Samuel Merritt University

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY PROGRAMS

Doctor of Occupational Therapy Program
Master of Occupational Therapy Program

STUDENT HANDBOOK

2026 – 2027

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WELCOME

Welcome to the MOT and OTD Programs at Samuel Merritt University.

You have chosen a profession that asks something of you that few careers ask. It asks for your mind, certainly. You will study anatomy and neuroscience, theory and evidence, assessment, and intervention. But occupational therapy asks for more than knowledge. It asks for you.

I say this to students often, and I mean it: there is no greater asset you will ever bring to your practice than the therapeutic use of yourself. Your presence, your attention, your capacity to sit with another human being in their hardest moments and help them find their way back to the life that matters to them. Techniques can be taught. Tools can be handed to you. But the person you are becoming, that is the instrument that will reduce human suffering and improve the quality of life of the people and groups you will one day be privileged to serve. Everything we do in these programs is in service of sharpening that instrument.

You will work hard here. Our faculty will hold you to a high standard because the people waiting for you on the other side of graduation deserve nothing less. In return, you will find a community of teachers, clinicians, and classmates who are invested in your growth, not just as a practitioner but as a person.

This handbook will guide you through the academic and professional expectations of your program. Read it carefully and return to it often. It works alongside the Samuel Merritt University Catalog and Student Handbook.

On behalf of our faculty and staff, I am glad you are here, and we look forward to walking this journey with you.

Each of you belongs here. Welcome to SMU.

Joseph Pellerito

Joseph Pellerito, PhD, OTR/L
Program Director & Associate Professor - Master & Doctoral Occupational Therapy Programs

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SAMUEL MERRITT UNIVERSITY

Vision, Mission, and Values

Mission

Samuel Merritt University educates students to become highly skilled and compassionate healthcare professionals who positively transform the experience of care in diverse communities.

Vision

Samuel Merritt University will become nationally recognized as a premier, multi-specialty health sciences institution. Expert faculty and staff will shape an inclusive learning environment where all students experience the best teaching practices and state-of-the-art learning approaches. The University will select and support students who will flourish in the rigorous academic programs, learn to practice expertly, and pass licensure or certification examinations on their first attempt.

Values

At Samuel Merritt University, we value…

- A learning environment where we challenge ourselves and our students to think critically, seek mastery, and act compassionately;
- A collegial environment where we are fair, respectful, and behave with integrity;
- A collaborative environment where we partner with one another and with others in the community;
- An innovative environment where we take reasoned risks and move nimbly;
- A results-oriented environment where we provide and expect exceptional performance and service.

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OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY GRADUATE PROGRAMS

Vision, Mission, and Philosophy

Vision

We will be an innovative graduate level program preparing students to provide exceptional, holistic occupational therapy to meet the evolving occupational needs of society.

Mission

To provide transformational professional education that prepares students to provide holistic, client-centered, and evidence-based occupational therapy to diverse communities in a continuously evolving healthcare environment.

Aims of Our Graduate Programs

- Provide a creative and innovative graduate occupational therapy program that meets and exceeds professional standards of excellence;
- Educate students to meet the societal needs for occupational therapy services;
- Educate qualified students from diverse backgrounds to become competent, compassionate and contributing health care professionals;
- Offer curricula designed to prepare graduates who can think logically, critically and independently; who demonstrate competence in the application of knowledge and skills; and whose behavior is guided by professional, humanitarian and ethical values;
- Facilitate the participation of faculty, staff and students in community service, scholarship and professional activities;
- Engage in activities that contribute to the health and well-being of the community;
- Cultivate a caring atmosphere in which occupational therapy students, faculty, and community service providers work together to optimize their personal and professional development.

Philosophy

Occupational therapy empowers individuals to engage in meaningful daily activities to enhance their health, well-being, and participation. Our programs are grounded in a holistic perspective, recognizing the interconnectedness of mind and body and the influence of biological, psychological, and social factors on individual experience. We also acknowledge the critical role of the environment—encompassing physical, psychosocial, cultural, and spiritual dimensions—in shaping occupational engagement.

Our curriculum aligns with our university's mission and vision to foster understanding, critical thinking, and respect for diversity in all its forms. We emphasize interprofessional collaboration and the application of scientific inquiry to advance healthcare practices for individuals, groups, and populations. We value our students as adult learners and cultivate cooperative learning

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environments that promote inquiry, critical thinking, and personal and professional growth, while accommodating diverse learning needs.

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OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY DEPARTMENT'S FOUNDATIONAL FRAMEWORK

The Mind-Body Model underpins occupational therapy practice, viewing the mind and body as interconnected. This model is supported by research in neuroscience, health psychology, and psychoneuroimmunology, providing a scientific basis for the therapeutic value of occupation.

OUR COMMITMENT TO OUR MISSION AND VALUES

The Department of Occupational Therapy is guided by its mission to prepare students to serve and improve healthcare in diverse communities. We achieve this by grounding our work in the distinctive nature of occupational therapy: its holistic perspective, its focus on addressing the social drivers of health in underserved communities, and its unwavering commitment to occupational justice. As a department, we are continually seeking innovative ways to enhance our teaching and practice, ensuring we live out our mission in fostering an inclusive and strong sense of belonging for students, for communities we serve, and for each other.

Curriculum Design

Our curriculum integrates both scientific rigor and holistic principles, particularly emphasizing the Mind-Body Model. This approach recognizes the interconnectedness of physical, psycho-social, cultural, and spiritual aspects in understanding individuals. While rooted in rigorous scientific training, our programs emphasize the broader context in which occupational therapy services occur, going beyond mere physical interventions to encompass the client's unique occupations and their environmental influences. This holistic perspective is crucial in occupational therapy, as it acknowledges that effective services involve understanding and addressing all facets of a person's life and well-being (AOTA, 2020).

