



## TILTING Beyond the Classroom: Utilizing Transparency Components to Develop Student Centered Administrative Processes

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### **Author Biography**

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## TILTING Beyond the Classroom: Utilizing Transparency Components to Develop Student Centered Administrative Processes

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*Transparency in learning and teaching (TILT) has been shown to benefit student's ability to be successful within the classroom. Transparent concepts produce positive outcomes within organizational systems as well. However, there is no research that analyzes how the TILT framework can be used to analyze and develop academic policies within educational institutions. This manuscript discusses the potential benefits of utilizing TILT components in the creation of academic policies and processes in order to promote successful student engagement within an occupational therapy academic program.*

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Higher education is becoming increasingly aware of the need to ensure educational accessibility to promote an equitable learning experience for all students. Transparency in learning and teaching, otherwise known as TILT, is one way for educators to facilitate student success through increased student accessibility to course content (Winkelmes, 2013; Winkelmes et al., 2016). TILT focuses on students' increased ability to learn when information is shared with them in a transparent format that highlights the purpose of the learning, the students' requirements, and the engagement of the student (Winkelmes, 2013). Utilizing a TILT approach has shown to increase students' academic confidence, their skill mastery, and their sense of belonging with a particularly heightened positive impact on at risk students such as first generation college students, low income students, and minority students (Winkelmes et al., 2016). Additionally, students are more motivated to participate in learning activities when transparent approaches are utilized (McNair, 2016).

The benefits behind transparent concepts, such as clarity of information, identification of expectations, and the purpose behind change, are not unique to education and pedagogy. Transparent ideals have been discussed and regarded highly in a variety of other contexts including leadership, business, and healthcare. Organizational employees who receive transparent communication

demonstrate increased trust, commitment, and satisfaction with the organization (Men & Stacks, 2014). In regards to the rapidly changing healthcare environment, Greengard (2019) states “in the years ahead there will be a need to drive greater transparency into processes and pricing, facilitate communication, open up decision-making, and help teams and individuals develop the skills necessary to build a better health care organization” (p.23). The desire for transparency has never been as prevalent as it is currently in the world of “fake news” and “click bait” where it is sometimes difficult to obtain dependable information.

Individuals who develop policies and procedures within higher education academic programming often hold roles as both educators and administrators, working from educational pedagogy and organizational leadership theory. It can be challenging to balance the needs of both the students and the organization. Literature supports the use of transparent concepts in each of these contexts (Men & Stacks, 2014; Wells & Walker, 2016; Winkelmes, 2013); however, there is no framework for incorporating these concepts into the development of academic policies and procedures. Therefore, the purpose of this manuscript is to discuss the benefits of utilizing the TILT framework in the development of academic policies and procedures within an occupational therapy, academic program.

### **Institutional context**

The majority of academic healthcare programs are governed by standards put in place by their associated accrediting organization. The Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE) is the accrediting body for both occupational therapy and occupational therapy assistant programs in the United States (AOTA, 2020). Adhering to accreditation standards and other departmental processes are the foundation for the daily workings of a professional program. Policies and procedures are often put in place to create systems that ensure departmental, faculty, and student action aligns with these standards.

Students’ engagement within a professional program is reliant on their ability to understand and conform to these departmental processes. Examples of policies that directly impact students are procedures related to acceptance to a program, academic retention procedures, and processes associated with being placed in outside clinical experiences. A student’s ability to understand these processes and engage with them effectively is vital in their successful participation within the program. Developing academic processes that are both transparent to the student and the program will decrease confusion, reduce errors, increase program efficiency, and increase students’ confidence that they are doing the things

necessary for them to be a successful student within their program of choice (Kilker, 2019). Program policies and procedures are often considered separate from students. However, this manuscript argues that ensuring clarity to students is necessary for effective policy development and successful student engagement.

## **Overview of Approach**

An accredited occupational therapy program must meet 131 standards. Sixteen of those standards are specifically related to the fieldwork portion of the program (ACOTE, 2018). Fieldwork is the terminology used in occupational therapy programs to describe student practicum experiences, which includes both Level 1 and Level 2 experiences (AOTA, 2020). The author of this manuscript serves as the Academic Fieldwork Coordinator (AFWC) for a large occupational therapy program, which is the individual who oversees the fieldwork program and ensures compliance with related ACOTE standards.

In order to ensure compliance with ACOTE standards, the AFWC may review and/or create policies and procedures that impact all parts of the fieldwork program, including student requirements. This manuscript describes a policy review and modification that was completed by the author, referred to as AFWC, utilizing TILT methods and the associated observed benefits.

