By: Cheryl Crow, MOT2

OT Month: Backpacks, Ice Cream, and More!

The Master in Occupational Therapy (MOT) students at Samuel Merritt University (SMU) have been busy celebrating OT month through a variety of awareness and education activities.

On Tuesday, April 3rd, MOT students enticed the student body to gather on the second floor lounge for a free Ice Cream Social. Once the students arrived, they found a plethora of information about occupational therapy displayed in posters, flyers, and magnets adjacent to the ice cream. Student body members were encouraged to try on splints and ask the MOT students questions about their profession. Second year MOT student Princess Albania reported, “It was great telling other disciplines what we do and learning what they do.” Special thanks goes to SOTA member Marie Nicolopulus for organizing the event.

On Friday April 6th, Carla Randall organized a Backpack Awareness event. MOT student volunteers lined the entrance of the school and provided students, faculty and staff the opportunity to weigh their backpacks/purses and handed out fliers with backpack, purse and briefcase tips. Carla Randall stated, “It was great informing SMU community members about backpack, purse and briefcase ergonomics!”

This year’s OTAC Spring Symposium took place at a hotel next to the happiest place on earth, Disney’s Paradise Pier Hotel, Anaheim, CA. The symposium went from Saturday, March 31st, to Sunday, April 1st. However, the discounted student track was only on Saturday, which left me plenty of time to go back to my Fullerton home and smother my dog with love. The Student Track on Saturday included five presentations by fellow OT students, of which two were from our very own Samuel Merritt University, and one panel discussion.

Among the five presentations, of course I was very biased to be impressed by The Benefits of Cognitive Training for Older Adults and The Effectiveness of Neurofeedback Training for Children with Autism. These two topics were presented by Mikaela Dubin, Kieran Nicholson, Marie Nicolopulos, Nicole Pierce, Kathryn Wolfe, Princess Albania, Antonio Gomez, and Lisa Holsinger, for Dr. Guy McCormack’s research studies.

Other OT students from various schools presented topics such as caregiver stress for people with Asperger’s Syndrome, the role of service animals in OT, and fall prevention in older adults. What intrigued me the most, besides the cognitive training and neurofeedback, was the animal assisted therapy, presented by Jamie Morris. She spoke about incorporating trained therapy dogs into her practice. Although this would not be appropriate in some settings and for many clients with allergies or severe fear, therapy animals indeed can

By: Kelly Ma, MOT1

OTAC Symposium From the Eyes of a First Year Attendee

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OTAC Symposium (continued from page 1)

become a part of a very engaging and meaningful occupational therapy. An OT can either become a trained therapy animal handler or contact widely recognized organization for a volunteer handler to bring a therapy animal to the treatment session. The use of a therapy animal in OT would then be billed as any other tools and/or supplies used in therapy. The organization Morris recommended, Delta Society, will be discussing how animal assisted therapy is used in a conceptual framework for OT at the AOTA national conference.

Another session that I found invaluable was the panel discussion on successful fieldwork experiences. The panel included an academic fieldwork coordinator, a fieldwork educator, a new COTA graduate, and an OT student with completion of one level II fieldwork. Repeated multiple times by all four perspectives was the significance of communication. However, what I found the most encouraging was a point made by both fieldwork coordinator and educator: An excellent OT student inspires the fieldwork educator to become a better practitioner. This showed that our fieldwork educators are open to new experiences with us, and we would do them right to respond in kind.

The excitement and pride of my fellow Samuel Merritt students, looking professional and serious to present Dr. McCormack’s research studies, kept me engaged to the last minute of the student track. Unfortunately, I had no interest in staying for the following student networking reception. More eager to go home to my family, friends, and dog, I grabbed two ginormous cookies from the reception to share with all those I love.

Community Service Takes Students to the Court

By: Laura Heinemann, MOT2

On the morning of March 11, seven second-year MOT students from Samuel Merritt University gathered at the Kleeberger field house on the campus of UC Berkeley, to take part in the fifth annual Cal Roll N Shoot. This was not your typical community service day. The students walked onto a basketball court, ready to play in a 3-on-3 tournament that they had been raising money for through a pledge drive. Sporting matching OT t-shirts they took the floor...in their wheelchairs.

The Cal Roll N Shoot tournament is a student-organized 3-on-3 wheelchair basketball tournament at Berkeley that invites students from the university, as well as groups from across the East Bay, to participate in a day of competition, education, fun and adaptive sport. Funds raised for the event are donated to the Bay Area Outreach and Recreation Program (BORP)- a local organization that provides athletic and recreational opportunities to people with physical disabilities in the Bay Area. Through the efforts of the nine teams that participated in the event, over $5,600 was raised to support BORP.

Samuel Merritt University was represented for the first time in this event, by a group of enthusiastic second year MOT students. “I was excited to take part in a tournament that included individuals who were able-bodied and trying the sport out from a different angle,” said Nicole Pierce, a second-year MOT student, of the anticipation she felt before the tournament began. Accompanying the SMU students on the courts were over 140 participants, volunteers, fans and staff of the Roll N Shoot. Additionally, the BORP Bay Cruisers prep and varsity level wheelchair basketball teams were present to act as coaches for able bodied teams. “After our first loss, our coach did a great job of bringing us together to give us positive encouragement before our next game,” said David Pilon, another member of SMU’s team, of his 9-year-old coach for the event.