Two important documents have informed our curriculum design: ACOTE Accreditation Standards for our entry-level Doctoral and Master's Programs (ACOTE, 2023); and the Occupational Therapy Practice Framework: Domain and Process, 4th Edition (AOTA, 2020). These documents provide guideposts to ensure the OTD and MOT Programs are well-founded and aligned with established standards and current and best practices in occupational therapy.

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CURRICULAR THREADS

The curricular design of our graduate programs is a progressive, evidence-based education of knowledge and skills, and application of both, using a Mind-Body Model. The themes or threads of our graduate programs are foundational knowledge, evidence-based practice, critical analysis and problem solving, occupational therapy theoretical tenets, occupational therapy processes, clinical reasoning, and professionalism. Within these themes, students develop understanding of and skills in provision of occupational therapy services, program development and implementation, research processes, advocacy, and leadership.

Foundational Knowledge

Early coursework aims to facilitate students' understanding of human anatomy and physiology, neuroscience, kinesiology, and biomechanics. In addition, literature search, review and synthesis; professional writing; and oral communication prepare students to meet literary, scientific, academic, and practice expectations of the profession. For example, prior to delving into occupational therapy practices, students learn about common human conditions that affect a person's occupational performance. Problem-based learning is introduced throughout the curriculum to encourage students to apply knowledge and to develop skilled inquiry.

Evidence-Based Practice

The curriculum emphasizes evidence-based practice, a cornerstone of occupational therapy practice that has evolved over the years. Evidence-based practice was introduced in the health professions as "the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of the individual patient. It means integrating individual clinical expertise with the best available external clinical evidence from systematic research" (Sackett et al., 1996, p. 71). Grounding our clinical practice to the current research continues to be a foundation for occupational therapy practice (Thomas et al., 2023).

The Department of Occupational Therapy believes in educating students on the essentials of evidence-based practice, which includes researching, identifying, and critically reviewing evidence relevant to interventions used by occupational therapy practitioners. Throughout the curriculum, students are frequently expected to locate and incorporate supporting evidence when completing scholarly papers and developing intervention plans. Students will develop evidence-based practice skills by incorporating credible evidence along with client values and clinical expertise when making decisions about occupational therapy practice.

Critical Analysis and Problem Solving for Practice and Scholarship

The process of critical analysis begins in the first semester when students have the opportunity to explore, identify, and reflect on complex factors that enable human occupational performance. Students also acquire basic research and analytic skills from the introductory research course. As students have acquired these basic skills, case studies of individuals with disabilities and occupational performance deficits are used to further develop critical analysis and problem-solving skills.

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For OTD students, an additional advanced research course is required that aims to develop students' clinical research knowledge and skills through active participation in analysis and interpretation of quantitative and qualitative data. A final OTD course in research inquiry affords students a rigorous acquisition of research skills.

The students' participation in guided clinical experiences, which include serving adults with psychosocial conditions, children with developmental delay or learning impairment, and adults with physical disability; and four sequential integrative seminars utilizing both problem-based learning and simulation, demands the synthesis of skills in research, critical analysis, and problem solving in order to address occupational performance issues that are facing real and simulated clients. Students in the OTD program complete their capstone experience and project in the final semester of their program.

Occupational Therapy Theoretical Tenets

The fundamental occupational therapy theoretical concept of occupation in relationship to human development, health, life's purpose and meaning, and existence is presented in the first semester and reiterated throughout the curriculum. Through knowledge and understanding of the history, philosophy, beliefs, principles, values, and ever-evolving ideology of occupational therapy, students are expected to understand the intricacy of how occupation is a driving and organizing force in human life. Occupational therapy theories and frames of reference are introduced to students in the first semester and are further applied to clinical practices in clinical courses throughout the program.

Occupational Therapy Processes

At the start of the program, students are introduced to the *Occupational Therapy Practice Framework* (AOTA, 2020) as a fundamental tool for evaluation and intervention with individuals, groups, and populations with a wide range of needs. The Therapeutic Media, Materials and Processes course promotes the students' ability to self-analyze their occupations, skills, patterns, and contexts. The skills for activity/task analysis needed to understand occupation in relationship to the whole human being, mind, body, spirit, and context are constantly reinforced throughout the program.

Having acquired the concepts, knowledge, and skills needed to view human beings and their occupations through the lenses of an occupational therapist, students begin applying theories to practice while specific skills are learned and practiced throughout the last two semesters of coursework prior to Level II Fieldwork. Each course emphasizes use of occupations, tasks, and activities to promote wellness and participation, while addressing the wholeness of a human being. Consistent with the mission and philosophy of the Department of Occupational Therapy, a holistic approach is emphasized, thus students are introduced to various complementary approaches to augment traditional occupational therapy services.

Clinical Reasoning Skills

Assisting the student to develop sound clinical reasoning skills is an important goal for the curriculum design. Foundational knowledge and skills are first taught to students, followed by

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evaluation of their comprehension of knowledge and ability to demonstrate skills. Throughout the didactic coursework, students are constantly challenged to apply learned knowledge in case studies and class discussions. We have developed sequential problem-based courses that utilize our simulation center to allow students to apply their knowledge and to demonstrate the use of clinical reasoning skills. By the second year, students must apply clinical reasoning in all three community participant laboratories during faculty-supervised evaluation, intervention planning, and provision of occupational therapy intervention for clients.

