OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY PROGRAM WELCOMES TOP-NOTCH COHORTS OFF TO A GREAT START AND EXCELING AT GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

We are happy to welcome the first two cohorts for the OT Master's program at Georgia State University. These students were chosen from a broad pool of applicants and have demonstrated outstanding academic accomplishments and potential. The students come from a variety of backgrounds, representing undergraduate degrees from the fields of exercise science, human development, social work, finance, advertising, and other disciplines. Many had former careers, ranging from being a wilderness therapy guide to an analytical chemist. These students are enthusiastic, exceptionally qualified, and eager to learn. Our students hold undergraduate degrees from highly competitive schools such as the University of Georgia, Auburn University, Clemson University, Kennesaw State University, and others. These students have demonstrated a commitment to excellence and have completed thousands of volunteer hours with special needs populations.
GREETINGS FROM THE CHAIR

KINSUK MAITRA, PH.D., O.T.R./L., F.A.O.T.A.

Welcome to the Department of Occupational Therapy in the Byrdine F. Lewis College of Nursing and Health Professions at Georgia State University. We are excited to offer the new MSOT program, welcome the new faculty and cohorts, and to introduce the OT newsletter! The timing is important as the college celebrates its 50th year anniversary. The department is planning a host of activities throughout the year to mark the half a century existence of the college. With many new developments in the department, we are looking forward to a great year in 2018. However, it is also important for us to reflect back on our successes in the past year.

Throughout the past year, the department has experienced noteworthy growth. We welcomed several distinguished faculty members whose knowledge and expertise will provide valuable teaching and research experiences for our OT students. Dr. Jade Gross and Dr. Pey-Shan Wen joined the faculty in January. In August of 2017, Dr. Yoonjeong Lim joined the faculty. More recently, we have added Dr. Emily Buchman and Dr. Debi Hinerfeld as part-time instructors to the OT program. Also, we are hoping to add four to five new faculty members in August 2018. These new faculty members bring a wide range of clinical background experience and research interests that will enhance the quality of our education program. To learn more about our faculty, please visit our website at occupationaltherapy.gsu.edu.

Our academic fieldwork coordinator, Prof. Carolyn Podolski, continues to develop the clinical fieldwork portion of the program and foster new relationships with facilities in the Atlanta area and around the country, exposing our students to a broad spectrum of therapy experiences.

Perhaps the most noteworthy development is the recent submission of our self-study. This milestone represents major progress in becoming a fully accredited OT program. The ACOTE team will visit Georgia State University during June 25-27, and we earnestly hope that our accreditation should be complete in July 2018.

The class of 2018 is excitedly anticipating traveling nationwide for their level two fieldwork experiences this summer. We also have a strong pool of applicants for the entering 2018 class and look forward to welcoming our largest, most competitive group of students yet this fall. In December, our inaugural cohort of students will receive their diplomas and begin their careers as occupational therapists. We are eager to see the great work they will do in the field upon graduation.

Our faculty will continue to collaborate with colleagues and other programs to conduct innovative, interdisciplinary research that will shape the profession of occupational therapy and provide evidence-based solutions to meet society's occupational needs. Several of our faculty were awarded institutional grants from the university, and our program is now poised to be well-represented at the AOTA and other national academic conferences. Finally, OT at Georgia State University has a new home, and we are now located at Suite 1242 in the Urban Life Building. Please visit us, and surely stop by if you are in the area. It is my privilege to serve as the inaugural chair of the Department of Occupational Therapy at Georgia State University.

Wishing you a happy and healthy 2018!

Kinsuk Maitra, Ph.D., O.T.R./L., F.A.O.T.A. 

"THROUGHOUT THE PAST YEAR, THE DEPARTMENT HAS EXPERIENCED NOTEWORTHY GROWTH."
LETTER FROM THE SOTA PRESIDENT

KAITLYN THOMAS

My name is Kaitlyn Thomas, and I am serving as this year’s Student Occupational Therapy Association’s president. We have had a wonderful start to the new term and are excited to see what’s in store.