In Fall 2019, the AFWC completed a policy review of an internal policy that addresses students who have extenuating circumstances that may impact their participation in their Level 2 fieldwork experience. It was found that the policy was appropriate and necessary in order to align with ACOTE standards, however the procedures connected to the policy seemed to be confusing and had previously resulted in extensive student questions. The AFWC felt it necessary to modify the procedure associated with how students should communicate extenuating circumstances and make a request for a modification. It should be noted that this policy and procedure is in addition to student accessibility policies already in place through the University for academic accommodations.

The TILT framework includes three components: purpose, task and criteria (Winkelmes, 2013). Winkelmes (2013), the founder of TILT, explains that the purpose defines the learning objectives, the task defines the activities which must be completed, and the criteria describes the characteristics of a successfully completed project. A richer description of the TILT model along with assignment templates can be found on the TILT website at [tilthighered.com](http://tilthighered.com). The AFWC analyzed the procedure utilizing a TILT lens, including modifying the associated

student form based off of the TILT framework. The AFWC utilized the newly tilted student document during the Spring 2020 semester to allow students in the occupational therapy program to communicate extenuating circumstances and request modifications to their Level 2 fieldwork.

## **Assessment**

Seventy-five students, the entirety of the student cohort, were provided with the updated procedural form. There were no questions from students related to completion of the form. Approximately ten students completed the form requesting modifications to their Level 2 fieldwork. There were no errors and no need for the AFWC to reach out to obtain additional information for any of the submitted forms.

While there was no collected data available from previous semesters, the AFWC reported that the number of completed forms was similar to previous semesters. However, previous students had demonstrated more confusion as indicated by multiple questions through email and during in-person office hours related to the process of completing the form. Prior to the TILT modification of the form, more errors had been observed in student submissions. Based on this information, the modification of the described policy processes and associated form using the TILT model resulted in a more efficient process, decreased questions, and increased accuracy upon student submission.

## **Discussion**

This project found that utilizing a TILT framework to modify academic policies and procedures provided benefits to both the student and the associated program. Students who were involved in using the updated procedural form had no questions about how the form should be completed. This is an indication that students had more confidence in their ability to accurately complete the form when it was provided in a transparent manner. This aligns with findings from Winkelmes and colleagues (2016) which found that students who were provided with transparent assignments demonstrated an increase in academic confidence. Additionally, there were no errors noted on any of the forms which demonstrated an improvement in student success from the prior semesters. Similarly, the literature demonstrates that using the TILT framework to develop academic assignments promotes overall student success (Winkelmes, 2013; Winkelmes et al., 2016).

Students with the need to utilize the fieldwork extenuating circumstances policy and related procedures may or may not have identified as students who are typically in an at-risk student population, such as low-income, minority groups, or first generation students. However, they are certainly students who are experiencing life events that impact their ability to complete a typical fieldwork rotation. Therefore they are, to some extent, at-risk for being unable to successfully complete their occupational therapy programming. The modified extenuating circumstances policy appeared to be accessible to these types of students as indicated by the reduced questions and the reduction in errors or need for additional information. Winkelmes and colleagues (2016) also found that the TILT framework has disproportionately high benefits for at-risk students.

The modification of this policy using a TILT framework was also beneficial to the program itself. The decreased student questions and increased accuracy of form completion reduced the time required of the AFWC to review and complete the extenuating circumstances process. Increased efficiency of a program when using a TILT model was also discussed by Kilker (2019) as a benefit to educators using transparent assignments.

While the findings from this project are based on anecdotal evidence, the achieved benefits of using the TILT framework to analyze and modify an academic program policy was notable. The extant literature which focuses on the benefits of transparency in teaching and learning is relatively limited, however it is growing (Kilker, 2019; McNair, 2016; Winkelmes, 2013; Winkelmes et al., 2016). To this author's knowledge there is no known studies on the benefits of using a similar model for academic policy development. The positive outcomes of this experience demonstrated the potential benefits of using a TILT model in this capacity and the need for further research to validate those benefits. A better understanding of methods for policy development that support both student accessibility and organizational efficiency could be hugely beneficial to academic organizations.

## **Conclusion**

Universities are enormous organizations that require structured policies and procedures to function, while also having a vested interest in student success, accessibility, and happiness. More specifically, professional healthcare programs such as occupational therapy, are bound to complicated accreditation standards and learning outcomes which must be met while simultaneously providing exceptional education to students. It can be difficult to manage these dual interests. Ensuring that policies and procedures are clear and accessible to

all students is beneficial to both student success and organizational efficiency. Utilizing the TILT framework to analyze and develop academic policies could be a tool for organizations to ensure they are effectively developing clear, efficient, and accessible policies.

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