



NEWSLETTER

SUNY Downstate Occupational Therapy Program



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A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Dear students, faculty, staff, and alumni of SUNY Downstate,

As we begin another exciting semester, I want to take a moment to celebrate our students' accomplishments, passion, and commitment to learning. They continue to take on new challenges with grace and dignity and embrace opportunities to engage with the community.

I want to give a special shoutout to the alumni of the **MS-OT Class of 2025**, many of whom have already passed the NBCOT exam and are registered/licensed occupational therapists. We wish you continued success and look forward to all that you will achieve! To the **MS-OT Class of 2026**, congratulations on completing your didactic coursework and best of luck with Level II fieldwork! I hope it is an enjoyable and rewarding learning experience, and I am confident that you will embody Downstate's values of professionalism, innovation, and excellence throughout your journey. To the **MS-OT Class of 2027**, welcome back! You are blossoming as future OTs, continuing to progress through our new 24-month curriculum with diligence and determination. Lastly, congratulations to the graduates of the inaugural **PP-OTD Class of 2026**! You have made incredible strides in our newly established doctoral program, paving the way for future cohorts.

I am excited to see what the future has in store as our OT community continues to grow and flourish. As always, we are grateful for your continued support and dedication.

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



STUDENT AND FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

Rachel Bergsohn, OTS and Jenny Kim, OTS are the valedictorian and salutatorian of the MS-OT Class of 2026! These students have excelled not only academically but through their service and leadership as well. As the top academic performers in their class, Rachel and Jenny also served as executive board members of SOTA (*Student Occupational Therapy Association*). Their accomplishments demonstrate their commitment to advancing the profession while inspiring and uplifting their peers. Congratulations, Rachel and Jenny!



Rachel Bergsohn

- Valedictorian
- SOTA E-Board: Inter-Cohort Coordinator



Jenny Kim

- Salutatorian
- SOTA E-Board: Treasurer



Thank you to the creative directors of SOTA and COTAD (*Coalition for Occupational Therapy Advocates for Diversity*), **Milena Scala, OTS and Chloe Dela Santa, OTS**, for creating an incredible, heartfelt montage in celebration of the MS-OT Class of 2026. Featuring memorable pictures and videos, the montage premiered at the OT White Coat Ceremony in April. It captured the lighthearted antics, late-night study sessions, meaningful friendships, and other defining moments that made the students' time at Downstate so special.



A warm welcome to Laura Park, MS, OTR/L, CHT — a Downstate alum from the Class of 2021 and now an assistant professor in the Occupational Therapy Program!

As a Certified Hand Therapist, Laura has extensive experience treating complex upper extremity conditions across the lifespan in outpatient settings. As an educator, she aspires to spark curiosity and intrinsic motivation in her students. Laura aims to encourage them to develop a deeper understanding of biomechanics from an injury and rehabilitation perspective, by combining theoretical knowledge and practical experience.





Pi Theta Epsilon Induction Ceremony

On February 9, a new cohort of 11 high-achieving students from the MS-OT Class of 2026 were inducted into the Alpha Kappa Chapter of the Pi Theta Epsilon Occupational Therapy Honor Society. Family, friends, and peers gathered for an evening of celebration as this year's inductees were honored for their impressive academic achievements. These 11 students have also excelled as ambassadors for the Downstate OT Community. We are excited to see where their leadership skills, commitment to learning, and passion for OT will take them in the future!



OT National Honor Society Inductees

Colleen Cassidy
Madeline Silverstein
Madison Thristino
Sharon Park
Jennifer Mudick
Asa Bartholomew

Milena Scala
Rachel Bergsohn
Dana Anglin
Jenny Kim
Christina Ye

Interprofessional Case Study Roundtable

On March 31, students from all disciplines in the School of Health Professions (SOHP) and select groups from the College of Nursing and School of Public Health, gathered for a roundtable. It was a valuable opportunity for future healthcare professionals to engage in an interdisciplinary learning experience centered around a clinical case. Through presentations, student representatives from each discipline highlighted unique perspectives and interventions that could be used to treat the patient in the case. The floor was then opened for questions and insightful discussions related to interprofessional team collaboration.

