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2017

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

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Exploring Fieldwork Educators' Expectations of  
Occupational Therapy Students' Professional and Technical Skills

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Occupational Therapy

Eastern Kentucky University  
College of Health Sciences  
Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy

Jessica Mason

2017

**EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY**


**COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES**

**DEPARTMENT OF OCCUPATIONAL SCIENCE AND OCCUPATIONAL  
THERAPY**

**Certification**

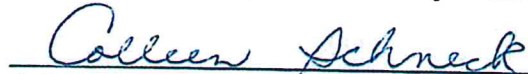
We hereby certify that this Capstone project, submitted by Jessica Mason, conforms to acceptable standards and is fully adequate in scope and quality to fulfill the project requirement for the Doctor of Occupational Therapy degree.

Approved:

  
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**EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY**  
**COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES**  
**DEPARTMENT OF OCCUPATIONAL SCIENCE AND OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY**

This project, written by Jessica Mason under direction of Dr. Cindy Hayden, Faculty Mentor, and approved by members of the project committee, has been presented and accepted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY**

**CAPSTONE COMMITTEE**

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## Executive Summary

**Background:** This capstone project focused on professional and technical skills of occupational therapy students beginning Level II Fieldwork. Fieldwork educators are essential personnel to the development of successful occupational therapy students. The education provided by the fieldwork educators is vital to the growth of each occupational therapy student in the profession.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this capstone project 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. By identifying these perceptions, academic occupational therapy educators can assist students to develop these skills while they are still in the classroom setting.

**Theoretical Framework.** This capstone project utilized the theoretical framework of pragmatism. Using pragmatism, the researcher directs the research process by understanding the desired research outcome to be achieved.

**Methods.** For this capstone project 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 same survey was available as both an online survey and a mailed survey. The survey included 12 closed and three open-ended questions.

**Results.** When focusing on professional skills, communication was identified as the top professional skill essential for Level II Fieldwork and also the skill most lacking in students. Planning, implementing, and grading intervention were identified as both the top essential and lacking technical skill of students. The qualitative research within the capstone reinforced the application process is a weakness of students compared to possession of knowledge.

**Conclusions:** Survey participants expect students to possess a variety of professional and technical skills in a multitude of areas. Students must be able to translate and apply their knowledge from the educational classroom to the clinical setting.

## **Acknowledgements**

Words cannot begin to express my appreciation and gratitude to my capstone mentor, Dr. Cindy Hayden. Throughout this entire process you led me with wisdom and patience. Your words inspired me each week to perform better than the last and embrace the research process. You knew when to let me falter and stumble and also when to lead. I could not imagine this research project evolving from where it started with an idea to the results at the end. I look forward to working on more projects with you in the future and continuing to learn from your expertise. I would also like to thank Dr. Renee Causey-Upton, my committee member. It was a pleasure to have you provide me with feedback and encouragement throughout my time in the OTD program. Your wisdom and passion for educating others does not go unnoticed by your students. The entire ECU OTD staff has contributed to my learning and growth as a person. This whole experience has made me a better instructor in the classroom and a therapist in the clinic. For that, I thank each of you.

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**EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES  
DEPARTMENT OF OCCUPATIONAL SCIENCE AND OCCUPATIONAL  
THERAPY**

**CERTIFICATION OF AUTHORSHIP**

Submitted to (Faculty Mentor's Name): Dr. Cindy Hayden

Student's Name: Jessica Mason

Title of Submission: Exploring Fieldwork Educators' Expectations of Occupational  
Therapy Students' Professional and Technical Skills

*Certification of Authorship: I hereby certify that I am the author of this document and that any assistance I received in its preparation is fully acknowledged and disclosed in the document. I have also cited all sources from which I obtained data, ideas, or words that are copied directly or paraphrased in the document. Sources are properly credited according to accepted standards for professional publications. I also certify that this paper was prepared by me for this purpose.*

Student's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

*Jessica Mason*

Date of Submission: \_\_\_\_\_

*January 25, 2018*



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## **Section One: Nature of Project and Problem Identification**

The clinical and educational worlds are interdependent, with both fulfilling the need for preparing students for practicing in a fast changing healthcare system. 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. Professional behaviors and technical skills are shaped from the first day in the classroom making it imperative to offer the best educational opportunities for a student from the beginning of any occupational therapy program.

