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## Fieldwork Educators' Expectations of Level II Occupational Therapy Students' Professional and Technical Skills

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## Fieldwork Educators' Expectations of Level II Occupational Therapy Students' Professional and Technical Skills

### Abstract

Fieldwork educators are critical to the development of successful occupational therapy students, and the fieldwork experience is vital to the growth of each occupational therapy student in the profession. The purpose of this research was to explore perceptions held by Level II fieldwork educators of occupational therapy students' professional and technical skills at the beginning of Level II fieldwork. This study used a convergent parallel mixed-method design and surveyed 54 fieldwork educators. The survey participants expected students to possess a variety of professional and technical skills in a multitude of areas. Fieldwork educators identified communication as the most essential professional skill and the most lacking technical skill in students for Level II fieldwork. Planning, implementing, and grading interventions was identified as both the top essential and most lacking technical skill in students for Level II fieldwork. Collaboration between academic and fieldwork educators is necessary to ensure students are best prepared for Level II fieldwork.

### Comments

The authors report no potential conflicts of interest.

### Keywords

clinical reasoning, communication, intervention, fieldwork

### Credentials Display

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The clinical and educational worlds of occupational therapy are interdependent, with both fulfilling the need of preparing students for practicing in fast-paced health care and education settings. To ensure the profession of occupational therapy continues to grow and thrive, clinicians and educators must be willing to seek ways to improve and strengthen this relationship. Fieldwork educators offer clinical knowledge and expertise to occupational therapy students being supervised in their settings. They also share a collaborative effort with the academic institution in preparing students to enter professional practice by helping students master competencies and skills necessary for entry-level practice (American Occupational Therapy Association [AOTA], 2016). Therefore, occupational therapy programs should be cognizant of clinician's expectations and perceptions of students. Fieldwork educators can provide valuable insight to academic faculty about the skills students need to possess and the skills students are lacking at the beginning of Level II fieldwork experiences.

Fieldwork educators in the profession of occupational therapy provide expert opinions on current occupational therapy practice for the students they mentor and supervise (Brown et al., 2015; Kielhofner, 2005). The occupational therapy profession must consider how the content and methods of didactic and clinical education will ultimately impact the future of practice. The assessment of a student's academic occupational therapy education begins from the first day of class in the academic program until the moment he or she steps into a clinical setting on a fieldwork experience. To improve practice in occupational therapy, occupational therapy educators and clinicians must be willing to accept necessary changes. Educators in occupational therapy programs realize practice is constantly changing and evolving (Hanson, 2011), which requires the world of academia to change as well. Obtaining feedback from individuals who practice and supervise students on Level II fieldwork has the power to evolve how educational offerings are presented to occupational therapy students. Implementing fieldwork educators' feedback can help ensure educational programs prepare students to enter the occupational therapy fieldwork setting with the most current preparation in professional and technical skills.

### **Literature Review**

Academic and fieldwork educators must prepare future occupational therapy students to become highly skilled in multiple areas. Emerging areas of practice in occupational therapy and a changing health care system require occupational therapy programs to educate students for complex future roles in the profession (AOTA, 2007; James & Musselman, 2006; Robinson et al., 2012). Providing students with preparation for evidence-based practice and meeting the needs of society for occupational therapy services begins at the start of the occupational therapy program and extends through the last day of fieldwork clinical practice. The Accreditation Council of Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE) provides standards and policies that universities must meet to become an accredited institution of an occupational therapy program for doctoral and master's degree programs (AOTA, 2018). The profession currently has both a master's and doctorate entry-level degree. Both modes of entry into the profession require a student to complete Level I and Level II fieldwork. "The goal of Level I fieldwork is to introduce students to fieldwork, apply knowledge to practice, and develop understanding the needs of the clients" (AOTA, 2018, p. 41). Objectives for Level I fieldwork will vary between educational programs. Level I fieldwork affords the opportunity for students to see the relationship between didactic coursework and the occupational therapy process. Level I fieldwork allows the opportunity for student professional and technical skill development prior to beginning Level II fieldwork (AOTA, 2019). "The goal of Level II fieldwork is to develop competent, entry-level, generalist occupational therapists"

(AOTA, 2018, p. 42). Level I and Level II fieldwork experiences will differ for each student dependent on fieldwork site location, patient caseload, and the clinical fieldwork educator.

