



NEWSLETTER

SUNY Downstate Occupational Therapy



Greetings from the Chair

Hello and welcome to the latest edition of our OT Program Newsletter! I'm absolutely delighted to share the wonderful updates, impressive achievements, and bright opportunities currently buzzing throughout our OT community. There is so much energy in the air, and I couldn't be more proud of the milestones our students are reaching.

First, I want to send a huge, heartfelt congratulations to our MS-OT Class of 2025 for successfully crossing the finish line of their Level II fieldwork this past fall. Watching your personal and professional transformation has been a true joy for all of us, and we are sending you all the confidence and good vibes in the world as you prepare to tackle the NBCOT exam. At the same time, it is such a pleasure to welcome back our MS-OT Class of 2026. You are entering the final stretch of your didactic coursework, and we are already looking forward to the cheers and celebrations that await you at commencement this spring.

I also want to give a special shout-out to the MS-OT Class of 2027. You've officially conquered your first semester at Downstate and navigated the inaugural term of our new 24-month curriculum with grace and determination. Beyond our master's cohorts, our PP-OTD students continue to inspire us as they make incredible strides in their advanced research and practice.

Looking ahead, I am filled with anticipation for the months to come. It is a privilege to watch our students evolve into community leaders and sharpen the clinical skills that will define their careers. I invite you to stay connected and share in our pride as this community continues to grow and flourish. As always, thank you for your unwavering support and for being such a vital part of our journey.

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





RECENT EVENTS



Meet the Class of 2027

On September 2nd, SOTA and COTAD kicked off the fall semester with a welcome gathering, giving first-year OT students the chance to meet and mingle with second-year students and OT faculty. It was a great opportunity for first-year students to get to know their second-year mentors, begin building friendships, gain valuable tips for success in the program, and learn more about the exciting experiences in store for them at Downstate.



Community Healthy Lifestyle Fair

On September 6th, first and second-year students had the opportunity to engage with the community while promoting health and wellness. The students spread awareness about what OT is and how it can be beneficial to people of all ages. Attendees had the opportunity to learn about backpack awareness, highlighted through a student-performed play. This play emphasized the importance of wearing backpacks properly to promote comfort and prevent pain or injury, which the audience seemed to enjoy. The fair featured many other tables as well, such as Dermatology, Physical Therapy and so much more, sharing knowledge in an engaging way.



RECENT EVENTS



Backpack Awareness Day

On September 17th, first and second-year OT students gathered at PS 235: Janice Marie Knight School to celebrate Backpack Awareness Day. The day began with an exciting, interactive presentation and short play performed by OT students about backpack safety. Next, the OT students showcased their leadership skills as they visited classrooms and facilitated creative lesson plans to reinforce healthy backpack habits. There were plenty of opportunities for the elementary school students to test their backpack safety knowledge and win prizes. It was a fun-filled day for all involved!



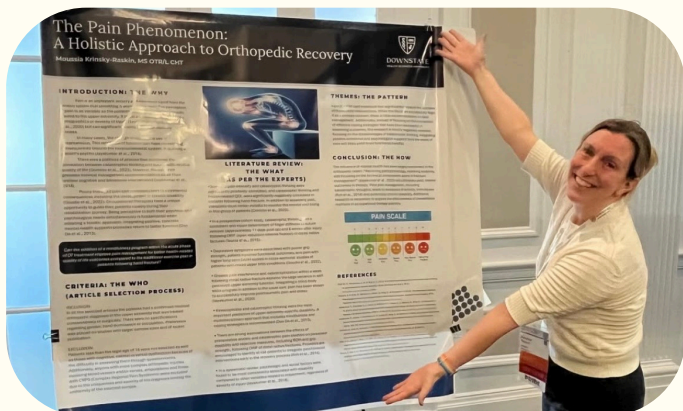
Autism Awareness Fair

On September 28th, SOTA & COTAD board members participated in the Autism Resource & Awareness Fair hosted by Downstate. Students interacted with the community, promoted OT awareness, and provided education and resources for families.