A student pursuing a degree in occupational therapy has a choice regarding the universities to which he or she chooses to apply; however, the educational offerings in each academic setting will differ. The Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE) currently mandates a minimum of a master's degree as the entry-level degree into the profession (AOTA, 2015). ACOTE provides standards and policies that universities must meet to become an accredited institution of an occupational therapy program for doctoral, master's, and associate degree programs. The standards and objectives that must be met are clear at each point of entry. How the standards are met, however, are up to interpretation by educators within each occupational therapy program. Educational programs must ensure students are prepared for clinical practice prior to initiating the mandated fieldwork experiences defined by ACOTE. This is completed through a multitude of educational learning strategies including lectures, service learning opportunities, and competency-based performance. Occupational therapy professionals serving as fieldwork educators in clinical settings can offer unique insight to occupational therapy educators regarding how to best prepare students for clinical practice.

Educational programs for occupational therapy students are continually being revised, which impacts fieldwork experiences for students, including the identification of site locations as

well as fieldwork educator experience and knowledge. Fieldwork educators have reported a need for more support from educational institutions (Evenson, Roberts, Kaldenberg, Barnes, & Ozelie, 2015). Fieldwork educators serve as valuable instructors to students and are essential personnel for the development of student growth within the profession. Fieldwork educators can provide valuable insight to academic faculty of the skills students need to possess or skills students are lacking at the beginning of the mandated Level II Fieldwork experiences.

Expectations of students in academic programs do not necessarily match what the fieldwork educators believe are most important. Fieldwork educators offer clinical knowledge and expertise to occupational therapy students being supervised within their settings. They also share a collaborative effort with the academic institution to prepare students to enter professional practice by helping students develop competencies and skills necessary for practice (American Occupational Therapy Association, 2016). Therefore, occupational therapy programs should be cognizant of clinical expectations of clinicians and support these as appropriate.

Ensuring students are prepared to enter the world of professional practice is the vital role of academia, whether the student is completing Level II Fieldwork or practicing as a novice therapist. Evaluating program design from multiple perspectives and implementing appropriate changes as a result can better prepare students for the profession (Benevides, Vause-Earland, & Walsh, 2015; Hodgetts et al., 2007). The aim of this capstone project was to obtain insight from clinical fieldwork educators of their expectations of student clinical and professional skills at the beginning of Level II Fieldwork. By obtaining this information, academic programs can make appropriate and/or necessary changes to curriculum. This information will aid in better preparing students for clinical experiences within the profession.

**Problem Statement**

Occupational therapy students are taught specific standards and learning objectives within their respective academic programs set forth by ACOTE. Accredited occupational therapy programs must ensure students are being taught these identified standards if they are to maintain accreditation. Students completing required Level II Fieldwork as part of an accredited program are entering clinical sites where their academic education has been governed by ACOTE. As students begin these fieldwork experiences, they are expected by fieldwork educators to bring a certain set of skills, both technical and professional, with them from classroom training. Healthcare is evolving quickly and is ever influencing the occupational therapy profession in clinical practice. A disconnect can exist between the realities of clinical practice and student experiences in academia. In order to ensure students are best prepared to enter into Level II Fieldwork practice settings, the expectations of clinical fieldwork educators supervising students needs to be further explored. The feedback provided from clinical educators can be used to provide changes to academic programs, which can further enrich the learning experiences of occupational therapy students before Level II Fieldwork placement.

**Purpose of the Project**

The purpose of this capstone project 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. 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 in a multitude of practice areas and be poised to successfully complete the required Level II Fieldwork experiences as determined by ACOTE.

## **Project Objectives**

The objectives of this capstone project are to:

1. Determine if fieldwork educators perceive students as adequately prepared to initiate Level II Fieldwork experiences currently
2. Identify the technical and professional skills fieldwork educators expect of occupational therapy students at the beginning of Level II Fieldwork experiences
3. Identify technical and professional skills that students might be lacking at the beginning of fieldwork experiences
4. Better understand fieldwork educators' expectations in regards to students' skills.

These objectives are important so that appropriate changes can be made in academic programs to further enhance and develop students' clinical skills within the profession. The results of this capstone will allow academic educators to be informed about what fieldwork educators consider the most crucial qualities and skills students should demonstrate prior to entering the occupational therapy clinical practice setting on Level II Fieldwork.

## **Guiding Theoretical Framework**

The guiding theoretical framework for this capstone project is pragmatism. Patton (as cited in Creswell, 2014) discusses how the pragmatic worldview “arises out of actions, situations, and consequences rather than antecedent conditions...” (p.10). Pragmatism allows for mixed method research resulting in both quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell, 2014). As research is conducted, the researcher is able to choose techniques and processes, which best meet his or her desires and drives using the pragmatic worldview (Creswell, 2014). Utilizing this theoretical base will allow for the exploration and identification of clinical instructor perceptions of the qualities and potential skills for students required at the beginning of Level II Fieldwork experiences. Using pragmatism, the researcher directs the research process by understanding the

desired research outcome to be achieved. This process includes identifying the information being researched and the best method to investigate it (Creswell, 2014). Using this theory as a guide within this capstone project will allow the outcomes of the project to shape educational offerings to better prepare students for success in clinical practice.