Professionalism and Cultural Humility

To fully embrace the holistic philosophy of the Department of Occupational Therapy, students are introduced to various traditional and non-traditional service delivery environments to understand how occupational therapy is situated within those environments. Professionalism within these environments is promoted through opportunities to apply the concepts of cultural humility (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998) throughout the program, an examination of the roles and responsibilities of occupational therapy practitioners, an introduction to administration and management responsibilities within occupational therapy, and an emphasis on the importance of lifelong learning for professional development. Students develop skills in professional communication through the Interprofessional Communication course which is taken with Doctor of Physical Therapy students during the second semester and these skills are further developed throughout the program. Advocacy, service, and promotion of the profession are presented as core responsibilities of an OT professional, and all students are expected to adhere to ethical principles and demonstrate personal integrity.

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CURRICULUM SEQUENCE AND COURSE OFFERINGS

The Department of Occupational Therapy engaged in a year-long program improvement process that resulted in a resequencing and integration of courses within both the Masters and Doctoral Programs. Therefore, the following curriculum sequence and course offerings are presented based on the start date of your cohort.

Master of Occupational Therapy Curriculum Sequence (Fall 2025 and Forward)

Course No.	Course Title	Units
Year One		
Fall Semester – 13.5 Units		
OT 601	Integrative Seminar I	1
OT 610/610L	Anatomical and Physiological Basis for Human Occupation (lecture and lab)	3.5
OT 611	Foundations of Occupational Therapy	3
OT 612	Theories of Inquiry and Research Methodology	3
OT 619	Human Occupation Throughout the Life Span	3
Spring Semester – 16 Units		
OT 602	Integrative Seminar in OT Practices II and Level 1 Fieldwork A (Simulations)	1
OT 613	Occupational Impacts of Health Conditions	4
OT 616/616L	Therapeutic Media, Materials and Processes (lecture and lab)	2
OT 617/617L	Interpersonal and Interprofessional Communication (lecture and lab)	2
OT 618	Functional Neuroscience	3
OT 627/627L	Applied Kinesiology and Biomechanics (lecture and lab)	4
Summer Semester – 3 Units		
OT 621L	Level I Fieldwork B (Off-Site Clinical or Community-Based Experiences)	3
Year Two		
Fall Semester – 13.5 Units		
OT 603	Integrative Seminar in OT Practices III	0.5
OT 609	Introduction to Documentation	1
OT 626/626L	Theory and Practice in Psychosocial Conditions and Level 1 Fieldwork C (lecture and lab)	4
OT 629/629L	Theory and Practice in Physical Dysfunction (lecture and lab)	4
OT 636/636L	Advanced Clinical Practice (Adults) (lecture and lab)	4
Spring Semester – 13.5 Units		

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OT 604	Integrative Seminar in OT Practices IV	1
OT 652/652L	Administration, Management, and Leadership in Occupational Therapy (lecture and lab)	2.5
OT 631/631L	Occupational Adaptations and Introduction to Modalities (lecture and lab)	3
OT 633	Health Promotion and Wellness in Occupational Therapy Practice	2
OT 632/632L	Advanced Clinical Practice (Pediatrics) (lecture and lab)	4
OT 637	Preparation for Fieldwork Level II	1
Summer Semester – 6 Units		
OT 640	Fieldwork Level IIA	6
Year Three		
Fall Semester – 6 Units		
OT 641	Fieldwork Level IIB	6
Total MOT Units: 71.5		

Doctor of Occupational Therapy Curriculum Sequence (Fall 2025 and Forward)

Course No.	Course Title	Units
Year One		
Fall Semester – 13.5 Units		
OT 701	Integrative Seminar I	1
OT 710/710L	Anatomical and Physiological Basis for Human Occupation (lecture and lab)	3.5
OT 711	Foundations of Occupational Therapy	3
OT 712	Theories of Inquiry and Research Methodology	3
OT 719	Human Occupation Throughout the Life Span	3
Spring Semester – 16 Units		
OT 702	Integrative Seminar in OT Practices II and Level 1 Fieldwork A (Simulations)	1
OT 713	Occupational Impacts of Health Conditions	4
OT 716/716L	Therapeutic Media, Materials and Processes (lecture and lab)	2
OT 717/717L	Interpersonal and Interprofessional Communication (lecture and lab)	2
OT 718	Functional Neuroscience	3
OT 727/727L	Applied Kinesiology and Biomechanics (lecture and lab)	4
Summer Semester – 8 Units		
OT 721	Introduction to Fieldwork Level I B (Clinical Experiences)	3

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OT 715	Scholarly Study	1
OT 720L	Advanced Research Methods	1
OT 753	Special Topics: Advanced Practice Exploration in OT (two 1.5-unit sections)	3
Year Two		
Fall Semester – 15.5 Units		
OT 703	Integrative Seminar in OT Practices III	0.5
OT 709	Introduction to Documentation	1
OT 723	Capstone Exploration	2
OT 726/726L	Theory and Practice in Psychosocial Conditions and Fieldwork Level I C (lecture and lab)	4
OT 729/729L	Theory and Practice in Physical Dysfunction (lecture and lab)	4
OT 736/736L	Advanced Clinical Practice (Adults) (lecture and lab)	4
Spring Semester – 15.5 Units		
OT 704	Integrative Seminar in OT Practices IV	1
OT 752/752L	Administration, Management, and Leadership in OT (lecture and lab)	2.5
OT 731/731L	Occupational Adaptations and Introduction to Modalities (lecture and lab)	3
OT 733	Health Promotion and Wellness in Occupational Therapy Practice	2
OT 732/732L	Advanced Clinical Practice (Pediatrics) (lecture and lab)	4
OT 735/735L	Capstone Development (lecture and lab)	2
OT 737	Preparation for Fieldwork Level II	1
Summer Semester – 6 Units		
OT 740	Fieldwork Level IIA	6
Year Three		
Fall Semester – 6 Units		
OT 741	Fieldwork Level IIB	6
Spring Semester – 9 Units		
OT 754	Capstone Implementation	6
OT 755	Capstone Report	3
Total OTD Units: 89.5		