RECENT EVENTS



NYSOTA Fall Conference

From October 24th to 26th, Downstate OT faculty attended the NYSOTA Annual Fall Conference in Glens Falls, New York. Faculty like Dr. Suzanne Rappaport and students in the PP-OTD program, presented their research and posters at the conference. It was an inspiring time of OTs coming together to share research, participate in continuing education, and network!



Multicultural Holiday Potluck

On November 21st, SOTA and COTAD hosted a Thanksgiving potluck to celebrate the holidays and enjoy down-time in the midst of exams and a busy semester. Board members presented about common holiday traditions in various cultures and students also shared about their unique cultural foods and the family traditions they participate in.





STUDENT ACHIEVEMENTS



Madeline Silverstein, OTS was appointed as NYSOTA Student Delegate. As delegate, she will serve as the crucial liaison between our program and NYSOTA, connecting us with students across the state, sharing important legislative updates, and advocating for the needs of future OTs.

Noah Pulakos, OTS, was accepted into the 2026 AOTA/AOTF Future Scientists in Occupational Therapy Program. Noah was selected for advanced mentorship, training, and networking in occupational therapy research while being an OT student. Participants will engage in grant writing, study design, mentoring with seasoned academics, and developing the skills required to lead OT science in the future.



During the Downstate Honors Ceremony on September 30th, **President Wayne Riley** presented **COTAD** with the **2025 Resiliency Award for Student Synergy**. Downstate's COTAD chapter was recognized for its synergy as it is led by a group of self-driven students that exemplify exceptional teamwork and leadership as they advocate for diversity and inclusion. Members of COTAD work to increase awareness of the essential role that culture and diversity play in the occupational therapy profession.



STUDENT FEATURES: THIRD YEAR TIPS & TRICKS

We asked students from the Class of 2025:

What is some advice you can give to students starting fieldwork?



"Have an open mind and be completely willing! Get comfortable with being uncomfortable, that's when you know you're truly learning. Ask questions, introduce yourself to everyone so the team knows who you are, and build rapport with your instructors. Also, observe the culture of the workplace – is it an environment you could see yourself working in? How are staff supported by management? Make a mental note about the things you like and don't like about each setting to support your future job hunt!"

– Anna Todd, OTS

"Go into fieldwork with an open mind and give yourself grace. You are not expected to know everything—fieldwork is where learning truly comes to life. Ask questions, seek feedback, and reflect often. Trust that each experience, even the challenging ones, is shaping you into a confident and compassionate OT. "

– Kristin O'Regan, OTS



"My best advice is to take each day as it comes and as a new opportunity for growth! Stay curious and open to feedback and don't be afraid to give your supervisor feedback as well. Keep track of your little wins and the progress you make, it'll shock you how much you learn in such a short period of time."

– Jamie Siegart, OTS



"It is so easy to get in your head and focus on what we don't know but I want you to change your mindset to focus on what you DO know (which is a whole lot)! The reality is we will always learn something new each day and that is the beauty of this profession as we expand our knowledge/clinical reasoning. Many of the occupational therapists I worked with during my fieldwork told me they are constantly refreshing and educating themselves on intervention approaches. Trust your instinct and use the clinical knowledge you already have, you are more than capable! Lastly, for many of you, this will be your first time treating with hands-on experience– please be kind to yourself and enjoy each day as it comes!"

–Malai O'Keeffe, OTS





UPCOMING EVENTS

JAN
20

First Day of Fall Semester

APR
23–25

AOTA Annual Conference
ANAHEIM, CALIFORNIA

MAR
3

NYSOTA Lobby Day

APR
17

Master's Project Presentations &
White Coat Ceremony

MAR
16–20

Spring Break

MAY
12

SOHP Commencement
CONEY ISLAND AMPHITHEATER

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 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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