### **Study Significance**

All students must complete a degree program in an academic setting to practice within the occupational therapy profession. Addressing the development of identified behaviors and skills necessary for practice in clinical settings will lead to student growth and better preparation for real-world expectations. Fieldwork educators within the profession of occupational therapy offer unique insight to educating occupational therapy students by providing expert opinion on current occupational therapy practice (Brown, Crabtree, Mu, & Wells, 2015; Kielhofner, 2005). The occupational therapy profession must consider what and how students are taught within occupational therapy programs will ultimately impact their future practice within the profession. This begins from a student's first day in class to the moment he or she steps into a clinical setting on a Level II Fieldwork experience.

In order to improve practice within occupational therapy, all occupational therapy professionals must be willing to accept necessary changes. Educators in occupational therapy programs realize the world of healthcare is constantly changing and evolving (Hanson, 2011) which requires the world of academia to change as well. There are many resources available to academic educators to help design and shape curriculum. Obtaining feedback from individuals who practice and supervise students on Level II Fieldwork has the power to evolve how we present educational offerings to occupational therapy students. Considering fieldwork supervisors' input can help ensure educational programs prepare students to enter the occupational therapy fieldwork setting with the most current preparation in professional and



technical skills.

### **Summary**

This capstone project was developed to better understand the expectations clinical fieldwork educators have for students at the beginning of the Level II Fieldwork experiences. Limited research exists regarding occupational therapy graduates' perceived level of satisfaction and preparedness for the clinical setting (Hodgetts et al., 2007). As students graduate and enter clinical practice, these graduates can become fieldwork educators following their first year of practice. Developing an appreciation of clinicians' perspectives on current occupational therapy practice will provide academic educators the opportunity to focus on specific technical and professional skills embedded within the mandated standards. This capstone project can help bridge the gap between clinical educators' expectations of students and academic faculty preparation of students' professional and technical skills.

## **Section Two: Detailed Review of the Literature**

The American Occupational Therapy Association's (AOTA, 2007) *Centennial Vision* states "We envision that occupational therapy is a powerful, widely recognized, science-driven, and evidence-based profession with a globally connected and diverse workforce meeting society's occupational needs" (p. 613). AOTA recognizes the profession not only as empowering an individual's ability to change his or her physical and mental health, but also as having a key-role in prevention of disease and wellness for individuals (AOTA, 2007). Academic and fieldwork educators must prepare future occupational therapy students to become highly skilled in multiple areas. Emerging areas of practice within occupational therapy and a changing healthcare system requires occupational therapy programs to educate students for complex future roles within the profession (AOTA, 2007; James & Musselman, 2006; Robinson, Tanchuk, & Sullivan, 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 Significance of Education**

Occupational therapy programs are not identical in regards to the content offered to students. The profession currently allows for both a master's and doctorate entry-level degree into the profession. By July 1, 2027 ACOTE has announced the only point of entry for occupational therapists into the profession will be a doctoral degree (AOTA, 2017). A study by Case-Smith, Page, Darragh, Rybski, and Clearly (2014) focused on the entry-level doctorate in occupational therapy as offering increased knowledge of community-based care services, health and wellness promotion, in-depth clinical experiences, and expansion of application of evidence-based practice in the intervention process.

The leadership experiences embedded in occupational therapy entry-level doctorate programs prepare clinicians to be leaders in the profession, specifically among healthcare teams (Case-Smith et al., 2014). Pierce and Peyton (1999) looked at the development of doctorate programs in medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, nursing, and physical therapy. The ever evolving healthcare system requires clinicians, regardless of their profession, to be well educated, client advocates, and responders to change within this system. The curriculum of occupational therapy programs need to be reexamined to see if the needs of the present and future healthcare system are being and will be met with the required current and future ACOTE standards. By developing an understanding of the educational background process of other professions in healthcare, the occupational therapy profession can assess the current mode of entry into practice and determine if the profession is achieving the health needs of individuals, groups, and communities.

