# STUDENTS' LEARNING ABOUT OCCUPATION IN AN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY PROGRAM

By

Erik Regalado

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Erik Regalado

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Donnamarie Krause, Ph.D.
*Graduate Coordinator*

Jefferson Kinney, Ph.D.
*Graduate Program Chair*

Alyssa Crittenden, Ph.D.
*Vice Provost for Graduate Education & Dean of the Graduate College*

## Abstract

**Objective:** Describe the learning activities that occupational therapy students found helpful for learning the concept of occupation and describe what students know about the concept of occupation.

**Design:** Descriptive correlational

**Setting:** Occupational therapy program in the U.S

**Participants:** Occupational therapy students

**Measure**: Survey

**Results:** These students had a general understanding of occupation and its relationship to health, however, lacked the more conceptual understanding of occupation found in occupational science. Participants reported that activities such as fieldwork, group discussion, and lecture helped them understand the concept of occupation.

**Conclusion and Relevance:** These students missed aspects of occupation and would benefit from more occupation-centered curricula to increase their understanding. Students prefer experiential learning activities and certain didactic learning activities for understanding the concept of occupation. Future studies should research a broader range of students to understand their understanding of occupation and what learning activities they found useful.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the faculty of the Occupational Therapy Program at University of Nevada, Las Vegas. I especially thank Dr. Krishnagiri for pushing me and making me grow as a thinker and practitioner. I would like to thank Dr. Price for helping me better understand our nature as occupational beings, and her commitment to research in retirement. I also want to acknowledge my classmates Lester, Andrew, Tashia, Cynthia, Jerome, and Apasara for bringing joy and companionship during the hardest times.

## Dedication

This is dedicated to my friends and family. I feel so much joy and giddiness from their charity, commitment, and understanding of the difficulty of human endeavors.

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## List of Definitions

### Definition 1: Occupation

Conceptual Definition: “An occupation is a specific individual's personally constructed, nonrepeatable experience. That is, an occupation is a subjective event in perceived temporal, spatial, and sociocultural conditions that are unique to that one-time occurrence. An occupation has a shape, a pace, a beginning and an ending, a shared or solitary aspect, a cultural meaning to the person, and an infinite number of other perceived contextual qualities. A person interprets his or her occupations before, during, and after they happen. Although an occupation can be observed, interpretation of the meaning or emotional content of an occupation by anyone other than the person experiencing it is necessarily inexact” (Pierce, 2001, p. 139).

Operational Definition: The operational definition will be measured by the responses of the participants within the survey (see Appendix A).

### Definition 2: Occupation-Centered Education

Conceptual Definition: “Occupation-centered education refers to teaching and learning in which educators systematically link all aspects of a curriculum to occupation, from its broadest aim, vision, and mission to its specific curricular activities, assessment approaches, and processes used daily in classrooms” (Hooper et al., 2020, p.2).

Operational Definition: The conceptual definition, as seen in the literature by Hooper et al. (2020) is the same definition that was used in the implementation of the study.

### Definition 3: Occupational Therapy Students

Conceptual Definition: Students enrolled in an occupational therapy program either at an associates, bachelors, masters, or doctoral level.

Operational Definition: Students enrolled in the occupational therapy doctorate program at UNLV.

**Definition 4: Teaching Activities**

Conceptual Definition: Various instructional activities that incorporate different strategies to achieve a singular or various learning outcomes (Beetham, 2007).

Operational Definition: The operational definition of teaching activities was measured through the teaching activities provided by the responses by the participants (see Appendix A).

**Definition 5: Understanding**

Conceptual Definition: "The power to make experience intelligible by applying concepts and categories" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d).

Operational Definition: The conceptual definition, as defined by Merriam-Webster (n.d.) is the same definition that was used in the implementation of the study.

## Introduction

Occupational therapy (OT) is the therapeutic use of occupations for persons, groups, and populations for the purpose of enabling participation and the promotion of health and wellness (American Occupational Therapy Association [AOTA], 2020). Occupations are everyday activities that occupy time and bring meaning and purpose to life (World Federation of Occupational Therapists [WFOT], 2012). Making occupation the central concept of occupational therapy enables the profession to view the human being not as a body to be fixed, but as a complex system of personal, contextual, and occupational differences that enable or deter engagement in life (Yerxa, 1998a). However, occupational therapy programs differ in their explicitness and central use of occupation in their curricula (Hooper et al., 2018). This has led to graduating occupational therapists who may or may not have a deep understanding of occupation and its impact on health. Research is needed to understand what aspects of these students' education were most helpful for increasing their understanding of occupation. This capstone project explains the background of the issue and the results of a descriptive correlational study that was performed with an occupational therapy doctorate (OTD) program in the United States to better grasp the students understanding of occupation and how they perceived learning about the concept.

### Research Problem

One of the most important aspects of occupational therapy education is the degree to which programs base their curricula on occupation (Hooper et al., 2014; Krishnagiri et al., 2017). The profession has been moving toward reinvigorating the centrality of occupation in occupational therapy practice, as this was largely abandoned in the mid-20th century in favor of a biomedical model (WFOT, 2016; Yerxa, 1998b). The basis for this change begins in the

classroom, as entry-level education is where students are first introduced, molded, and transformed into embodying the key tenets of their professions (Hooper, 2008). Adults learn differently compared to adolescents and benefit from alternative methods of teaching, which occupational therapy educators utilize through various teaching methods (Hooper, 2006; Krishnagiri et al., 2017). Alongside traditional occupational therapy topics, occupational science is a crucial source of information that occupational therapists and students can utilize to have a deeper understanding of humans as occupational beings (Price et al., 2017; Yerxa, 2000).

Within occupational therapy, occupation has historically had a tangled relationship with other concepts, such as those of activities and tasks (Pierce, 2001). This entanglement creates difficulties in the understanding of occupation among those who practice occupational therapy. With the focus on increasing the centrality of occupation, programs and curricula need to place occupation explicitly and purposefully at the forefront in teaching. By deepening and making clear the definition of occupation, as well as increasing its use in courses and curricular design, occupational therapy can manifest itself to its highest capacity.

A major issue currently facing occupational therapy is a lack of empirical data to understand what entry-level students understand regarding the concept of occupation and how they learn it during their professional program. Although there exists research on students' perceptions and experiences of occupational therapy education in general, there is hardly any research regarding students and their understanding of the core subject of occupation (Roberts et al., 2022). Researchers do not truly know the extent to which occupational therapy students understand occupation, and what lessons they found useful in learning it. Pragmatically, researchers have given more attention to curriculum design and the teaching methods of educators as they have provided excellent material that is used to enhance occupational therapy

education across the world. Yet, to have a clearer understanding of all components of higher education, students must be considered as well.

**Relevance to Occupational Therapy**

If a major goal of occupational therapy is to increase the centrality of occupation in all areas of occupational therapy, it is pertinent to not only have the perspectives of educators on how occupation is being taught, but also of students and what they find salient and powerful (Hooper, 2006; Hooper et al., 2014; Krishnagiri et al., 2017). Without this perspective, researchers and educators miss what could be impactful teaching strategies that ensure understanding of core concepts of the profession. The research study performed within this capstone project has described the teaching activities students found useful at the OTD program at UNLV regarding learning about the concept of occupation. This study is relevant to occupational therapy as the data provides a small window into understanding what students know about occupation and what they find useful in their education. Educators employ a myriad of strategies to teach and organize the concept of occupation in their curricula, and there is always the possibility that these teaching strategies work differently or do not work as intended with students. This information may be used to make changes in curricula in entry-level professional programs.

## Literature Review

This literature review will first examine the theories and principles by which adults learn in higher education. The following section will expound on the current state of occupation-centered education primarily focused in the United States. Next, the methods occupational therapy educators use to teach occupation as well as their perspectives on education will be explored. The penultimate section will focus on the experiences and perceptions of students in occupational therapy programs, as well as their experience in learning occupation. At the end of the review, a synthesis of the current literature surrounding the teaching and learning of occupation in occupational therapy programs is provided to highligh missing areas of knowledge.

### Adult Learning

Learning has been described and delineated by many theorists through the past hundred years. Many of the later theories of learning lean heavily toward an organismic model, which posits that human behavior is unitary, interactive, and acts as a developing organism (Knowles, 1984). This line of reasoning is echoed in Wilcock's (1998) description of how occupation relates to people's formation and growth, that is, the ways in which we enact our lives through occupation define individual's identity and life course. Different learning theories are used by different disciplines as they align more closely with the type of information, subject matter, and characteristics of the learner.

A seminal theory in education is Malcolm Knowles' andragogy, or adult learning, which distinguished itself from pedagogy, child learning, in several areas. Although many continue to use the term pedagogy to refer to both children and adults, Knowles (1984) noted that the pedagogical model assigns teachers the primary role for deciding what will be learned and if it

has been learned, as well as the little value in the experiences of the learner, the use of external motivation, and a task-oriented and subject-centered orientation of learning. In contrast, Knowles' andragogical model elevated the importance of the requisite need to know in adult learners, the transformed self-conception of being capable, and shying away from overbearing authority, as well as the plethora of applicable experiences one gains through adulthood. These concepts are evident in several works, such as those of Bazyk et al. (2010), in which seven occupational therapy students experienced service learning by providing occupation-based skills training to low-income urban youth. The students described, as Knowles explained in his concept of readiness to learn, that the uncertainty and excitement around doing occupational therapy gave the final push to actually learn and incorporate more readily the course work in their program, allowing them to see a bigger picture. However, a major limitation of this theory of adult learning is that all principles Knowles demarcated do not always apply to all people. Many educators continue to instruct adults in pedagogical manners, while at the same time many students expect their adult schooling to be a continuation of primary school.

Another concept of andragogy is the orientation to learning adults possess as compared to children. Adults are more focused on life-centered education, or subject matter they perceive will be useful in their daily life situations. In Roberts et al.'s (2022) qualitative descriptive study on the perspective of 20 entry-level occupational therapy students, the students, unbeknownst, expounded the principles Knowles sets out in his conception of adult learning. The students explained that engaging in workplace-based learning with practicing occupational therapists allowed them to see occupation being made real. The students saw value and enjoyed the manifestation of their education because they expect that one day they will need to make occupation real as well. By experiencing this type of learning, they satisfied their life-centered

approach most adults possess. However, these students were from one school in Australia, therefore, it cannot be said that their experiences were valid across their country or the world as they may practice differently.

Another theory that is congruous to occupation-centered education is transformative learning by Mezirow (2000). This theory is often used to explain how students are assimilated and professionalized into occupational therapy. Mezirow posited that transformative learning occurs when people are able to be self-critical of their own underlying assumptions, and when problematic frames of reference change to become more dependable. More broadly, transformative learning changes the ways people view the world. In occupational therapy education, educators use transformative learning to create future occupational therapists who view people as occupational beings rather than body structures and functions that require rehabilitation. Krishnagiri et al. (2019) conducted a qualitative study with data gathered from a stratified random sampling of 25 occupational therapy programs across the U.S. and they reported that occupational therapy education had transformative learning as one of its signature pedagogies. These occupational therapy programs intended for their teaching to transform the way students view themselves, others, and the profession itself through the lens of occupation. However, it remains unclear if the majority of programs ascribe to this learning theory.

One transformative learning strategy occupational therapy educators utilize is service learning. Service learning is an out-of-classroom experience that requires students to think, do, and reflect on their work (Seperson, 2008). Bazyk et al.'s (2010) phenomenological study on seven occupational therapy students during their fieldwork placement with low-income urban youths illuminated the transformative aspect of service learning. The students reported that during their initial weeks with the youths they had existential questions, such as the role

occupational therapy plays in non-traditional settings, but over time transformed their conception of occupational therapy as a powerful medium by which to address challenges in the human experience. Similarly, Vroman et al.'s (2010) case study of a student learning the occupational nature of humans revealed the power of service learning as a transformative tool. The reflective journals of the student in an adult care center for people with cognitive impairments showed the student's realization of the connection of theory and practice, and the therapeutic power of occupation. The student confided that without this experiential learning, the concepts learned in class do little in transforming or convincing them of their power to bring health. This study only included one student; it is unknown if this transformation would occur with most students. This study did not examine how other aspects of the student's education affected their worldview, such as those found within the classroom.

One major difficulty occupational therapy programs must address in adult learning are threshold concepts. Threshold concepts are concepts that provide access to a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about a subject (Myer and Land, 2003). Threshold concepts are inherently difficult to learn because they require a deeper understanding of the concept, one that is not surface-level nor inert in its use. Threshold concepts should have lasting effects on the learner, and be unique to a discipline, where no other can make a claim upon it. Fortune and Kennedy-Jones (2014) wrote that the sole threshold concept for occupational therapy is the relationship between occupation and health, as it has the qualities of being transformative, irreversible, integrative, bounded, and troublesome for students who primarily come from a biomedical background. It is, therefore, the community of knowers' responsibility to elucidate the connections between practice and theory, so that students exit the liminal space and fully realize and utilize occupation (Hooper et al., 2014).

In Rodgers et al.'s (2015) qualitative study on 10 occupational therapy faculty, the researchers found that incorporating strategies to better understand threshold concepts in their curricula increased the shared language and communication abilities between students and faculty, reducing instances of confusion between the two parties. By focusing on threshold concepts, the faculty were able to better conceptualize their curricula, which cascaded down to the individual content and activities used to teach occupation. They also noted that focusing on understanding threshold concepts quickened the students' professional identity formation. The researchers noted that although they focused on educators' view of threshold concepts, they were limited in their understanding of students as they did not explore the students' perspective. Professional identity itself has been identified as a threshold concept by practitioners and students (Tanner, 2011, it is important to note that professional identity is a key area of interest to both students and graduate programs generally. Adult learners want and expect what they are learning to translate into real world skills (Knowles, 1984), and graduate programs understand that professions rely on a shared identity to perpetuate their ideals and further their professional agendas (Hooper, 2008).

