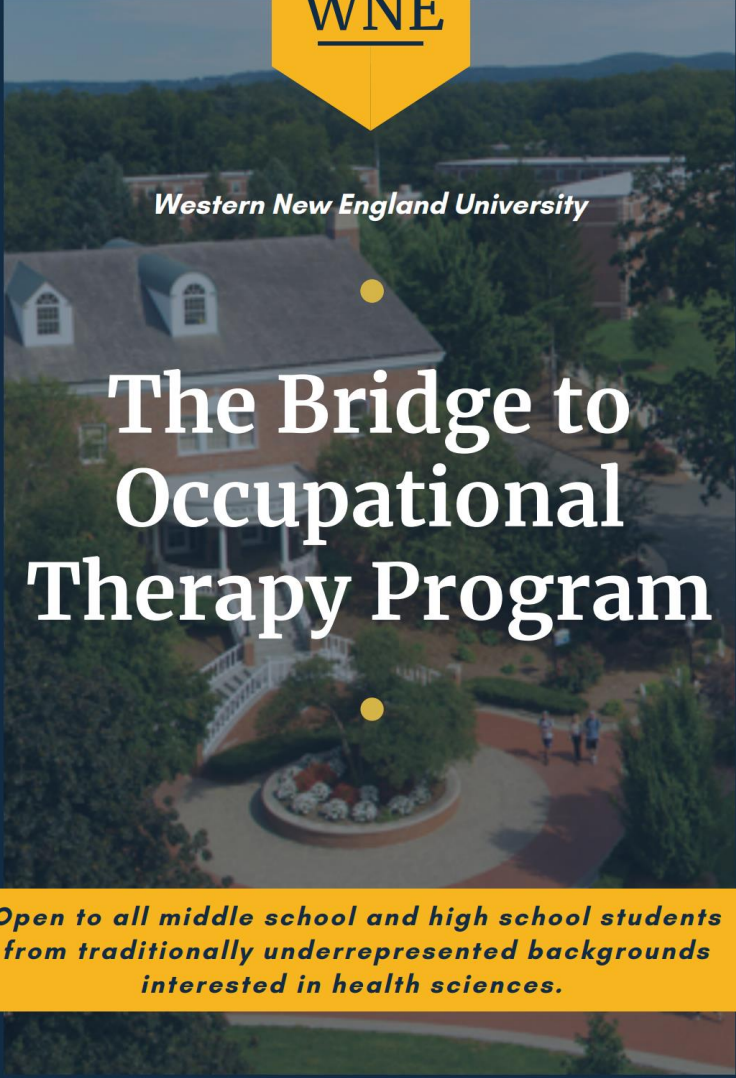
4. 3 year Occupational Therapy Doctoral Program

5. **Pass NBCOT Exam!**

6. Enter the profession and make a difference!



f. Appendix 6. Potential Bridge Mentorship Program at WNE



WNE

Western New England University

The Bridge to Occupational Therapy Program

Open to all middle school and high school students from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds interested in health sciences.



WESTERN NEW ENGLAND UNIVERSITY | WNE
COLLEGE of PHARMACY and HEALTH SCIENCES

The Bridge to OT Program

In collaboration with Chicopee Public School System

WNE OTD students will have the chance to complete this program as a part of their Level 1 fieldwork requirement. OTD students will mentor students in the Chicopee Public School System by interacting one-on-one with middle and high schoolers to help them develop a greater understanding of this field and educational requirements to enter the profession.

Appendix 7. 3+3 Health Studies OTD

Jumpstart Your Future in Occupational Therapy

3+3 HEALTH STUDIES/OTD PROGRAM

Become a Leader in Occupational Therapy

What an opportunity! At WNE you can earn your bachelor's and doctorate (no master's required) and graduate in just six years, ready to be a leader in the growing and rewarding field of occupational therapy. Occupational therapists help people perform everyday activities of daily living (occupations); adapt environments to improve function in home, work, or leisure settings; and provide client-centered support for participation in life. Entering the workforce with occupational therapy's highest degree will set you apart in a competitive job market. With an OTD degree, you will be equipped with the research evidence and the policy perspectives necessary to rise to leadership roles in a global healthcare workforce.

"We are pleased to offer our 3+3 Health Studies/OTD program. It provides incoming high school students with necessary foundational knowledge in occupational therapy and a degree in Health Studies, while also affording an entire year off from the more "traditional" track to becoming a Doctor of Occupational Therapy. An OTD degree from WNE allows our students to stand out in the field as leaders, innovators, and scholars."

BRITTANY ADAMS, OT, OTD, MS, OTR
Interim Chair and Program Director

Performance and Participation Labs

Our three OTD clinical laboratories and Health and Wellness House permit students to experience occupational therapy practice for children and youth and the adult and aging populations. Each of the performance and participation labs are specifically designed to provide applied learning opportunities in realistic environments that simulate practice settings such as hospital rooms, early intervention centers, outpatient rehabilitation facilities, and nursing homes.

In the Adult and Aging labs, students are provided with opportunities to assess and provide therapy for individuals with such diseases and conditions as congestive heart failure, bone fractures, hip replacements, stroke, and multiple sclerosis, to name a few. The Pediatrics lab permits students to administer evaluations and interventions for diseases and conditions impacting the pediatric population including infants and young children with cerebral palsy, autism, Down Syndrome, Attention Deficit Disorder, and many more.

Living On Campus

OTD students have the ability to live on campus for all six years. Western New England University offers suite, apartment, and townhouse residence options for upperclass and graduate students.



It All Begins with Our Health Studies Program

When you commit as a first-year student to this early admissions program, you'll spend your first three years in the Pre-OTD concentration of the Health Studies program focusing on prerequisite OT coursework (biology, chemistry, anatomy, physiology, psychology, mathematical analysis, statistics, and general liberal arts curriculum), with a strong emphasis on lab work. After successful completion of five semesters, you will apply to the OTD program during the spring of your junior year. Once accepted in to the OTD program, you will spend your fourth year—traditionally the senior year of study—completing OTD graduate coursework in the College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences. At the end of four years, you will join your undergraduate classmates in receiving your Bachelor of Science degree. After six years, you will receive your Doctor of Occupational Therapy degree.

Earn Both a Bachelor's and a Doctor of Occupational Therapy Degree

- Completion of both degrees will prepare you to work in clinical settings.
- Small classes and labs foster individualized faculty attention.
- The Health Studies/Pre-OTD concentration is a three-year program designed to lead directly into our three-year Doctor of Occupational Therapy program.
- Earn a bachelor's degree in Health Studies after four years and the OTD degree after six.
- According to the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy (NBCOT) for calendar year 2020, the WNE OTD graduates taking the NBCOT exam within one year of graduation had a pass rate of 100%. This is the highest passing rate among OTD programs in western Massachusetts.

To schedule a visit go to wne.edu/visit.

To learn more about our Health Studies program visit wne.edu/academics/undergraduate.

WESTERN NEW ENGLAND UNIVERSITY | WNE
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OTD ACCREDITATION

In December, 2019, the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE) voted to Grant the OTD Program accreditation for the maximum length of time through academic year 2026/2027, for having achieved full compliance with the academic standards.

The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) is located at 6116 Executive Boulevard, Suite 200, North Bethesda, MD 20852-4929. ACOTE's telephone number is (301) 652-AOTA and its web address is www.acoteonline.org.

g. Appendix 8. How Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Impacts Student Recruitment and Admission Practices Within Education Poster