### **Identifying Professional and Technical Skills**

An understanding of clinical fieldwork educators' expectations of occupational therapy student performance can inform academic settings of the appropriate changes necessary to better prepare students for clinical practice. AOTA (2015) defines the minimum standards for practice in the profession of occupational therapy from evaluation to discharge. AOTA (2015) also defines the minimum educational and licensing requirements one must possess to practice as an occupational therapy professional (AOTA, 2015). Both professional and technical skills are essential for an occupational therapy student to develop to become an entry-level clinician. Professional skills include communication, personal responsibility, organization, and problem-solving, whereas technical skills focus more on the skills required to provide therapeutic services (Brown et al., 2016; Kasar & Muscari, 2000; Strong et al., 2003; Tryssenaar & Perkins, 2001). Technical skills include the ability to apply therapeutic interventions and assessment of client skills. Professional skills become more expected and essential as one's career progresses from student to clinician. Communication, specifically, was identified throughout the literature search as a critical skill among both occupational therapy practitioners and students. Communicating with others is an essential component of the therapeutic process. Effective communication skills can serve as a valuable tool for an individual throughout his or her career (Brown et al., 2016; Campbell et al., 2015; Strong et al., 2003).

Occupational therapy students must be knowledgeable, display professional skills, and demonstrate clinical skills to perform well on Level II fieldwork placements. Professional skills in the occupational therapy profession have been identified as just as important as technical skill development (Brown et al., 2016; Kasar & Muscari, 2000; Strong et al., 2003; Tryssenaar & Perkins, 2001). Educational programs can use this information to design and shape future curriculum appropriately to meet the challenge of teaching students higher-level clinical or technical skills required in today's health care climate. Goldbach and Stella (2017) stated that a primary role of academic educators is to ensure students are ready for fieldwork. Effective partnerships between fieldwork and academic sites are vital. As academic educators send students out on fieldwork rotations, preparing students to engage in the experience is indispensable. This can be accomplished through the development of students' professional and technical skills during the academic years in the occupational therapy program (Goldbach & Stella, 2017).

### **Evaluating Student Performance**

Students' professional and technical skills are evaluated throughout the duration of the academic experience and clinical experience prior to Level II fieldwork. Academic educators and clinical fieldwork educators have assessed student performance using a variety of methods. O'Brien and McNeil (2013) examined didactic teaching effectiveness by assessing students' clinical performance prior to Level II fieldwork using two different methods. Clinical reasoning and problem-solving development were encouraged in the academic environment using a case-based learning format. The Short Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) provided an indication for performance-based skills for student performance in the classroom. Using this method, students were allowed the opportunity to practice performance skills on a weekly basis in order to demonstrate clinical achievements. These skills were not specific to a client or case study. O'Brien and McNeil (2013) concluded that assessing student performance while in the academic setting may help in preparing students for clinical practice. Further

evaluation of both teaching methods and assessment measures is needed to determine the best way to prepare students' technical skills for the clinical setting.

Wallingford, Knecht-Sabres, Lee, and St. Amand (2016) investigated student and practitioner perceptions of the significance of specific occupational therapy skills and knowledge related to entry-level competence in the profession. Both master-level students and practitioners indicated increased importance for communication, intervention, goal development, use of theoretical concepts and evidence, and time management; however, students rated these areas of higher importance compared to clinicians. Wallingford et al. (2016) stated it is essential that students and practitioners be aware of differences in perceptions of what skills are deemed important for entry-level competency. The best way to address these differences is through effective communication and education.

Many factors influence the fieldwork experiences for students, including site location and fieldwork educator experience and knowledge (Evenson et al., 2015). Because of the variety of settings in which clinicians are practicing occupational therapy services and serving as clinical fieldwork educators, it is imperative to have collaboration and communication between academic educators and educators in clinical practice settings throughout the duration of a fieldwork rotation. AOTA (2017) offers an evaluation tool for Level I fieldwork entitled *Level I Fieldwork Competency Evaluation for OT and OTA Students*. This foundational building tool assesses student performance skills on Level I fieldwork prior to Level II fieldwork. This tool, or tools like these, can provide students the feedback necessary to further develop technical and professional skills prior to Level II fieldwork.

