By: Cheryl Crow

On October 13-16th, over 20 Masters of Occupational Therapy (MOT) students from Samuel Merritt University (SMU) attended the Occupational Therapy Association of California (OTAC)’s 35th anniversary at their annual state conference in Sacramento. Ten students attended the Advocacy day at the State Capitol building which included many renowned speakers such as Jennifer Synder (OTAC Lobbyist) and Amy Jo Lamb, OTD,OTR/L of the American Occupational Therapy Political Action Committee (AOTA-PAC Chair). Activities included small group discussions on timely issues such as tele-health, autism, budget/financing, and scope of practice. Students then met with legislators for 15-20 minutes on these issues and passed out a card titled, “35 Reasons Californians Can Be Grateful for Occupational Therapy,” which was generated by 10 current second year SMU MOT students.

SMU Professor Guy McCormack, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA and co-chair of the Advocacy and Government Affairs committee, stated, “I am extremely proud of the students for showing up at Advocacy Day. Staff and colleagues told me how professional and helpful the SMU students were in volunteering at the conference. The students put forth a great effort to be there when they had many course assignments to get done. I suspect we will see a number of emerging leaders coming out of these classes.”

David Pilon, MOT2 and SOTA OTAC Rep, deserves special recognition for his dogged persistence in recruiting students. After the event, he stated, “Advocacy day was an eye-opening experience. Health care is constantly changing, and it’s important that occupational therapy students and practitioners become aware of those changes and be a voice for the unique services OT provides.”

Students also attended many talks on relevant topics, from hand camps to virtual reality. Many attended an alumni reception, sponsored by SMU and arranged by Alumni Relations Director Carla Ross. Overall, the event lived up to its theme: “Unique History, Vibrant Future.”

Welcome, Class of 2013!

By: Cheryl Crow

The first few days at a new school or job are often overwhelming—that’s why this year, the Student Occupational Therapy Association put on a “Welcome BBQ” for the incoming class of 2013.

After Day 2 of orientation, new MOT students filed onto Peralta’s sunny second floor patio to bond with MOT2s (second year students) over a delicious potluck. Second year students also provided tours, which involved many reassurances that, “Yes, you will find your way soon!”

The second year students also hosted a Pizza Party in early September on the new Green Space outside Peralta, where MOT “buddies” were revealed. SOTA President Darlyn San Jose explains, “Second year buddies serve as a mentor and support system for the first year buddy.” MOT2s were matched up with MOT1s based on shared interests and passions.

Although a fire alarm threatened to interfere with the celebration, we persevered and were able complete the activity with new friendships forged.

For more photos, see page 9.
Bicycling for a Cause: BORP Ride

By: Laura Heinemann & Cheryl Crow

Hundreds of bicycles, handcycles and road-racing chairs coursed over the back roads of Sonoma County near Geyserville, California on September 24 to support Bay Area Outreach and Recreation Program (BORP) in their annual Revolution Ride. Cyclists included SMU’s own Carly Keller, Greer Bradley and Laura Heinemann (pictured above left), all second year OT students.

Taking part in the Revolution was more than just a ride through the wine country; for these students it was an opportunity to give back to their community and take part in SOTA’s first community service day of the year. “The event was very inspiring,” said participant and SOTA member, Keller of the ride. “We were riding alongside the people for whom our fundraising dollars were being raised and the BORP community was incredibly welcoming.” The three members of Samuel Merritt University’s “Masters of Occupation” team raised $1,300 for BORP—contributing to a total of over $150,000 dollars raised that day.

The Revolution Ride was an easy choice for SOTA’s first community service day—Heinemann doubles as an assistant coach to BORP’s prep-level wheelchair basketball team on the weekends. Wheelchair basketball being the reason that she became interested in the profession of Occupational Therapy, Heinemann was proud to bring her two worlds together for the 25 mile ride through the wine country. “It was so great to have my classmates along for the ride with me—I loved introducing them to my fellow coaches and the kids on my team.”

