

NEWS LETTER

SUNY Downstate Occupational Therapy Program



GREETINGS FROM THE CHAIR

RECENT ACTIVITIES

Dear students, staff, and alumni of SUNY Downstate,

Welcome back to school and to another edition of the OT Program Newsletter, where we share program events, opportunities, and achievements by our gifted students and faculty!

A warm welcome to both the MS-OT Class of 2026 who have completed their first summer of courses, and the PP-OTD Class of 2026 who started this fall and kicked off the brand new post-professional program! We are also thrilled to welcome back the Class of 2025 and are excited to see the impact of your continued hard work and leadership at Downstate. Finally, congratulations to the Class of 2024 for wrapping up your didactic coursework and starting your final Level II fieldwork experience. We look forward to an inspiring year ahead with all of you!

As we enter the fall semester, we reflect on the exciting accomplishments of our OT community so far this year. This summer, we've continued to engage in activities that promote inclusion and accessibility at Downstate and beyond. From engaging educational programs hosted by SOTA & COTAD to connecting with local residents at community outreach events, our students are representing Downstate OT with pride and excellence. Additionally, we are thrilled to have commenced our Post Professional-OTD program this fall! Read on to learn more and as always, we thank you for your continued support in SUNY Downstate's OT program.

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



Class of 2026 Welcome Event:

In June, SOTA and COTAD kicked off the summer with a welcome gathering for first year students to mingle and get to know second year students. E-board members gave a presentation to share the purpose and roles of each club and how students can get involved.



Juneteenth Celebration:

On June 20th, COTAD hosted a potluck to celebrate and learn about the significance of Juneteenth with guest speaker, Dr. Brigitte Desport. First and second year students plus faculty enjoyed an afternoon filled with delicious food and celebrated our cultural diversity at Downstate!



RECENT ACTIVITIES

Play it Forward New York- Adaptive Surf Clinic:

On July 27th, SUNY Downstate's COTAD and OT students volunteered and cheered on surfers at Play it Forward, an organization that hosts adaptive sporting programs for individuals with disabilities to help people with disabilities via advocacy, mentorship, and support services to reach their goals.



Community Healthy Lifestyle Fair:

On September 9th, students and faculty joined forces to engage with attendees of the Community Healthy Lifestyle Fair. Volunteers played a key role in raising awareness about the critical benefits of occupational therapy, including fall prevention, pelvic floor health, early intervention, and boosting student health and engagement. These advocacy efforts not only helped to promote the profession but also to reach individuals who might otherwise be unaware of the valuable services available to them. To cap off the event, first-year students conducted a demonstration on fall prevention.



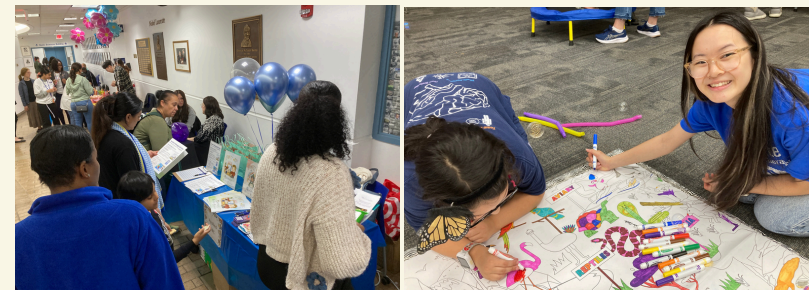
Backpack Awareness Day:

On September 18th, Downstate's COTAD and SOTA held its annual School Backpack Awareness Day event! First and second-year OT students engaged with elementary and middle school students at neighboring schools, P.S. 235 and Parkside Prep, to teach them how and why it is important to wear backpacks correctly.



Autism Awareness Fair:

On September 29th, COTAD and SOTA were co-sponsors at the Autism Awareness Fair hosted by the LEND program. It was a wonderful opportunity for students to interact with the local community, to advocate for OT and learn how it is integrated into autism awareness.



INTRODUCING THE PP-OTD PROGRAM!

In 2024, SUNY Downstate's Occupational Therapy Department broadened its impact by launching a new post-professional Doctor of Occupational Therapy program. Designed for practicing occupational therapists eager to return to school to enhance their clinical expertise and leadership skills, the program kicked off this fall with the inaugural cohort, the Class of 2026. Composed of four proud alumni of the SUNY Downstate MS-OT program, we are delighted to launch this initiative with outstanding students who share our profound passion for the field.



Ardissa Phillips, OTR/L, is a first-generation American from Brooklyn with Caribbean roots who has dedicated 16 years to OT, returning to her roots at Downstate Medical Center where she worked her first summer job. She began her career

at Kingsbrook Jewish Medical Center and later worked at Kings County, gaining experience in settings such as pediatrics and neonatal care. Since 2013, she has worked for the DOE while also serving as a provider in EI and subacute care. Ardissa aims to innovate within the field by creating therapeutic products for clients and educators.

