

Exploring the Aspirations and Motivations of Entry-Level OTD Students: Implications for Addressing the Shortage of Academic Professionals in Occupational Therapy

Dr. Vikram Pagpatan EdD, OTR/L, ATP, CAS, BCTS, CLA,; Benson Liang, Kerianna Krebushevski, Holly Hudgins, &

Rebeca Gonzalez
UNV Downstate Health Sciences University, Occupational Therapy Program



DOWNSTATE
HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION

As eOTD programs outpace MSOT programs, the dearth of qualified occupational therapists in the academic setting may have significant repercussions on the profession and future professionals, resulting in a decline in quality and relevance. According to the latest faculty data from AOTA's Academic Programs Annual Data Reports, both OTD and MSOT programs are facing vacancies in full-time positions, with higher rates in OTD programs. The continued growth in new doctoral programs is happening at the same time many faculty members are approaching retirement. This is compounded by the current workforce statistics that seem to indicate a shortage of new occupational therapists pursuing academic careers. Understanding the reasons why individuals pursue an eOTD and ultimately transition to academia is critical to bridging the gap in the shortage of academic professionals. This study aims to examine the aspirations and motivations of current students pursuing an eOTD to investigate the lack of OT educators amidst the continued rise of OTD programs.

CONSTRUCTS

PRESTIGE AND EGO	IMPROVED QUALITY OF CARE
DESIRE TO PURSUE ACADEMIA	ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

KEY TERMS

Entry-Level Occupational Therapy Doctorate (eOTD)- the highest level of academic preparation that an entry-level occupational therapist can obtain.

Master of Science in Occupational Therapy (MSOT)- a graduate degree program for students who have earned a bachelor's degree in a field other than occupational therapy.

METHODS

Design: This study utilized a quantitative research design, using an electronic survey as the primary data collection tool. The pilot survey was designed to take approximately 5 to 10 minutes. The electronic survey included 18 Likert scale questions in 4 different constructs relating to the four themes. Questions provided students with a set range of response options to gauge how much they agreed or disagreed with the statements.

Participants: The participants of the pilot survey included one eOTD cohort (n=12) of students from the Washington D.C. area. Participants were currently enrolled in the eOTD program, were able to read and understand English, and had means to access and complete the electronic survey. There were no inclusion or exclusion criteria for this study based on race, age, gender, or health status.

Procedure: The recruitment process involved contacting the department head of George Washington University via email and explaining the study's purpose and significance. Upon receiving their consent, the department head distributed an electronic survey through listserv email to their current eOTD students. The survey was voluntary and designed for anonymous completion.

RESULTS

Notably, 75% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the prestige of having a doctorate was important to them when deciding to pursue an eOTD (Figure 1). Yet, when assuming potential for higher compensation when selecting an eOTD over an MSOT, participants responded 33.3% in agreement, 25% in disagreement, and 25% in neutrality. 66.6% agreed or strongly agreed that the eOTD will afford them more employment opportunities, and 50% agreed that the eOTD would allow them a more prestigious work placement. 41.7% of the sample disagreed or strongly disagreed that the eOTD would earn them more respect among other healthcare professionals.

In regards to clinical aspirations, 91.7% agreed that they were interested in becoming clinical OTs after graduation (Figure 2), and 58.4% agreed that they chose an eOTD over an MSOT because it would make them a more competent clinician while 33.3% disagreed with that statement.

Regarding academic pursuits, 58.3% of the sample agreed or strongly agreed that they were interested in becoming a professor after graduation (Figure 3).

CONCLUSION

The results of the pilot survey both confirmed and subverted the researchers' expectations. The prestige of a doctorate, the desire to become a clinician, and the assumption of more job opportunities were the most agreed upon aspirations. At the same time, higher compensation and perception of competency by oneself and others were more widely distributed. Although the desire to become a clinician was relatively unanimous, there was also a significant interest in entering the academic field. Unfortunately, the sample only being from one program makes the question of curriculum preparing one for academia null. As well, this pilot study had a small sample size, as well as a lack of diversity across gender, age, and location. In the future, more research needs to be done on a wider sample across programs with more specific questions. Future iterations of this survey may explore the progress of the career path after graduation, such as gaining experience as a clinician first and entering academia after, and more specific questions about aid in the transition process from eOTD to academia. These alterations to the survey may give us more insight into the issues of faculty vacancies in OT programs.

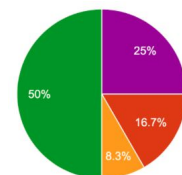


Figure 1: Prestige

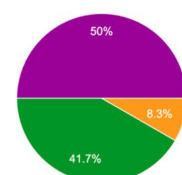


Figure 2: Clinician

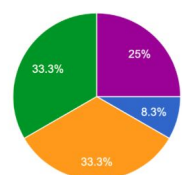


Figure 3: Academia

● Strongly Disagree
● Disagree
● Neutral
● Agree
● Strongly Agree

REFERENCES