Occupational therapy programs exclusively serve adult learners, who have different educational needs regarding the subject matter, how information is provided, and the purpose of learning. Select theories offer structures that can be used to understand how to best educate adult learners, such as andragogy and transformative learning. These theories can help explain why students prefer certain learning strategies or dislike learning experiences that are not congruent with their learning needs. For example, occupational therapy researchers often use the concept of transformative learning as the subject matter they study as it aligns well with the tenets of that theory (Ghul et al., 2013; Hooper et al., 2018; Krishnagiri et al., 2019; Price et al., 2017). By

using these different learning theories, educators hope to alter how students think and ultimately practice. Adults are engaged by teaching activities that are applicable and benefit from education that alters their understanding of the world around them (Knowles, 1984; Mezirow, 2000). Learning for adults can be challenging, as subject matters become more complex and abstract, which often require specialized education and training (Fortune & Kennedy-Jones, 2014). Therefore, it becomes a challenge for educators to understand how to best serve these students, especially when the curricula and programs are evolving with new information.

**Occupation-Centered Education**

For occupation to truly be learned, it is vital for occupation to be central in occupational therapy education. Until recently, there have been few resources for educators and program directors to utilize and to create occupation-centered curricula (Hooper et al., 2020). Although there exist standards that occupational therapy programs must meet in accordance with the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE), it is at the discretion of educators and directors to decide how intensively specific standards should be emphasized. One such standard is the "distinct nature of occupation" (ACOTE, 2018) that must be taught in all occupational therapy programs. This nature of occupation is best understood within the context of occupational science and the myriad concepts engendered in that science (Backman et al., 2021). There also exist many ancillary topics that must be provided in an occupational therapy education that may be challenging to connect to occupation (Di Tommaso et al., 2019; Hooper et al., 2020). There exists a broad spectrum of methods of teaching, and curricular design across the United States and in different countries, which has only been partially researched over the last 20 years.

Mernar and Herzberger (2024) reviewed the ACOTE B standards which describe what content occupational therapy programs should educate students on. The researchers found that since 2006 to the most recent 2018 version, there has been a reduction in accreditation requirements that cover the topic of occupation. They utilized the revised Bloom's taxonomy as a framework to understand how the wording of the standards has changed. They found that the presence of occupation has decreased in both lower and higher-order cognitive skills as described by Bloom's taxonomy. This indicates that those who create the standards have been lowering the expectation to understand occupation in occupational therapy programs. This was an opinion piece and solely used the revised Bloom's taxonomy; analyzing the accreditation standards through another framework could have led to a different interpretation.

Although the ACOTE standards have changed, different programs are at their discretion for implementing these standards. Hooper (2006) conducted a qualitative case study to understand the teaching practices of one occupational therapy program that was considered an exemplar for occupation-centered education. Her methods included using intensity sampling of the faculty of the program, using semi-structured interviews, classroom observation, participant observation, and artifact reviews for triangulated data. She found that this program utilized many active learning methods, such as group discussions, case studies, field observations, and guest presenters. She noted that unless instructors were actively tethering disparate content to occupation, then neither the content nor the instructional method was inherently occupation-centered. One example she reported was the use of orienting remarks in lectures to transition the ways students view content such as anatomy from rote and biomechanical to a more functional, occupation-centered version. Hooper also noted the social dimensions of learning that pervaded each classroom, as instructors would hold onto their own expertise while allowing for student's

prior experience to create contexts by which to learn. Much of what Hooper described is the implicit doings of educators that they themselves may not entirely be aware of or are consciously enacting in their role. A limitation was that the researcher was unclear as to whether or not the students understood the expectations that were placed upon them nor if these implicit doings were useful for them as she did not collect data from the students.

Looking more broadly, Krishnagiri et al.'s (2019) exploratory qualitative study mentioned earlier, focused on understanding the strategies educators used to convey occupation to students. The majority of educators reported using small group discussions, assigned readings, experiential learning, writing about occupation, and case-based learning to convey occupation. In line with Hooper (2006), although there were many activities and strategies used, educators can be vague in their intentions of conveying occupation. Further research is warranted to understand what is explicitly mentioned by educators to increase knowledge of occupation in students. It was also unclear how students value the learning activities they participated in, which could be different from the activities educators commonly use.

Another key factor one must consider in occupation-centered education is the extent to which occupation is truly central in the curriculum. Krishnagiri et al. (2017), used a qualitative descriptive design to find the extent to which occupation is central in occupational therapy curricula across the U.S. The researchers concluded that there exists a continuum of occupational explicitness in the strategies programs utilized. At one end of the continuum, some programs were seen to emphasize occupation as a concept that was taught unto itself, divorced from therapy. In the middle were programs that focused on topics such as Occupational Therapy Practice Framework and client-centered practice, which they perceived was the same as teaching occupation. At the other end of the continuum were programs that did not focus on nor

emphasize occupation at all, in other words, there was an absence of the concept. The researchers explained several possible reasons why a program would exist on the absent end of the spectrum, including disparate levels of knowledge of educators on occupation, or that the centrality of occupation is taken for granted and may not fully be explicated in content and material. The researchers suggested that a gap may exist between the knowledge of content of the educators and the ability to convey the concept fully to students. A limitation of their study, similar to Hooper (2006), was the lack of evidence between intentions from educators and teaching practices and how this concept was received and learned by students. More research is needed to understand how effective teaching strategies are in conveying the depth of occupation and to uncover how to increase the centrality of occupation in curricula across the nation.

Hooper et al. (2018) also used data from the national study previously mentioned to understand the curriculum level strategies used to address occupation across the United States. The researchers found through a descriptive design that two strategies were used to address occupation: namely, the curriculum design and the implementation. The programs used curricular threads to weave occupation into disparate concepts such as those of professional reasoning and leadership, as well as creating a curricular philosophy that pervaded all aspects of the programs. In implementation, programs focused on monitoring how students' fieldwork experiences aligned with what they were learning, strategically linking occupation to subject areas that are not occupation-based, as well as engaging students in their communities of practice. Some of the biggest challenges programs had were assuming that the conveyance of occupation was obvious to students, as well as the blending of occupation with other knowledge domains in teaching without demonstration or differentiation of how the disparate domains link to occupation. One limitation of their study was a lack of the student perspective on how

occupation was addressed in their education. Another limitation was the lack of data regarding how accreditation standards limit or enhance the inclusion of occupation within programs.

As a result of these challenges, Hooper et al. (2020) created a conceptual model named the subject-centered integrative learning model (SCIL-OT) to better aid occupational therapy educators. The SCIL-OT model acts as a framework that allows educators to intentionally relate various topics toward the central concept of occupation. Hooper and colleagues found that no conceptual model exists which defined occupation-centered education, nor one that has guided the development of curricula for occupational therapy education. The SCIL-OT model consists of five elements which are: occupation at the core, the topics students learn, the knowledge community, the learning context, and the interconnecting lines. The model demonstrates how all five elements interact and interconnect to create a cohesive framework for a curricular design which can help students integrate the myriad pieces of knowledge they must acquire in their education. The use of this model allows for instructional design that places occupation at the center of education, allowing for a true occupation-centered education. The researchers did not fully discuss the challenges this model may face given the historical contexts which has led to programs not centering occupation in their curricula.

Breen-Franklin and Atler (2022) published an article using the SCIL-OT model to demonstrate how it guided the development of a semester-long assignment. The study demonstrated how the use of the SCIL-OT model aided students in creating connections between occupation and health, well-being, the self, and the clients occupational therapists work with. Breen-Franklin and Atler suggested that educators should use the SCIL-OT model to more directly develop reflection questions that are explicitly about the interconnecting lines within the model, as the students had the tendency to go off-topic. The researchers noted a major limitation

of their study was that they were not able to see changes in perception during subsequent semesters, as they had only taught the assignment with one cohort during one semester.

Outside of the U.S, Irvine-Brown et al. (2020) published a reflection article where they articulated some distinct features of two occupational therapy programs, in Griffith University, Australia and the Federal University of Sao Carlos, Brazil. In the Australian program, the "understanding the context of occupation" course was designed to bridge OT-specific courses with other disciplines such as social theory and public health. Its aim was to uncover how meso and macro contexts affect the occupational performance of various groups, amongst other goals. In the Brazilian program, the course "social occupational therapy" was offered to the students as the development of social occupational therapy has distinctly evolved in Brazil since the late 1990s. The course was designed to explain the differences between social and health fields, discuss social inequalities, and how occupational therapy can be practiced outside of clinical settings. The authors concluded with a call for occupational therapy programs to increase teachings on social approaches to therapy, and that a more global approach is needed for curricula everywhere as there is much to learn from different cultures. By doing this, they argued that programs would create future-focused role-emerging skills for work with groups, communities, and populations. The researchers only provided descriptions of two programs in two different countries, this may limit the readers' understanding of how other countries are educating their students, especially if they wish to adopt the global approach they write about.

In summary, there are myriad topics that must be presented in occupational therapy education, many of which do not explicitly or directly relate to the core concept of occupation. Hooper (2006) noted that one avenue of linking disparate topics was through educators' use of orienting remarks, as well as designing curricular threads that can provide this connection at a

deeper level (Hooper et al., 2018). Given that many programs across the U.S. exist on a continuum regarding the explicitness of occupation in their curricula, and that there are many common teaching strategies used to convey occupation (Krishnagiri et al., 2017; Krishnagiri et al., 2019), a more robust framework is needed to better guide and incorporate occupation. One remedy for this is Hooper et al. (2020) SCIL model, which has been shown in a small study to better connect occupation, health, and ancillary topics together (Breen-Franklin & Atler, 2022). Many of the remedies presented in the literature for connecting occupation to various topics are through the work of educators.

**Educators in Occupational Therapy Education**

Currently, there are many definitions of occupation and its use in practice. In the discipline of occupational science, research is continually delving into more nuanced understandings of occupation beyond practice (Price et al., 2017). Given how complex the understanding of occupation, many of the differences between programs can be attributed to departments and their faculty's expertise and opinions on what is important for students to understand to enter the profession of occupational therapy. Similar to the perspectives on students' experiences of learning in occupational therapy programs, there is little research on educator's perspectives on occupation as the central subject in occupational therapy education and their methods of delivering this education. As educators are the main drivers of creating occupational therapists, it is important to understand their experiences in linking occupation and health.

Di Tommaso and colleagues (2019) performed a qualitative study using focus groups with eight occupational therapy educators from Australia. Their goal was to understand the educators' perspectives on the centrality of occupation in their curricula, as well as their opinions

on how to strengthen occupation-centered education. Their findings showed that educators understand and encourage the use of occupation as the framework for their profession, however, most were unclear as to what was the proper means of carrying out this framework, and most felt that it is nigh impossible to do true occupation-based therapy in numerous healthcare settings. Many educators understood the stark differences students can encounter between what they learn in school and what they perform during fieldwork, a similar finding to Bazyk et al. (2010). The educators reaffirmed that it is the university's responsibility to drive the future and ensure that its students are not held back by the profession's recent past of reductionism and biomedical views. A limitation of their study was their use of fieldwork educators, which steered the conversation heavily toward practice education. Gathering data from educators in OT programs could yield a broader range of data.

As it is the educator's responsibility to progress occupation-centered education (Di Tommaso et al., 2019), it is important to consider how occupation is portrayed to students. In Price et al.'s (2017) qualitative descriptive study on a subset of eight occupational therapy programs based on the national study previously mentioned, the researchers sought to understand how occupation was taught beyond therapy. They found that occupation was explained as a lens through which to see the self, others, and the profession. The educators understood that relating occupation back to the self was an important milestone in crossing the threshold of occupation as a concept, since it then becomes easier to understand others as occupational beings who rely on performing occupation to bring health and meaning to their lives. Once occupation was taught as its own concept, introducing it back in the context of application within the profession was helpful in facilitating the student's understanding of its central role in therapy. It is then the intention of educators that students be able to see other academic content through an

occupational lens. It was unclear from this study that using occupations as a lens was an effective tool for students as they did not have data on the students' perspectives. The majority of participants in the study were program directors; understanding how occupation was taught by other faculty such as those who are clinicians, researchers, and part-time would increase the variability of responses.

There are different ways educators teach occupational therapy students across the world. One example is seen in Hooper's (2008) case study of nine occupational therapy educators and their use of personal biography to foster professional identity formation. Without identity formation, it is difficult for effective occupation-based practice to take root in students (Peloquin, 2005). Hooper found that educators' personal biographies often influence how they intend to form students' identities within the profession. For example, one educator's move from the racially segregated South to a more integrated Northern state led her to ensure that within her classes she would open up conversations about personal experiences in a respectful and compassionate manner. Another educator lamented that in her occupational therapy education, she often felt frustrated at the ambiguity of her education. Yet, when confronted with the ambiguity of everyday practice, she understood how important it was to create learning activities where students are faced with ambiguity and have to find clarity for themselves. Hooper concluded that focusing on implicit curriculum, the culture, customs, and patterns of relating in a program, was equally important to the explicit curriculum. The experiences students receive from their educators and education can have a profound impact on their professional formation and understanding of core concepts; however, whether or not this occurs is difficult to ascertain without input from the students themselves on their education in regard to their professional identity.

