Students at the Tufts Department of Occupational Therapy understand that their chosen profession transcends borders. Even if they never work overseas, occupational therapists will encounter clients from different cultures and backgrounds throughout their careers. That’s just one of the factors that motivated four OT students to travel on an academic immersion trip to Chengdu, China in the summer of 2015.

Caitlin McConnell, Patrick Hartmann, Priscilla Park, and Claire Heinegg spent two weeks at Sichuan University in Chengdu, China’s 5th largest city, participating in a summer immersion program in the rehabilitation department. They were joined by 10 other international students from occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech and language pathology. Throughout the program, the students interacted with Chinese occupational therapists, students, professors, and practitioners from other disciplines while learning about OT practice and philosophy in China.

According to Caitlin McConnell, the trip not only provided insight into the occupational therapy profession in China, but also gave the students a global perspective and increased their cultural awareness. “It was fascinating to learn how our profession works in another country, and to be able to exchange knowledge and resources with OT students internationally,” she says.

In addition to learning about OT in China, the Tufts students also visited different units throughout the hospital, including intensive care, pulmonary, and orthopedic, in order to understand more about the Chinese healthcare system. They also shared their own perspective about how the profession differs in the United States.

For example, although OT is a relatively new profession in the U.S., it is much “younger” in China; the Occupational Therapy program at Sichuan University was established in 2008. According to Patrick Hartmann, “OT is rarely used outside of a hospital setting in China, and those hospitals are “busy and crowded, almost like an American shopping mall,” he says.

Hartmann also observed that the physical/biomechanical aspects of therapy are preferred in China due to a lack of practitioners; caseloads are high and funding is scarce, in part because the profession is still so unfamiliar. In addition, because there is also significant stigma around mental health in China, “there is virtually no occupational therapy for patients with mental health issues,” McConnell says.

She feels that the trip not only taught her and her fellow students about specific aspects of occupational therapy in another country; it also offered “an invaluable opportunity to gain a new perspective on our profession through a global lens. It’s so important to understand that different cultures have different values, beliefs, and biases. Working in a different country increases one’s cultural competency,” she says.

Hartmann agrees. During his work at Sichuan University, he noticed the keen involvement that multiple generations of families—including children, parents, and even grandparents—had in a patient's treatment. “This was a Chinese cultural phenomenon that we don't usually see in the U.S.” he says. From this experience, Hartmann realized that whether he practices his profession abroad or only in the United States, he will always be “exposed to culturally diverse populations. It’s critical to have a global perspective because that’s what the world is really like.”

The trip to Chengdu enhanced for these four Tufts students the belief that all occupational therapists should have the eye-opening experience of learning about their profession in another country. “Occupational therapy is becoming more universal. The more we can learn about OT practice in other countries, the stronger and more united we will be as a profession,” McConnell says. “This trip required us to have a sense of open-mindedness and cultural sensitivity that we could not have gained in the States. We will carry that with us and utilize it in our practice.”
A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

The past year has been one of exciting change for the Department of Occupational Therapy. In August, we moved to a brand new building, the Collaborative Learning and Innovation Complex (CLIC) at 574 Boston Avenue. Designed as a hub of collaborative thinking and facilitation across disciplines, the CLIC houses departments and researchers from occupational therapy, community health, physics, astronomy, child development, and entrepreneurial leadership, as well as research labs and office space for mechanical and human factors engineering and robotics. With an open floor plan and informal meeting spaces, the center sparks the kinds of collaborations that generate new ideas. This new physical environment is emblematic of the three “I’s” of our strategic goals—and those of the university: interdisciplinary thinking and collaboration, innovation, and impact.

The OT department is already reaping the benefits of our new home. Many of our faculty are working with others from community health, engineering, and computer science. For example, faculty and students are key members of interdisciplinary teams focused on assistive technology, robotics, and “app” design through innovative research and educational initiatives. Occupational therapists bring a unique, “whole person” perspective to these fields; while engineers focus on how to build and program the technology, OTs focus on how these devices can best enhance a person’s ability to participate in meaningful occupation.

After years of collaboration, Tufts engineering and OT students and faculty—now being housed together at CLIC—have more time to learn each other’s “languages” and cultures, which ultimately enhances our ability to help those with disabilities across the lifespan.

Along with moving to our new home, there were many other “firsts” in 2015. We had a record number of students presenting at MAOT and AOTA conferences, we participated in adaptive sports programs (see page 3), and we welcomed outstanding new faculty (see page 4). We are also collaborating with the new Tufts Institute for Human-Animal Interaction (TIHAI) (http://hai.tufts.edu), led by Lisa Freeman, DVM, at the Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine. TIHAI is designed to promote the health and well-being of humans and animals through trans-disciplinary partnerships that foster innovative research, education, and service programs in the growing field of human-animal interaction. Occupational therapists have used animals in practice for many years, so they offer an integral perspective on this work. We are excited to participate in TIHAI’s growth in the year ahead.