### **Significance of Identifying Necessary Skills**

Further understanding of the expectations of clinical fieldwork educators of occupational therapy student performance has the potential to inform academic settings of necessary and appropriate changes to be made to better prepare students for clinical practice. Professional and technical skills are essential for an occupational therapy clinician to develop and possess. One must possess these skills to achieve success in the profession. Professional skills include communication, personal responsibility, organization, and problem-solving. Technical skills focus more on the skills required to provide therapeutic services. These include the ability to apply therapeutic interventions and assessment of client skills. Professional behaviors become more expected and essential as one's career progresses from student to clinician. Professional behaviors within the occupational therapy profession have been identified as just as important as technical skill development (Brown, Williams, & Etherington, 2016; Kasar & Muscari, 2000; Strong, Baptiste, & Salvatori, 2003; Tryssenaar & Perkins, 2001). Communication, specifically,

was identified throughout the literature search as an essential skill among both occupational therapy practitioners and students. Communicating with others is an important component of the therapeutic process. Effective communication skills can serve as a valuable tool to an individual throughout his or her career (Brown et al., 2016; Campbell & Corpus, 2015; Strong et al., 2003).

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). Addressing the development of these identified behaviors will lead to student growth and better prepare him or her for real-world expectations and practice. Occupational therapy students must be knowledgeable, display professional behaviors, and demonstrate clinical skills to perform well on Level II Fieldwork placements.

Educational programs must begin to address such identified behaviors early within a student's academic career. Kenyon and Ilot (1997) completed a study exploring whether standards of defining a competent practitioner had been met for past students including retention of employees and accountability. Individuals with practice experience offered valuable feedback to programs seeking such information (Wallingford, Knecht-Sabres, Lee, & St. Amand, 2016). This is especially true regarding graduate performance upon entry into the profession. Educational programs can utilize this information to design and shape future curriculum appropriately. A model or framework of teaching these identified skills would be beneficial to the occupational therapy profession. Educational programs also face the challenge of teaching students higher-level clinical skills required in today's healthcare climate. Today's clinical practice environment requires therapists to think critically and use sound clinical reasoning to meet the needs of patients throughout the occupational therapy process (Coker, 2010).

Academic educators and clinical fieldwork educators assess student performance using a variety of methods. O'Brien and McNeil (2013) examined student performance in relation to clinical performance for Level II Fieldwork utilizing two different specific types of assessment methods. Clinical reasoning and problem solving development were encouraged through the use of 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. Utilizing 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 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.

Professional and technical skills of students are evaluated throughout the duration of the academic experience. 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 within the profession. Occupational therapy students indicated increased importance for communication, intervention, goal development, utilization of theoretical concepts and evidence, and time management compared to practitioners. 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. Due to the variety of settings in which clinicians are practicing occupational therapy services and

serving as clinical fieldwork educators, it is essential to have collaboration and communication between academic educators and clinical practice settings.

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. Deterrents 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 clinical 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. Goldbach and Stella (2017) stated that a primary role of academic educators is to ensure students are ready for fieldwork. Partnerships between fieldwork and academic sites are essential. 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 skills during the academic years of the OT program (Goldbach & Stella, 2017).

## **Conclusion**

Through the literature review and research for this capstone project, several research areas emerged as potentially affecting this study. These include educational development and design, the advancement process from student to clinician, and a need for understanding the link between education and clinical practice. Research articles focused on revising the educational curriculum for occupational therapy students, based on student and practitioner responses (Evenson et al., 2015; Hodgetts et al., 2007; Kenyon & Ilot, 1997; Strong et al., 2003; Thomas,

Saroyan, & Snider, 2012). Students must be prepared to perform the essential skills of occupational therapy practice. Ensuring students are prepared to enter the world of professional practice is the vital role of an educator in the academic setting. Evaluating program design and implementing appropriate changes to the educational setting will help to bridge the transition from academic student to better prepared fieldwork student and then to clinician (Benevides, Vause-Earland, & Walsh, 2015; Hodgetts et al., 2007).

Fieldwork educators within the profession of occupational therapy offer unique insight into academia by providing expert opinion of current clinical occupational therapy practice (Brown, Crabtree, Mu, & Wells, 2015; Kielhofner, 2005). Educators must acknowledge the impact of how and what students are taught within occupational therapy programs will ultimately impact future practice within the profession. Fortune, Ryan, & Adamson (2013) proposed collaboration between educators, practitioners, and managers to further enhance academic settings and curricula. This collaboration would allow students to be more prepared to enter the professional world where occupational therapy is practiced. These studies support the need for educational programs to be revised as needed to display the relationship between real life practice and the educational setting. Through the completion of this capstone project, identifying essential skills necessary for clinical practice, will allow for better prepared students on Level II Fieldwork.