Throughout the last semester, our students have volunteered at a variety of community service events, gained experiences in fieldwork, and planned our upcoming Cause Ball. As a cohort, we volunteered at the Foster Care Support Foundation in Roswell. We helped sort through bags of donations and unload donation deliveries. A group of students also assisted with the Buddy Walk in Atlanta. We had students volunteer with Camp BIAG (Brain Injury Association of Georgia) as camp counselors as well.

We are incredibly excited to be hosting our first ever Cause Ball. It is a masquerade themed event which will benefit the Frazer Center Adult Program as well as provide more community service opportunities for our students.

In addition to these events, our program is eager to announce that two of our students will be going to Denmark over spring break to study abroad at the Center for Music in the Brain. What a great opportunity!

As the second cohort is reflecting on their first semester of level I fieldwork, the first cohort is approaching their level II fieldwork and completing their masters projects to present at the Lewis College graduate research conference in April. Everyone loves sharing about all of their new experiences, and we are looking forward to the experiences to come.

MEET THE NEW SOTA OFFICERS!

TOP ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: MELISSA PERKOWSKI, SECRETARY; JENNIFER BONER, HISTORIAN; DEBORAH HAGERTY, FUNDRAISING CHAIR; KELLY FITZGERALD, STUDENT DELEGATE

BOTTOM ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: KAITLYN THOMAS, PRESIDENT; HAYDEN GEORGE, VICE PRESIDENT; EMMA HEARN, TREASURER; ALEX ANTHONY, COMMUNITY SERVICE CHAIR
GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY SOTA EVENTS

SUMMER 2017 VOLUNTEER DAY

This past July, students from both cohorts came together to give back to the Atlanta community. The Summer 2017 volunteer day was organized by the former SOTA community service chair, Christine Sherwood. A group of students volunteered at the Foster Care Support Foundation Distribution Center, an organization that provides clothing, equipment, and toys to children in Georgia who are currently in the foster care system or are receiving care from relatives. The OT students received incoming donations, sorted bags of donated clothing, and helped to organize other donated items on shelves. Another group of students volunteered at Petsmart. These students are implementing the mission, vision, and values of the program: GSU CARES.

FALL 2017 BACK TO SCHOOL BASH

In August, the Student Occupational Therapy Association (SOTA) arranged a back-to-school mixer, inviting students from both cohorts and faculty members to celebrate the beginning of an exciting new year! The group played games and socialized on the back patio of the Lost Dog Tavern in Buckhead. This was a wonderful opportunity for students in the two cohorts to bond. SOTA looks forward to planning more social events. Stay tuned!
FACULTY SPOTLIGHT:
JADE GROSS, OTD, OTR/L

WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO PURSUE OT AS A CAREER? WHO HAS INFLUENCED YOU MOST AS AN OT?

I have always felt a calling to go into a healthcare profession, and I have several family members who work in the healthcare field. I discovered occupational therapy when I was in high school, felt an instant connection to the practice with everything I read, and fell in love the more I gained experience in the field. This still holds true today – I love OT.

There are several people who have had a profound influence in shaping me as a person and an occupational therapist. My grandfather played an important role in my life growing up. He demonstrated the value of hard work, grit, lifelong education and perpetual curiosity for continued learning, and prolific community service and supporting others in need. In occupational therapy school, I was very fortunate to get to know and work with many leaders in the field of occupational therapy and other related disciplines. My graduate school advisor, Dr. David Gray, was a respected and influential leader in disability research and advocacy for people with disabilities nationally and worldwide. His mentorship continues to play a guiding role in both my personal and professional life. Additional and very significant mentors are Dr. Peggy Neufeld, who fostered and supported my passion for community-based practice occupational therapy, and Dr. Thilo Kroll, who skillfully demonstrates how research can have a powerful and widespread impact on the health and well-being of disadvantaged populations.

WHAT MADE YOU DECIDE TO TRANSITION INTO ACADEMIA, AND WHAT HAVE YOU ENJOYED MOST ABOUT SERVING ON THE FACULTY AT GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY?