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ACCREDITATION STATUS

Our regional accreditation is through WSCUC, Western Association of Schools and Colleges, Senior College and University Commission. WSCUC handles the evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of institutions offering the baccalaureate degree and above in California, Hawaii, Guam and the Pacific Basin. Samuel Merritt University has been reaccredited through Spring 2031. The core purpose of WSCUC accreditation is to assure the educational community and general public that an institution meets the Standards of Accreditation, and the Core Commitments to Institutional Capacity and Education Effectiveness.

In March 2024, the OTD Program was granted re-accreditation by the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE), located at 7501 Wisconsin Avenue, Suite 510E, Bethesda, MD 20814. Phone: (301) 652-6611. Email: accred@aota.org. Website: acoteonline.org. Our next on-site visit for the OTD program will occur during the 2028/2029 academic year. The MOT Program was re-accredited in 2017. Our next on-site visit for the MOT program will occur during the 2027/2028 academic year. Our next on-site visit for the OTD program will occur during the 2028/2029 academic year. The MOT Program was re-accredited in 2017. Our next on-site visit for the MOT program will occur during the 2027/2028 academic year.

Graduates of the MOT or OTD Program are eligible to take the national certification examination for the occupational therapist administered by the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy (NBCOT) (www.NBCOT.org). After successful completion of this exam, the individual will be an Occupational Therapist, Registered (OTR). The credential will qualify the individual for state licensure in the United States.

Students are **only eligible** to take the exam when they have successfully completed all aspects of the programs. For MOT students this includes all didactic courses and Level I and II Fieldwork experiences. For OTD students this includes all didactic courses, Level I and II Fieldwork experiences, and their Capstone Experience and Project. To register for the exam, you need to submit your official transcript. Official transcripts are available 3–4 weeks after grades are submitted to the Registrar. NBCOT accepts a Degree Verification Form for you to complete and submit. To obtain the DVF, go to NBCOT's website, nbcot.org, and submit it within the NBCOT Portal. The Department Chair and the University Registrar will need to verify your completion of the program. Please allow 2–4 weeks for the DVF to be completed. For more details about the NBCOT exam, review the Certification Exam Handbook.

The United States Department of Education recognizes ACOTE as the accrediting agency for professional programs in the field of occupational therapy. To comply with accreditation, educational programs in occupational therapy must meet or exceed the minimum standards outlined in the 2023 Standards for an Accredited Educational Program for the Occupational Therapist.

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FACULTY AND STAFF

- Alondra Ammon, PhD, MOT, OTR/L
- Marci Baptista, OTD, MOTR/L, CHT, CEAS – Academic Fieldwork Coordinator
- Emily Ann Becker, MOT, OTR/L, CNS, CAPS
- Jena Bischel, Administrative Assistant
- Nancy Chee, OTD, OTR/L, CHT
- Elizabeth Ching, OTD, M.Ed., BSOT, OTR/L
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- Sara Delucci, OTD, OTR/L
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- Gordon Giles, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA
- Goli Hashemi, PhD, MPH, OTR/L – Doctoral Capstone Coordinator
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- Morgan Inouye, MOT, OTR/L
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- Diane Tom, OTD, OTR/L
- Nichole Vasquez, OTD, OTR/L
- Robyn Wu, OTD, OTR/L

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ACADEMIC ADVISING

Advisor-Advisee Meetings

Advisement plays a crucial role in guiding students through their educational journey by providing guidance on course and program requirements, addressing academic progress, and discussing professional development and behaviors. Regular engagement in advising sessions is required and takes place one time each semester, at minimum. Advisors and advisees may choose to meet more often. Students are encouraged to contact their advisors when educational and personal issues impact engagement and progression in the program.

Each student will be assigned to an academic advisor. In most cases, this faculty member will remain as the student's advisor throughout the didactic part of the program. The Academic Fieldwork Coordinator is advisor to all students when engaged in Level II Fieldwork. For OTD students, their Faculty Capstone Mentor is their advisor for the rest of their program.

Student Success Monitoring

The faculty recognize that student success is dependent on multiple factors and can change throughout the program as life circumstances may change. Examples of challenges faced by students may include identified learning differences; coping with life events such as illness, injuries, loss of a loved one; and difficulties in completing course and program expectations related to writing skills; and professional behaviors and accountability. Examples of support include referring students to the university Disability Resource Center (DRC), the Student Health and Counseling Center (SHAC), peer tutoring, and additional meetings with program faculty and advisors.

Students achieve a course passing grade only when minimal course expectations are met. Students with identified challenges must take full responsibility for ensuring their academic success by promptly responding to recommendations and additional support provided by the faculty.