## **Section Three: Methods**

### **Project Design**

This capstone project used a convergent parallel mixed-method design to identify fieldwork educators' perceptions of students' technical and professional skills when starting Level II Fieldwork. A convergent parallel mixed method design allows for the researcher to collect both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously (Creswell, 2014). Data was obtained through a survey available both online and mailed to current fieldwork educators. The information obtained from the study allows for identification of professional and technical skills students possess and lack at the beginning of Level II Fieldwork. This information can be used to further develop course content within an academic program. Information obtained will also determine if fieldwork educators perceive students as adequately prepared to begin Level II Fieldwork and will increase understanding of fieldwork educators' expectations for student skills.

### **Setting**

This capstone project was designed and implemented on the campus of a public university in the central Northern United States. The university typically enrolls approximately 10,000 students into its courses each fall and spring semester and offers dual credit, undergraduate, and graduate coursework to students. The university offers 81 majors for degree seeking students, including nursing, radiography, health services, and occupational therapy. This academic setting awards associate, bachelor, master, and doctorate degrees. This setting was utilized for the purpose of convenience. The researcher is employed full time at the setting in the occupational therapy program. The current OT program is an accredited master's entry program that accepts 30 students annually. Second year occupational therapy students within this program complete two Level II Fieldwork placements for twelve weeks each.



## **Participants**

The participants of this capstone project 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). Research participants were current fieldwork educators from the university database who supervised Level II Fieldwork students. Fieldwork educators who had not supervised a Level II Fieldwork student from 2014- 2017 were excluded from the study. After necessary Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained from the University of Southern Indiana and Eastern Kentucky University in March and April 2017, respectively, fieldwork educators meeting the stated criteria were identified through departmental records within the occupational therapy department. A total of 353 surveys were distributed of which 65 surveys were returned. Eight surveys were excluded because the participants did not sign the returned consent form. Two surveys were excluded due to the survey not being fully completed by the participants. A total of 54 surveys were analyzed.

## **Project Methods**

For this capstone project a survey approach was used as the data collection method. “A survey design provides quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population” (Creswell, 2014, p. 155). 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 to be utilized (see Appendix A) was developed by this author with input from faculty mentors at Eastern Kentucky University and colleagues within the research setting and clinical sites. Information obtained from the literature review on student development and attainment of occupational therapy skills was used as a guide (Kasar & Muscari, 2000; O’Brien & McNeil, 2013; Strong et al., 2003; Tryssenaar & Perkins, 2001;; Wallingford et al., 2016), in addition to the author’s work experience and

feedback from the capstone mentor, to create the survey. The survey was available in two formats to the participants. The same survey was available as both an online survey and a mailed survey. The online survey used Qualtrics to obtain data. Instructions for survey completion were provided with a detailed explanation of the overall intent of the survey for both online and mailed surveys. The sequence of survey questions was taken into consideration with introductory basic questions first (Forsyth & Kviz, 2006) followed by the main survey questions. The survey included 12 closed and three open-ended questions (Appendix A). Open-ended questions provided the researcher a narrative response from the research participant (Forsyth & Kviz, 2006).

After information from the survey was obtained, responses were analyzed using quantitative statistical analysis and qualitative analysis methods. The researcher analyzed the qualitative data utilizing a 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 coding was performed by the researcher of the study and reviewed by the capstone faculty mentor and committee members as appropriate. After coding was completed, categories were developed with appropriate themes and their interrelationships identified. Quantitative and qualitative data were compared at the completion of the study to assess if any of the same skills were identified for both professional and technical skills.

### **Outcome Measures**

At the conclusion of data collection, all information was thoroughly reviewed by the researcher to answer the specific objectives of the capstone project. The capstone faculty committee and applied leadership experience mentor reviewed the survey (Appendix A). Information obtained during the survey allowed for fieldwork educators' identification of desired

technical and professional skills of occupational therapy students beginning Level II Fieldwork.

The questions the survey sought to answer were to:

1. Identify fieldwork educators' perceptions of skills students perform well at the beginning of Level II Fieldwork.
2. Identify fieldwork educators' perceptions of skills students are lacking at the beginning of Level II Fieldwork.
3. Identify what professional and technical skills fieldwork educators consider essential for OT students beginning their Level II Fieldwork placements.

The information obtained from the survey will aid in program development for future occupational therapy students. The results will allow for better understanding of what fieldwork educator expectations of students are in order to make appropriate changes within an academic program to further enhance student skills prior to Level II Fieldwork.

Strengthening the quality of data within any study is imperative to ensure that outcomes are valid (Lysack, Luborsky, & Dillaway, 2006). It is important to reflect on all information and responses obtained during data gathering and the possible impact it may have on the overall results of the survey when interpreting information. All survey data has been reviewed between the author and faculty mentor at Eastern Kentucky University. Discussion of possible outcomes of the data results and their implication within the research setting is necessary for continued program development.