It was a difficult decision to leave full-time clinical work because I truly loved working one-on-one with clients. But I was at a point in my career where I was ready for the opportunity to grow professionally. Teaching at Georgia State University and being part of a team that is developing a new occupational therapy program has been one of the most challenging and rewarding professional experiences so far in my life. Through mentorship, I am participating in the research process again, which was always a career goal. Also, I really enjoy getting to know and working with the next generation of occupational therapists.

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE OT PROGRAM?

As I mentioned before, it has been very rewarding being part of a team that is developing a new occupational therapy program. I have truly enjoyed being a part of this process and look forward to continuing to watch the program grow and develop into a leading national program.

ANY ADVICE FOR STUDENTS GOING INTO THE FIELD OF OT?

My advice for future occupational therapists would be to never lose sight of the reasons that made you want to be an OT. And most importantly, never lose compassion for those clients that we serve. One approach I took to OT clinical practice was to imagine that each client was a family member and remember how I want my loved ones to be treated in the healthcare system. Some of the best therapists lead by example, and they are easily identifiable in clinical practice. They regularly demonstrate core foundational principles including client-centered, evidence-based, and compassionate occupational therapy practice.

WHAT ARE YOUR RESEARCH INTERESTS, AND WHY ARE YOU PASSIONATE ABOUT THESE TOPICS?

I am excited to receive mentorship in the research process. It is my goal to participate in community-based practice and community-based research methods again. Dr. Peggy Neufeld, one of my mentors who has a strong background in community-based practice, has demonstrated how occupational therapy can positively support the health of disadvantaged or underserved individuals in the community.

WHAT ARE YOUR HOBBIES, INTERESTS, AND THINGS YOU LIKE TO DO IN YOUR SPARE TIME?

Aside from enjoying the work that I do, I love spending time with my daughter who will be three-years-old in March. Seren is very active and loves rock climbing (she can now climb a 25-foot indoor rock wall by herself), playing outdoors, bicycling (glide bicycle), skateboarding (with assistance), gymnastics, and wearing dresses. If there is any time left, I love reading biographies and autobiographies, listening to music (especially live), attending art shows, watching documentaries and independent films, hiking, yoga, running (or actually a leisurely jog), and cooking.
STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: BEN ALLEN

WHAT IS YOUR PROFESSIONAL/EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND?

I have a bachelor’s in banking and finance from UGA. Then I worked as a cost and reporting analyst for two years at Kimberly-Clark, a consumer goods company making mostly paper products. I eventually decided I needed a change to pursue something more meaningful and important to me, and now I’m in school for OT! Best decision I ever made.

WHAT STUDENT ACTIVITIES ARE YOU INVOLVED WITH?

I was the SOTA treasurer for the first year. I’m also a GRA and trainee in GaLEND (Georgia Leadership and Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities, part of the Center for Leadership in Disability at Georgia State University). This is an interdisciplinary program with students from a few different schools. It also has disability advocates, family advocates, current professionals and students in OT, PT, SLP, law, social work, nutrition, and more. That has been an incredible experience so far – there is a lot of focus on leadership development and policy/systems issues (which is particularly relevant at the moment). However, I think the most impactful thing for me is my perspective on disability has changed so much. It has also reinforced why I love OT – we really focus on viewing people through a different lens, trying to take in the whole picture of someone rather than just looking at a diagnosis and going from there. LEND has really reinforced this idea and made me think about my own views and biases on disability. Also, I’ve realized I have so much more to learn about the disability community.

WHAT HAVE YOU ENJOYED MOST ABOUT THE OT PROGRAM?

The faculty is incredible. It has always been very clear to me that the OT faculty wants the very best for us as students and future professionals. You can tell they genuinely care about us and people in general, and they really have a passion for OT. They have gone out of their way on so many occasions to really maximize our experience. I owe a lot to all the professors and faculty for the work they have put into this program, especially being that it’s brand new and already running so smoothly.

HAVE YOU HAD A FAVORITE FIELDWORK PLACEMENT?