Access to Student Support Services

The University provides a range of support services for students including counseling and health and wellness resources through the Student Health and Counseling Center (SHAC) and disability accommodations through the Disability Resource Center (DRC), among others. These resources are available during the entire time the student is enrolled, including during Fieldwork Level II and Capstone Implementation. Students will be provided with information about accessing these services during the mandatory, in-person, College of Health Sciences Orientation. These orientations typically occur during the week prior to the start of the first term. We are committed to ensuring equitable access to these services throughout the program and may recommend/refer students to support services as appropriate.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/student-affairs

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ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The information below complements the University-wide Academic Integrity policy available within the SMU Catalog and Student Handbook. Every student is responsible for reviewing and familiarizing themselves with these policies.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/catalog/academic-personal-professional-integrity

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is unacceptable and may result in many consequences. Most people understand plagiarism to be the action of copying someone else's work, words, or ideas without giving proper credit. Sometimes plagiarism is evident, and other times it is not as clear to students.

There are degrees of plagiarism, from outright copying written material without quotations or citation, to copying a small phrase or statistic without properly crediting the source. We assume all graduate students understand what plagiarism is and how to avoid it. If you do not feel you understand plagiarism, please review the information on Avoiding Plagiarism within Academic Writing Resources on the SMU Library Website. AOTA also has a useful tool on the AOTA Ethics website that provides tips to Avoiding Plagiarism in Today's World.

Faculty recognize plagiarism could be unintentional. Whether the student intended to plagiarize is considered, but the extent of the infraction will determine the outcome rather than the student's reported intent. If a faculty member believes plagiarism has occurred on an assignment, the faculty member may do any of the following, depending on the extent of plagiarism:

- Offer the student additional guidance regarding the mechanics of properly crediting others' work.
- Counsel the student on plagiarism with a notice of this occurrence placed in the student's file.
- Give the student a failed grade on the assignment and require the student to complete the assignment again for the maximum possible passing points of 70%. A notice of this occurrence will go into the student's file.
- Fail the student's assignment without the option of redoing the assignment. A notice of this occurrence will be placed in the student's file.

If a student has a record of prior counsel regarding plagiarism, the second occurrence will be sent to the Program Director for determination of consequences. The Department Chair will make a decision after consulting with two uninvolved faculty members. The determination will consider:

- The quantity of plagiarism in an assignment
- The number of prior occurrences
- The student's feedback on the occurrence
- The assignment instructions that were given to students

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- The involved faculty member's statement and suggested outcome
- The extent of plagiarism (from citing the wrong source or poor paraphrasing to copying a full paragraph or paper)

Possible actions recommended by the Program Director include counseling and remedial work, failing the assignment, receiving a D in the course, or failing the course and subsequent dismissal from the program.

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The use of AI technology involves ethical considerations, academic integrity, and integration of tools (Thacker, Mason, & Weir, 2024). Guided by Samuel Merritt University's Center for Academic and Instructional Innovation, courses will have their own policies regarding student use of AI for course assignments. Students are encouraged to request clarification for accepted and unaccepted uses of AI in specific courses. Students are expected to follow the University's Academic Integrity Policies, the University AI policy, as well as appropriately cite and reference AI tools used in any work.

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PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIORS

Professional behaviors in occupational therapy practice are essential for establishing respectful relationships with clients, families, colleagues, and other professionals. Our communication, language, and appearance can greatly affect interactions, relationships, and outcomes. The Department of Occupational Therapy utilizes a self-assessment process to support the development of students' professional behaviors. Students will complete this self-assessment during the fall semester of the first and second years of the program. Each student will meet with their Faculty Advisor to review the self-assessment and set goals for a Professional Behavior Development Plan.

All students must always behave professionally within the SMU learning environment (face-to-face or online) following the policies of Academic Integrity, Code of Conduct, and the Code of Ethics (https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/catalog/academic-personal-professional-integrity).

Professional behaviors include, but are not limited to:

- Engaging in responsible and courteous communication
- Maintaining a respectful tone of voice in all communications (not yelling or speaking loudly over others)
- Listening to and acknowledging feedback from peers and faculty
- Adhering to professional dress codes for class and clinical activities as outlined in the individual syllabi
- Participating actively in course activities and maintaining attention in class
- Following directions during program activities including classroom and clinical settings

Examples of unprofessional behaviors include but are not limited to:

- Tardiness
- Entering in and out of class during lectures and/or student and professor presentations
- Eating in class, without prior discussion with professor
- Side-talking in class
- Absence from class without notifying the professor prior to class
- Using computers and electronic media during class for non-class related activity
- Not responding to email communications
- Refusing to meet with a faculty member or the Program Director upon request

Faculty will monitor students' professional behaviors and will address unprofessional behaviors with the student directly. If three incidences of unprofessional behavior occur, the student will be required to meet with the Program Director, their Faculty Advisor, and possibly with the Professional Behaviors and Student Conduct Committee, depending on the nature and the impact of the unprofessional behavior. One possible outcome is the creation of a Professional

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Behaviors Remediation Plan and/or a record of unprofessional conduct that could be placed in the student's file and/or noted on their official transcript.

Concepts of professionalism are introduced at the beginning (during orientation to the program) and throughout our graduate programs. The department promptly addresses concerns about professional behavior and assists students in developing in this area.

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ACADEMIC PROGRESS

Refer to the SMU Catalog and Student Handbook and the corresponding Academic Policies.

Under the “Progression & Graduation–Graduate Programs”, information is provided about minimum grade point average and progression requirements for the Occupational Therapy programs.

ACADEMIC CLINICAL EXPECTATIONS

In the clinical setting, observations and fieldwork experiences are designed to complement and reinforce academic course work. The University expects students and faculty to behave consistent with federal and state law and ethical practice and to observe and honor patients’ rights, privacy, informed consent and dignity.