All of these advances in the department would not be possible without you—our alumni, donors, and friends. By offering scholarships, funds, and fieldwork placements, you enhance our programs and give our students the vital experience they need to acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to succeed as evidence-based practitioners, interdisciplinary collaborators, researchers, and leaders in the field. We are grateful for your support and invite you to come visit us in our new home at 574 Boston Ave. On behalf of myself and the entire department, I wish you a happy and healthy 2016!

Gary Bedell, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA
Chair

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT:

Nicole Picone Brings OTs into Disaster Planning

The media scrutiny post-Hurricane Katrina and “Super Storm Sandy” made it clear that not all populations are affected equally in disasters. “The effects of a single incident, such as flash flooding, can impact residents in a city block to very different degrees,” says OTD student Nicole Picone, MS, OTR/L. Picone, who has always been interested in humanitarian relief in developing countries, emphasizes the great deal of work that needs to be done within the United States to improve disaster planning for at-risk populations. That’s why she has focused her OTD leadership project on “The OT Role in Disaster Preparedness (Massachusetts).”

Picone’s research—including a review of the literature and consultation with experts in the field of disaster relief—has revealed that “at risk individuals—children, older adults, those with chronic medical conditions and disabilities, racial and ethnic minorities, among many others—remain highly unprepared for future emergencies and disasters,” she explains. “Despite the evidence that families are motivated to develop emergency plans and learn about community resources, there is a wide gap in knowledge that prevents healthcare professionals from implementing evidence-based strategies.”

A 2011 AOTA paper1 on the role of occupational therapy in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery lends credence to her project idea. The paper reinforces the notion that “occupational therapists are unique in their ability to holistically assess a person’s physical and emotional needs during a disaster. They are highly skilled at adjusting interventions to maximize function—and this is critical in an emergency,” she says.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) also supports the importance of OTs in disaster preparedness. Its “whole community” approach to disaster planning—which emphasizes collaboration among small businesses, nonprofits, faith-based organizations, and healthcare providers—recommends extensive training to meet the vast health and logistical needs of people with physical and mental health conditions (FEMA, 2011).

Yet, there is no OT-specific framework or training program in disaster planning, according to Picone. “OT practitioners and emer-

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Occupational Therapy
Occupational Therapy

Emergency planners don’t really understand each other’s roles, which creates a considerable barrier to integration of services,” she says. Therefore, the main thrust of her project is on a free, four-hour educational workshop targeted at licensed OT practitioners in Massachusetts. Consisting of a lecture, emergency planning tools (including apps and other technologies), and active-learning activities, the course focuses on disaster-scenario exercises in which participants develop shelter in place and evacuation plans for clients and staff in the workplace.

Picone held the first of these workshops on December 11th and 12th, 2015, and they were well received. The classes drew 13 participants from a range of settings, including hospitals (inpatient and outpatient), long-term care facilities, school systems, sensory integration clinics, mental/behavioral health settings, residential programs (young adults), and the Massachusetts Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Based on participants’ verbal feedback and post-workshop surveys, Picone plans to refine the training to target practitioners’ needs going forward. “Participants were largely satisfied with the workshop experience and offered valuable input about the need for site-specific training. There were a lot of thought-provoking conversations about how the group would address the ‘access and functional needs’ of staff and clients with few resources at hand,” she says.

For future workshops, Picone plans to focus on the concrete steps that practitioners can take to update emergency plans/drills at their respective workplaces. Due to the high level of interest, she plans to provide email updates on future training opportunities. Picone hopes to collaborate with the Boston-based Delvalle Institute of Emergency Preparedness, and possibly adapt the program for other states. In January, she will be presenting a new workshop to the Rhode Island Association of Occupational Therapists. “I’m still receiving requests for future workshops, so it’s exciting to gain momentum,” she says.

Tufts lecturer Sarah Everhart Skeels knows what it takes to go for the gold. She and her sailing partner Cindy Walker just returned from Melbourne, Australia, where they competed in the Paraworld Sailing Championships and finished 10th. Their team, Good Karma Racing, is the only all-female team in the world trying to qualify for the Paralympics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in September, 2016. There is one more regatta (May 24–30, 2016, in Medemblik, Netherlands) they must compete in in order to qualify as the single U.S. representative at the Games.

Skeels, who experienced a spinal cord injury in a bike accident in 1990, took up sailing four years later. As a former Division I college athlete, she had been searching for an adaptive sport that would satisfy her competitive nature. It took only one regatta for her to find her place in sailing, which, she says, is “the most inclusive of all adaptive sports. Sailing uses the same boat, the same equipment, just with adaptation. It’s very inclusive.”