It’s pretty hard to just choose one because there have been different aspects I’ve enjoyed at each location. If I had to pick, I’d say working with Dr. Gross at DeKalb Medical. It was a wonderful learning experience and she really allowed us to be involved as students with a lot of hands-on experience. However, my favorite part of that placement was just that it was so much fun every day. We just finished up a mental health rotation too, and I really enjoyed working with individuals there as well – it was extremely different than my experiences in outpatient clinics and hospitals, so I really valued seeing that setting (also I love mental health).

ANY IDEA ABOUT FUTURE CAREER GOALS?

My career goals are all over the place honestly, but I’ve always wanted to incorporate a mental health focus into my work. There are a variety of populations I’d like to work with, but I have a particular interest in working with veterans. I’d also love a chance to work with individuals who have mental illness and co-occurring substance abuse disorders – maybe integrating alternative treatments like outdoor therapy such as surfing or hiking. I think I’ll eventually try and teach though if I can handle the extra schooling – but that will likely be way down the road.

ANY ADVICE FOR STUDENTS IN THE COHORTS BELOW YOU?

Just relax!! It can be incredibly overwhelming at times, but it all works out in the end. I spent way too much time future-tripping about different assignments and tests, but if you put in the time and effort, you have nothing to worry about. More importantly, enjoy the time with your classmates. Take time to get to know people in the program because they will for sure become lifelong friends. We spend a whole lot of time together, and it is totally worth it to get to know the other people in your cohort and build some wonderful friendships.

MOST HELPFUL ADVICE YOU HAVE RECEIVED AS A FUTURE OT?

The value in letting the individual you’re working with drive the therapy process. We’re constantly reminded of using a client-centered approach and it took me a few semesters and fieldwork experiences to really understand and see the true value in that. The client, patient, consumer, or family – they will often know what is meaningful to them and all our professors have reminded us to keep that at the forefront of our treatment. If someone has lost sight of what they find meaningful, you get the exciting opportunity to help them find out what that is depending on how you approach your work. GaLEND is super person/client-focused so my experience there has been a wonderful reminder of the value it can hold in therapy.

WHAT ARE YOUR HOBBIES, INTERESTS, AND FAVORITE THINGS TO DO AROUND ATLANTA?

FOOD!! I love trying out new foods, especially different ethnic foods. Atlanta has some incredible food spots. I live in Grant Park, which is a wonderful place to hang out, but I’m about to move over to East Atlanta Village – wonderful area for good music (which I may enjoy more than food). I’m also a big coffee drinker and love checking out different coffee shops around the city – Chrome Yellow and HodgePodge are fun places to hang/study/avoid studying/whatever. But yeah, there are so many different things to do in Atlanta, but I’m also not planning on staying here when I graduate. I’m ready to move on!
FACULTY MILESTONES

- Prof. Mette Andresen and Prof. Betina Rasmussen of Metropol University Occupational Therapy Department in Copenhagen, Denmark visited Georgia State University in November 2016 to discuss research collaboration and faculty-student exchange.
- Dr. Pey-Shan Wen presented her research on *Yoga for Sleep, Pain, Mood, and Executive Functioning in People with TBI* at the 2017 AOTA Conference in Philadelphia last April.
- In July 2017, Dr. Maitra met with Dr. Youngjin Jung from Dongseo University and Dr. Hae Yean Park from Yonsei University, South Korea to discuss their collaboration in a study that will bring together architecture, occupational therapy, and biomedical engineering for research on older adult home design. Dr. Sonit Bafna from Georgia Tech is also a lead investigator of the study. This cross-cultural study aims to increase activity and improve quality of life and health for older adults who want to age in place.
- In November, Georgia State University Occupational Therapy faculty members and students from the first cohort traveled to Birmingham, Alabama to attend the AOTA/NBCOT National Student Conclave. At this conference, students attended discussion panels and deep dive sessions, participated in networking events, and learned about how to prepare for their upcoming licensing exams.
- Dr. Wen is collaborating with Dr. Yang (PI) in the Department of Kinesiology on a study funded by the Brain and Behavior Seed Grant to investigate the effect of vibration training on cognitive function in individuals with multiple sclerosis.
- Dr. Sangheon Lee will be serving as a visiting faculty member for the OT Department throughout 2018. He is visiting from SoonChunHyang University in South Korea. Dr. Lee will conduct research and collaborate with the OT faculty in various capacities.