BORP, an institution of the Bay Area for over thirty years, provides opportunities for recreational and athletic activities for people with disabilities in all age groups. The organization’s competitive athletic programs include wheelchair basketball, power soccer and goal ball—a sport for competitors with visual impairments. BORP also offers access to a fully accessible club house, complete with handcycles, a wheelchair-accessible movie room, computers and desk space for the participants’ homework needs, and a fully equipped and adapted weight room.

SMU’s participation in the Revolution Ride was the first of a year-long of planned community service and outreach events. SOTA would love to see more participants in upcoming events—ask your SOTA officers about opportunities to get involved in the future!

Brain Awareness for Elementary Students

By: Cheryl Crow

How many 5th graders have the opportunity to hold a human brain in their hands? Although no statistics are available for this question, we can safely say it is a rare opportunity, particularly in low income areas. Samuel Merritt University Neuroscience Associate Professor Dr. Barbara Puder, Phd, is doing her best to increase that number, with the help of Masters of Occupational Therapy students.

In early October, students visited Hoover and Emerson Elementary schools to engage students in three educational brain activities including a “brain station” with the human brains, an outdoors “human neuron” activity, and a jelly bean activity to explore the sense of taste. These visits took place as part of Dr. Puder’s Brain Awareness Program.

To learn more, see Dr. Puder’s website: http://www.samuelmerritt.edu/basic_sciences/brain_awareness
Notes from the SOTA Chairperson: What is SOTA?

First and second year students are partnered up based on various commonalities. This year, we also hosted a Welcome Back BBQ for faculty and new and current students. This gave us the opportunity to get to know each other as well as give the new students a tour of the campus.

Recently, many of us attended the Occupational Therapy Association of California (OTAC) Conference in Sacramento where we attended various seminars and an all day Advocacy event. Many of us were inspired by the different specialties of other occupational therapists, the various populations that we can work in and how we can advocate for our profession. We had the opportunity to go to the Capital Building and learn about legislation that can affect occupational therapists, how to get involved and how to meet with legislators. We learned that even though we are still students, we can get involved in advocacy and make a difference now to ensure a bright future for occupational therapy.

SOTA’s future plans for the year include fundraisers, community outreach opportunities, a Holiday party, Friends and Family day and events for OT awareness month including Backpack Awareness Day. Our organization would not be what it is today without the support from our faculty and staff and the time and commitment from all the board members who are taking SOTA to the next level.

Newsletter Editor’s Notes: OT in High Definition

By: Cheryl Crow, MOT2

“Occupational therapy...what is that?” Many of us will hear this question over and over throughout our careers. I often feel torn between highlighting an aspect that the person I’m speaking to might find interesting (for example, focusing on OTs’ role in mental health, schools or physical rehabilitation) versus giving a big picture explanation of the field’s breadth. I usually try to kill two birds with one stone by providing a high level introduction (“We help people achieve their goals regardless of what physical or mental challenges they face”) followed by some specifics (“for example, in ___, we do ___”).

This year, SOTA is starting local with our effort to expand awareness of occupational therapy, first by rejuvenating this Newsletter and secondly by creating a brand new SOTA website. We look forward to spreading the word further through community outreach events such as Backpack Awareness day and our volunteer efforts.

The theme at last year’s national AOTA conference was “OT in High Definition.” The importance of defining our profession recurred throughout the event. We all should consider what our “OT Elevator Speech” is—I would love to hear yours, drop me a line and I’ll include it in January’s Newsletter!

National Affairs

First things first: have you joined the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) yet? Please visit www.aota.org to do so today! Our goal is to have 100% participation for our current students...if USC can do it, we can do it too.

For those who don’t know, in 2017, the profession of Occupational Therapy (as well as AOTA) will turn 100. Thus, for every day meeting society’s occupational needs.” Find out how you can get involved on the Centennial Vision webpage.