In the clinical setting, the Fieldwork Educator is authorized to dismiss a student for cause without notice. Situations in which this action is justifiable include but are not limited to behavior that seriously jeopardized the safety of others; substance abuse; refusal to follow a supervisor’s instructions without providing any explanation; or violation of federal law, state law and ethical practice. Such dismissal from a clinical site is referred to the Academic Fieldwork Coordinator and the Department Chair of Occupational Therapy. The student may be subject to further disciplinary action.

PROMOTING FACULTY-STUDENT MENTORSHIP AND COMMUNICATIONS

Academic Support

- Students are encouraged to take the lead and initiate communications with the faculty of record for a particular course to receive instructional clarification, additional academic support, potential tutoring, or to address other coursework related issues.
- Students are encouraged to take the lead and initiate communications with designated academic advisers to receive academic guidance and support as indicated.
- Students may contact other faculty members, who may not be the designated academic adviser or faculty of record, for potential collaborations and mentorship based on areas of practice and/or research interest.

Faculty Response to Student Email

As a collective, we prioritize our responsiveness to students’ inquiries, concerns, and needs. We also model our own wellness and work-life balance. Please review our faculty commitment to respond to student emails in a predictable timeline:

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- Part-time, Full-time, and Adjunct Faculty responses to electronic communications from students will be within 2 days of the initial posting on weekdays (weekends and holidays not counted in this 2-day period).
- If faculty are away from their departmental and teaching duties for an extended time, an automated response will be generated to inform students. Students are welcome to contact the Program Director if their needs or concerns are time-sensitive.

Student Response to Faculty and Staff Email

Our Faculty and Staff hold the same expectations for students in responding to emails and require students to reply within 2 days of the initial posting on weekdays (weekends and holidays not counted in this 2-day period).

COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING TO ADDRESS CONFLICTS

Addressing Conflicts with Peers

Step One – Respectful Inquiry: Collaborative relationships, such as working closely with others, may involve disagreements with peers. We encourage students to initiate attempts to solve conflicts through Respectful Inquiry, defined as a leadership approach that involves asking questions and actively listening to understand a person's motivations, perspectives, and values (Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018).

Step Two – Collaborative Conversations: If students need additional mentorship or mediation, we welcome students to contact a faculty member and/or the Program Director to schedule a conversation with all involved parties.

Step Three – Professional Behaviors and Student Conduct Committee: If the situation is part of a pattern that impacts students' learning and participation within the program, conflict resolution may need to occur with assistance from our Professional Behaviors and Student Conduct Committee.

In cases of harassment, bullying, or discrimination, students should access the University resources detailed in the Academic, Personal, and Professional Integrity section of the University Catalog and Student Handbook: https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/catalog/academic-personal-professional-integrity

Addressing Conflicts with Faculty or Staff

Our faculty shares the collective value of supporting and mentoring students. If conflicts or disagreements arise, we encourage students to speak directly to the faculty or staff members involved (Respectful Inquiry). We also welcome students, faculty, and/or staff to include the Department Chair within these conversations. Additional student resources and supports are offered through Student Life and Student Services:

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/2025-2026/student-life-%26-student-services

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ACADEMIC POLICIES

The information below complements the University-wide Academic Integrity policy available within the SMU Catalog and Student Handbook. Every student is responsible for reviewing and familiarizing themselves with these policies.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/student-catalog-and-handbook

Academic Advising

In addition to the departmental academic advising, also refer to the section on Academic Advising in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/catalog

Access to Records

Refer to the section on Academic Records in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/2025-2026/academic-policies

Attendance Policies and Expectations

The OT Department Attendance Expectations are designed to complement the University Attendance Policies outlined in the 2025–2026 University Catalog's Academic Policies. Students should review both the University policies and the department's specific attendance and punctuality expectations.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/2025-2026/academic-policies

Attendance and Punctuality

Attendance and punctuality are crucial components of professional development in our Occupational Therapy programs. As such, attendance in all classes is mandatory and is closely linked to the demonstration of professional behaviors. All courses in the program follow the following policies regarding absences and tardiness. It is the student's responsibility to communicate with their instructor regarding absences. Students are expected to notify their instructor in advance via email of any anticipated absences. If prior notification is not feasible, students must inform their instructor as soon as possible after the absence occurs.

	Reduction in Course Grade		
	1st Occurrence	2nd Occurrence	3rd or More
Absence with Notification	0%	0%	Additional 2% per episode
Absence without Notification*	1%	2%	Additional 5% per episode
Lateness (>5 min)	0%	1%	Additional 1% per episode

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**All grade reductions may be waived at the discretion of the instructor in consultation with the student's advisor and the Department Chair for extenuating circumstances.*

Award of Academic Credit

Refer to the section on Award of Academic Credit in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/catalog

Transfer Credit

Refer to the section on Transfer Credit in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/catalog/academic-policies

Challenge Credit

Refer to the section on Challenge Credit in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/2025-2026/academic-policies

Grading Policy

In addition to the information below, refer to the section on Grading in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/2025-2026/academic-policies

Plus or minus grades will not be offered in the Occupational Therapy Program. Refer to each course syllabus for the grading criteria in each course.

Graduation and Credentialing Requirements

Refer to the section on graduation and credentialing in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/2025-2026/graduation-requirements

Please review the requirements for either the MOT or OTD programs.

Certification and Licensure Requirements for the Practice of Occupational Therapy

Licensure

Graduates wishing to practice in the state of California must apply for a state license to practice. State licensure is based on successful completion of the NBCOT Certification Examination. Licensure requirements vary between states and among different countries. Therefore, students are encouraged to keep their own electronic files of course syllabi, fieldwork evaluations for both Level I and Level II completed by their fieldwork educators, and any key assignments from courses that exemplify the program's compliance with ACOTE standards.