Pictured above, left to right: Cierra Shaw, Amanda Pitts, Dr. Kinsuk Maitra, Dr. Yoonjeong Lim, DeAmbrielle Simpson, and Nia Hunt.

Pictured above, left to right: Dr. Youngim Jung, Dr. Hae Yean, Prof. Carolyn Podolski, Nikcole Moore, Dr. Kinsuk Maitra, and Dr. Sonit Bafna.
Members of the Community Leadership and Legacy Committee serve as voices of the community. They come from a range of organizations throughout Atlanta, including research universities, hospitals, occupational therapy facilities, and various public and private entities. They provide meaningful leadership, support, and direction to the occupational therapy program. This group will meet once a semester to provide valuable guidance and feedback regarding program plans and activities. The spring 2018 meeting will take place on March 21. We appreciate your service to our program!

Sonit Bafna, Ph.D.
Georgia Institute of Technology

Protip Biswas
United Way of Greater Atlanta

Sheila Brock, O.T.R./L.
Emory University Hospital

Shara Brown, M.S.O.T., O.T.R./L.
Grady Memorial Hospital

Andrew Butler, Ph.D.
Georgia State University

Mark Crenshaw, M.T.S.
Georgia State University

Daniel Crimmins, Ph.D.
Georgia State University

Jennifer Fangmann, O.T.R./L.
Children's Healthcare of Atlanta

Chris Doane, M.S., O.T.R./L., F.A.O.T.A
Advanced Rehab Services

Iris Feinberg, Ph.D.
Georgia State University

Amy Glass, Ph.D.
Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta

Lynda Goodfellow, Ed.D.
Georgia State University

Gina Holeczek, M.P.H., O.T.R./L., C.D.R.S.
Emory Rehabilitation Hospital

Katie Kimball, M.S., O.T.R./L.
Shepherd Center

Nancy Kropf, Ph.D.
Georgia State University

Angela Matthiessen, M.S.O.T., O.T.R./L.
Pediatric Occupational Therapist

Martin Norgaard, Ph.D.
Georgia State University

Susan Orloff, O.T.R./L.
Children's Special Services

Nahea Patel, O.T.R./L.
Pediatric Development Center of Atlanta

Jon A. Sanford, M.Arch.
Georgia Institute of Technology

Peachtree Orthopedics Physical Therapy

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CLASSROOM EVENTS

Left: Karlie Moore, Hillary Woodall, Wei Wang, and DiAmbrielle Simpson learn about adapted driving at AMS (America’s Mobility Superstore) Vans, Inc. for their fieldwork seminar course.

Right: Mary Alvarez tries out assistive technology devices at the Shepherd Center as part of Dr. Buchman's assistive technology lab course.

Left: Kelly Fitzgerald, Emily Kidd, Megan Hinman, and Steven Evans practice transfers in Dr. Gross' occupational assessment and intervention course.

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CONNECT WITH US!

Make sure to "like" our new Facebook page. Connect with fellow students and share your program experiences by using the hashtag #GSUOT on Instagram. Share OT-related resources via our Pinterest page!
CALENDAR

FEBRUARY 22
SOTA Meeting
12:00 PM - 1:00 PM

MARCH 21
Community Leadership and Legacy Meeting
6:00 PM - 9:30 PM
Golden Key Room

MARCH 22
SOTA Meeting
12:00 PM - 1:00 PM

APRIL 12
SOTA Meeting
12:00 PM - 1:00 PM

APRIL 19-22
Annual AOTA Conference
Salt Lake City, Utah

JUNE 25-27
Accreditation Visit

MEET THE FACULTY & STAFF

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