### **Fieldwork Educators' Perceptions**

Fieldwork educators' experiences supervising students during Level II fieldwork will vary with each student. Hanson (2011) reported that fieldwork educators identify several strengths and disadvantages to supervising students on clinical rotations. Benefits included professional development, chance of employment recruitment, and increased enthusiasm for practice. Deterrants included lack of training in the role of educator and previous student performance concerns. Students who were not readily prepared for fieldwork, specifically with their communication, assessment, and intervention skills, frustrated their fieldwork educators. Hanson (2011) reported fieldwork educators desired better communication between the clinical setting and the academic setting. Fieldwork educators also believed the facility expectations for the student should be voiced prior to the Level II fieldwork placement. Fieldwork educators serve as valuable instructors to students and are essential personnel for the development of student growth in the profession. Fieldwork educators have reported a need for more support from educational institutions (Evenson et al., 2015). Fieldwork educators can provide valuable insight to academic faculty of the skills students possess or lack at the beginning of the Level II fieldwork experiences.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this research study was to explore Level II fieldwork educators' perceptions of occupational therapy students' professional and technical skills at the beginning of Level II fieldwork. By identifying these perceptions, academic occupational therapy educators can assist students to develop these skills while they are still in the classroom setting. The goal of occupational therapy educational programs is to prepare students to be competent as a generalist in a multitude of practice areas and successfully complete the required Level II fieldwork experiences as determined by ACOTE (AOTA, 2018).

## Research Objectives

The objectives of this study were to:

- determine if fieldwork educators perceive students as being adequately prepared for Level II fieldwork experiences,
- identify the technical and professional skills fieldwork educators expect of occupational therapy students at the beginning of Level II fieldwork experiences, and
- identify technical and professional skills that fieldwork educators indicate students might be lacking at the beginning of Level II fieldwork experiences.

## Methods

### Research Design

This study used a convergent parallel mixed-method design to identify fieldwork educators' perceptions of students' technical and professional skills at the start of Level II fieldwork to collect data. A convergent parallel mixed method design allows for the researcher to collect both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously. The quantitative and qualitative data is then merged to provide a more thorough understanding of research results (Creswell, 2018). Using both the quantitative data and qualitative data from the survey offered a more in-depth portrayal of fieldwork educators' perceptions. Institutional review board approval was obtained from two universities in the central United States. Data was obtained through a survey available both online and mailed to current fieldwork educators. Microsoft Excel was used for statistical analysis of quantitative data.

### Participants

The participants of this study were selected using purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is the intentional selection of individuals to participate in a research study based on specific criteria (Dickerson, 2006). The research participants were current fieldwork educators from a university database of primarily physical dysfunction settings who supervised Level II fieldwork students with varying levels of expertise from a variety of practice settings. Three hundred and fifty-three surveys were distributed and 65 surveys were returned. Eight surveys were excluded because the participants did not sign the returned consent form. Three surveys were excluded because the participants did not fully complete the survey. Fifty-four surveys were analyzed and reported in the findings for a response rate of 15.3%.

### Data Collection

For this research, a survey approach was used as the data collection method. The overall aim of the survey was to uncover clinical fieldwork educators' specific perceptions and expectations associated with student technical and professional skills. The survey was developed by the first author with input from faculty mentors and colleagues with the research setting and clinical sites. Survey questions were developed based on literature review related to student development and attainment of occupational therapy skills and the researchers' academic and clinical experiences. The survey was available in two formats, online and mailed, to the participants. Instructions for survey completion were provided with a detailed explanation of the overall intent of the survey for both online and mailed surveys. The survey included 12 closed and three open-ended questions (see Appendix).

After information from the survey was obtained, responses were analyzed using quantitative statistical analysis. The researcher analyzed the qualitative data using a thematic coding process. As new ideas emerged from the surveys during data analysis, new codes were formulated. There were inclusion and exclusion criteria formulated for each code, which allowed for more accuracy when determining

how to code information (Peacock & Paul-Ward, 2006). All fieldwork educators' responses were analyzed separately using a spreadsheet to identify common words and phrases in responses. Once these were listed, a chart was created for each question to identify categories of similar topics. Words and/or phrases were combined into similar topics and categories. The columns were then analyzed to identify categories. Responses were appraised by the researcher and examined to identify themes. All coding was performed by the researcher of the study and reviewed by the faculty mentor and committee members to confirm study themes. Themes were then compared and contrasted to the quantitative data in order to better understand the relationship between perceived professional and technical skills expected and lacking in occupational therapy students at the beginning of Level II fieldwork and those identified in the qualitative data.