Wendy Arty, OTR/L, a Brooklyn native, shifted from elementary teaching to earning her MS-OT at Downstate in 2008. With over 15 years of OT experience, she has worked primarily in pediatrics across various settings. Since

rejoining the DOE in 2011, she has focused on supporting non-verbal children with ASD. Inspired by the PP-OTD program and encouragement from classmates, Wendy aims to bridge the gap between OT and families, highlighting the importance of educating caregivers to improve treatment in everyday environments.



Moussia Krinsky-Raskin, OTR/L, CHT was born and raised in Brooklyn, and after graduating from Downstate in 2014, she has worked exclusively in private practice outpatient settings. Currently, she serves as the clinical supervisor in a

surgeon-owned office in Park Slope, where she treats various UE injuries and fabricates custom orthoses. She earned her Certified Hand Therapist credential in 2021, which has enhanced her skills and treatment approach. Always seeking a challenge, Moussia returned to improve her daily practice and explore dynamic career options.

Svetlana Prokopenko, OTR/L is originally from Ukraine but has lived in Brooklyn since age 18. After graduating from Downstate in 2008, she has spent 16 years in a District 75 school, supporting K-8 students with diverse needs.

Encouraged by her OT supervisor, she decided to pursue the PP-OTD program to enhance her leadership skills and evidence-based practice, aiming to advance her career and potentially open her own practice in the future. She hopes to contribute to the field by implementing effective strategies that empower her students and their families.



Dr. Suzanne Rappaport, OTD, OTR/L, PP-OTD Program Coordinator



Inspired by a transformative experience teaching circus arts to adolescents with disabilities, Dr. Rappaport has dedicated her career to exploring innovative therapeutic tools. With diverse clinical experience ranging from geri-psych to school-based practice, she is excited to shape a curriculum that empowers students to become leaders in their communities. According to Dr. Rappaport, SUNY Downstate's PP-OTD program stands out for its advanced elective tracks and the opportunity for students to undertake innovation projects, equipping them with the skills to drive meaningful change as therapists.

“ I've thoroughly enjoyed watching my current students level up and expand their knowledge. Their energy and dedication have been inspiring, and I'm excited about the possibility of creating innovative change together as the semester progresses! ”

STUDENT FEATURES: THIRD YEAR TIPS AND TRICKS

We asked students from the Class of 2024:
What is one piece of advice you would give to students starting fieldwork?



“Be kind to yourself. Get enough quality sleep, eat/hydrate, spend time doing the ADLs that are most meaningful to you! If we are not taking care of ourselves, how can we expect to be able to take care of others! Lean on your fellow students/classmates.”

- Jenna Derleth, OTS

“Don’t question what you know/don’t know, if you are prepared or not. Move forward, trust yourself and you will be more than amazing. “

- Penny Ni, OTS

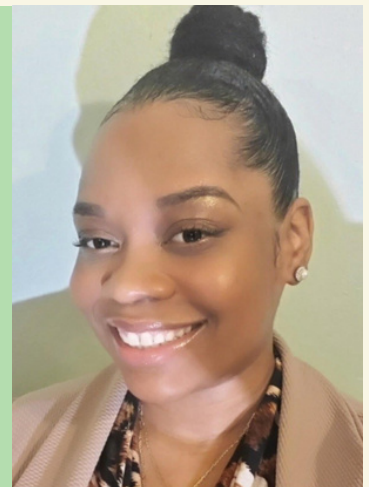


“Managing passive studying while balancing your personal life and fieldwork responsibilities can be challenging. The material we learned in school can sometimes feel distant in memory once we start treatment planning and working with real patients. And so, an advice is to actively maintain and refresh your knowledge, even when not in the formal class or preparing for exams... Of course, it is also okay to not have all the answers either, we are still learning! Best of Luck =D”

- Arubah Mansoor, OTS

Hi future OTs! My advice would be to start developing your OT identity/clinical reasoning from your first Level I experience. During your observations, really think about how the treatments address the goals, understand how diagnoses affect occupational performance, and/or how you would grade the intervention to fit the capabilities of the patient/client. Take time to observe good interventions and add them to your own OT toolkit, you will need it for Level II and as a therapist! Lastly, if possible, build great relationships with your CIs, because it can lead to future mentorship, employment, recommendations, etc. Good luck and enjoy the journey!

- Nadine Johnson, OTS



ALUMNI CORNER + UPCOMING EVENTS

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!

GET INVOLVED:

→ Attend Conference Meet-Ups: Join us at the NYSOTA Annual Fall Conference in Albany, NY this November and at the AOTA Annual Conference and Expo in Philadelphia, PA in April 2025. 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

→ 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.

Click or Scan Here to Donate:



Save the Date!

Oct 10	SOTA Fuel & Focus Event
Nov 12	SOTA Kozey OT Guest Speaker
Nov 15-17	NYSOTA Annual Fall Conference ↳ Albany, NY- Crowne Plaza Albany
Nov 26	SOTA & COTAD Multicultural Party
Apr 3-5	AOTA Annual Conference & Expo ↳ Philadelphia, PA

Follow us on Instagram!

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