On October 28-29, AOTA is providing an Adult Cognition Specialty Conference, featuring among others SMU Faculty member Gordon Muir Giles, PhD, Dip COT, OTR/L, FAOTA. For more information, click here. There will also be an Autism West conference in Long Beach, CA on Dec 2-3, 2011.

Finally, the AOTA Student Conclave will be in Rhode Island...
Student Spotlight: SOTA Members

Read the boxes below to get to know your Student Occupational Therapy Association members.

**Carly Keller, MOT2, Student Body Representative.**
“While the paths we all took to becoming an OT may differ, the one thing we all share is compassion for others.”

**Karen Sommers, MOT1: SOTA Representative.**
Fun fact: Karen’s favorite flavor of ice cream is Ben & Jerry’s Fish Food!

**Kelly Ma, MOT1: Community Outreach Representative.**
Kelly’s response when people ask what OTs do: “We help you do!”

**Morgan Inouye, MOT1: ASCOTA Representative.**
Favorite quote: “The secret of health for both mind and body is not to mourn for the past, not to worry about the future, or not to anticipate troubles, but to live in the present moment wisely and earnestly.” -Buddha

**Nancy Ou, MOT1: Student Body Representative.** Favorite quote: “People are afraid to pursue their most important dreams, because they feel that they don’t deserve them, or that they’ll be unable to achieve them. -The Alchemist

**Leslie Marsden, MOT1, Student-Faculty Liaison.**
“Go confidently in the direction of your dreams, live the life you’ve imagined.” - Thoreau

**Jen Warner, MOT2, Vice Chair-Person.**
“Do what you love and love what you do”

**Marina Gonzalez, MOT2: Student-Faculty Liaison.**
“I enjoy dancing, playing my clarinet, hiking, kayaking, going for long rides on my scooter, and creating activities for my nephews and nieces to explore.” Favorite quote: “To love oneself is the beginning of a lifelong romance.”

**Margaret Marini, MOT2: Recording Secretary.**
Favorite Books: A Tree Grows in Brooklyn, Tuesdays with Morrie. Favorite Quote: “To the world you may be one person, but to one person you may be the world.”
Erin Niland, MOT2: Student-Faculty Liaison
Why OT school: “I started out as a sociology major, took a course in sociology of health and medicine, and decided I wanted to work in the healthcare field; it became clear to me that being an OT would allow me to work with people in a context I felt really empowered people.”

Marie Nicolopoulos, MOT2: SOTA Representative
“Find something you love to do and you’ll never have to work a day in your life.”

Darlyn San Jose, MOT2: Chairperson. “I enjoy helping people and want to be in a profession where I can build relationships and see people live their lives again. I believe that everyone deserves a chance to live independently and enjoy their lives despite the disabilities they may have. Learning to become an occupational therapist transcends into my life as well and I am appreciating every step of this journey.”

Carla Randall, MOT2, Community Outreach Coordinator
"Courage doesn't always roar. Sometimes courage is the little voice at the end of the day that says I'll try again tomorrow." - Radmacher

Cheryl Crow, MOT2, Newsletter Editor. “My punctuation mark of preference is the exclamation point. I really enjoy making videos about my passions—check these out!”

Laura Heinemann, MOT2: Corresponding Secretary
“I am a small-town, meat and potatoes, honest to goodness farm-girl, who used to get up at 4 a.m. to pick corn and now get’s up at 4 a.m. to study! Well, not quite that early, but it feels like it sometimes!” Favorite quote: “Even if you’re on the right track, you’ll get run over if you just sit there.” - Will Rogers

Margaret Marini, MOT2: Recording Secretary. Favorite Books: A Tree Grows in Brooklyn, Tuesdays with Morrie. Favorite Quote: "To the world you may be one person, but to one person you may be the world.”