Yet, the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) has eliminated sailing from the 2020 games; Skeels and other adaptive sailors are advocating to the IPC to get the sport reinstated. That’s one reason why her participation in this year’s trials has felt so precious. “For those of us who love this sport, the stakes are very high. The 2016 games could be the last ones for adaptive sailing.”

Advocacy comes easily to Skeels, who serves on the Rhode Island Governor’s Commission for People with Disabilities and is a board member of New England Disabled Sports (NEDS). An adaptive ski instructor, Skeels recently received a $28,000 grant from the Craig H. Neilsen Foundation designed to help adaptive skiers reach the most elite levels of Paralympic skiing. She is working with NEDS, nationally ranked ski coaches, Tufts occupational therapy students, and others to study ways to improve skills and appropriately classify skiers by their athletic ability, not their mobility status. The grant will also help fund an adaptive ski camp in March, 2016, at Loon Mountain, at which Tufts students will volunteer.

Skeels is very excited about giving OT students more exposure to the world of adaptive sports. “When people with spinal cord injuries and other disabilities engage in high levels of adaptive sports, they are more likely to be employed, to pursue education, and to participate actively in life,” Skeels says. “Adaptive sports is occupational therapy in practice.”
While new to the faculty group, Sue Higgins has spent plenty of time on the Tufts campus over the years. A triple Jumbo (BSOT, '86; MAOT, '02; OTD, '15), she returns to Tufts as academic fieldwork coordinator and lecturer.

Higgins brings extensive experience in mental health practice and fieldwork coordination to her new role. She has been a practicing occupational therapist for 30 years and has acted as a fieldwork coordinator in a variety of settings, including at Taunton State Hospital, New England Institute of Technology, Bristol Community College, and Butler Hospital, among others. She recently completed her doctoral research on identifying current OT practice trends and views of group treatment in order to identify supports and barriers to group intervention; clarify future educational needs; and propose recommendations to increase group work in OT practice.

Higgins is also involved in the new Institute for Human-Animal Interaction at Tufts (http://hai.tufts.edu) and is excited about the role the OT department is playing in this initiative (see p. 2). For the past six years, Higgins and her dog Bridget have been participating in animal assisted therapy (AAT) at Butler Hospital and Memorial Hospital in Rhode Island, working mostly with patients with mental illness. She says that AAT goes hand in hand with occupational therapy, and there are strong advocates for this type of intervention within the profession. “Animals have tremendous power over people and taking care of a pet is a human occupation. And from a mental health standpoint, animals help people to feel better. No matter how down someone is, a dog still gives unconditional love,” she says.

Higgins is thrilled to be back teaching at her alma mater, especially as fieldwork coordinator. “Fieldwork is critical in this profession, but unfortunately, there is a shortage of fieldwork opportunities for people coming out of school,” she explains. Her goal is to generate new placements and to help students develop the skills they need to be successful in their placements. “I’m looking for innovative ways to solve the ‘lack of fieldwork’ challenge,” she says. “This is my niche.”

Assistant Professor Beth Marfeo comes to Tufts from Boston University, where she earned a PhD in Health Services Research and was a lecturer and research assistant professor. She also holds a masters in public health from Yale University and a bachelors in occupational therapy from the Medical College of Georgia.

Marfeo has worked as an occupational therapist in Boston-area healthcare facilities, taught in occupational therapy and public health programs, and participated in hospital and university public health committees. Her primary research interests include measurement development, work disability, and healthy aging, with a focus on the interactions between environmental demands, adaptations, and aging as it affects a person’s health-related quality of life.

With this strong interest in both health policy and aging across the lifespan, Marfeo brings a unique perspective to her Tufts course Occupation and Adaptation across the Adult Lifespan. “The focus of my work has been around healthy and productive aging,” she says. “The public health experience has allowed me to integrate how health policy affects practice when working with older people.”

Marfeo also teaches Research Methods for Rehabilitation Professionals, a class that dovetails with her research interest in measurement development. She is currently a co-investigator on several large research projects related to examining measurement challenges within the U.S. Social Security Administration’s disability programs and has done extensive work in measurement development. In her research methods class, Marfeo emphasizes that measurement is a critical part of the research process and of occupational therapy as a profession. “Occupational therapy is not just about interventions. You have to be able to measure a person’s participation, health function, and quality of life,” she explains. “I teach from a patient-centered research approach. My goal is to help students learn to conduct research that is meaningful for the population,” she says.

Applying her strong research background to her work in the classroom is, to Marfeo, the best part of her move to Tufts. “My previous positions were primarily about research. Now I am really enjoying interacting with the students,” she says.

Friday, April 8th – AOTA Conference Alumni & Affiliates Reception
Thursday, April 28th – BSOT Party for Alumni and Friends, CLIC Building, 574 Boston Ave.
Last spring, students Elizabeth Casey and Julie Jacobs organized a book drive for the Reading Buddies program at the VA. Liz, Julie and their classmates collected more than 500 books to add to the collection for the Reading Buddies program.

Congratulations to our Spring 2015 Department MS & OTD Student Award Recipients:

Beckenstein Family Award: Gabrielle Mele-Algus, OTS; Nicole Picone, MS, OTR/L; Haley O’Connor, OTS; Denise LaRocca, OTS; Sara Tian, OTS.

Joy Ann Greisen Award: Brij Malaya, MS, OTR/L

Marjorie B Greene Award: Susan Higgins, OTD, OTR/L

In September, Cailin Donahue, MS, OTR/L, and Linda Tickle-Degnen, PhD, FAOTA, OTR/L, traveled to Umeå University in Sweden to meet with OTs from the Department of Community Medicine and Rehabilitation. They met to discuss collaboration in research related to quality of life and social participation in Parkinson’s disease, Donahue presented What is a Clinical Doctorate in Occupational Therapy? Tickle-Degnen gave a presentation Purposeful and Meaningful Life Activity in the Very Old and Parkinson’s to staff and faculty at Umeå University Hospital. The pair enjoyed meeting with their Swedish colleagues and developing a more global perspective on their profession.

Congratulations to Gary Bedell, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA, who has been elected to the Academy of Research of the American Occupational Therapy Foundation (AOTF). His election will be acknowledged at an awards ceremony at the April, 2016, AOTA annual conference in Chicago.

Congratulations to Joanne Farrar, MS, OTR/L (’95), who has been awarded a United States Department of Veterans Affairs Certificate of Recognition for her work with veterans in White River Junction, Vermont. This is the second time Joanne has earned this prestigious award.

Congratulations to Fiona Jensen, OTR/L (’85), who was interviewed by Mindy Todd on NPR’s The Point, about ways to teach young people to manage stress and resolve conflict using mindfulness. In 2010, Jensen founded the nonprofit community organization CALMER Choice (www.calmerchoice.org), which stands for Cultivating Awareness, Living Mindfully, Enhancing Resilience, after a rash of teen suicides and deaths in the Barnstable, Massachusetts school district. Calmer Choice works with school systems on Cape Cod to provide mindfulness-based inner resilience training in order to prevent and reduce stress, addiction, and suicide among high school teens.

Publications


Scientific Posters & Presentations (Students have *)


ACCOLADES

The new complex at 574 Boston Avenue, housing the Department of Occupational Therapy as well as other Tufts departments, offers collaborative learning spaces.
Accolades, continued from page 5


MAOT 2015 Workshop & Poster Presentations


Rini Aras,* Samantha Cooper,* Xue Deng,* Taylor Rose,* Gary Bedell, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA. Social participation and navigation: A usability study.

Mary Alicia Barnes, MS, OTR/L; Maureen Nardella, MS, OTR/L; Kim Bushey, OTR/L; North Shore Community College and Jean MacLachlan, MS, OTR/L; Salem State University; Collaborative intraprofessional level II fieldwork.

Megan Barrett*, Caroline Cohn*, Rose Anne Lajara*, Jaye McLaren*, Jennifer Schmitt*, Amanda Belville, MS, OTR/L, Alyson Jodoin, PT, DPT, Christa Rocco, PT, DPT, Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital, The effects of pet therapy on stress among college students.

Gary Bedell, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA. Social participation and navigation: Phase I intervention design.


Katie Buttafarrow*, Alisha Cerel*, Jamie Crooker*, Amanda Simmons*, Therapy animals and stress reduction in college students.


Catherine Evans*; Patrick Hartmann*; Emileigh Mercer*; Claudia Nason*; Marisa Williams, *; Lisa Payne PhD., Swarthmore College; Selective attention in older adults.


Jessica Harley, DPT, PT, OTR/L; Chelsea Mello, MS, OTR/L (alumna), Neighborhood House Charter School, Look aHEAD: Occupational therapy’s role in concussion management.

Michelle (Hung) Jacquin*, Naomi Lin*, Jennifer Quinn*, Pranjali Salva*, Dorothy Smith*, Jessica Pickett, MS, OTR/L; Teresa May Benson; ScD, OTR/L, FAOTA. Jarrold, Boucher, & Smith play scenario: Inter-rater reliability.

Margaret (Peggy) Morris, OTD, OTR/L, BCP. Contextual services for school practice: An evidence-based plan.

Sharan L. Schwartzberg, EdD, OTR/L, FAOTA, CGP, FAGPA; Ellen S. Patterson, MD, MA, Mohammed Barra, Johanna Hauer, Tufts Dental School; Ellen White, MS, OTR/L, Tufts Medical Center; Rini Shaji*, & Shannon Stubbs*. Designing oral health education group for psychiatric inpatients.