### **Ethical Considerations**

There are many ethical considerations to contemplate when conducting any type of research study. First, approval to conduct the research study was obtained by the IRB at the research setting by submitting the research proposal for analysis. The study was approved by the

research setting March 2017. Eastern Kentucky University entered into an IRB agreement with the research setting in April 2017. There was minimal risk to the participants of the capstone project and informed consent (Appendix B) was obtained from all participants. At the beginning of the survey, it is essential to provide the participants of the study with the overall purpose of the research so they know what they are agreeing to do (Creswell, 2014). It is also important for the researcher to maintain professional boundaries with the participants of the research study at all times (Taylor & Kielhofner, 2006). By maintaining a professional boundary, the participants are less likely to be influenced by their response while answering open-ended questions reporting information they think the researcher wants to hear. While collecting data using open-ended questions, the researcher avoided using leading questions that might have influenced the participant. All participants of the study remain confidential and privacy has always been respected by the researcher (Creswell, 2014).

### **Capstone Timeline**

Table 1. *Time Frame of Capstone Project*

Time Frame	Expected Results
October 2016	Finalized capstone idea
March 2017 – April 2017	Submitted IRB to Eastern Kentucky University and University of Southern Indiana
June 2017 – July 2017	Distributed surveys following IRB approval from both Eastern Kentucky University and University of Southern Indiana
August 2017	Began data analysis
December 2017	Present completed capstone

## **Section Four: Results and Discussion**

### **Introduction**

The results presented are based on the research questions and objectives. Analysis of information revealed essential professional and technical skills necessary within the clinical setting for occupational therapy students beginning Level II Fieldwork. This was achieved through participants' ranking skills using Likert type scales, forced choice responses, and open-ended responses to identify both professional and technical skills expected for fieldwork performance. Results revealed participant perceptions of student readiness entering into the Level II Fieldwork experience along with the identification of the essential professional and technical skills the occupational therapy student should possess.

353 participants were invited to participate in the research study. A total of 54 survey results were analyzed and reported in the findings for a response rate of 16.1%. 25 of the surveys were completed using the online system Qualtrics and 29 were returned by mail. The participants using the online Qualtrics system were provided informed consent at the beginning of the online survey. By proceeding to the first research question, online participants consented to participating in the research study. Participants who completed the survey by mail returned both the signed consent to participate in the study and the survey. Participants had supervised students on Level II Fieldwork in a variety of clinical settings including hospitals, outpatient, and school-systems. There were also varying levels of experience as a fieldwork educator ranging from 1.8% reporting 0-1 year experience to 43.6% of participants reporting more than 10 years of experience.

## Results

### Quantitative Data

Microsoft Excel was utilized for statistical analysis as there was a small sample size and limited quantitative analysis required for the data. Table 2 summarizes participant practice settings, Table 3, the number of years served as a fieldwork educator, and Table 4 is the number of occupational therapy students supervised from 2014 through 2017 as reported by the survey participants.

Table 2. *Participant Practice Setting*

Primary Area of Practice	Number of Responses (N)	Results (%)
Outpatient	17	30.9
Inpatient Rehabilitation	13	23.6
Acute Care	11	20.0
Skilled Nursing Facility	9	16.4
Other (Please list)	8	14.5
Mental Health	4	7.3
Home Health	3	5.5
School-based Practice	2	3.6
Academia	0	0.0

Table 3. *Years as Fieldwork Educator*

Number of Years as Fieldwork Educator	Number of Responses (N)	Results (%)
More than 10 years	24	43.6
6-10 years	12	21.8
2-5 years	17	30.9
0-1 year	1	1.8

Table 4. *OT Students Supervised*

Number of OT Students Supervised since 2014	Number of Responses (N)	Results (%)
5 or more students	14	25.5
3-4 students	23	41.8
1-2 students	17	30.9

From the data it was determined the top primary area of practice reported by the participants was the outpatient setting with 30.9% reporting this as the primary practice site. Inpatient rehabilitation followed with 23.6%, acute care with 20.0%, skilled nursing facility was reported by 16.4%, 14.5% reported other which included First Steps, 7.3% reported mental health, 5.5% home health, 3.6% reported school-based practice, and 0.0% reported academia as the primary work setting. Approximately 43.6% of participants reported having more than 10 years of experience as a clinical fieldwork educator for occupational therapy students and 30.9% reporting 2-5 years, 21.8% reporting 6-10 years, and 1.8% had 0-1 year of experience. When asked the number of occupational therapy students supervised since 2014 through the 2017 year, 41.8% reported 3-4 students, 30.9% reporting 1-2 students, and 25.5% reported 5 students at the time of survey completion for the 2017 year.