Tina Sidhu, MOT1: Vice Treasurer. Favorite quote: "Nothing is more highly to be prized than the value of each day"- Goethe

David Pilon, MOT2: OTAC Representative. Favorite quote: "Life is short but sweet for certain.” - Dave

Janet Alexander MOT2: Treasurer. Fun fact: Janet was born at Providence Hospital, essentially on campus. She grew up in Castro Valley.
1) Why did you become an OT/ specialist in your area?  
When I was exploring career options I took a test that was designed to identify professionals, who represented various professions, whose answers to the same test questions most closely matched “test takers” answers. Results showed that my answers least matched those of practicing occupational therapists. Hm… I really like what I do so I am still baffled. When I was in my first year of OT school, I placed a picture of a child with an upper extremity prosthesis on my refrigerator. Perhaps this was a source of inspiration but at the time I thought I’d be working with adults with developmental disabilities. Some 25+ years later I am the Director of a hand camp for kids with upper limb difference and I work as an OT serving children with hand differences or injuries.

Two years after I received my BS in OT I decided to work towards a second degree in OT with the primary intention of bettering my skills. In the MS program I completed an instructional technology class and learned how to create slide shows, presentation posters, and videos. I blended my interest in educational technology with my other interest in assistive technologies and made a series of instructional videos for OTs. Peddling my technology wares, I applied to a new occupational therapy program being developed in Oakland …and now you know the rest of the story.

2) What advice do you have for current students?  
As much as possible, be an evidenced-based practitioner and always know your purpose for providing a particular intervention. Being an evidenced-based practitioner does not mean that you will abandon all intervention strategies not shown to be research, but it might mean that you will: 1) pay attention to search; 2) question intervention strategies that seem widely popular but don’t really make sense when you consider the science behind the intervention; and 3) take meaningful measures to monitor change. Regarding the latter, if your client makes no improvement with a particular intervention, how much longer will you continue with the intervention?

3) What is your favorite thing about teaching?  
I truly enjoy watching students learn and creating good learning opportunities that facilitate better understanding. Being present and observing the facial expression a student has in the moment he or she ‘gets it’ is priceless!

3) What is something people might not know/  
As much as possible, be an evidenced-based practitioner and always know your purpose for providing a particular intervention. Being an evidenced-based practitioner does not mean that you will abandon all intervention strategies not shown to be research, but it might mean that you will: 1) pay attention to search; 2) question intervention strategies that seem widely popular but don’t really make sense when you consider the science behind the intervention; and 3) take meaningful measures to monitor change. Regarding the latter, if your client makes no improvement with a particular intervention, how much longer will you continue with the intervention?

Professor Spotlight: Dr. Barbara Puder, Ph.D.

1) Why did you become a Neuroscientist?  
I became interested in neuroscience after my husband was diagnosed was an oligodendrogloma - I could hardly say the word at that time, but it is a brain tumor. I wanted to learn more about the brain and brain cancer so after he was through with surgery and radiation therapy I went back to school and earned my BS in biology and an PhD in Neurosciences/Biomedical sciences.

2) What’s something interesting about yourself outside your role as an educator? I always like to be doing something - running, hiking, yoga, dancing, shopping, gardening and I will do most anything if someone else wants company such as tennis, golf, wine tasting, or more.

3) Advice for current students:  
All of your profs have different teaching styles so listen to each of them and focus on what they tell you is important. Also study a little bit each day - your brain doesn’t like cramming - if you cram for an exam, you may actually be successful for that exam, but you won’t retain the information over the long run. You would never show up for a 26.2 mile race unless you have trained your body for several months, so why would you treat the most important organ in your body (your brain) any differently??

4) What’s your favorite thing about teaching?  
I love seeing that “aha” moment when a student grasps a concept that they were struggling with. I like the challenge of explaining concepts in many different ways for students who are not understanding something.

5) What is your favorite book and/or movie?  
I just read The Four Agreements by Don Miguel Ruiz - the book’s been out for a while (1997), but it is a short read - I read it in 4 hours - but you really should read this book... really :) Forrest Gump is my favorite movie because that character is truly following his life’s calling in regard to his career paths and his enduring love for Jenny.