In occupational therapy education, educators can offer different perspectives and experiences. The majority of educators believe that occupation is the framework for the profession, however, understand that occupational therapists must work within healthcare systems that are often unagreeable to influences outside of the biomedical model. Educators also report struggles with integrating theory and practice (Di Tommaso et al., 2019). Still, other educators have found ways of integrating occupation within curricula, both explicitly and implicitly. These educators demonstrated how occupation and the tenets of occupational therapy can be married to ancillary topics by using occupation as a lens, as well as forming students who value the autonomy of others and can work within ambiguous systems (Hooper et al., 2008; Price et al., 2017). Given the varying levels of understanding and ability to convey occupation to students, the question arises: what are the students actually learning and understanding regarding occupation from their education?

**Students' Experiences in Occupational Therapy Programs**

Occupation is the central concept of occupation therapy and has been proposed as the primary threshold concept of occupational therapy (Fortune & Kennedy-Jones, 2014) Threshold concepts are bothersome and typically require the most effort in learning on the part of the student. In fact, most students enter their graduate program with the general public's understanding of occupational therapy, which can be simple, superficial, or even nonexistent (Turpin et al., 2012). The previous section provided examples of how educators use different strategies to teach in occupation-centered curricula, as well as elucidating a disconnect between their intentions and what is explicitly done with students (Price et al., 2017; Krishnagiri et al., 2017). It is therefore important to understand the experiences of students per their learning of

occupation and its application in OT programs. By understanding students' perspectives, a clearer understanding of which aspects of that education were helpful can emerge.

For example, Asbjørnslett et al. (2022) conducted a qualitative study on six first-year occupational therapy students to understand their perceptions of the learning activities provided in their program. The researchers utilized interviews as a part of a longitudinal investigation over three years with six programs. The students reported that collaboration with other students is an important aspect of learning as many can feel intimidated which affected their learning. They also reported what aspects of their education would disengage them from learning, such as educators who read from slides, or requiring students to find relevant literature when the educators already knew what to read. The researchers concluded that students highly value socialization within their classes, and what educators do in their classrooms has a large impact on student engagement, and subsequent learning. The researchers only interviewed first-year students, therefore, it is unknown what differences in responses there would be if they interviewed second- and third-year students. The researchers' results also lacked any mention of experience-based or fieldwork-based learning, which is an important aspect of OT education.

Müllersdorf and Ivarsson (2008) conducted a study using grounded theory to describe the dimensions of occupation understood by 50 novice occupational therapy students. Using a spontaneous writing prompt on what the students considered occupation to be, the researchers found a core category, "The what, why, and how of occupation", as well as five emergent categories: the doing and context of occupation, motive for occupation, time and place for occupation, type of participation in occupation, and outcome of occupation. The students conceptualized occupation as the entirety of human activity, purposefulness in engagement, the physical context of occupation, different types of participation, and that occupations have

expected outcomes. This study claimed to contain the non-professional view of occupation. The sample contained new students who may already know much about occupational therapy or have preconceived ideas of occupation, and their responses may be biased toward agreement with a general sentiment given their recent admission.

The same researchers then performed a follow up grounded theory study with the same prompt and the same cohort of students nearing the end of their program (Ivarsson & Müllersdorf, 2009). From the analysis of their data, the researchers were able to generate six new categories, showing an increased comprehension of the complexity of the concept of occupation. These new categories included how feelings impact what is considered an occupation, how occupation differs between people, and how occupation can be facilitated by another person. The researchers noted that both studies demonstrate the perceived notion that occupation influences health and well-being, which echoes previous theorists (Wilcock, 1998; Yerxa, 1998). The researchers were surprised by the fact that "the outcomes of occupation" code was not entirely reiterated; this suggests future research is needed for a more comprehensive grasp of student's understanding of occupation. This study was not able to explain what exactly influenced the changes of responses in this cohort of students. The method of data collection could have been more robust, such as focus groups or individual interviews, as the writing prompt may provide insufficient data due to response biases.

Moving from in-class learning, Copley et al.'s (2010) phenomenological study on nine students participating in a pediatric occupational therapy clinic, the researchers discovered several key points about the perceived education of the students. Students often reported feeling a disconnect between the basic sciences taught in lecture and the occupation-centered approaches they were expected to perform. As the researchers noted, a theoretical shift needed to occur in

the minds of students to go from body structures to occupational performance. This demonstrated some of the difficulties students have in understanding the intentions of educators, as many participants in the study felt that the first two years of their degree were heavily favored toward sciences and performance components, and then were expected to understand the commonsense nature of occupation-centered approaches. However, it remains unclear whether or not this is due to educators' teachings or some other variable. The students also expressed a disoriented contrast between clinical educator practicing styles and the approaches they were shown in school. This is a common refrain that even occupational therapy educators understand as a problem (Di Tommaso et al., 2019). Copley et al.'s study demonstrated the need for a deeper and more interconnected education regarding occupation and non-occupation-based material. The researchers were unclear about what occupation-centered learning the students were provided and how it contrasted with the basic sciences they were taught. Another limitation of this study is it cannot be easily generalized to other programs given it was only performed in a single university, therefore, it would be helpful to understand if this phenomenon is present in different programs or countries.

A study by Bazyk et al. (2010) conducted a phenomenological study on 18 occupational therapy graduate students experiencing a service learning program for low-income urban youth. The researchers sought to understand the perceptions and experiences of these students utilizing occupation-based social skills training by performing both focus groups and having students fill out reflective journals. One of the most telling findings was that most students struggle to envision occupational therapy in this nontraditional setting. Yet, midway through the fieldwork experience, many began to see the connections between theory and practice as well as occupational therapy's role in this setting. Nearing the end of the experience, many participants

had a realization of the power of occupation on individuals and groups. This study demonstrated how important practice education is in the formation of occupational therapy practitioners. Copley et al. (2010) also studied students during clinical rotations and the students reported difficulties translating didactic knowledge into clinical practice. Given the small scope of this study, it is difficult to know if it can be generalized to other fieldwork experiences of students. Two other studies demonstrated the differences between fieldwork experiences that are occupation-based and in turn develop occupation-based therapists, and fieldwork experiences that increase the divide between occupation-based coursework and rote clinical practice (Bagatell et al., 2013; Rezaee et al., 2014).

Cho et al. (2023) conducted an interpretive descriptive study on 13 recent Canadian occupational therapy graduates to understand their perspectives on occupation. The researchers utilized semi-structured interviews with participants with 0 to 36 months of experience in a variety of settings. They concluded with four themes: occupation is more than doing, occupation is broad, abstract, and context-dependent, occupation is not understood, and navigation of describing occupation. Many of the participants found other definitions of occupation to be confusing or limiting. The participants relayed that the abstract nature of occupation as it is taught does not translate well to other professions who seek to understand the tangible aspects of occupational therapy and its process. Given how misunderstood occupation is, as well as the profession, many felt that they were narrowed in their scope of practice due to the ignorance of others. Yet there were some who gave examples of how they navigated the difficulties presented in the real world. For one, having a clear theoretical understanding allowed them to better articulate his role to his team and use occupational terms; another participant realized their need to break the role of occupational therapy and its definition to the context they worked in. This

study exemplified the importance of having highly nuanced discussions of occupation and its role in therapy, as well as highly educated graduates who are able to articulate and advocate for occupation. Although they provided their perspectives on occupation, given the small sample size, it remains unclear if their perspectives are held by all or most occupational therapists.

Finally, Roberts et al. (2022) conducted a qualitative descriptive study on 20 occupational therapy students regarding their experiences of learning occupation. Four focus groups were transcribed and analyzed for themes. Three themes encapsulated their experience: making occupation real, relating occupation to the self, and theory as a lens. The first theme echoes Bazyk et al. (2010) in that the students enjoyed seeing occupation in action, seeing how occupation-based treatment is performed, and linking teachings with practice. The students reported that the second theme of relating occupation to the self was impactful because it was experiential, constructed knowledge that they could not deny as it was a reflection of their own lives. This is similar to Price et al.'s (2017) findings of using occupational analysis on the self to understand others as occupational beings, which allowed students in Roberts et al. (2022) study to see occupational therapy's relevance in different practice areas. Lastly, students reported using occupation-centered theory as a lens to frame their thinking. Students reported that the use of occupation-centered theories positively influenced how central occupation was to their practice and understanding of the profession. However, the students found it was a challenge to be an occupation-centered practitioner in a setting divorced from occupation-centered practice, similar to the findings of Copley et al. (2010). A limitation of this study was its limited generalizability as it was performed on only one program in Australia.

Within the small studies described above, occupational therapy students generally appear to have difficulties with the core subject of their profession. Occupation is multifaceted with

broad and context-specific qualities (Cho et al., 2023). Students form a deeper understanding of it as they progress in their programs yet can still have difficulties explaining it to other professionals (Cho et al., 2023; Ivarsson & Müllersdorf, 2009; Müllersdorf & Ivarsson, 2008). The core subject of occupation is often incongruously taught with ancillary topics, and the focus on occupation-centered practice is oftentimes at odds with what fieldwork educators demonstrate to their students (Copley et al., 2010). With the inclusion of detailed education on the concept of occupation, students are able to see the benefits and realness of occupation-based practice when tasked to perform it and are exposed to it (Bazyk et al., 2010; Roberts et al., 2022). There exists some data on students' experiences in their educational programs, however, many aspects are still unclear. Fieldwork experiences have been shown to be both effective and disconcerting for students in understanding occupations' role in therapy (Bazyk et al., 2010; Copley et al., 2010). There are still other learning experiences and teaching strategies that are used by educators to explain occupation which have not been explored. From the studies currently published in the literature, it is unclear what other aspects of occupational therapy education is helpful in increasing the knowledge of occupation in students.

**Discussion**

This literature review has explored topics of adult learning theories, occupation-centered education, educators and their role in that education, and students' experience in occupational therapy programs. When taken as a whole, there are several areas that connect as well as apparent gaps in knowledge that must be addressed. Adults have unique ways of learning and there are different ways educators have conceptualized their learning styles and the ways to meet these differences (Knowles, 1984; Mezirow, 2000). Adult learners and educators are often faced with the challenge of threshold concepts. In occupational therapy education, one of the primary

threshold concepts is occupation and its relationship to health (Fortune & Kennedy-Jones, 2014). Given the importance of occupation as a threshold concept, it is challenging for educators to understand how to best serve these students, especially when the curricula and programs are evolving with new information or when there is little direction in curricular design (Hooper et al., 2020). More careful examination of what adult learners value in occupational therapy education is warranted given the magnitude of the issue.

Educators and researchers are interested in occupation as it is the core subject of occupational therapy and have discovered that teaching occupation is difficult as there are many factors that influence the ability to learn, and the context in which it is being taught. Hooper (2006) found that linking occupation to topics that are not occupational in nature can be challenging to educators and often needs to be linked explicitly and implicitly. This coincides with Di Tommaso et al.'s (2019) findings that many educators have difficulties using occupation as a framework for their teachings and are aware of the inconsistencies between lectures and real-world practice. In fact, students reported this incongruity between didactic courses and fieldwork as one of the most challenging aspects of doing occupational therapy (Copley et al., 2010). One solution proposed by Hooper and colleagues (2020) is a learning framework, titled the subject-centered integrative learning model, that would allow educators to intentionally relate multidisciplinary topics back to occupation as well as be integral components of the framework itself through their experiences (Hooper, 2008). Few frameworks exist to guide occupational therapy programs toward a more occupation-centered future. This framework is already demonstrating positive results, as evidenced by Breen-Franklin and Atler (2022) successful implementation of the model.

In addition to the challenges educators face in using occupation as a framework in their teaching, the problem of the explicitness of occupation within occupational therapy curricular design and implementation in course design is also an issue.. Given its status as a core subject, one would expect to find occupation at the forefront of curricula and intermingled with various topics, yet researchers find that there exists a continuum of whether or not it is in plain view or hidden (Krishnagiri et al., 2017). Many educators believe it is the university's responsibility–their own responsibility–to drive the future of practice (Di Tommaso et al., 2019). Different universities across the globe create varied curricula that include aspects of medical and social knowledge, however, not all programs are created equally or as deeply informed in occupation (Irvine-Brown et al., 2020). Professional education being the main driver of future occupational practice entails making occupation core to practice, in both explicit and implicit curricula. Again, students notice these inconsistencies in class and suffer from it (Copley et al., 2010). Students have preconceived ideas of occupation, and as they progress have an increased understanding of occupation (Ivarsson & Müllersdorf, 2009; Müllersdorf & Ivarsson, 2008), however, it is unclear what altered their understanding of the concept. The concept of occupation is complex and needs to be addressed so that both educators and students are able to incorporate it into their occupational therapy education and practice. Krishnagiri et al.'s (2019) qualitative study on teaching practices found that experiential learning is one method educators use to convey occupation. Therefore, what seems most helpful for students is having experiences in fieldwork that are closely linked with what is learned in the classroom and having educators who can clearly articulate connections between theory and practice. More research is needed to understand what aspects of these students' education is helpful for making those connections between theory and practice.