## Results

Fifty-four fieldwork educator participants had supervised students on Level II fieldwork in a variety of clinical settings, including hospitals, outpatient, and school-systems. The information obtained from the study identified the professional and technical skills students possessed and lacked at the beginning of Level II fieldwork. Information obtained also determined if fieldwork educators perceive students as adequately prepared to begin Level II fieldwork. There were varying levels of experience as a fieldwork educator that ranged from 1.8% ( $n = 1$ ) of the participants reporting 0–1 year of experience to 43.6% ( $n = 24$ ) of the participants reporting more than 10 years of experience. Data results revealed the top primary area of practice reported by the participants was the outpatient setting (type not specified) with 30.9% ( $n = 17$ ) reporting this setting, and the second area of practice reported by the participants was inpatient rehabilitation with 23.6% ( $n = 13$ ) reporting this setting. Acute care was reported by 20.0% ( $n = 11$ ) of the participants, skilled nursing facility was reported by 16.4% ( $n = 9$ ) of the participants, early intervention (which included First Steps) was reported by 14.5% ( $n = 8$ ) of the participants, mental health was reported by 7.3% ( $n = 4$ ) of the participants, home health was reported by 5.5% ( $n = 3$ ) of the participants, and school-based practice was reported by 3.6% ( $n = 2$ ) of the participants. Most of the survey participants identified their primary area of practice as a physical dysfunction setting.

### Quantitative Data

Table 1 represents the professional and technical skills fieldwork educators perceived as crucial for an occupational therapy student to possess at the beginning of Level II fieldwork. The participants were asked to rank their top five skills with 1 = *the most important* and 5 = *the least important*. Skills were assigned a point value with skills ranked *number 1* receiving 5 points, skills ranked *number 2* receiving 4 points, skills ranked *number 3* receiving 3 points, skills ranked *number 4* receiving 2 points, and skills ranked *number 5* receiving 1 point. Point totals were added for each skill and the mean value was found for each. Skills were then ranked in mean order from highest to lowest.

The top five professional skills identified by the participants as crucial for students to possess at the beginning of Level II fieldwork in rank order were communication skills, personal responsibility, problem-solving skills, uses sound judgment and safety, and initiative. The top five technical skills identified by the participants as crucial for students to possess at the beginning of Level II fieldwork in rank order were plans, implements, and grades intervention; clinical reasoning; completes required documentation; acquires information through both standardized and nonstandardized assessments; and selects interventions for managing a client-centered plan throughout the occupational therapy process. Fieldwork educators were asked how prepared they felt students were to perform professional skills for

Level II fieldwork. The results indicated that 69.1% believed students possess most necessary skills, 27.3% believed students possess some necessary skills, 1.8% believed students possess all necessary skills, and 0.0% believed students possess little to no necessary skills. The same question was asked regarding student possession of technical skills at Level II fieldwork. The results indicated that 47.3% of the participants reported students possess some necessary skills, 43.6% reported students possess most necessary skills, 5.5% reported students possess little to no necessary skills, and 1.8% reported students possess all necessary skills.

**Table 1**

*Professional and Technical Skills Perceived to be Essential at the Beginning of Level II Fieldwork*

<b>Professional Skills</b>	<b>Point Total</b>	<b>Ranking</b>
Communication skills	124	1
Personal responsibility (accountable for self)	120	2
Problem-solving skills	115	3
Uses sound judgment and safety	107	4
Initiative	103	5
Manages time effectively	92	6
Adheres to ethics	68	7
Empathy	38	8
Creativity	27	9
Self-awareness	19	10
<b>Technical Skills</b>	<b>Point Total</b>	<b>Ranking</b>
Plans, implements, and grades intervention	117	1
Clinical reasoning	110	2
Completes required documentation	103	3
Acquires information through both standardized and nonstandardized assessments	95	4
Select interventions for managing a client-centered plan throughout the OT process	88	5
Identifies factors that influence client performance	86	6
Plans for discharge and transition	62	7
Abides by laws, regulations, accreditation guidelines, and facility policies	56	8
Uses evidence-based services to maintain and enhance competence	42	9
Integration and implications of theoretical knowledge	36	10
Uses an occupation-based practice approach	30	11

Table 2 represents the professional and technical skills fieldwork educators indicated students are lacking at the beginning of Level II fieldwork. The participants were asked to rank their top five skills with 1 = *the most important* and 5 = *the least important*. Skills were assigned a point value, totaled, and ranked the same as in Table 1.