Table 5 represents the professional and technical skills fieldwork educators believed crucial for an occupational therapy student to possess at the beginning of Level II Fieldwork. Participants were asked to rank their top five skills with one being the most important and five being the least important. Skills ranked number 1 were assigned a point value of 5, skills ranked number 2 were assigned a point value of 4, skills ranked number 3 were assigned a point value of 3, skills ranked number 4 were assigned a point value of 2, and skills ranked 5 were given 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.

Table 5. *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
Use evidence-based services to maintain and enhance competence	42	9
Integration and implications of theoretical knowledge	36	10
Utilizes an occupation-based practice approach	30	11

The top five professional skills identified as crucial for students to possess at the beginning of Level II Fieldwork by participants 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 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 OT process. Fieldwork educators were asked how prepared they felt students were to perform professional skills for Level II Fieldwork. Results indicated 69.1% believe students possess most necessary skills, 27.3% possess some necessary skills, 1.8% possess all necessary skills, and 0.0% possess little to no necessary skills. The same question was asked regarding student possession of technical skills at Level II Fieldwork. 47.3% of participants reported students possess some necessary skills, 43.6% possess most necessary skills, 5.5% possess little to no necessary skills, and 1.8% possess all necessary skills.

Table 6 represents the professional and technical skills fieldwork educators believe students are lacking at the beginning of Level II Fieldwork. Participants were asked to rank their top five skills with one being the most important and five being the least important. Skills ranked number 1 were assigned a point value of 5, skills ranked number 2 were assigned a point value of 4, skills ranked number 3 were assigned a point value of 3, skills ranked number 4 were assigned a point value of 2, and skills ranked 5 were given 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.

Table 6. *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 judgement 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
Use 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
Utilizes 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

The top five professional skills identified by 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 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 7 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. Fieldwork educators spend the most time with students developing documentation and intervention selection and implementation skills. The least amount of time is spent developing an understanding of the basic tenants 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, judgement). Approximately 78.2% of participants' report "some disconnect" between academia and the

clinical site setting followed by 14.5% perceive a significant disconnect, 3.6% report no disconnect, and 1.8% report a total disconnect.

Table 7. *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 tenants of occupational therapy (role of therapist, collaboration with clients)	2	8
<b>Least Time Developing</b>	<b>Point Total</b>	<b>Ranking</b>
Basic tenants 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, judgement)	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 were analyzed for qualitative data in addition to the quantitative data. The three questions asked of fieldwork educators were:

1. Using your knowledge of your clinical setting, please describe what you believe are the strengths of students in the select occupational therapy program as they start their Level II Fieldwork.

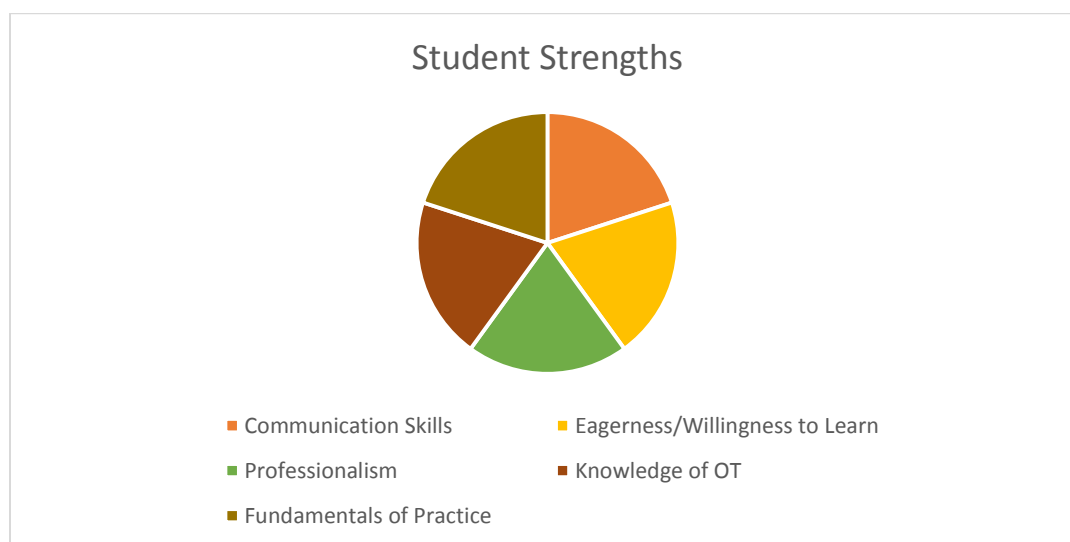
2. Using your knowledge of your clinical setting, please describe what you believe our occupational therapy program could improve to make students more successful in transitioning from the classroom to the clinic.
3. Finally, what clinical practice skills (transfers, manual muscle testing, etc.) do you identify are necessary for a student to be successful on your Level II Fieldwork in your clinical setting?