Favorite Quote(s): "Out beyond ideas of wrong doing and right doing there is a field. I’ll meet you there. “ - Rumi (Sufi poet)
Professor Spotlight: Ciara Cox, MS, OTR/L

1) Why did you become an OT?
I think for me it was more a question of how rather than why. I was first exposed to art of rehabilitation as a student athlete at Cal. I came over from Ireland on a scholarship to play field hockey and was devastated when an Achilles injury caused me to red-shirt my first year. The athletes trainers were wonderful and I realized I would love to be able to help people that way they did. This was the first step in a journey that led me to becoming an OT. Other steps included being a student athletic trainer, rehab aide, physical therapy assistant and occupational therapist. I love physical rehab and was heading for a career in physical therapy but chose OT because of our added emphasis on cognition.

2) What was your favorite part and/or the most challenging part of becoming an OT?
Working mainly in physical rehabilitation in nursing homes with geriatric residents, I realized that context and cognition were very important to achieving the residents’ maximum potential. I had a dog named K.D. who used to come to work with me and I saw how she reached some residents on a level that I could not. She calmed them and earned their trust immediately. Inspired by K.D., I wrote my Masters’ thesis on Pet Assisted Wellness at Stanford, an animal-facilitated occupational therapy group run on the psychiatric units at Stanford hospital.

3) What is your favorite thing about teaching?
Having the opportunity to contribute to the profession by helping to develop future OTs is very rewarding to me. I don’t have one favorite thing, it is the whole experience of getting to know the students, watching them absorb the course work and develop their clinical reasoning skills; knowing that they are going to be great OTs and that they will improve the lives of so many. Highlights for me are working in the adult clinic and working with students on research. In the clinic, watching students apply their didactic knowledge and experiencing their abilities to improve the lives of the clients they work with is a wonderful experience.

4) Do you have a favorite quote or inspirational saying?
Probably, “The most wasted of all days is one without laughter.” e. e. cummings.
However, what really inspires me are all the people out there who live life to its fullest despite the challenges they face. Two of my favorite organizations are the Wounded Warrior Project and the Challenged Athlete Foundation.

Professor Spotlight: Donna Breger-Stanton, MA, OTR/L, CHT, FAOTA

Why did you become an OT specialist in hand therapy?
I worked several years in neurological rehab and pediatrics. Eventually I found I wanted to work with a different group of patients and had opportunities to help out in the hand clinic. I liked it, and continued until I only treated hand patients. It has been the area where I seem to be able to be most focused.

2) Can you share something interesting about yourself outside your role as an OT/educator?
I used to be a decent skier and I went to Aspen, Colorado where I lived for two years just so I could ski.

3) What advice do you have for current students?
Despite my love for hand therapy, I would never take back my years of working in neurological rehabilitation and in pediatrics, along with time in a state hospital. I fear that if you do not get the full generalist experience, that you will be missing some important pieces of potential knowledge that applies to the hand patient.

4) What is something people might not know about you?
When I tell about my taking two years of ski instruction off to be a ski bum I usually hear a kind of hush in the room. I think we all need to find time after school to follow our special longing to do something, to travel, or whatever it is, before we get much older. Those experiences add to our beings.

5) Can you tell me more about your research?
My particular passion for research has been focused on use of contrast baths because for years I had patients repeatedly tell me how much better their hands felt. Currently, for research we are studying the use of sensory testing instrumentation and I feel sure we will have another great presentation next semester.

6) What’s your favorite Book and Song?
I love the blues, and am an old rock and roll fan. I read books that are usually some kind of mystery, such as by Grisham or Ludlum. I read a lot, it helps me settle down.

“Despite my love for hand therapy, I would never take back my years of working in neurological rehabilitation and in pediatrics, along with time in a state hospital.”
Associate Professor Donna Breger Stanton, MS, OTR/L, CHT received the North Coast Medical Scholarship for her Post Professional preparation for her doctoral studies at Thomas Jefferson University.