The top five professional skills identified by the participants that students are lacking at the beginning of Level II fieldwork in rank order were communication skills, problem-solving skills, initiative, manages time effectively, and creativity. The top five technical skills identified by the participants that students are lacking at the beginning of Level II fieldwork in rank order were plans, implements, and grades intervention; clinical reasoning; acquires information through both standardized and nonstandardized assessments; plans for discharge and transition; and uses evidence-based services to maintain and enhance competence.



**Table 2***Professional and Technical Skills Perceived to be Lacking at the Beginning of Level II Fieldwork*

<b>Professional Skills</b>	<b>Point Total</b>	<b>Ranking</b>
Communication skills	128	1
Problem-solving skills	126	2
Initiative	123	3
Manages time effectively	111	4
Creativity	97	5
Personal responsibility (accountable for self)	84	6
Self-awareness	67	7
Uses sound judgment and safety	65	8
Empathy	15	9
Adheres to ethics	3	10
<b>Technical Skills</b>	<b>Point Total</b>	<b>Ranking</b>
Plans, implements, and grades intervention	120	1
Clinical reasoning	106	2
Acquires information through both standardized and nonstandardized assessments	104	3
Plans for discharge and transition	102	4
Uses evidence-based services to maintain and enhance competence	93	5
Select interventions for managing a client-centered plan throughout the OT process	83	6
Completes required documentation	80	7
Identifies factors that influence client performance	76	8
Uses an occupation-based practice approach	31	9
Integration and implications of theoretical knowledge	25	10
Abides by laws, regulations, accreditation guidelines, and facility policies	10	11

Table 3 represents the skills identified that the fieldwork educators spend the most and least time developing in occupational therapy students at the beginning of Level II fieldwork. The fieldwork educators spent the most time with students developing documentation, intervention selection, and implementation skills. They spent the least amount of time developing an understanding of the basic tenets of occupational therapy (role of therapist, collaboration with clients), an understanding of the management of occupational therapy services (timeliness, costs, organizational goals), and the basic fundamentals of practice (safety, ethics, judgment). Approximately 78.2% of the participants reported “some disconnect” between academia and the clinical site setting followed by 14.5% who perceived a significant disconnect, 3.6% who reported no disconnect, and 1.8% who reported a total disconnect.

**Table 3***Skills Fieldwork Educators Spend the Most and Least Time Developing with Students at the Beginning of Level II Fieldwork*

<b>Most Time Developing</b>	<b>Point Total</b>	<b>Ranking</b>
Documentation	42	1
Intervention selection and implementation	35	2
Clinical reasoning	34	3
Evaluation and screening process	31	4
Basic fundamentals of practice (safety, ethics, judgement)	10	5
Management of occupational therapy services (timeliness, costs, organizational goals)	9	6
Communication and professional behaviors	3	7
Basic tenets of occupational therapy (role of therapist, collaboration with clients)	2	8

Least Time Developing	Point Total	Ranking
Basic tenets of occupational therapy (role of therapist, collaboration with clients)	50	1
Management of occupational therapy services (timeliness, costs, organizational goals)	36	2
Basic fundamentals of practice (safety, ethics, judgment)	36	2
Communication and professional behaviors	28	4
Intervention selection and implementation	6	5
Evaluation and screening process	5	6
Documentation	3	7
Clinical reasoning	1	8

### Qualitative Data

Three open-ended questions asked of the fieldwork educators were included in the survey. The first two questions were specific to a particular program and are not presented in this article. The third question analyzed in this article is: What clinical practice skills (transfers, manual muscle testing, etc.) do you identify are necessary for a student to be successful on your Level II fieldwork in your clinical setting?

#### *Skills Necessary for Success*

The third open-ended question asked the participants to identify the necessary skills needed for success on Level II fieldwork in the participant's specific clinical setting. The responses were analyzed to identify common themes (see Table 4). Categories that emerged included occupational therapy assessments, intervention, medical knowledge, positioning/mobility, and traits/characteristics. One participant reported the necessary skills to include the "ability to perform safe transfers, knowledge of DME and adaptive equipment and ADL strategies, good documentation skills, communication with the entire rehab team, initiative, receptiveness to feedback and willingness to learn, and good time management." Another participant reported "Good communication skills and comfort interacting with patients, clear/concise documentation and legible handwriting, safety and body mechanics for functional transfers, MMT, clinical reasoning and consideration of home safety for D/C planning." The survey participants expected students to be knowledgeable in a variety of areas.