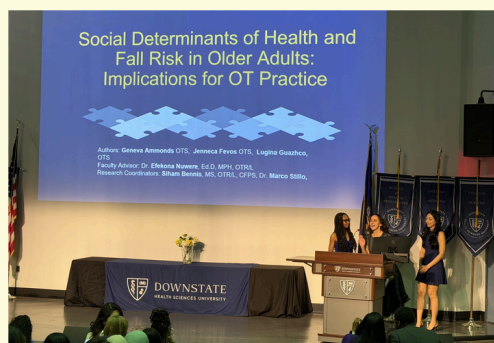




Master's Project Research Day and OT White Coat Ceremony

April 17 was a pivotal day of growth, scholarship, and achievement for the MS-OT Class of 2026. In the presence of family and friends, Master's Project groups proudly presented the results of their four-semester long research project including methodology, data analysis, and implications for OT practice. Over the course of their project, each group worked closely with a member of Downstate's OT Faculty, and some consulted with external researcher(s) and/or statistician(s) as well. The completion of the Master's Project course sequence is a testament to the incredible growth demonstrated by the students over the past year, providing a strong foundation for continued professional development.

Following Master's Project presentations and poster viewing, the White Coat Ceremony commenced, celebrating another significant milestone. OT faculty assisted each student with donning their white coat, symbolically marking the student's entry into the occupational therapy profession. Once all white coats were donned, the future practitioners collectively recited a pledge—a professional commitment to the following: practicing ethically and compassionately, advocating for clients, maintaining competence, and upholding the integrity of the occupational therapy profession.





AOTA INSPIRE 2026 Annual Conference & Expo

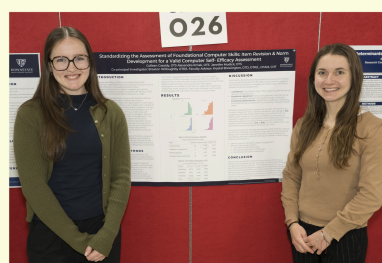
The 2026 AOTA Annual Conference & Expo took place from April 23–25 in Anaheim, California. MS-OT and PP-OTD students, alumni, and faculty from the Downstate OT community presented posters and led sessions showcasing their innovative research. These individuals are leaders in the field, contributing to the growing body of knowledge that continues to shape the impact of OT across healthcare, education, and the community.

Under the mentorship of **Suzanne Rappaport, OTD, OTR/L**, students **Madeline Silverstein, Madison Thristino, and Milena Scala** led a short course based on their Master's Project. The course highlighted OT's role in the advancement of inclusive and equitable gender-affirming care.



SOHP Annual Research Day

On May 7, students and faculty across the School of Health Professions gathered for a day of research and scholarship. A group from each profession was selected to showcase their exceptional research, sharing their findings with peers of other disciplines. Following the student presentations, awards were presented for outstanding research and scholarship, as determined by poster reviewers recruited by the SOHP Research Day Committee. Student posters across all SOHP disciplines were displayed in the lobby for viewing and discussion at the conclusion of the event, creating additional opportunities for students to learn about research in various healthcare fields.





Convocation and SOHP 60th Anniversary Reception

On May 12, the SOHP Class of 2026 attended Convocation with family and friends. All graduates were recognized and received a commemorative pin and SOHP 60th anniversary graduation stole. Special achievement awards were also presented, honoring students for their exceptional dedication, academic excellence, and leadership.

Convocation OT Award Recipients

- **Sigrid Hansen Award:** *Rachel Bergsohn, OTS*
- **Patricia B. Trossman Award:** *Jenny Kim, OTS*
- **Award for Outstanding Representation of Occupational Therapy in College, Center-Wide and Community Activities:** *Julianna Theolin, OTS*
- **Joyce Sabari Research Award:** *Madison Thristino, OTS, Madeline Silverstein, OTS and Milena Scala, OTS*
- **Community Practice Service-Learning Awards:** *Colleen Cassidy, OTS, Andy Eisen, OTS and Jenny Kim, OTS*
- **Leadership and Professional Stewardship Award:** *Ardissa Phillips, MS, OTR/L*
- **Award for Excellence in Scholarly Inquiry:** *Moussia Krinsky-Raskin, MS, OTR/L, CHT*

The evening of celebration continued as guests gathered over refreshments for the **SOHP 60th Anniversary Reception**. SOHP has a longstanding tradition of preparing the next generation of healthcare professionals to carry forward its legacy of excellence and make meaningful contributions to their fields. This is made possible by the passion, dedication to lifelong learning, and commitment to professional growth demonstrated by SOHP students, alumni, and faculty.