After all nine able-bodied teams played in round-robin games for seating in the tournament, BORP’s varsity wheelchair basketball team took on all comers for an exhibition game. Before tip-off, the able-bodied team was given a 40 point lead on the scoreboard. Having just returned from a regional tournament in Phoenix the weekend before, the varsity team was looking like a well-oiled machine as they worked the floor against the assortment of college students, local business people, and members of the Cal Division I men’s basketball team. In the end, the Bay Cruisers pulled ahead and beat the able-bodies 54-44. The able-bodies only managed two shots against BORP’s air-tight defense.

SMU’s team, unlike the Bay Cruisers, operated somewhat less efficiently, going 1-3 in their games for the day. The first two games the OTs played were heartbreak-breaking losses, but the students made good use of their time on the court to practice maneuvering their chairs, setting up strategies, and developing their communication skills. MOT student Mikaela Dubin said of the experience, “It was so hard to know where to be on the court, and then to figure out how to get there on wheels!” During the third game of the day, the SMU students started to function like a team- plays were made, baskets fell, and in the end they only lost to a team of local architects by one point. Finally, in the last game of the day, the SMU students managed to pull off a win with their new found set of occupation performance skills for the sport of wheelchair basketball.

The event was more than just a community service day. For this group of SMU students, it was a day of learning and inspiration. “Getting to see these kids use their chairs effortlessly after we’d fought with turning quickly all morning was amazing,” said Princess Albania, who played on the MOT team. “I was totally fascinated all day long and I loved that by the end of the day I didn’t see the chairs anymore, I saw athletes.”
Notes from the SOTA Chairperson: Year in Review

This year has been filled with amazing accomplishments from our organization that includes: Buddy system, friends and family day, community outreach events, various activities for OT awareness month, fundraising, advocacy and more. Therefore, it has been my pleasure and honor to be the Chairperson of SOTA this year. Our success would not have been possible without the time, dedication and commitment from all of the executive board members and our advisor. I wish the incoming SOTA executive board all the best of luck and I have no doubt in my mind that they will continue to do great things with the organization.

To my fellow classmates of 2012, we made it! These past two years have gone by so fast and I can’t imagine completing this program with anyone else. We are a wonderful, unique class and I am very lucky to have met every single one of you. You are all amazing individuals and I can’t wait to see where our careers take us.

Good luck and Congratulations!

Newsletter Editor’s Notes: Dancing for Stress Relief

By: Cheryl Crow, MOT2

As I finish the classroom portion of my graduate school experience, I find myself reflecting on the importance of my leisure and play occupations/routines throughout my education. My once to twice weekly swing dance routine has provided some much needed social, physical and psychological stress relief from the demands of my coursework. Additionally, maintaining a dancing routine has also helped me structure my time. For example, if I know I’m dancing at 8pm, I will be less likely to procrastinate on a paper than if I have all afternoon/evening to do so.

You may not enjoy dancing as much as I do, but I encourage you to find some form of enjoyable, meaningful leisure activity to pursue throughout your education, whether it be a physical art such as knitting, a creative journal project, or simply making time to visit with friends and family. It is far easier to encourage our clients to engage in meaningful occupations if we do so ourselves. Plus, if they challenge us (like dance challenges me), we can identify with our clients as they struggle to overcome the challenge of learning new skills. I wish all the Class of 2012 and 2013 the best and hope everyone finds a meaningful form of stress relief throughout their careers!

National Affairs: OT Month & More

By: Cheryl Crow, MOT2

As stated on page 1, April is national OT month, and AOTA has provided the top 10 ways to promote our profession on their website!

Additionally, AOTA President Florence Clark recently blogged a very interesting post about ways to succinctly define occupational therapy, which may be helpful to students and professors alike.

The AOTA 2010 Occupational Therapy Compensation and Workforce Report is currently accessible to AOTA members, click this link for more details.

Finally, a list of upcoming conferences and events can be found on the AOTA website here.
Student Spotlight: Volunteering

Read the boxes below to learn more about the volunteer and charity endeavors of your classmates!

Laura Heinemann, MOT2, above: I've been an assistant coach for the prep-level wheelchair basketball team at Bay Area Outreach and Recreation Program (BORP) for the last two years. As a coach, I not only help my kids refine their skills and teamwork on the court, but also to help them adapt their equipment, posture and techniques so that they may participate to the fullest extent possible despite their disability.

Meg Marini, MOT2: The images above are of myself working for an NGO (Non-governmental organization) named (SIC) Support for international Change. The program focuses on educating and testing individuals on HIV/AIDS. We spent a little less than 3 months teaching children and adults about the transmission and progression of the disease in Arusha and Babati, Tanzania. Tanzania is part of sub-saharan Africa and considered a third world country. I fully intend to go back after graduate school and offer my services to the people in the village where I lived while there.