**Table 4**

#### *Identified Skills Necessary for Success*

<b>Occupational Therapy Assessments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ADLS/ADL</li> <li>• FIM</li> <li>• FMC Testing</li> <li>• Goniometry</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grip/Pinch Testing</li> <li>• ROM/MMT</li> <li>• Observation Skills</li> <li>• Standardized Testing</li> </ul>
<b>Intervention</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AE Use</li> <li>• DME Knowledge</li> <li>• Grading Interventions</li> <li>• Manual Therapy Techniques</li> <li>• Modalities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NDT</li> <li>• Splinting</li> <li>• Treatment Planning</li> <li>• Discharge</li> </ul>
<b>Medical Knowledge</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anatomy</li> <li>• Kinesiology</li> <li>• Lab parameters</li> <li>• Pulse oximeter</li> <li>• Vitals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HIPPA</li> <li>• Insurance</li> <li>• Documentation</li> <li>• Interdisciplinary Referrals/ Collaboration</li> </ul>

<b>Positioning/Mobility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Body Mechanics</li> <li>• Functional Mobility Handling</li> <li>• Positioning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wheelchair Positioning</li> <li>• Wheelchair Mechanics</li> <li>• Transfers</li> </ul>
<b>Professional Skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clinical Reasoning</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Confidence</li> <li>• Creativity</li> <li>• Initiative</li> <li>• Judgement Skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizational Skills</li> <li>• Problem-solving Skills</li> <li>• Receptive to Feedback</li> <li>• Safety Awareness</li> <li>• Time Management</li> <li>• Willingness to Learn</li> </ul>

*Note:* A majority of the survey respondents represented physical dysfunction settings.

## Discussion

Of the fieldwork educators who participated in the survey, 70.9% reported that students possess most of the necessary professional skills at the beginning of Level II fieldwork. Regarding technical skills at the beginning of Level II fieldwork, 47.3% of the participants reported students possess some of the necessary skills and 45.5% of the participants reported students possess most of the necessary skills. The survey participants, which represented mostly physical dysfunction settings, expected students to possess a variety of professional and technical skills in a multitude of areas. Some of these skills are specific to occupational therapy, such as being able to apply specific intervention techniques and perform assessments as indicated in quantitative data. Other skills not specific to occupational therapy included knowledge of general medical care, such as performing vitals and understanding lab parameters as reported in the qualitative data. From both the quantitative and qualitative data obtained during this research study, students are expected not only to have a vast knowledge base when entering into Level II fieldwork, but also to be able to apply and demonstrate this knowledge in each specific clinical site. The qualitative data gathered during this study supported the quantitative findings. Both sets of data indicate the need for a student to display both professional and technical skills throughout the entire fieldwork experience.

When focusing on professional skills, fieldwork educators identified communication as the top professional skill essential for Level II fieldwork and also the skill most lacking in general for occupational therapy students. Previous research supports the need to address the professional and technical skills of students in the academic portion of learning through the duration of all fieldwork experiences (Brown et al., 2016; Campbell et al., 2015; Evenson, 2015; O'Brien & McNeil, 2013; Strong et al., 2003; Wallingford et al., 2016). A standard model of teaching professional behaviors does not exist for the occupational therapy profession, even though these behaviors are identified as essential (Kasar & Muscari, 2000). Planning, implementing, and grading intervention was identified as both the top essential and most lacking technical skill of students by survey participants. Level I fieldwork performance evaluation tools can also aid in development for student professional and technical skills prior to initiating the Level II fieldwork experience. Fieldwork educators can use evaluation tools to provide valuable feedback to a student during all fieldwork experiences.

Students are exposed to a variety of learning topics while in the academic setting. There is no uniform method of instruction to present learning topics. Identification of the professional and technical skills fieldwork educators believe to be essential and lacking of students at the beginning of Level II fieldwork may allow for increased time to develop these skills while the student is in the academic

portion of learning. In addition, uncovering the skills to be essential for success in the clinical setting through this study will allow for occupational therapy educators to devote increased time in teaching and assessing knowledge for these particular skills with the curriculum. The skills identified in this study are important for students completing fieldwork in physical dysfunction settings; however, they are no more important than any skill occupational therapy professionals perform in another setting. Occupational therapy educators should ensure students are graduating with the necessary professional and technical skills to enter into the profession regardless of the setting. The results obtained during the research study can be used to strengthen program content and the enrichment of learning experiences, especially when focusing on physical dysfunction content.

