

Creating COTAD Chapters in Occupational Therapy Programs: How and Why?

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Diversity and Occupational Therapy

- Occupational therapy (OT) recognizes the importance of diverse cultural experiences and is committed to building a profession that values and proactively builds inclusive and nondiscriminatory.^{1,2}
- The profession continues to lack diversity in the workforce and does not reflect the clients it serves.
- Imbalances in gender, race, ethnicity, and age.
 - 83.9% of OT practitioners are female and 82.7% are white (non-Hispanic).³
 - 40% Americans identify as non-White.⁴
 - Lack of diversity in race and ethnicity in applicants to OT/OTA programs.²
 - 74-85% students self-identify as white; 87% self-identify as Non-Hispanic.
 - Average age of practitioners has dropped; 39 for OTs and 42 for OTAs.⁵
 - 16.5% of US population is 65 or older and is expected to increase.⁴
 - Salary gap exists between genders.⁵
- Need to increase diversity to better serve clients and populations.

What is COTAD?

- Coalition for Advocates for Diversity in Occupational Therapy.¹⁰
- National organization established in 2017 for practitioners, students and educators.
- Aims to promote diversity and inclusion within the profession, build diverse leaders, and foster culturally sensitive care.
- Uses a 3-pronged approach to address DEI on individual, group, and structural levels.
- COTAD-ED builds skills, knowledge and networks of educators.



Our Process

Phase 1

- Faculty identified the need at local level and connected with COTAD at AOTA conference.
- Obtained buy-in from Program Director and Dean to start COTAD chapter.
- Program agreed to fund COTAD dues for first year.

Phase 2

- Doctoral OT Student completed proposal for COTAD chapter and submitted to national organization.
- Surveyed OT students.

Phase 3

- Established COTAD Co-Chair position on SOTA board.
- Created goals for first year.
- Identified fundraising activities for annual dues.

Phase 4

- Developed 3-year COTAD work plan to promote diversity and inclusive practices campus-wide.
- Plan to reach out to other occupational therapy schools in Virginia to establish regional COTAD network.

What is the Profession Doing?

- AOTA created diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) task force in 2020.
 - Embedded DEI into Vision 2025.²
- AOTA's Multicultural, Diversity & Inclusion (MDI) network comprises independent groups that support diversity based on race/ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, gender, and religion.⁶
- Academic programs are reviewing strategies to increase diversity in admissions and student bodies.⁷
- Educators are infusing greater diversity into curricula.^{8,9}
- Advocated at Hill Day 2019 for Allied Health Workforce Diversity Act to increase diversity in the profession.

What Can You Do?

- Review diversity and inclusion initiatives in your setting to identify good practices and areas for growth.
- Partner with local OT/OTA program to facilitate diversity and inclusive practices.
- Establish COTAD chapter in your school.
- Participate in events hosted by COTAD e.g. Ignite series.
- Discuss current events with co-workers/students and explore occupational therapy's role.
- Create culturally immersive experiences for students.¹¹
- Create awareness of OT as a career by reaching out to culturally diverse groups and individuals.¹²
- Embody reflection, humility, openness and inclusion in practice.

3 Year Plan

- Aims to build sustainability across cohorts.
- Initiatives include:
 - Faculty-student initiatives to embed greater diversity in case studies and course work.
 - Promote dialog and reflection on diversity and inclusion within the college and profession.
 - Discussion series.
 - Encourage students to apply for COTAD minority mentoring program
 - Create safe spaces.
 - Fundraising.
 - Build community partnerships.