One important finding is the portrayal of occupation as a lens for practice. Price and colleagues (2019) reported that several programs in the U.S. used occupation as a lens to understand the self, others, and the profession. In another study, students also reported being taught this method of thinking and finding it useful in their education (Roberts et al., 2022). Students reported having a greater understanding of occupation when it was made real, such as during practice education (Bazyk et al., 2010; Roberts et al., 2022). They also reported a greater understanding of it when their educators tasked them to be self-reflexive of their own occupations, which enables students to view others as occupational beings (Price et al., 2019). Their understanding of occupation led to a broader and deeper understanding of their profession, especially when trying to explain it to other professionals (Cho et al., 2023; Di Tommaso et al., 2019). Students valued learning activities that increased their collaboration with others, and found educators that did not connect topics well to be ineffective and disengaged them from learning (Asbjørnslett et al., 2022). This research demonstrates that students have a keen awareness of which aspects of their education help them the most in becoming occupational therapists.

Several studies had limitations regarding their data and its connection to students and their experiences. For example, Krishnagiri et al. (2017) advocate for future research to understand the effectiveness of instructional methods' ability to convey occupation by understanding the experiences of students. Hooper's (2018) article on curricular strategies explores the myriad ways programs introduce occupation, however, have no way of measuring whether these methods are found useful by students. Price et al. (2017), in their study of teaching occupation beyond its use in therapy, note that their data came from rich sources–program directors–however, they are unsure if additional insights could be gathered from other faculty

and students. The one study that researched specifically the experiences and perceptions of students and their learning of occupation is small in size; therefore, it cannot easily be generalized to other programs or students (Roberts et al., 2022).

The reviewed literature demonstrates that there needs to be increased research on the perspectives of students and what is salient to them when learning about the concept of occupation. There appear to be some common experiences in the literature: such as seeing occupation used in therapy, the use of occupation as a lens, and the importance of experiential learning. However, too little is known about what exactly transforms their understanding of the core concept of their profession, and too little is known about what students believe increased their understanding of occupation. It is one thing to have studies that explain and explore the many ways educators and curricula convey occupation, it is another to know which of those methods used students find most helpful in their education.

## Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this project was to conduct a study to answer the question, “what do occupational therapy students know about the concept of occupation, and which teaching activities do they perceive as most helpful in understanding the concept of occupation?” The study’s objective was to describe what OT students know about occupation, as well as describe the breadth of learning activities that occupational therapy students found helpful in their education for learning the concept of occupation. This information can be used by occupational therapy educators to improve teaching strategies, as well as curricular design to increase the effectiveness of education on occupation.

## Theoretical Framework

The capstone was developed using transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2000). This theory posits that learners are transformed by their education and ultimately shift their perspective of the world. Transformative learning is useful for creating professionals that value concepts and ideas specific to their profession, which changes practice and knowledge creation. This theory aided in conceptualizing occupational therapy education as a transformative process through which occupational therapy students learned new ways of viewing people as occupational beings. This theory aided in viewing the literature through a specific lens, which allowed for understanding occupation-centered education, educators perspectives on their teaching strategies, and student's experiences in their educational programs as all containing transformative learning inherently.

The capstone also utilized the Person-Environment-Occupation (PEO) model. The PEO model describes how the person, environment, and occupation interact and affect occupational performance, that is, how someone performs the occupations in their life. The model describes how these three elements work independently and transact in different ways. In framing this capstone, it allowed for viewing students as individually unique people that must transact within their scholastic environments. The occupation in this capstone was education, which again interacts with the individual person and the environment it is situated in.

## Methodology

The first section will include information on the research design used to answer the research question. The subsequent sections will explain the agency where the study was conducted, summary of the capstone experience, as well as the methods of data collection and the procedures of the study. The section thereafter will provide information on the participants and how they were recruited, and the materials that were required to complete the study. The closing section will end with results and discussion of the findings.

### Design

This capstone project utilized a descriptive correlational design using a survey. This design aims to describe the characteristics, attitudes, or behaviors of a given population (Portney, 2020). Descriptive research is the basis of all research as it seeks to describe the world and identify concepts, constructs, and relationships before attempts to experiment. In this case, the study sought to describe what OT students understand about the concept of occupation and which learning activities they found useful for understanding the concept of occupation in their OTD education. This research design is a useful first step in research as it seeks to describe the world rather than attempt to interpret or manipulate variables (Tomlin & Borgetto, 2011). It also can contain both quantitative and qualitative data, as is the case for this project. The exploratory nature of this design was apt to provide preliminary data on the types of learning activities students found useful in this one U.S. OT program. A more robust qualitative research design may have led to higher quality data, however, given the preliminary nature of the topic, those type of designs may run the risk of not fully comprehending the contexts they are studying. A longitudinal design could have allowed for understanding the changes of how OT students understand occupation and what learning activities they found helpful, however, due to time

constraints of the graduate program, this design was not feasible. This design was ultimately chosen to gather preliminary and basic data within a given timeframe for future studies to build from.

**Data Collection Method**

Data was acquired via an electronic self-administered survey using Qualtrics software (see Appendix A). The advantages of using this collection method were as follows: the online format allowed for flexibility in designing and modifying the content, the online format was accessible to this population is who required by their program to have at-home access to the internet, the online format was able to reach more people more quickly in comparison to a face-to-face survey, mail-in survey, or other data collection methods such as interviews or focus groups, and the cost to produce this survey was low. The disadvantages were as follows: respondents were more likely to provide brief and incomplete responses, some respondents could have misread the question and provide an answer that was not related to the topic, the researcher's inability to answer questions respondents have about the survey content, and a decrease in the ability to delve into a participant or group of participants opinions. This survey design was ultimately chosen to acquire as many participants as possible. To increase a wider array of responses, all three class years of the UNLV OT program were recruited to understand how OT students at different levels of their education respond to the question, rather than just a single class year.

The questionnaire was a non-standard assessment created by the researcher based on the research question. Demographic data was collected in the questionnaire; this data included the participants' age, class year, and a specific course taken. Age range of five-year increments was utilized to help deidentify the data as well as for statistical analysis. The questions in the survey

were centered around defining occupation, explaining occupation and its influence on health, and about the learning activities the respondents thought were useful for learning the concept of occupation. Given there are no standardized assessments that would answer the research questions, the quality of the survey was addressed by piloting the survey with UNLV OT alumni to ensure it was comprehensive to current students (see Appendix B). The data collection period began when the study was first announced to the participants. Anonymity of the participants was ensured by using the "anonymize response" setting in Qualtrics.

The questionnaire primarily contained open-ended questions in which participants wrote their own personal responses. The closed-ended questions were formatted to yield nominal data and interval data. Some questions contained named learning activities, which were taken from a larger list provided by Krishnagiri et al. (2019) whose study sought to understand learning activities OT curricula at the national level. The questions were designed with information acquired in the literature review and through discussions with capstone and site mentors. The questionnaire was peer reviewed by two experts in occupational science who are also experts in survey design, qualitative methods, and research.

**Sampling and Recruitment**

The population for this study was entry-level OT students, which included students in associate-level, master's-level, and doctorate-level programs. The majority of U.S. based occupational therapists are white (82.5%) and women (88%) (Banks, 2022; Ledgerd, 2020). The target population for this study was entry-level occupational therapy doctorate students in the United States. The accessible population was the OTD students at UNLV, estimated at 81 students currently enrolled in all three class years in the program. Unlike OT practitioners in the U.S, the accessible population was ethnically diverse and contained a supermajority of women,

which is similar to the demographics of occupational therapists in the U.S in regards to gender. This data was not gathered in the survey, however it is known to the student researcher by personal interactions. The sole inclusionary criteria for the sample were students who were currently enrolled in the entry-level OTD program at UNLV.

Convenience sampling was utilized during a two-week recruitment period in February. This method of recruitment was useful as the researchers had access to the entire UNLV OTD student population. A randomized sampling design was not appropriate as the researchers wished to acquire as many responses as possible. IRB approval was obtained (see Appendix C) for all procedures of the study prior to recruitment. An email was sent out to the UNLV OTD students (see Appendix D) with permission from the program director Dr. Krause (see Appendix E). Due to an initial low response rate, in-person recruitment also occurred for the three cohorts with the instructors present at the Shadow Lane Biotech Research campus at UNLV. A script was prepared to ensure transparency and consistency (see Appendix F). The survey was self-administered and electronic, therefore, the completion of the survey took place in many locations. Two email reminders were sent out to the participants a week apart (see Appendix G). To further recruit numbers, another week was added to the recruitment period, and time was allotted after class time for each cohort to complete the survey with permission from the program director and faculty. Participation was entirely voluntary and remained at the discretion of the potential participants. A total of 38 participants completed the study, with two participants only partially completing the study.

**Pilot Study**

A pilot study was conducted to ensure that the survey was effective and comprehensive to the current study body. The recently graduated alumni of UNLV OT were contacted via the

program director and recruited to participate in a draft of the study. A feedback box was added to the end of the survey; this allowed the alumni to provide open-ended comments and criticism of the content, wording, and layout of the survey. Their feedback was considered and relayed to two occupational scientists and ultimately implemented into the final survey.

**Procedures**

1. IRB approval from UNLV was obtained.
2. The student researcher contacted the program director, Dr. Donnamarie Krause, to contact the UNLV OT alumni for the pilot study in late 2023.The program director then announced the pilot study to UNLV OT alumni in early 2024.
3. Survey was piloted with recent UNLV OT alumni. Feedback was used to ensure the survey was understandable and useful for the current cohorts of students.
4. Consent was obtained from the program director to contact faculty for permission to recruit in person after class times in the spring semester. Faculty granted permission to conduct the study during class time at the Shadow Lane campus at UNLV in early 2024. The researchers coordinated with the faculty to ensure the study did not interfere with their schoolwork.
5. Verbal announcement was made to the three cohorts in the courses where instructors had provided permission. Data collection of the study commenced after the announcement using a QR code. Students were requested to complete the questionnaire at the time when the announcement was made or within two weeks of that date at their leisure.
6. Student researcher was present in case participants have questions or have difficulty accessing the electronic survey. Two QR codes were displayed on a display in each classroom, one that linked to the information sheet and another that linked to the study

survey. No observational notes were taken of the students who were completing the survey and course instructors were not present.

7. Contact information on paper for those first- and second-year students who wished to be emailed the study information. This paper's content was manually entered into a word document and uploaded to the Google Drive. The paper was destroyed in a paper shredder afterwards.
8. Researcher extended the data collection period by one week to increase the response rate.
9. Researcher ended access to the questionnaire three weeks after the initial verbal announcement.
10. Data was downloaded from Qualtrics and uploaded into SPSS and Microsoft Excel for analysis.
11. Interpretation of the data was performed next.
12. The writing and finalization of the results and discussion via a capstone manuscript and presentation occurred last.

**Data Management and Analysis**

The data was gathered using Qualtrics which hosted the online survey. The data was then recorded on Qualtrics cloud storage and recorded as an Excel (.xlsx) and Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) statistical data file (.sav) to Google Drive's cloud storage regulated by UNLV, and Box cloud storage regulated by the University of Utah. Only the researchers of the study were allowed access to the data. Qualtrics security options were used, including anonymous responses that did not record IP addresses, location data, or contact information, as well as prevention of search engine indexing. Google Drive required 2-factor authentication and only the student researcher had access to this account. Data was checked for completeness on

Excel by visually scanning for missing cells. For incomplete data, mean values were calculated using class year groupings and added to the different questions that had missing data.

Analysis of the close-ended questions data was completed on SPSS and Microsoft Excel. First, descriptive statistics were used to find the frequency and percentage for the nominal data, as well as measures of central tendency for the ordinal data. This was performed to understand basic information about the variables in the data, as well as uncover potential relationships between data. Next, the closed-ended questions were analyzed for a normal distribution pattern and were found to be parametric through Excel. This was done to ensure which statistical analysis could be performed. Then regression analysis was chosen and performed to understand the relationship between the participants responses for the item "rank the items from least to most helpful for increasing your understanding of occupation" and their class year as well as age groupings. Finally, the quantitative analytical methods were affirmed by a UNLV OT faculty member with expertise in quantitative research.

For the open-ended questions, the data was imported and formatted in columns in Excel to allow for visual comparison. First, the frequency of words was recorded for all open-ended responses. Words with different verb tenses or noun forms were grouped into one category (e.g. did, do, participate, participation). This was performed to understand basic information of the written responses and understand what participants mentioned the most in their responses. Then, content analysis was performed; this analytical approach is used for the analysis of text, wherein direct information from participants is received without imposing preconceived categories. Content analysis was utilized as it is a commonly used approach when existing research on the topic is limited (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). For the open-ended responses, codes were created by analyzing each individual word, phrases, sentences, and entire responses. Further visual analysis

was conducted between respondents, in comparison between questions of an individual, between class years, and between age groups to uncover patterns of responses. These codes were then discussed with the student researchers' mentor, a qualitative researcher, to confirm their validity. The codes were then organized to create common categories (Portney, 2020). These preliminary categories underwent peer debriefing to ensure the credibility of the data. The student researcher and their mentor met weekly to discuss the data, compare their individual findings, and arrive at an agreement for what categories were present in the data. Next, categories were then grouped into core categories and were discussed and approved once more. Finally, for question one and two, the categories were used to create two separate definitions. These definitions were discussed with the student researcher's mentor and approved. Reflexivity was performed weekly via journaling during the data analysis to ensure the researchers are examining how their subjectivity can affect the results of the study data.

Regarding the content of the survey, questions one, two, and four were open-ended questions for the variable of describing occupation. Questions three, five, six, seven, eight, nine, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18 were for the variable of learning activities used to understand occupation. Questions 19, 20, 21 were for the demographic data. See Appendix A.

**Agency**

The Shadow Lane Biotech Research campus at UNLV was the location where the study was conducted. UNLV is a public university that has recently established an OTD program. The student researcher was enrolled in the OTD program at UNLV at the time of the study and had contacted the program director, Dr. Donnamarie Krause, to conduct the study on the OTD student population. The capstone experience also occurred at the Shadow Lane campus at UNLV, as well as the University of Utah.

## Capstone Experience

The capstone experience encompassed learning more deeply about the concept of occupation, descriptive research methodology, learning to create a survey for data collection, learning to perform content analysis and correlational statistics, and the interpretation of data. This education and experience led to the creation of an educational module on the topic of social inclusion. The module was designed and created using information gathered from the project study to inform teaching practices and strategies and gaps in student knowledge. The module was provided in OCT 730 - Culture during the Spring 2024 semester. Information for this module was obtained from primary and secondary sources agreed upon by the student researcher and the faculty and site mentor.

## Material

The materials needed for this project included the following:

- Recruitment materials such as digital invitational letters with an information sheet
- Authorization and acknowledgement from the UNLV OTD program director and faculty
- Computer to create material, gather the data, and analyze the data
- Access to Qualtrics via UNLV
- Digital self-report questionnaire made in Qualtrics
- Access to classroom space and time to perform the study with the UNLV OTD student body
- Google Drive cloud storage provided by UNLV
- Box cloud storage provided by site mentor from the University of Utah

## Ethical and Legal Considerations

The ethical and legal considerations most pertinent to this study regarded the anonymity of the participants. Through the use of Qualtrics, the only data that was gathered regarding the personal information of the students were their class year, age, and completion of level II fieldwork, for the use in descriptive correlational statistics. Class year and age were sufficiently broad that the identity of any participant cannot be ascertained. The measures for de-identification for age included transposing data to age ranges during analysis with SPSS and Microsoft Excel.

All participants had the option of volunteering to participate in the study. The participants were given access to the information sheet prior to viewing the survey and completed the survey through their own volition. Once started, completion of the survey was not required and the participants could end the survey at any time. No vulnerable groups were enrolled in the study as described in the IRB application material. According to the UNLV OTD student handbook, students must be proficient in the use of computers and have access to a computer, therefore the use of email to acquire this sample did not exclude any of the population.

## Results

Per the analysis described above, this section will describe the results to answer the research question: "what do occupational therapy students know about the concept of occupation, and which teaching activities do they perceive as most helpful in understanding the concept of occupation?" A description of the sample characteristics is provided. The following section describes students understanding about occupation, the next what learning activities assisted participants in learning about occupation. Finally, results regarding the challenges of explaining occupation to others is reported.

### Sample Characteristics

A total of 38 participants completed the full survey. This yielded a 47% (38/81) response rate. Two participants only completed the first four open-ended questions at the beginning of the survey; their open-ended responses were used for content analysis. Of the 38 who fully completed the study, including demographic data, the majority of participants were between the ages 20-29 (84%) and had completed a level II fieldwork placement (68%). In the UNLV OT program, second- and third-year students must complete a level II fieldwork experience, hence only the first-year respondents did not complete this fieldwork. Of the 38 participants, eight were second-year (21%), 12 were first-year (32%), and 18 were third-year students (47%).

### Student's Understanding of Occupation

What students at UNLV OT understand about the concept of occupation was garnered through two open-ended prompts, which were question one, "in your own words, write a short description of the concept of occupation," and question two, "in your own words, describe how occupation influences health." The categories used to create the definition of occupation are as follows with the number of instances found within the data: engagement (30), meaningful (21),

activities (30), temporality (20), wants and needs (18), life (11), and context of occupation (five). The categories used to create the second definition that explains the influence of occupation to health are as follows: Aspects of health (17), relationship of engagement to health (16), maintenance of biological functions (six), and positive and negative occupations (five). Performance patterns in relation to health was only mentioned once and was not included in the definition.

Participants often cited specific occupations in their description of occupation, such as activities of daily living (ADLs), hobbies, work, cooking, playing, and leisurely activities. Some responses that included named occupations were closely related to the categories of occupations as described by the OTPF-4. The respondents also reported the relationship of occupations to physical or biological health more often than any other category of health such as mental, social, or spiritual health.

Visual analysis of the text was used to better compare the responses between participants, and between questions. When performing the visual comparison of those who had non-thorough definitions, it was evident that they had also written fewer words in the other open-ended questions. These respondents provided responses that either did not answer the prompt, did not link concepts clearly, or contained basic aspects of the concept that other responses contained, such as meaningful activities and engagement, however, did not provide further insights. The opposite can also be said for those who wrote thorough responses. Of the 40 respondents, 11 provided definitions that were deemed unthorough for the first prompt (29%), and seven for the second prompt (18%). Thoroughness was ascertained through discussion and agreement between the student researcher and the mentor's judgement. When visually comparing responses between the first prompt of defining occupation and the second prompt of explaining the influence of

occupation on health, respondents who wrote brief entries into the first prompt had the tendency of writing more elaborate responses for the second prompt.

Based on the analysis described in an earlier section, students described occupation as, "occupation encompasses all the meaningful activities that people want or need to engage in their life. These occupations occur throughout time and are affected by different contexts such as roles, culture, or environments." This definition is similar to the definition provided in the OTPF-4 (2020).

For the second prompt, students described the relation of occupation and health as, "the ability to engage in occupations affects health both positively or negatively. Occupations are either good or bad for health and are closely related to physical, social, emotional, mental, and spiritual health." Categories, such as meaningful and activity, were grouped together in the definitions based on the proximity of the words within the data, as well using the context of the response as meaningful was often linked to the word activity.

## Learning Activities That Students Perceive as Helpful

This section will discuss the various findings regarding what learning activities the participants thought were most helpful for learning the concept of occupation. It is separated into two sections, didactic learning and experiential learning activities.

### *Didactic Learning Activities*

Several questions were asked regarding what type of didactic instructional methods were helpful for these students to come to this understanding of occupation. The open-ended question, "what learning activities, class, or lab experience did you find most helpful for increasing your understanding of occupation?" resulted in several categories: hands-on experience, fieldwork or community practice, lecture, and occupational analysis. These learning activities were self-

reported prior to exposure to any activity choices provided by the researcher contained in questions within the survey. Rare learning activities reported by the students were discussion, viewing occupation through the self, and teachers' experiences.

The closed-ended questions on didactic learning activities resulted in various findings. On the topic of using occupation as a lens, participants were more likely to be unsure if their fieldwork used occupation as a lens in comparison to their didactic education (36.8% vs. 10.5%), however, most reported that they did find it useful to use occupation as a lens in general (84.2%). Regarding various learning activities found in OT programs, participants in this study reported that their curriculum did link basic sciences to occupation (78.9%), and they held a similar belief that OT programs should explicitly link occupation and basic sciences. When comparing different class years, third-year students overwhelmingly agree that linking basic sciences to occupation was necessary throughout their education (94%), while first-year students believe less so (72%). The participants also reported that the Occupational Therapy Practice Framework-4 (OTPF-4) is a useful tool for learning occupation (89.5%). Participants reported that case-based learning (85%) and small group discussions (80%) were the most helpful for learning occupation in a didactic setting, with writing about occupation being considered the least helpful (17.5%). When asked if they would prefer for experiential learning to increase their understanding of occupation, all but one said yes (97.4%).

To uncover if there were any relationships between variables, regression analysis was performed between all class years and ranked choice of instructional methods taken from Krishnagiri et al. (2019). First-year, second-year, and third-year students will be referred to as Y1, Y2, and Y3. For the majority of ranked activities, there was no statistical association between class year and ranked choice of instructional methods. Years exposed in the OT

program was statistically and significantly associated with the activity of large group discussion ($r^2$=0.19; p<0.007) and small group discussion ($r^2$=0.17; p<0.01). To understand if there were differences between individual class years, a post hoc analysis was performed between Y1 vs. Y2, Y1 vs. Y3, and Y2 vs. Y3. For the activity of large group discussions, only Y1 vs. Y3 were statistically different from one another ($r^2$=0.22; p<0.01). On average, Y1 participants (M = 5.5) found large group discussion as more helpful for learning occupation in comparison to Y2 (M = 4.75) and Y3 (M = 3.8). For the small group activity, Y1 vs. Y3 differed statistically ($r^2$=0.18; p<0.02). Again, on average, Y1 participants (M = 5.6) found small group discussion as more helpful for learning occupation in comparison to Y2 (M = 5.4) and Y3 (M = 4.4).

Years exposed to the OT program was also statistically and significantly associated with the learning activity of lecture ($r^2$=0.14; p<0.02). In the post hoc analysis, Y1 vs. Y2 ($r^2$=0.22; p<0.04), and Y1 vs. Y3 ($r^2$=0.16; p<0.03) differed statistically, however, Y2 vs. Y3 did not ($r^2$=0.004; p<0.77). Y1 participants reported finding lecture more helpful for learning occupation (M = 5.3), compared to Y2 (M = 4.1) and Y3 (M = 3.9). See Tables 1 and 2.

**Table 1**

*Questions Regarding Didactic Learning Activities*

| Question | No. of participants responding yes (%) | No. of participants responding no (%) | No. of participants responding I'm not sure (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| It is helpful to use occupation as a "lens" to see others and yourself? | 32 (84.2) | 2 (5.3) | 4 (10.5) |
| Did your didactic education include using occupation as a "lens" to see others and yourself? | 27 (71.1) | 5 (13.2) | 6 (15.8) |
| Did your fieldwork experience include using occupation as a "lens" to see others and yourself? | 22 (57.9) | 2 (5.3) | 14 (36.8) |
| Did your didactic education link basic sciences and practice knowledge to occupation? | 30 (78.9) | 3 (7.9) | 5 (13.2) |
| Is it helpful or would it be helpful if educators linked occupation to basic sciences? | 32 (84.2) | 6 (15.8) | N/A |
| Did your educator describe their professional experience with occupation in OT practice? | 34 (89.5) | 4 (10.5) | N/A |
| Which of these teaching styles do you find most helpful in learning the concept of occupation? | 7 (18.4) | 31 (81.6) | N/A |
| Do you think the OTPF is helpful for learning about the concept of occupation? | 34 (89.5) | 4 (10.5) | N/A |
| Would you prefer more experiential learning to increase your understanding of occupation? | 37 (97.4) | 1 (2.6) | N/A |

*Note: N/A signifies that this answer choice was not asked/provided in the survey*

**Table 2**

*Question Regarding Different Learning Activities*

| **Question: Which of these experiences do you think are most helpful for learning occupation?** | |
|---|---|
| **Response** | **Frequency (%)** |
| Fieldwork level I | 17 (42.5) |
| Fieldwork level II | 30 (75%) |
| Community-based practice | 27 (67.5) |
| Lab activities | 28 (70) |
| Small group discussion | 32 (80) |
| Large group discussions | 17 (42.5) |
| Readings on occupation | 13 (32.5) |
| Writing about occupation | 7 (17.5) |
| Case-based learning | 34 (85) |
| Lecture | 16 (40) |

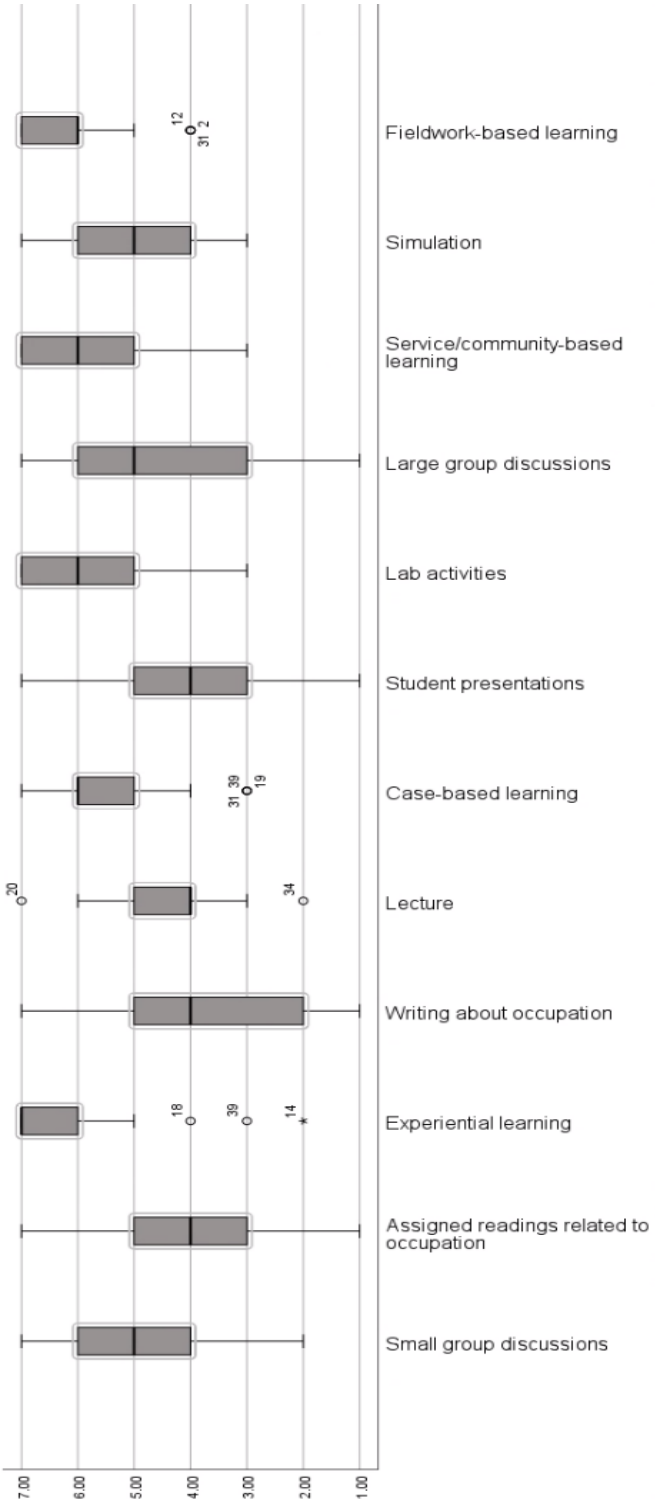
### *Experiential Learning Activities*

Questions were also asked regarding what type of experiential instructional methods were helpful for learning the concept of occupation. When asked if participants preferred experiential to didactic activities for learning about occupation, participants overwhelmingly chose experiential (84.2%). Except for one person, the participants reported wanting more experiential learning activities in their education, with a large majority reporting level II fieldwork (75%), lab activities (70%), and community-based practice (67.5%) as the most helpful for learning occupation. UNLV follows the ACOTE required minimum standard of 24 weeks of level II fieldwork and provided various level I fieldwork experiences throughout the program. See Table 2.

When asked to rank both didactic and experiential activities based on helpfulness to increase understanding of occupation, the three activities with the highest rankings were fieldwork-based learning, experiential learning, and community-based learning on a 7-point Likert scale. The activity that scored least helpful was writing about occupation. See Figure 1 for more detail. To uncover if there were any relationships between variables, regression analysis was performed between all class years and ranked choice of instructional methods. There was no statistically significant difference between classes regarding the perceived helpfulness of fieldwork for learning occupation ($r^2$=0.01; p<0.47), experiential learning ($r^2$=0.002; p<0.79), or community-based learning ($r^2$=0.003; p< 0.75).

**Figure 1**

*Boxplot of Ranked Items From Least to Most Helpful for Understanding Occupation*



Regression analysis was also performed to understand the relationship between the participants responses for the item “rank the items from least to most helpful for increasing your understanding of occupation” and their age group. Two groups were created, one group which included participants between the ages of 20-29, and another with participants 30 years and older. This was performed to understand if there were differences between younger and older students. There was a statistically significant difference between the two groups regarding experiential learning ($r^2$=0.2; p<0.004) and fieldwork-based learning ($r^2$=0.12; p<0.04), with younger students finding those learning activities more useful or learning occupation.

Overall, students reported that lecture, occupational analysis, case-based learning, and group discussion helped them understand the concept of occupation. There was also a statistically significant difference between group discussions and lecture when comparing first-year and third-year students, wherein first-year students found them to be more helpful for learning occupational therapy.

**Challenges in Describing Occupation to Non-OTs**

The results of the open-ended question, “Do you think it is difficult to explain occupation to others? Please explain,” is as follows. The respondents who reported it was difficult to explain occupation often had more elaborate definitions of occupation based on visual comparison and agreement between the two researchers. The respondents who reported it was not difficult to explain tended to provide simple and brief definitions of occupation. For those who wrote it was not difficult to explain occupation, when performing the visual comparison, responses to the prompt about the influence of occupation and health were often more elaborate.

Three categories were discovered: occupation equating to jobs, complexity of occupation, and audience dependent. For the category occupation equating to jobs, respondents reported that

the more common use of the term occupation would often lead to confusion when discussing the concept. For the category complexity of occupation, respondents classified occupation as both broad, complex, and abstract. Respondents who believed it was not difficult to explain typically had brief definitions of occupation. For the category audience dependent, respondents reported that different audiences were either more or less responsive to understanding the concept of occupation. Third-year students were more likely to report this than any other class.

## Discussion of Findings

### Sample Characteristics

The total number of participants who finished the survey was 38 out of 81 (47%) total students enrolled in the program. Even with extending recruitment timelines, recruiting in-person, and sending out email reminders for increased responses, this response rate is below the average response rate for this given population (Wilson et al., 2024). While 47% is a fair number, it is not representative of the UNLV OT program. When comparing classes, there was an over-representation of third-year students, which was likely due to the prior relationships established with the student researcher. Although the data is intentionally vague, the student researcher understood that there are more students over the age of 30 than the sample represented. This sample is thus not random nor representative of the UNLV OT program. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalized to all the OT programs in the U.S, as it was not generalizable to the accessible population, let alone the target population. Future studies should include a broader range of students from different universities and countries.

### Student's Understanding of Occupation

The definition of occupation that first- and second-year participants' definition closely followed the definition provided in the OTPF-4 (AOTA, 2020). One explanation for this is due to the OTPF-4 being used during the beginning of the program to orient students to the domain and process of occupational therapy. In general, third year students had far more detailed definitions of occupation, however, some continued to use the WFOT definition provided in the OTPF-4. Krishnagiri et al. (2017) found that along the continuum of the explicitness of occupation in OT programs, many informants believed teaching the OTPF-4 was equivalent to teaching the concept of occupation. The OTPF-4 is an often-used teaching tool across the U.S.;

however, it can be used as a crutch in place of teaching occupation more conceptually and in the context of occupational science. Similarly, in Ivarsson and Müllersdorf's (2009) study of occupational therapy students, they found that those who were nearing the end of their program had a more complex understanding of occupation, than when they first started (Müllersdorf & Ivarsson, 2008). They also found that first-year OT students described the dimensions of occupation in several ways. Their sample described the doing and context of occupation, which was similar to the named occupations and various contexts provided by the participants in this study. Their sample also described the time and place for occupation, which was similar to the high frequency of the concept of time in this study. The samples were similar in the description of what Müllersdorf and Ivarsson term "outcome of occupation", that is, how occupational engagement relates to health. The samples differed in the categories of doing and context of occupation, as our study's sample mentioned the different contexts of occupation, however, did so sparingly and not universally as is the case for the doing of occupation—namely all of the named occupations provided by participants.

Overall, participants' definition of occupation was broad, however, it lacked some of the complexity found within occupational science. A component the definition missed was the social nature of occupations, with most respondents defining occupation through an individualistic lens. Occupations carry intrinsic social qualities, as well as external qualities derived from cultural and social mores. The respondents included some contextual aspects of occupation, however, it was sparse and not as common as the physical or participatory nature of occupation. Finally, occupation and its purpose in identity formation was missed by all but one respondent. Including these components of the complexity and breadth of occupation is a challenge; it may be too much to ask for students to provide this in one answer. Future studies can include more questions

to better understand what students know about these facets of occupation. These components are important, and considering the sparsity of them within the dozens of answers, it demonstrates the importance of reinforcing missed themes in future courses and curricula.

One important aspect that was missing from their responses was the occupational nature of humans, as only one respondent provided this definition. A few mentioned occupations as a necessity for biological functioning, however, none of the participants linked occupation to a necessity of other aspects of health, such as mental, social, and emotional health. For instances, if mental health is not addressed through engagement of occupations, poor mental health can lead to death or disability (WHO, 2023). This is a more abstract way of thinking, and can be difficult to grasp, however, it is an important concept, especially for occupational therapists who will work with mental health issues in all settings and all populations. It is important that the concept of humans as occupational beings is fully addressed in OT curricula for this very reason.

The respondents hinted at but rarely explicitly mentioned the nature of occupation and health in regard to performance patterns. Performance patterns develop over time and are an essential quality of people's lives as they determine the short- and long-term engagement in health and unhealthy activity (AOTA, 2020). Performance patterns are one domain occupational therapists address, therefore it is important topic to address in curricula, so that students understand this connection when they go out and practice. The questions were intentionally vague and brief to ensure that the participants reported whatever they felt relevant to answer the question. More thorough or direct questioning may increase the data gathered regarding different aspects of occupation. Different methods of data collection, such as semi-structured interviews could also yield better data that would answer the research question.

The responses also did not mention occupational science concepts such as occupational balance and occupational justice. Although participants were aware of mental, physiological, and social health they did not demonstrate a connection in their writing to how these health outcomes can be affected by outside forces, e.g. structural racism, social determinants of health, that deprave individuals of their rights to occupational engagement. For example, respondent 12 wrote: "A disruption in our occupations or a lack of participation in occupations can lead to a decline in all aspects of our health because occupations are so closely tied to who we are and what makes us happy." Although they mention disruption, they did not provide a source of that disruption, which is often an external force. These concepts are not easily written about in a brief description, therefore, the method of data collection was unfit to provide these descriptions of what students know. Future research with different methodologies should be considered to understand how students view occupational justice in relation to health and occupation.

Many of the participants were able to link engagement and disengagement with positive or negative health outcomes, however, many did not explain how this relationship functioned; for example, respondent seven wrote, "occupation has a direct impact on health and engaging in occupation has the capacity to maintain and increase health." Many of the participants linked occupation with various aspects of health, including emotional, mental, spiritual, physiological, and social health. Few participants described how negative or bad occupations can be detrimental to health, however, those who did had a dichotomous view of the matter. Bad or dark occupations are currently not well understood and are currently being researched, therefore it is reasonable to expect that students did not have a deep grasp of the concept.

## Learning Activities That Students Perceive as Helpful

This section discusses the findings of the learning activities students perceived as useful for learning the concept of occupation. It is divided into two sections, one on didactic learning activities, and the other on experiential learning activities.

### *Didactic Learning Activities*

As shown in the results, first-year students were statistically and significantly more likely to rank large and small group discussions as helpful for learning occupation (M = 5.55), in comparison to when students are nearing the end of their education (M = 3.83). There was also a statistically significant difference between Y1 vs Y2 ($r^2$=0.22; $p<0.04$) and Y1 vs. Y3 ($r^2$=0.16; $p<0.03$), with the Y1 students on average finding lecture more helpful (M = 5.3) in comparison to Y2 (M = 4.1) and Y3 (M = 3.9) for learning occupation. An explanation could be that students with more years in the UNLV OT program favored other forms of learning that they had not yet received in their first year. That is, first-year students only have a limited view of the learning activities they will receive in their program, and when students are nearing graduation, they are able to reflect and find that other teaching activities were more helpful than lectures or group discussions, and consequently rated activities differently. It is possible that including more courses with lecture and discussion will allow students to have a better conceptual understanding of occupation, which can then be used in conjunction with application of the knowledge gained in various experiential contexts. An alternative explanation is that the students in different cohorts are dissimilar and vary in their preferences of learning activities. It is known by the student researcher that each cohort is unique in learning styles and characteristics as reported by the faculty and interactions with them.

The third open-ended question regarding self-reported learning activities matched well with the closed-ended responses that provided learning activities from Krishnagiri et al.'s (2019) study (see Appendix A). When prompted to provide learning activities, respondents wrote hands-on, fieldwork, and community practice (see Table 2). In the close-ended questions, as all but one participant wished for more experiential learning (97.4%), and the highest ranked learning activities were fieldwork lab-activities, and community-based practice. The lone exception in the data was the teaching activity of lecture. In the closed-ended questions, lecture was relatively low in perceived helpfulness for learning occupation (40%), however, it was the second-highest mentioned activity when students self-reported in their open-ended response. This could indicate that lecture was truly helpful to learn about occupation, while at the same time students demonstrated a bias toward experiential learning. This connects well with the adult learning literature, namely Knowles (1984) who posits that adult learners are task-oriented, and in the case for occupational therapy students, they wish to learn for their future employment which is often seen as experiential activities and skills. Students may find lectures boring, and thus rank the activity lower despite the actual utility for learning occupation.

Question 14 in the survey provided examples of learning activities that participants could select if they found them helpful for learning occupation. Students reported that group discussions and case studies were most helpful for understanding occupation in their didactic learning. This finding supports the findings of Hooper's (2006) study on an exemplar occupation-centered program in the U.S. used both methods frequently. In Krishnagiri et al.'s (2019) study of educators. The researchers reported the use of instructional strategies across the entire United States. Assigned readings and writing about occupation (amongst the top five most cited activities within that study) were rarely seen as helpful by the participants in this study.

Assigned readings and writing about occupation ranked lowest in regard to mean and mode in comparison to 10 other learning activities. An explanation for difference may come from the sheer weight these participants place on experiential learning activities. Another explanation is that students must read and write for many different classes, therefore additional readings can be perceived as overbearing or unhelpful toward their education. Nevertheless, it is worth considering whether or not text-based activities should be reconsidered in favor of either more discussion and case-based activities or hands-on approaches to understanding occupation.

Participants reported that their curriculum did link basic sciences to occupation, and they also agreed that OT programs should explicitly link occupation and basic sciences (see Table 1). One study in the literature demonstrated that students feel that there was a disconnect between learning occupation and basic sciences (Copley et al., 2010). The study reported that for their sample, the program they attended heavily favored sciences in the first two years of the program, and when out in fieldwork suddenly had to reconcile occupation and those more basic sciences. The researchers concluded that educators should provide authentic experiences and contexts. One explanation for our study's sample believing occupation was linked to basic science courses is the inclusion of occupation in most classes and topics. Third-year students agreed that linking basic sciences to occupation was necessary throughout their education (94%), while first-year students, who have not had this experience in fieldwork, believe less so (72%). This change in belief could be attributed to the years exposed to their program and the experiences they have had.

Hooper et al. (2018) reported that some programs in the U.S. rely on the OTPF-4 as the primary tool for addressing occupations, however, most programs did not demonstrate how students understood the broader conceptual aspects of occupation. In this study, first- and

second-year students provided simple definitions of occupation, such as “meaningful activities one engages in,” as well as provided various examples of occupation. Third-year students were more likely to provide definitions that included various contexts, uniqueness to individuals, the relationship to survival, and the time-dimension of occupation. From the student researcher’s perspective of the UNLV OT curricula, much less focus was placed on the OTPF-4 after the first year, wherein classes required students to think more conceptually about how occupation linked to various topics. This may explain why third-year students had definitions that were more detailed than the definition provided in the OTPF-4.

The results from the closed-ended questions seen in Table 1 are similar to Asbjørnslett et al.’s (2022) findings that students highly value socialization and collaboration in their education. In this study, small group discussions were highly valued for learning about occupation when previously prompted, in comparison to more solitary learning activities (reading and writing). However, these closed-ended responses are in contrast to the open-ended question of, “what learning activities, class, or lab experiences did you find most helpful for increasing your understanding of occupation?” Rare responses included: discussion, viewing occupation through the self, and teachers’ experiences. Discussions were highly preferred when given a list of options to choose from, yet rarely was it self-reported in the open-ended question. This could signal that students did not view discussions of any kind as a learning activity. Viewing occupation through the self was only mentioned once, yet was present in the curricula for all three classes in this program. Again, students may not conceptualize these experiences as learning activities. One method Hooper (2008) reported on was the use of educator’s personal biographies as a teaching strategy for the implicit curricula of a program. As only one participant reported this as helpful, this could indicate that the questions asked in the survey were not

specific or direct to induce this response more often, or students did not see their educators' experience as a teaching method worthy of mentioning. This study utilized both open-ended questions to yield personal examples that were, evidently, likely to miss the breadth of activities educators provided, as well closed-ended questions with the most common instructional activities identified by Krishnagiri et al. (2019). Future studies could specifically mention various activities, such as discussions and the use of educator's personal experiences, in their instruments so that students are encouraged to reflect on these as activities for learning occupation.

### *Experiential Learning Activities*

Students reported wanting more experiential learning activities, with level II fieldwork being viewed as the most helpful. Given that UNLV provided the minimum required weeks for level II fieldwork per the ACOTE standards to its second- and third-year students, it is likely that students would benefit from learning occupation and occupational therapy if they were provided with more than the minimum standard. Acquiring level II fieldwork sites may be a challenge, therefore it is also useful to consider other experiential activities for increasing understanding of occupation. Service learning is an experiential activity often used by OT programs to instruct on occupation-based practice (Bazyk et al., 2010) given the newness of the UNLV OT program, there are many avenues the program can take to increase experiential learning across the curricula.

Despite not having a dedicated activity analysis class due to a previous curriculum—the class only received content through lab activities—third-year participants mentioned activity analysis far more often than any other cohort in their open-ended responses to the third question (see Appendix A). Activity analysis teaches students to analyze all areas of performance that

could affect engagement in occupation. This is a fundamental skill required for experiential activities such as fieldwork, as well as for occupational therapy practice in general. The third-year participants describing it more often could signal the importance of activity analysis during experiential activities for understanding occupation, as that cohort received less content on activity analysis in comparison to the first-year students.

Overall, the activities that were most helpful for students were those that required active and interactive learning strategies, similar to the findings of Roberts et al. (2022). Those researchers reported a key theme of "making occupation real" by having students engage with practicing occupational therapists and working directly with clients in need of occupational therapy services. The data collected in this study reaffirmed this as the highest ranked experiential learning activities—fieldwork-based and community-based learning—includes both aspects of this theme. Interestingly, in Roberts et al.'s study, the participants reported that relating occupation back to the self was one of the main ways they came to understand occupation in their program, whereas it was hardly mentioned in the open-ended responses in this study. It is possible that the questions on the survey for this study were not specific or thorough to truly understand which learning activities the students found useful for learning about the concept of occupation. Future studies should be more specific to different learning activities to uncover how and why these activities are useful for students for learning the concept of occupation. An alternative explanation for the differences is that their program in Australia uses occupation as a lens more often than the UNLV OT program. Currently, there is no evidence that using occupation as a lens is more effective for teaching occupation. Future studies could compare programs based on their explicit curricula and the level of centrality of

occupation, and how they differ in the level of understanding that students have on the concept of occupation.

**Challenges in Describing Occupation to Non-OTs**

The first- and second-year students all had mixed responses for the difficulty of explaining occupation to others. The participants either considered it an easy task, while others reported it was difficult because of the complexity or broadness of the term. Many of the third-year respondents reported that explaining occupation is difficult depending on who they are speaking to and the complexity of occupation. Respondent 22 reported, “the textbook definitions are so long-winded and ineffective, I can see when the person I'm speaking to loses focus and their eyes glaze over.” As students gained more real-world experience throughout their program, they began to realize how their audience affects how they express occupation. This may not be as evident in the first-year students given their lack of experience in authentic settings and contexts.

For those who answered that it was not difficult to explain occupation there was a common theme of providing a definition of occupation that was simplified in the first question (see Appendix A). For instance, respondent six wrote, “not difficult to explain occupation,” and provided this definition of occupation, “activities of daily life”. In general, these responses tended to revolve around the phrase “meaningful activities.” Although this is an important aspect of occupation, it leaves out much of the breadth and complexity of occupation as conceptualized in occupational science and taught in this particular program.

Surprisingly, a fair number of participants who reported that it is not difficult to explain occupation to others had a more elaborate explanation of occupation and health. It is possible that those who find occupation easy to explain are better able to articulate the relationship of occupation and health to others rather than explaining the importance of occupation itself. For

example, respondent 30 wrote, “even with new people that I meet, I try to explain the definition of occupation in a way that will be clear, simple, and straight to the point,” and then provides this explanation for occupations influence on health, “one’s meaningful occupation can affect how they feel (emotional health), how they perceive things (mental health), and it makes how it makes their bodies feel (physical/ physiological health). Engagement can increase overall health and well-being.” This difference could be useful in the medical settings occupational therapists work in, however, having a deep understanding of occupation by itself may be more valuable for OT practice across all settings. Practitioners who do not understand occupation may not value it or utilize it in practice.

For those respondents who explained that describing occupation to others is difficult, their answers to the question regarding the definition of occupation were more nuanced. Respondent 19 reported that occupation is ambiguous and is embedded within the listener’s current cultural understanding of the word; their definition of occupation was closely associated with the concept of occupational being, something that was categorically missed in most responses. For those who responded that people assume it means job, they had the tendency, although not universal, to explain occupation by providing various examples. For example, respondent 27 wrote, “people also generally assume occupation is equal to one's career or job which also causes confusion about what OT helps people with,” when describing the difficulty of explaining occupation to others, and described occupation itself as, “occupation is spending time doing activities; these activities can be necessary for us (bathing, grooming, eating, etc).” This type of explanation could be useful for those who assume the listener will associate occupation with employment, as they are able to articulate the breadth of the concept with examples.

One student demonstrated having crossed a threshold of understanding. Respondent 26 wrote: “Some individuals may not understand the importance of occupation because it is hard to comprehend how something so simple can have such a great impact on our well-being.” The respondent has an understanding of occupation that is now more intuitive, but when attempting to discuss the concept with another who does not understand and has not crossed the liminal space, they realize how difficult it is to convey. This is a common occurrence with threshold concepts as they are troublesome and transformative (Kennedy-Jones, 2014; Myer & Land, 2003) and may be a reason why occupational therapy students had difficulty explaining occupation to others.

**Implications for Education**

There has been a lack of research into what occupational therapy students find useful in their education regarding the central concept of occupation. Although there exists some research on educators’ perspectives, as well as research on occupational therapy curricula, research regarding the third element—students—is sparse. This study is a first step toward understanding which common teaching activities occupational therapy educators and programs provide are salient to students’ personal experience of learning the threshold concept of occupation. The results demonstrated that students in this program overwhelmingly agree that experiential learning is useful for learning occupation, therefore, it would behoove educators to consider why experiential learning activities are so popular. The only difference in perceived helpfulness for learning about occupation between class years were regarding lecture and discussions as learning activities. Educators should consider how to use lecture and discussion to help teach the concept of occupation. The findings also demonstrate that students have an understanding of occupation generally, however, they missed several aspects of occupation. Educators should focus more on

incorporating occupation explicitly and implicitly within curricula so that students understand all the ways occupation relates to health, contexts, and occupational therapy.

Leaders and educators of occupational therapy are calling for a change of curricula, practice, and research that increases the centrality of occupation. Occupational therapy practice has been rooted in a reductionistic medical model for decades; Changes to a more occupation-centered profession and practice would allow occupational therapy to evolve and grow. These changes should have the input of students in mind, to better fit their experiences within OT programs. Student input could allow for more salient and powerful curricula and teaching methods that increase the understanding and use of occupation in OT practice. Given the variability between classes in this study, educators should consider how their instructional methods align with student input.

**Implications for Practice**

Students' understanding of occupation is vital for the centrality of occupation in practice. Without an understand of humans as occupational beings, as well as the influence occupation has on health, future and current practitioners may opt to provide interventions focused on body structures and function, and performance skills for individuals, groups, and populations that are absent of occupation. The participants of this study demonstrated a general understanding of occupation, as well as the relationship between occupation and health. It is unknown whether these students will value occupation once graduated. It is the job of programs and educators to indoctrinate students into their profession's ideology and ways of practicing. Educators should increase the use of service learning, community-based practice, or fieldwork to increase the centrality of occupation in practice. This may help increase the centrality of occupation when student's practice occupational therapy in fieldwork or once graduated.

## Implications for Research

The findings of this study provide several implications for future research. First, students favor experiential activities for learning occupation, however, the survey used was inadequately specific to understand why they favor experiential learning, or if there are more specific aspects of experiential learning that were useful. Future studies should delve into the various aspects of experiential learning as a method of teaching occupation. Second, students' responses were at times brief and often inadequate for analysis. Future research should utilize data collection methods that allow for more in-depth analysis such as one-on-one interviews or focus groups. Third, students often misinterpreted questions wherein they assumed the question was asking about occupational therapy practice rather than the concept of occupation. Future research should include methodologies that allow for researchers to clarify more easily the questions they seek to answer. Finally, the activities that were self-reported by the students are similar to the ones uncovered by Krishnagiri et al. (2017), however, many activities were absent. Future studies should consider including more activities educators report. This may allow students to consider more of the content of their education as a teaching activity, and therefore more robust data on their perceived usefulness.

## Limitations

- A limitation of the design is that it cannot provide causal relationships between variables.
- A limitation of the survey is that it did not contain enough detailed questions to fully answer the research question.
- A limitation of the sample recruitment is a small recruitment timeframe and few recruitment reminders.

- A limitation of the data analysis is an inability to perform certain statistical methods due to a decreased sample size.
- A small sample size and use of only one university limits the generalizability of the data.
- Non-response bias may influence the results of the data as there were not enough respondents in relation to the size of the population of the UNLV OT program.
- Response biases within the sample may create inaccurate data that are not reflective of the sample's past experiences. Third-year students may have misremembered what was actually helpful for learning the concept of occupation.
- Some participants may have misinterpreted questions.
- Students' perception of what a learning activity is may have led to a decreased breadth of activities when they were asked to self-report activities. Students' self-reported learning activities were not encompassing of all the learning activities they were provided in the UNLV OT program.
- Differences in educators present at the time of the participants' education may influence the responses of the participants.

**Assumptions**

- The program's change of curricula throughout different cohorts will influence the responses of the participants.
- It is assumed that the participants had exposure to various kinds of instructional activities.
- It is assumed that the participants have an understanding of the concept of occupation.

## Conclusion

The results of this capstone project describe what some occupational therapy students at the UNLV OT know about the concept of occupation, what learning activities they thought were helpful for learning the concept, and what they considered difficult in explaining occupation to others. Students reported that experiential learning activities were useful for learning the concept of occupation, as well as lecture and discussions in the classroom. The survey results in this study demonstrate similarities within the literature on students and their occupational therapy education. These results provide a small yet preliminary understanding of the learning activities that could increase the understanding of occupation for future practitioners. What is unknown is which learning activities truly do increase the understanding of occupation, therefore future research focus on uncovering these learning activities should be performed. Further research is also needed to uncover what occupational therapy students understand about the core concept of their profession.

## Appendix A: Survey

UNLV

1. In your own words, write a short description of the concept of occupation.
2. In your own words, describe how occupation influences health.
3. What learning activities, class, or lab experience did you find most helpful for increasing your understanding of occupation?
4. Do you think it is difficult explaining occupation to others? Please explain.
5. Is it helpful to use occupation as a "lens" to see the others and yourself?
    - Yes
    - No
6. Did your didactic education include using occupation as a "lens" to see others and yourself?
    - Yes
    - No
7. Did your fieldwork experience include using occupation as a "lens" to see others and yourself?
    - Yes
    - No
8. Did your didactic education link basic sciences and practice knowledge to occupation?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I'm not sure
9. Is it helpful OR would it be helpful if educators linked occupation to basic sciences?
    - Yes
    - No
10. Did your educators describe their professional experiences with occupation in OT practice?
    - Yes
    - No
11. Would it be helpful if educators described their professional experiences with occupation more often?
    1. Disagree
    2. Somewhat Disagree
    3. Neutral
    4. Somewhat Agree
    5. Agree
12. Which of these teaching styles do you find most helpful in learning the concept of occupation?
    - Didactic (e.g. lecture, coursework)
    - Experiential (e.g. fieldwork, lab, volunteering)
13. Would you prefer more didactic learning to increase your understanding of occupation?

- Yes
- No

14. Which of these activities do you think are most helpful for learning occupation?
    - Small group discussion
    - Large group discussion
    - Readings on occupation
    - Writing about occupation
    - Case-based learning
    - Lecture
15. Do you think the Occupational Therapy Practice Framework (OTPF) is helpful for learning about the concept of occupation?
    - Yes
    - No
16. Would you prefer more experiential learning to increase your understanding of occupation?
    - Yes
    - No
17. Which of these experiences do you think are most helpful for learning occupation?
    - Fieldwork Level 1
    - Fieldwork Level 2
    - Community-based practice
    - Lab activities
18. Rank the items from least to most helpful for increasing your understanding of occupation
    - Small group discussion
    - Assigned readings related to occupation
    - Experiential learning
    - Writing about occupation
    - Lecture
    - Case-based learning
    - Student presentation
    - Lab Activities
    - Large Group Discussions
    - Service/Community Based learning
    - Simulation
    - Fieldwork based learning
19. What is your age?
    - 20-24
    - 25-29
    - 30-34
    - 34-39
    - 40-44
    - 45+
20. What class year are you currently in?
    - 1st year graduate student
    - 2nd year graduate student

- 3rd year graduate student

21. Have you finished a level Il fieldwork experience?
    - Yes
    - No

## Appendix B: Invitational Letter to Alumni


### Alumni Invitational Letter

Participation in "Experiences of Learning Occupation in an Occupational Therapy Program"

Hello UNLV OTD alumni,

My name is Erik Regalado and I am a graduate student at UNLV. I am conducting a short survey for my capstone project to better understand what teaching activities or experiences you have had in your occupational therapy doctorate (OTD) education that were most helpful in your understanding of occupation. This information will inform faculty on what you found most valuable for learning about occupation at the UNLV OTD program. The principal investigator of this research study is Dr. Sheama Krishnagiri who is responsible for and oversees the procedures of the study.

I am reaching out to you as this is a pilot study using survey methodology, therefore I need to ensure that the questions are understandable. Your feedback will be used to improve the survey for use in my study. The survey should not take more than 10-15 minutes. The questions on the survey are about definitions and different learning activities you have had in this program. The study includes only minimal risk. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose to withdraw at any time. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to the principle investigator Dr. Krishnagiri at sheama.krishnagiri@unlv.edu or to me at regale1@unlv.nevada.edu. Thank you so much for your time!

You can fill out this survey by clicking this link or entering the following URL into your browser:
https://unlv.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bqsXOBeh1Zqd7N4

Thank you,
Erik Regalado

## Appendix C: IRB Letter of Approval

Date: 4-8-2024

IRB #: UNLV-2023-266
Title: Experiences of Learning Occupation in an Occupational Therapy Program
Creation Date: 5-15-2023
End Date:
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Sheama Krishnagiri
Review Board: Biomedical
Sponsor:

### Study History

| Submission Type | Review Type | Decision |
|---|---|---|
| Initial | Exempt | Exempt |

### Key Study Contacts

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Member Sheama Krishnagiri | Role Principal Investigator | Contact sheama.krishnagiri@unlv.edu |
| Member Erik Regalado | Role Primary Contact | Contact regale1@unlv.nevada.edu |

## Appendix D: Invitational Letter to Accessible Population


### Invitational Letter for Accessible Population

Participation in "Experiences of Learning Occupation in an Occupational Therapy Program"

Hello UNLV OTD students,

My name is Erik Regalado and I am a graduate student at UNLV. I am conducting a short research survey for my capstone project to better understand what teaching activities you have had in your occupational therapy doctorate (OTD) education that were most helpful in your understanding of occupation. This information will inform faculty on what you found most valuable for learning about occupation at the UNLV OTD program. The principal investigator of this research study is Dr. Sheama Krishnagiri who is responsible for and oversees the procedures of the study.

The survey should not take more than 10-15 minutes to complete, and can be completed from February 5th to February 19th 2024. The questions on the survey are about definitions and different learning activities you have had in this program. The study includes only minimal risk as some questions may create a feeling of being uncomfortable. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose to withdraw at any time. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to the principal investigator Dr. Krishnagiri at sheama.krishnagiri@unlv.edu or to me at regale1@unlv.nevada.edu. Thank you so much for your time!

You can fill out this survey by clicking this link or entering the following URL into your browser:
https://unlv.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3WoWv9bRbuc3U5o

You can access the information sheet by clicking this link or entering the following URL into your browser:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1KTuIGx20ObbFM2xc6cELojk_ufUssdye/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=117474754865274478424&rtpof=true&sd=true

Thank you,
Erik Regalado

## Appendix E: Faculty Permission

**UNLV OTD Faculty Permission for Study**

Research topic: “Experiences of Learning Occupation in an Occupational Therapy Program”

Dr. Krause,

My name is Erik Regalado and I am a graduate student at UNLV. I am working on a capstone project to better understand what teaching activities students have had in the occupational therapy doctorate (OTD) education that were most helpful to their understanding of occupation. Dr. Sheama Krishnagiri is the principal investigator of the research study and I am helping to conduct a survey on the students who are currently enrolled in UNLV’s OTD program. This information will inform faculty, such as yourself, on what students found most helpful in their learning of occupation in the UNLV OTD program. This information can better inform teaching strategies and program design. In order to ensure a high participation rate, I would like to ask permission for several things:

- Do you give me permission to contact the UNLV OT faculty for permission to conduct the study after their class time in February 2024? I will ensure that the time allotted to the research study will not be in excess of 15 minutes.
- Can you announce and provide the invitational letter for the research study to the current student body of the UNLV OT program?
- Can you announce and provide the invitational letter for the pilot survey to the most recently graduated class of the UNLV OT program?

The research study includes only minimal risk as some questions may create a feeling of being uncomfortable. The students participation is voluntary and they may choose to withdraw at any time. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to the principal investigator Dr. Krishnagiri at sheama.krishnagiri@unlv.edu or to me at regale1@unlv.nevada.edu.

Thank you,
Erik Regalado

## Appendix F: Verbal Announcement for Recruitment


### Announcement Script

Hello everybody,

My name is Erik Regalado, I am a third year OT student, and I am conducting a short survey for my capstone project. My capstone project is a research study that seeks to understand what teaching activities you have had in your OT education that you found most helpful in understanding occupation. With this information our professors will be better able to create lesson plans and curricula to teach occupation based on your feedback. Your feedback could also be used to inform other programs on their occupation-centered curricula. The principal investigator of this research study is Dr. Sheama Krishnagiri who is responsible for and oversees all the procedures of the study.

The survey should not take more than 10 to 15 minutes to complete. I have already sent out an email to you all asking you to complete the survey, and if you have already, thank you so much. For those of you who have not, your professor has offered me this time to explain the survey to you. Finishing the survey is completely optional, so do not feel that you have to do it. The questions on the survey are about definitions and different learning activities you have had in this program. There is little risk for you in doing this survey, however, there is the chance that some of the questions may make you feel uncomfortable. You are always welcome to not complete the survey. The information you provide will be anonymized, so when you click the Qualtrics link I will have no way of knowing it is you, and the information will be stored in an encrypted cloud storage. Questions regarding your personal information are intentionally vague and are difficult to identify you. If you did not have a chance to see the information sheet included in the email, please scan this QR code to see your rights as a participant, and this second QR code for a link to the survey should you wish to fill it in right now. If you choose to fill out the survey right away, please disperse yourself so that your classmates do not see what you have selected or written.

Thank you.

## Appendix G: Reminder Email for Completing Survey

UNLV

### Study Participation Reminder

Participation in “Experiences of Learning Occupation in an Occupational Therapy Program”

Hello UNLV OTD students,

I wanted to send out a courtesy email reminding you of the research study I am conducting for my capstone project. The survey should not take more than 10-15 minutes to complete, and can be completed from February 5th to February 19th 2024. The questions on the survey are about definitions and different learning activities you have had in this program. The research study includes only minimal risk as some questions may create a feeling of being uncomfortable. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose to withdraw at any time. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to the principal investigator Dr. Krishnagiri at sheama.krishnagiri@unlv.edu or to me at regale1@unlv.nevada.edu. Thank you so much for your time!

You can fill out this survey by clicking this link or entering the following URL into your browser:
https://unlv.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3WoWv9bRbuc3U5o

You can access the information sheet by clicking this link or entering the following URL into your browser:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1z5Rcus3Ro3B3X0OD1hw1-PJ2TseSODPxFyXb_bVHJCM/edit?usp=sharing

Thank you,
Erik Regalado

## Appendix H: Information Sheet

**Exempt Research Study Information Sheet**

**Department of Brain Health**

**Title of Study: Experiences of Learning Occupational Therapy in an Occupational Therapy Program**

**Investigator(s) and Contact Phone Number:**

**Sheama Krishagiri, Principal Investigator: (702) 895-1671**

**Erik Regalado, Student Researcher: (702) 277-7738**

The purpose of this research study is to understand what experiences you have had in your occupational therapy doctorate program that you felt were helpful in your understanding of occupation. The information gathered from students will increase educators' understanding of what students find useful in their education for increasing their understanding of occupation. This information may be used to improve teaching practices.

You are being asked to participate in the study because you meet the following criteria:

- You are currently a student at the occupational therapy doctorate (OTD) program at UNLV

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

You will need to fill out an electronic questionnaire within a time frame of 2 weeks once the study has begun. You will be asked to answer questions about the concept of occupation, and answer questions regarding different learning activities. You will need to provide your age range, class year, and whether or not you completed a level II fieldwork for your OTD program. The information you provide will be anonymized and kept in encrypted cloud storage.

This study includes only minimal risks. The study will take 15 minutes of your time. For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact **the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at 702-895-2794, or via email at IRB@unlv.edu.**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw at any time. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

**Participation Agreement:**

I have read the above information and by starting the survey I am agreeing to participate in this study. I am at least 18 years of age.

**Appendix I: Certificate of Approval**

UNLV | SCHOOL OF INTEGRATED HEALTH SCIENCES

Department of Brain Health

Doctor of Occupational Therapy

Students' Experience of Learning About Occupation in an Occupational Therapy Program

This capstone project proposal submitted by

Erik Regalado

Has been approved or declined by the Graduate Advisory Committee from the Graduate College of University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Chair

Graduate College Representative

Committee Member

Committee Member

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Yerxa, E. J. (2000). Occupational science: A renaissance of service to humankind through knowledge. *Occupational Therapy International*, *7*(2), 87. https://doi.org/10.1002/oti.109

**Curriculum Vitae**

**Erik Regalado**
errhhk@gmail.com

## Education

**Occupational Therapy Doctorate** **Expected May 2024**
*University of Nevada, Las Vegas*

**Bachelor of Arts - English** **May 2018**
*University of Nevada, Las Vegas*

## Relevant Coursework and Projects

**Capstone Project**

- Performed a descriptive study on the occupational therapy student body of UNLV to understand their perceptions of the teaching and learning strategies for understanding the core concept of their profession
- Disseminated the findings to the UNLV faculty

**Capstone Experience**

- Designed and taught an educational module for OCT 730 - Culture at UNLV. The module's topic was social inclusion in occupational therapy and occupational science, with mentorship from Dr. Price, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA

## Work Experience

**Graduate Teaching Assistant** **February 2024 - May 2024**
*University of Nevada, Las Vegas*

- Evaluated graduate students on various OT competencies of physical rehabilitation.
- Provided tutoring services for research and graduate level writing for the UNLV OT
- Co-graded assignments for the OCT 728 - Evidence-Based Practice I Quantitative Research, OCT 766 - Systematic Reviews, and OCT 756 - Leadership II

**Program Assistant** **June 2015 - Present**
*Clark County Parks and Recreation*

- Certified and instructed on the American Red Cross Lifeguard curriculum. Provided didactic and experiential on basic lifesaving skills, CPR/AED, and water rescues.
- Coordinated and provided assistance for various programs including: skate park, fitness area, day camp, and special events.

**Substitute Teacher** **December 2018 - March 2020**
*Clark County School District*

- Taught educator lesson plans in English, History, Spanish, and Anatomy.
- Monitored K-12 students

- Provided ancillary assistance to educators

## Fieldwork Experience

**St. George Regional Hospital - Level IIA** **Summer 2022**
*Neurospecialty Unit*
- Provided occupation-based high intensity training for numerous neurological conditions

**Centennial Hills Hospital - Level IIB** **Summer 2023**
*Acute Care*
- Provided occupational therapy services to a variety of diagnoses at the acute level

## Extracurricular and Volunteer Experience

**Volunteer** **June 2022 - Present**
*Silverado Red Rock Memory Care* *Number of hrs: 10 hrs*
- Provided assistance with the Nexus program developed by Dr. Karmella Bognot with clients with memory-related disorders.

**Freelance Graduate Tutoring** **June 2021-Present**
*University of Nevada, Las Vegas*
- Provided tutoring services to occupational therapy students for anatomy and physiology, pediatrics, physical dysfunction, and research.

**Student Ambassador** **November 2021-May 2024**
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
- Provided assistance for interviewing prospective students. Primary responsibilities include: directing other student volunteers and online panelist for prospective students.

**Fieldwork Toolkit**
*Occupational Therapy Doctorate Program, UNLV*
- Created a fieldwork toolkit for UNLV OT students. Topics included inpatient rehabilitation, acute care, school-based OT, various diagnoses, resources, evaluation and assessment, intervention planning, and discharge.

## Awards

**Out of Area Capstone Scholarship** **Spring 2024**
UNLV Occupational Therapy Doctorate

## Affiliations

**Vice President** **January 2023 - December 2023**
*Student Occupational Therapy Association*
- Assist in facilitation of actions set forth from the executive board
- Support the President and stand in their place in their absence

- Created and ran events for UNLV OT

Member **June 2021 - Present**
*American Occupational Therapy Association*