### **Implications for Practice and Education**

Occupational therapy students are the future practitioners of occupational therapy practice. The profession should be cognizant of the educational experiences of students along with their attainment or lack of skill development. This study offered insight into primarily physical dysfunction clinical fieldwork educators' expectations of student skills at the beginning of Level II fieldwork. By unveiling these expectations, occupational therapy programs can identify needed program development and implement specific program changes to better facilitate student growth and attainment of professional and technical skills. It is important to consider students may be provided the instruction of certain skills but fail to translate obtained knowledge into application when in the clinical setting outside of the academic environment. Level I fieldwork may offer insight into a student's development of professional and technical skills. Evaluating instructional and content delivery of the identified professional and technical skills with the program may lead to increased skill attainment for students (Knecht-Sabres et al., 2013). Assessing individual student performance during didactic coursework, along with his or her Level I fieldwork performance, may predict student success on Level II fieldwork (Giles et al., 2014).

This study also affirmed the need for collaboration between the educational and clinical site settings. Communication between these settings is essential in order for students to thrive and reach their highest level of success. Understanding the expectations of clinical fieldwork educators and the experiences of academic educators can foster better student outcomes in the future. By uncovering the expectations of fieldwork educators, academic educators can devote more time teaching students certain skills. If these skills are addressed in the classroom and attained by the student prior to the clinical fieldwork rotation, clinical fieldwork instructors can spend more time focusing on other essential skills that may not be able to be addressed during the academic portion of a student's career. Reinforcement or mastery of skills beyond surface level knowledge can also be performed in the clinical setting during fieldwork if the student is able to obtain beginning skill proficiency during the academic years.

### **Limitations**

A limitation for this research study was the small sample size. Another limitation was that the research participants were identified from a MSOT program school database of fieldwork educators and, therefore, may not be generalized. Survey participants' opinions may not represent the entire population of fieldwork educators in the occupational therapy profession. Fieldwork educators may have different expectations for students dependent on practice setting and years of experience. The survey results must be used with caution when used for program development. The study participants identified physical dysfunction settings as the primary area of practice. The occupational therapy profession encompasses many diverse practice settings and scopes of practice beyond physical disabilities, including pediatrics, school-based practice, community settings, and mental health. The survey outcomes identified by the

study participants focused mostly on physical related technical skills. With the current state of health care, especially during the time of a pandemic, civic unrest, and the opioid crisis, additional and different professional and technical skills may have been identified and emphasized. Therefore, the survey results must be viewed with caution when used for future program development. The research study questions were developed based on a literature review related to student development and attainment of occupational therapy skills and the researchers' academic and clinical experiences at the time of the study. The open-ended survey question results failed to capture the entire scope of practice for occupational therapy professionals because the participants mostly practicing in physical dysfunctions settings.

### Future Research

Fieldwork educator opinions expressed in this study varied by many factors, including years of experience and interactions with past students. A possible future research study could evaluate expectations of students based on fieldwork educator years of clinical experience and the number of students he or she has supervised. A research study examining the correlation between the different types of practice settings and student expectations for each is also warranted. For example, a study conducted with the majority of participants identifying as pediatric, school-based, or mental health fieldwork educators may uncover very different professional and technical skills needed for Level II fieldwork success. Clinical fieldwork educator training impacting perceptions of student performance is also an area of study necessitating further research.

### Conclusion

Results from this research study can be used to expand educational opportunities in the classroom to support increased student skill development in physical dysfunction settings. In order to expand and develop the professional and technical skills identified with the study, collaboration between fieldwork and academic occupational therapy professionals is essential. Academic and fieldwork educators can work as a collaborative team to develop students' essential skills necessary for Level II fieldwork success.

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## Appendix

### Fieldwork Educators' Expectations of Level II Occupational Therapy Students' Professional and Technical Skills

1. What is your primary area of practice with the occupational therapy profession?

- Acute care
- Inpatient rehabilitation
- Outpatient
- Home health
- School-based practice
- Skilled nursing facility
- Academia
- Mental health
- Other (please list) \_\_\_\_\_

2. How long have you served as a clinical fieldwork educator for the occupational therapy profession?

- 0-1 year
- >2-5 years
- >5-10 years
- More than 10 years

3. Since January 2014 through December 2017, how many students have you supervised or will you be supervising for Level II fieldwork?

- 0 students
- 1-2 students
- 3-4 students
- 5 or more students

4. Please identify the top 5 PROFESSIONAL skills you feel are most crucial for an occupational therapy student to possess prior to beginning Level II fieldwork. Rank them from 1 to 5 with 5 being the most important and 1 being the least important. For the five options you do not choose, please mark an "X" in the blank.