Jamie Lutat, MOTS (and SMU class of 2011) received an Entry Level Graduate Scholarship for her internship.

At the Awards Gala Dinner at the OTAC conference, John Goodfellow, MOT, OTR/L who graduated from the Samuel Merritt University Occupational Therapy Department in 1997 was honored with the OT Entrepreneur Award for his programs in rural communities that serve children in the Fresno area.

Do you want to promote your profession/school through your wardrobe? You’re in luck, we have 2 shirt options for you!

1) Another order of the polo shirts (pictured left) will be placed on November 5th. The price will be around $25 dependent on how big the order is. For now, there are 4 shirts left (various sizes). Please contact Jen Warner if you would like to order: jennifer.warner@samuelmerritt.edu

2) We have a second cotton navy T-shirt that has already been printed. Erin Niland has generously overseen the ordering and has 11 smalls and one medium shirt left; they are $13 for anyone who wants one. Email her at: Erin.Niland@samuelmerritt.edu. (design photograph below)

After the talk, second year MOT student Cindy Lyssikatos reported that, “She gave insight into the whole life perspective of being paraplegic, how she shifted the way she thinks about everyday tasks, it was really eye opening.”

Strelkoff shared many details relevant to occupational therapists, particularly regarding the importance of clear and honest patient communication about all domains of life. She also emphasized how her roles as a sister, girlfriend, wife, and mother are affected by her condition, but how ultimately, “It’s not about the chair.”

In a particularly moving moment, Strelkoff was joined by her husband and therapy dog (key characters to her stories) at the end of the talk.

To learn more about this story, visit Strelkoff’s website.

On October 5th, Lyena Strelkoff shared her heartfelt story of transitioning from being a professional dancer and actor to a patient recovering from a T11 complete spinal cord severing. With unfettered honesty, Strelkoff shared powerful vignettes of her psychosocial adjustment to her condition along with vivid details of everyday life today, 5 years post-injury.

For more information, visit Strelkoff’s website.

OT Class of 2012 debuts Two New T-shirts
Photo Reel: Pizza Party & OTAC

Alumni Reception and miscellaneous photos from OTAC Conference
Upcoming SOTA and MOT Events

10/27/2011: Bake Sale
10/31/2011: Axis Dance Company (dancers with and without disabilities) 12-1pm Bechtel
11/3/2011: 8am—Breakfast with faculty
11/24/2011: Volunteer at Thanksgiving event at East Bay Recovery Services
Late-November: Presentation Skills roundtable workshop (look for email from Cheryl)

November-December: Food Drive to benefit Alameda County Food Bank (SOTA sponsored)

December, 2011: Holiday Party for First and Second year MOT students (date and details to be emailed later)
January, 2012: Interviews of potential students (email to come)
2/11/2012: Friends and Family Day, 10:00AM-3:00PM (look for an Evite to come soon!)

April, 2012: -OT awareness month, Belated Backpack Awareness Day
4/26-28/2011: AOTA National Conference in Indianapolis, IN (look to website for more info)

Samuel Merritt University Student Occupational Therapy Association

Chairperson: Darlyn San Jose: darlyn.sanjose@samuelmerritt.edu
Vice-Chairperson: Jennifer Warner Jennifer.warner@samuelmerritt.edu
Website: http://www.samuelmerritt.edu/occupational_therapy/sota

SOTA has had an intermittent newsletter in the past and we hope that the current iteration will endure. We aim to inspire and connect current, former and prospective students and faculty through the program updates provided in this newsletter.

This newsletter was designed by Cheryl Crow, MOT2, Newsletter Editor with input from other SOTA members. We welcome any submissions of content or ideas for future newsletters.

Please contact Cheryl by the end of December to be included in January’s Newsletter! She can be contacted at: Cheryl.crow@samuelmerritt.edu