Cheryl Crow, MOT2: I have been a volunteer public relations writer and video developer for the global micro-lending nonprofit organization Jolkona.org since their inception in 2010. I also have raised funds to provide 8 limb braces for patients in Bangladesh through the Jolkona Micro-lending web-platform. I really enjoy being able to contribute from afar and hope to visit someday!
Professor Spotlight: Dr. Guy McCormack

1) Why did you become an OT professor in your area? After completing college I enlisted in the Navy Seabees and served in Vietnam for 13 months. Having been in a combat zone and seeing so many people wounded and disfigured, I decided that I wanted to devote my life to helping people. I liked the philosophy of OT and was able to obtain a stipend to study occupational therapy at the University of Puget Sound. I eventually came to Samuel Merritt University to develop the master of occupational therapy program in 1994. I left Samuel Merritt to become the program director of the OT program at the University of Missouri because I wanted to teach at a comprehensive research university and develop a curriculum for the graduate level program. To make a long story short, I became a professor because I like the intellectual stimulation and being around smart students and faculty.

2) What is your “elevator Speech” when people ask you “What is Occupational Therapy?” I start by finding out what they know about occupational therapy and build my answer around what they know. Sometimes I compare the similarities and differences between OT and PT. I describe the term “occupation” as having to do with constructive use of time and how participation in occupation has therapeutic value. OT is an evidence-based and science-driven profession. I believe if we do not infuse science into the principles of occupation we will not advance the profession.

3) Can you share something interesting about yourself outside your role as an OT/educator? I am a cancer survivor and a health nut! I get up at 5:30 AM every day and exercise with equipment and light weights; I bike and walk to maintain my cardiovascular system. I eat healthy and buy into the idea of increasing nutritional intake and antioxidants to fend off the ravages of aging. One of my favorite places to walk is on Ocean Beach in San Francisco where I can let my dog run free and enjoy meeting other dogs and their owners.

4) What is your favorite book/song/movie and why? Recently, I loved reading The Brain That Changes Itself because it inspired me to begin reading the neuroscience literature on neuroplasticity.

5) What is your favorite thing about teaching? My favorite thing about teaching is seeing the “lights go off” when I share a technique or intervention. In recent years I have been impressed with the new imaging in neuroscience and how it shows how interventions like mindfulness, breathing practices, and a range of manual therapies have positive outcomes and integrate the mind and body to heal itself.

Friends and Family Day Success

By: Cheryl Crow, MOT2

On February 11, over 100 Masters in Occupational Therapy students and their families/loved ones gathered at Samuel Merritt University for Friends and Family Day. This annual event, put on entirely by students in the Student Occupational Therapy Association (SOTA), provides an opportunity for loved ones to get to see what a day in a student’s life is like and experience firsthand some of the resources available at our school.

Highlights of this year’s event included a silent auction and raffle to raise money for SOTA, trips to the Anatomy cadaver lab, trips to the Human Occupation Lab (where professors handmade splints for friends and family and attendees were able to try modalities such as paraffin and heat packs), and Pediatric clinic trips with professor Robyn Wu.

SOTA member and second year student Carla Randall reported, “Venturing down into the anatomy lab was very educational for my middle school aged son,” who wrote a report about his experience for his school newsletter.

Students ended up raising $461.00 from the raffle and $1,268.00 from the auction.
Study Tips Talk

By Cheryl Crow, MOT2

On Tuesday, January 17th, 2012, Samuel Merritt University Director of Assessment Valerie Landau gave an encore presentation of her study tips from a cognitive and neuroscience perspective talk. She listed 15 strategies for optimal learning, the top 7 of which are:

1) **Exercise**: Exercise is the number one key to learning, Valerie reported. Walking was listed as the most effective way to increase one’s ability to study, and a 7 minute walk right before a test was associated with significantly increased test scores!

2) **Sleep** was listed as the second most critical element for learning and memory consolidation.

3) **Socialization**: This has cognitive benefits, according to Valerie.

4) **Meditation**: This can improve focus, increase the thickness of the cerebral cortex and improve learning via a stress reducing effect.

5) **Writing**: Either writing or talking about anxiety is associated with increased scores.

6) **Variety**: Making sure to vary your environment, where and what you study is recommended. The speaker made a point to clarify that variety based studying is not the same as multi-tasking.

7) **Involve as many senses as possible**: Relating information to colors, textures, and smells in particular can enhance memory.

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Introducing Class of 2013 SOTA members

**By: Cheryl Crow, MOT2**

For the 2012-2013 school year, the organization of SOTA will change structure to be more similar to the AOTA guidelines. We are very excited to announce the class of 2013’s officers:

**Co-Presidents**: Morgan Inouye and Tina Sidhu

**Public Relations officer**: Leslie Marsden

**Social Activities Co-Chairs**: Milena Milenkovic & Ashley Valenzuela

**Fundraising Chair**: Nancy Ou

**Newsletter**: Lloyd Galang

**Class Liaison**: Maribeth Walsh-Villa

First year students will be filling the following roles: **Secretary, Vice-President, Treasurer, Community Outreach, Class Liaison, Historian, and ASB delegate.**
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 Lloyd Galang for questions about future newsletters at: lloyd.galang@samuelmerritt.edu