- Adheres to ethics
- Communication skills
- Creativity
- Empathy
- Initiative
- Manages time effectively
- Personal responsibility (accountable for self)

- Problem-solving skills
- Self-awareness
- Uses sound judgement and safety

5. Please identify the top 5 TECHNICAL skills you feel are most crucial for an occupational therapy student to possess prior to beginning Level II fieldwork. Rank them from 1 to 5 with 5 being the most important and 1 being the least important. For the six options you do not choose, please mark an "X" in the blank.

- Acquires information through both standardized and nonstandardized assessments
- Abides by laws, regulations, accreditation guidelines, and facility policies
- Clinical reasoning
- Completes required documentation
- Identifies factors that influence client performance
- Integration and implications of theoretical knowledge
- Plans for discharge and transition
- Plans, implements, and grades intervention
- Selects interventions for managing a client-centered plan throughout the OT process
- Uses evidence-based services to maintain and enhance competence
- Uses an occupation-based practice approach

6. In your professional opinion, how prepared do you feel occupational therapy students are to perform PROFESSIONAL skills for Level II fieldwork in your clinical setting?

- Possess all necessary skills
- Possess most necessary skills
- Possess some necessary skills
- Possess little to no necessary skills

7. In your professional opinion, how prepared do you feel occupational therapy students are to perform TECHNICAL skills for Level II fieldwork in your clinical setting?

- Possess all necessary skills
- Possess most necessary skills
- Possess some necessary skills
- Possess little to no necessary skills

8. Please identify the top 5 PROFESSIONAL skills you feel students are lacking at the beginning of Level II fieldwork. Rank them from 1 to 5 with 5 being the most prevalent and 1 being the least prevalent. For the five options you do not choose, please mark an "X" in the blank.

- Adheres to ethics
- Communication skills



- Creativity
- Empathy
- Initiative
- Manages time effectively
- Personal responsibility (accountable for self)
- Problem-solving skills
- Self-awareness
- Uses sound judgement and safety

9. Please identify the top 5 **TECHNICAL** skills you feel students are lacking at the beginning of Level II fieldwork. Rank them from 1 to 5 with 5 being the most prevalent and 1 being the least prevalent. For the five options you do not choose, please mark an "X" in the blank.

- Acquire information through both standardized and nonstandardized assessments
- Abide by laws, regulations, accreditation guidelines, and facility policies
- Clinical reasoning
- Completes required documentation
- Identify factors that influence client performance
- Integration and implications of theoretical knowledge
- Plans for discharge and transition
- Plans, implements, and grades intervention
- Select interventions for managing a client- centered plan throughout the OT process
- Use evidence-based services to maintain and enhance competence
- Uses an occupation-based practice approach

10. As the clinical fieldwork educator, identify the **two areas** you spend the **most time** developing with your students at the beginning of Level II fieldwork. Mark **ONLY two responses** with a 1 and 2, with the 2 being the area you spend the most time developing. For the six options you do not choose, please mark an "X" in the blank.

- Basic fundamentals of practice (safety, ethics, judgement)
- Basic tenets of occupational therapy (role of therapist, collaboration with clients)
- Clinical reasoning
- Communication and professional behaviors
- Evaluation and screening process
- Intervention selection and implementation
- Documentation
- Management of occupational therapy services (timeliness, costs, organizational goals)

11. As the clinical fieldwork educator, identify the **two areas** you spend the **least time** developing with your students at the beginning of Level II fieldwork. Mark **ONLY two responses** with a 1 and 2, with the 2 being the area you spend the least time developing. For the six options you do not choose, please mark an "X" in the blank.

- Basic fundamentals of practice (safety, ethics, judgement)
- Basic tenets of occupational therapy (role of therapist, collaboration with clients)
- Clinical reasoning
- Communication and professional behaviors
- Evaluation and screening process
- Intervention selection and implementation
- Documentation
- Management of occupational therapy services (timeliness, costs, organizational goals)

12. Health care is quickly changing and evolving. Based on student performance, do you perceive a disconnect between the academic setting and the clinical practice setting with the occupational therapy profession?

- No disconnect
- Some disconnect
- A significant disconnect
- A total disconnect

13. Finally, what clinical practice skills (transfers, manual muscle testing, etc.) do you identify are necessary for a student to be successful on your Level II fieldwork in your clinical setting?