Commencement Ceremony

On May 13, the Commencement Ceremony for the Class of 2026 was held at the Amphitheater at Coney Island Boardwalk. Family, friends, and Downstate faculty proudly joined the graduates in celebrating their remarkable achievements and the diligence, dedication, and perseverance that made it all possible. For **MS-OT students**, this momentous occasion marked yet another milestone—the exciting transition from didactic coursework to clinical education! As the graduates celebrated and reflected on their accomplishments, they eagerly anticipated the next step in their journey toward becoming occupational therapy practitioners: Level II Fieldwork.



This year's Commencement Ceremony held special significance as it also celebrated the graduation of Downstate's **inaugural PP-OTD cohort!** As working professionals, the graduates continue to inspire us with their commitment to expanding their knowledge and skills, deepening their expertise in the field, advancing professional practice, and enhancing client outcomes.





Schneps Media – 2026 Healthcare Heroes

On May 19, **Jasmin Thomas, OTD, OTR/L, BCP** joined three other Downstate faculty honorees in receiving the Vanguard Award at Schneps Media's 2026 Healthcare Heroes celebration. Dr. Thomas was recognized for her commitment to shaping the future of healthcare through exemplary academic leadership, mentorship, research, and community engagement. Among Dr. Thomas' contributions to advancing occupational therapy education is her development of an innovative emotional intelligence curriculum that has been adopted by OT programs nationwide. She also recently received the 2026 Dr. Virginia Radley SUNY Fellowship for one of her research projects. We are proud to have Dr. Thomas as a member of the Downstate OT faculty, where she nurtures the next generation of practitioners and scholars.



Pelvic Health Continuing Education Course

From June 6-7, OTs from various stages of professional development gathered at Downstate for an exclusive pelvic health continuing education opportunity. The course, **Pelvic Rehab-Manual Assessment & Treatment Techniques (PR-MATT)**, was facilitated by **Laura Rowan, OT/L and Essential Pelvic Health**. The course consisted of a combination of didactic instruction and hands-on laboratory experience. Under the guidance of pelvic health experts, attendees explored clinical cases, participated in mock evaluations, and practiced treatment techniques, including internal and external assessment of the pelvic floor musculature. The course offered attendees valuable insight into the multi-tiered, whole-person approach to pelvic rehabilitation, sparking further interest in pursuing specialization in pelvic health.



Pelvic Health for the Occupational Therapy Practitioner

Laura@essentialpelvichealth.com by Laura Rowan, OT/L www.essentialpelvichealth.com

Pelvic Health Definition:

Pelvic floor health is a physical and functional integrity of the pelvic floor and through the life stages of an individual, providing an optimal quality of life through its multifunctional role, where the structural components of these areas in knowledge, which empowers the ability to prevent or manage dysfunction (from Benji Goldstein, October 2018).

Occupational Therapy Definition:

Occupational therapy helps people across the lifespan to do the things they want and need to do through the therapeutic use of daily activities (occupations). Occupational therapy practitioners assess people of all ages to help them to live as fully as possible, helping their physical health, and preventing or best better well-being, illness, or disability (AOTA 2023).

Common Treatment Areas



Common Symptoms

• Incontinence

Functional Deficits

• Decreased quality of life

Skilled OT Interventions

• Functional task analysis





UPCOMING EVENTS

Mon, 10/5 @ 6:00 PM – Pi Theta Epsilon (PTE) Honor Society Induction Ceremony

Fri, 11/13 @ 10:00 AM – White Coat Ceremony & Master's Project Presentations

Thurs, 11/19 @ 11:30 AM – Community Practice Fair

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 for the latest updates and events.

Become a Class Representative

Did you graduate from the MS-OT program between the years 2012 and 2022? We are looking for 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

Join our Advisory Board to shape the education of future practitioners, build meaningful professional connections, stay engaged with our programs, and contribute to the occupational therapy community—all while supporting your own personal and professional growth.

Donate to the OT Program Scholarship Fund

Your generosity, no matter the amount, will help us support our hardworking, talented students as they pursue academic goals and opportunities for professional engagement within the field.

To make your gift online, scan the QR Code below and select "**2585-Occupational Therapy Student Scholarship Fund**" from the drop-down menu.

**SCAN TO
DONATE:**



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