Certification through NBCOT

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Graduates of the MOT or OTD Program are eligible to sit for the national certification examination for occupational therapists administered by the National Board of Certification in Occupational Therapy (NBCOT). After successful completion of this examination, the graduate will be an Occupational Therapist Registered (OTR).

National Board of Certification in Occupational Therapy (NBCOT)

One Bank Street, Suite 300, Gaithersburg, MD 20878

Website: https://www.nbcot.org

Email: info@nbcot.org

Phone: (301) 990-7979

Felony Conviction and NBCOT Examination and California State Licensure:

A felony conviction may affect a graduate's ability to sit for the NBCOT certification examination or attain state licensure.

NBCOT: A student having a record of a felony conviction is advised to submit necessary documents to NBCOT for a background review prior to application. NBCOT's certification examination application contains character review questions that must be answered by all exam candidates. Applicants who answer "yes" to any of these questions must submit an explanation and official documentation regarding their background to NBCOT. For questions, contact Credentialing Services at NBCOT, One Bank Street, Suite 300, Gaithersburg, MD 20878; (301) 990-7979; info@nbcot.org. Also contact professional.conduct@nbcot.org.

California Board of Occupational Therapy (CBOT): The California licensing board requires fingerprinting for criminal background checks when an applicant applies for state licensure. Applicants with criminal convictions may voluntarily submit documentation to expedite the review process. Students with questions should contact CBOT directly, located at 1610 Arden Way, Suite 121, Sacramento, CA 95815; (916) 263-2294; cbot@dca.ca.gov.

Audit

Refer to the section on Audit in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/2025-2026/academic-policies

Repeating a Course

Refer to the section on Repeating a Course in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog. If students need to repeat a course based on their academic standing (i.e., receiving a D grade), they will need to follow an alternative schedule to progress with their program. Please see Decelerated Plans below.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/2025-2026/academic-policies

Pass/Fail Grading

Refer to the section on Pass/Fail Grading in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/catalog

In Progress Grades

Refer to the section on In Progress Grades in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/2025-2026/academic-policies

Withdrawal From a Course or Withdrawal From the University

In addition to the content below, refer to the section on Withdrawal From a Course or Withdrawal From the University in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/2025-2026/academic-policies

Decelerated Plans

Decelerated Plans in the MOT and OTD programs serve as a structured approach to support students facing challenges that impact their ability to progress through their studies at the standard pace. It provides a framework for academic and financial planning, ensuring students can successfully complete their program requirements while accommodating their individual circumstances. By extending the program's total duration by at least a year, the plan ensures that students can fulfill all academic requirements in a manageable manner.

The plan is formulated through collaboration between all interested parties:

- **Student:** Provides input about their circumstances and academic needs.
- **Program Director:** Offers guidance and ensures the plan aligns with program requirements.
- **Faculty Advisor:** Provides academic counseling and ensures the plan supports the student's educational and professional goals.

Students may opt for or be placed on a Decelerated Plan due to various reasons, including:

- Earning a grade of D in a course, necessitating a retake.
- Needing to reduce the number of classes taken each semester due to workload or personal circumstances.
- Taking a Leave of Absence for personal reasons, temporarily interrupting their academic progress.

Tuition for students on a Decelerated Plan is typically based on the number of units they are enrolled in. Tuition rates may increase annually, and students extending their program length will pay tuition at the current rates for each year.

Scheduling of Classes

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Refer to the section on Scheduling of Classes in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/catalog

Registration

Refer to the section on Scheduling of Classes in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/2025-2026/academic-policies

Class Lists

Refer to the section on Class Lists in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/catalog

Disclosures

Refer to the section on Disclosures in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/catalog

Drop/Add

In addition to the content below, refer to the section on Drop/Add in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/2025-2026/academic-policies

In the MOT and OTD Programs, if a student drops a course during the add/drop period, that student will require a Decelerated Plan and consequently will be subject to a change in tuition and restrictions in progressing to full-time status in subsequent semesters.

Transcript Requests

Refer to the section on Transcript Requests in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/catalog

Clinical Policy

Refer to section on Clinical Policy in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/2025-2026/clinical-policies

Client/Patient Participation in Course-Related Activities

Refer to the section on Client/Patient Participation in Course-related Activities in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/2025-2026/clinical-policies

Participation in Course Activities

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Refer to the section on Participation in Course Activities in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/catalog

Liability and Malpractice

In addition to the content below, refer to the section on Liability and Malpractice in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/2025-2026/clinical-policies

Safe and Professional Practice in Clinical Settings

Refer to the section on Safe and Professional Practice in Clinical Settings in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/2025-2026/clinical-policies

Licensure Requirements/Denial of License

Refer to the section on Licensure Requirements/Denial of License in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/2025-2026/clinical-policies

Evaluations

In addition to the content below, refer to the section on Evaluations in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/catalog

All instructors and courses are evaluated each semester. Students are encouraged to provide constructive feedback on the courses and faculty for continuous improvement of curriculum and teaching skills. The results of these evaluations will be anonymous. The intent of the course evaluation is to improve classroom and laboratory instruction. Comments of a personal nature concerning the instructor are not appropriate for professional evaluations. Students should seek out the instructor during the instructor's office hours to discuss concerns about the instructor's teaching methods.