All fieldwork educators' responses were analyzed separately using a spreadsheet to identify common words and phrases within responses. Once these were listed, a chart was created for each question to identify categories of similar topics. Each word and/or phrase was put into a column dependent upon the topic. This was done until each question's responses had been sorted into different columns. Words and/or phrases were combined into similar topics and categories. The researcher used the exact wording and phrasing used by the fieldwork participants as much as possible. The columns were then analyzed to identify categories. Responses were appraised by the researcher and examined to identify themes. These 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 of occupational therapy students at the beginning of Level II Fieldwork and those identified in the qualitative data specific to an occupational therapy program. The categories were then analyzed for themes that revealed the strengths and areas of improvement fieldwork educators perceived students needed at the select program. Identified necessary skills of site settings were also determined through this process.

**Strengths.** Common strengths identified of students within the specific occupational therapy program included communication skills, willingness/eagerness to learn, basic knowledge

of occupational therapy, knowledge of the fundamentals of practice, and professionalism among study participants (See Figure 1). One participant stated “Always polite, on time, & empathetic with patients. Most are really excited and willing to learn anything and everything I try to teach/explain to them. Always know ROM norms.” Another participant reported “Professionalism including ethical compliance, interpersonal skills, empathy and basic tenants of OT.” An overarching theme of professional behaviors as a strength for students of the select program was consistent among survey participants. An overall knowledge of occupational therapy also was reported collectively among study participants.

Figure 1. *Identified Student Strengths*



**Needed Improvements.** When analyzing the qualitative responses to identify needed improvements of students for the select program, themes and categories emerged. These included application of treatment, application of the occupational therapy process, examination of curriculum content, application of medical knowledge, and problem-solving/judgment (See Table 8). Participant E10 stated “Students may benefit from more specific training in therapy techniques, especially in ADL training and in neuromuscular reeducation.” Participant E21 reported “Sometimes there is a disconnect between theory and intervention in the real world.

Spending more time allowing students to understand simple interventions and equipping them with confidence. Although an intervention they implement may feel silly or appear unsophisticated, if it's addressing the patient's deficits and they can explain the clinical reasoning behind it, it's perfect. You can use a theraband to work on dressing." Throughout the analysis of data students appeared to have the necessary knowledge to perform in the clinical setting, however, failed to demonstrate application of skills.

Table 8. *Identified Needed Improvement*

<b>Identified Theme</b>	<b>Common Skills Identified by Participants</b>	
<b>Application of Treatment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adaptive Equipment</li> <li>• Transfers</li> <li>• Treatment Ideas</li> <li>• Splint Making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hands on Skills</li> <li>• Manual Therapy</li> <li>• Treatment Grading</li> <li>• Evidence-based Intervention</li> </ul>
<b>Application of the Occupational Therapy Process</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Documentation</li> <li>• Discharge Planning</li> <li>• Plan of Care</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Application of Theory</li> <li>• Evaluation Process</li> <li>• Scope of Practice</li> </ul>
<b>Examination of Curriculum Content</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clinical Diversity</li> <li>• Orthopedics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental Health</li> <li>• Increased Training</li> </ul>
<b>Application of Medical Knowledge</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medications</li> <li>• Medical Terminology</li> <li>• Medical Equipment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lab Values</li> <li>• Comorbidities</li> <li>• Diagnosis</li> </ul>
<b>Problem-solving/Judgment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decision Making</li> <li>• Time Management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clinical Reasoning</li> <li>• Flexibility</li> </ul>

**Skills Necessary for Success.** The final open-ended question asked participants to identify the necessary skills needed for success on Level II Fieldwork in the participant's specific clinical setting. Again responses were analyzed to identify common themes and categories (See Table 9). Categories emerged included occupational therapy assessments, intervention, medical

knowledge, positioning/mobility, and traits/characteristics. Participant E10 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”. Participant #258 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”. Survey participants expect students to be both knowledgeable about an array of information and also able to apply this knowledge.

Table 9. 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> <li>• Grip/Pinch Testing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <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> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modalities</li> <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>Traits/Characteristics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clinical Reasoning</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Confidence</li> <li>• Creativity</li> <li>• Initiative</li> <li>• Judgment Skills</li> <li>• