



NEWSLETTER

SUNY Downstate Occupational Therapy



Greetings from the Chair

Dear students, staff, and alumni of SUNY Downstate,

Welcome to the latest edition of the OT Program Newsletter! We're excited to share updates, achievements, and upcoming opportunities from our OT community.

A heartfelt congratulations to the MS-OT Class of 2025 as they completed their didactic coursework and began their Level II Fieldwork this summer. Welcome back to the MS-OT Class of 2026! We're excited to support you as you deepen your clinical knowledge and skills. We also extend a warm welcome to the incoming MS-OT Class of 2027, the first to begin our new 24-month curriculum this fall. Finally, I am pleased to share the continued progress of our PP-OTD students and welcome the new summer admits!

We are looking forward to the exciting year in store for our students as they continue to learn, develop clinical skills, and engage with the community. I invite you all to stay connected as our OT community continues to grow and flourish at Downstate. As always, thank you for your ongoing support and dedication.

Sincerely,
Efekona Nuwere, Ed.D, MPH, OTR/L
Program Chair and Assistant Professor



RECENT EVENTS



AOTA INSPIRE 2025

From April 3rd to 5th, Downstate faculty and students attended the 2025 AOTA Annual Conference and Expo in Philadelphia, PA. It was an incredible opportunity to network, attend a variety of engaging sessions and workshops, explore areas of interest in OT, learn about cutting edge research, and observe OT-related product demonstrations.



Downstate OT Program Reception

Students, alumni, faculty, and friends gathered in Philadelphia, PA for two nights of engagement and fun. Members of Downstate's OT Community made lasting memories bowling, dancing, and networking while enjoying delicious food and drinks!



NAMI Walk 2025

On May 18th, members of SUNY Downstate's SOTA and COTAD chapters proudly participated in the 2025 NAMI Walk, standing in solidarity with thousands across the city to advocate for mental health awareness and support.



RECENT EVENTS



Master's Project Presentations

On May 2nd, the Downstate MS-OT Class of 2025 presented a diverse range of research projects, showcasing their hard work and commitment to advancing occupational therapy. The event featured keynote speaker Dr. Lisa Raymond-Tolan, NYU professor and Downstate alum, who emphasized the vital role of scholarship in shaping evidence-based practice and the profession's future.



White Coat Ceremony

The MS-OT Class of 2025 also proudly received their white coats! This special ceremony marked their transition into clinical practice and their continued commitment to quality care.



Adaptive Skating Event

On June 8th, COTAD's new E-board kicked off their first official event by volunteering at Play It Forward's Adaptive Skating Event! Student volunteers jumped right in to support athletes in the skate bowl, helping with protective gear, and managing the merch table. It was a great opportunity to connect with the community while promoting accessibility in recreation!



RECENT EVENTS

Juneteenth Event

On June 17th, SOTA organized a Juneteenth event to honor and celebrate the holiday. Students came together to learn about the history and significance of Juneteenth, play games, and enjoy food together.



Wheelchair Lab

On June 26th, Mary Shea, MA, OTR, ATP, along with representatives from Quantum Rehab, provided second-year students with an engaging, hands-on learning experience about different types of wheelchairs.



Governor Hochul's Visit

On June 17th, Governor Kathy Hochul visited SUNY Downstate to announce a \$1 billion investment to revitalize the University Hospital. Students had the opportunity to meet and thank Assemblymember Brian Cunningham for his support!



Adaptive Surf Clinic

On July 26th, COTAD members volunteered with Play It Forward at an adaptive surf event in Rockaway Beach, joining around 700 participants and volunteers to promote inclusion, safety, and fun in the waves! Students had the opportunity to connect with the participants and even meet alumni Marion Dela Pena ['24], Valerie Batchner ['21] and Carissa Roca ['19].





MEET THE PP-OTD SUMMER ADMITS!



Alexis McLean, MS, OTR/L

Meet Alexis McLean, a dedicated OT with 8 years of professional experience in hospital and home care settings. Currently, Alexis is a senior OT for the NYC Department of Education, supporting students from 3K through 5th grade in East New York and Brownsville. She also runs monthly parent meetings and caregiver workshops. Through the PP-OTD program, Alexis hopes to strengthen her community engagement and expand access to vital resources for the families she serves. Her long-term goal is to transition to teach future OT professionals!

"I have a very busy life working full time, taking care of my daughter and now expecting another little girl in the fall. Despite everything I have going on outside of school, the classes and workload have been both engaging and manageable so I'm looking forward to seeing what the future holds in all aspects of my life!"



Kristen Viola, MS, OTR/L

Meet Kristen Viola, a Downstate alumna who has worked 8 years in pediatric acute care and earned specialty certifications in neonatal therapy and pediatrics. As a fieldwork supervisor, she hopes to build on her leadership experience and deepen her skills in training others. She is drawn to the PP-OTD program as the next step in her professional growth as an educator and to explore working in academia in the future!

"The semester has started off with a bang. I feel like I am running a relay race. There are moments I am asking myself, "What did you sign yourself up for?" then I smile and answer, "So I can grow professionally and personally while finding more ways to give back to the communities that produced me."



UPCOMING EVENTS

SEPT
02

First Day of Fall Semester &
Meet the New Cohort

OCT
24-26

NYSOTA Annual Fall Conference
GLEN FALLS, NEW YORK

SEPT
17

National Backpack Awareness Day

JAN
20

First Day of Spring Semester

OCT
14

Fieldwork I: Physical Disabilities
OCTOBER 14-NOVEMBER 6

APR
23-25

AOTA Annual Conference
ANAHEIM, CALIFORNIA

GET INVOLVED

As SUNY Downstate's Occupational Therapy Program continues to grow and evolve, we strive to offer meaningful ways to keep our alumni community involved and strengthen our network. Please email efekona.nuwere@downstate.edu if you are interested in any of the opportunities below and follow us on Instagram to stay up to date on updates and events within the department.

Attend Conference Meet-Ups:

Join us at the NYSOTA Annual Fall Conference in Glen Falls, NY this October and at the AOTA Annual Conference and Expo in Anaheim, CA in April 2026. Email for more information or to let us know that you will be there!

Become a Class Representative:

Did you graduate from the MS-OT program between the years 2012 and 2022? We're looking for class representatives to help connect us with your classmates. Join the following class representatives to maintain leadership for your cohort!

Class representatives:

- Esther Milina, Class of 2019
- Ryan Doherty, Class of 2021
- Jane Sato, Class of 2023

Follow us on Instagram!

@downstate.ot
@cotad.ch_sunydownstate
@sota_downstate

Join the Advisory Board:

Contribute as a member of our Advisory Board to impact the education of future practitioners, expand your professional network, stay informed about the programs, and engage with the occupational therapy community, all while enhancing your own personal and professional growth.

Donate to OT Program Scholarship Fund:

Your generosity, no matter the amount, will help us support our hardworking and talented students by financially supporting their academic journeys and professional involvement in the field! To make your gift online, scan below and choose 9294-Occupational Therapy Program Fund from the drop-down menu.

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