Finals Week

Refer to the section on Finals Week in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/2025-2026/academic-policies

Forms and Petitions

Refer to the section on Forms and Petitions in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/2025-2026/academic-policies

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Independent Study

Refer to the section on Independent Study in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/2025-2026/academic-policies

Clinical Readiness

Refer to the section on Clinical Readiness in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/2025-2026/academic-policies

Leave of Absence

Refer to the section on Leave of Absence in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/2025-2026/academic-policies

Student Classification

Refer to the section on Student Classification in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/2025-2026/academic-policies

Progression and Graduation – Graduate Programs

In addition to the content below, refer to the section on Graduate Progression and Graduation in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/2025-2026/academic-policies

Students must maintain current CPR certification, provide evidence of successful completion of a tutorial on blood-borne pathogens, and maintain updated required immunizations and TB tests before progressing to fieldwork.

Graduate Probation and Dismissal

Refer to the section on Graduate Probation and Dismissal (found within the section, Progression and Graduation – Graduate Programs, scroll down to Master and Doctor in Occupational Therapy) in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/2025-2026/academic-policies

Graduate Dismissal

Refer to the section on Graduate Dismissal (found within the section, Progression and Graduation – Graduate Programs) in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/2025-2026/academic-policies

Graduation Requirement

Refer to the section on Graduate Procedures in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog for MOT and OTD.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/2025-2026/graduation-requirements

Dates of Degree Conferral

Refer to the section on Dates of Degree Conferral in the Samuel Merritt University Catalog.

https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/2025-2026/academic-policies

Starting with the Fall 2024 cohort, both Master of Occupational Therapy (MOT) and Doctor of Occupational Therapy (OTD) students will participate in the May commencement ceremony that follows the completion of the OTD students' final semester. This change allows the entire cohort to graduate together and have a unified graduation celebration.

For MOT students who began their program before Fall 2024, there will be an option to request participation in the December ceremony, provided they have successfully completed all aspects of the program, including their last Level II Fieldwork experience prior to the December commencement.

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LEADERSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP WITHIN SMU OT STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

Students develop additional leadership and collaborative skills by serving as a leader and active member within Student Organizations within the OT Department and within the University. These are done on a voluntary basis through election processes. (Students with a documented conduct issue with a current notation within their student file or transcript are not eligible to serve in leadership roles within the OT Department).

Student Cohort Representatives

Each cohort shall have two representatives who will serve as a communication liaison between the cohort and the faculty. Students may only serve as a representative for one year.

Responsibilities include:

- Gathering input from classmates about program-wide / cohort-wide issues and communicating them professionally to the faculty.
- Relaying information in a professional manner from the faculty to the cohort.
- Attending the bi-monthly OT departmental meeting (one or both representatives). This meeting is normally scheduled for the first and third Thursday of the month.
- Conducting their responsibilities in an unbiased and professional manner.

Elections for Student Representative

Timing:

- Second Week: Student Candidates will submit a brief statement (25–50 words) to the Department's Administrative Assistant.
- Third Week: Students vote for their candidates through electronic and anonymous balloting. The two candidates who receive the most votes will be appointed the class representatives for their cohort.
- Beginning of Fourth Week: Election results will be announced by the Department's Administrative Assistant.

If students or faculty have concerns about the class's representatives being unable to fulfill their responsibilities, they should contact the Program Director and the Professional Behaviors and Student Conduct Committee for guidance.

Student Occupational Therapy Association (SOTA)

The Student Occupational Therapy Association (SOTA) is the official organization for educational programs. The purpose of the SOTA is to promote greater unity and understanding among occupational therapy students and to present educational material that is of particular interest. The student association also serves as a community of support, is active in fundraising,

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and acclimates the student with the profession's organizational structure and decision-making process. Students elect their own officers and send representatives to local chapter meetings. Students are encouraged to play active roles in SOTA. Please visit the SMUSOTA Instagram to stay informed about upcoming events and resources.

Additional Student Organizations

Our students take the initiative to form additional organizations that have both a local and national reach. These include COTAD, the Coalition of Occupational Therapy Advocates for Diversity (https://www.cotad.org/), and Diverse OT (https://diverse-ot.com/chapters/). Students will communicate with all students on meeting dates, times, and locations. Contact information for Chapter leadership will be provided during the OT Department Orientation.

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PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Now more than ever, our local, state, and national professional organizations work on behalf of occupational therapy students, practitioners, educators, and our clients to ensure our work is supported through policies and legislation. They also provide vital resources across your evolution from student to entry-level OT, and as you gain expertise in your area of practice.

During the 2025–2026 Academic Year, SMU's Occupational Therapy Department will purchase student memberships for AOTA and OTAC for all students enrolled in the MOT or OTD Programs. We see this as a critical investment in your preparation and development as an occupational therapist.

American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA)

The national organization for the occupational therapy profession is the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA). The Association is responsible for developing standards for education and practice, for promoting the profession in important political issues, and for marketing the profession to the public and to other professional organizations. Membership in AOTA is mandatory for students in the OTD or MOT program at Samuel Merritt University. Benefits include receiving *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy* and *OT Practice* (a monthly newsletter that includes employment notices). Additionally, membership provides access to important information via online resources and discounted continuing education opportunities. Student Membership annual fee: $78.00. Website: www.aota.org.

Occupational Therapy Association of California (OTAC)

Every state has a professional association for occupational therapy. In California, this association is called the Occupational Therapy Association of California (OTAC) and is one of the largest in the nation. The annual OTAC conference is well attended and takes place in either Northern or Southern California. Membership includes a newsletter and reduced rates for conferences and workshops. Membership in OTAC is mandatory for students in the OTD or MOT program at Samuel Merritt University. Student Membership annual fee: $69.00. Website: www.otaconline.org.

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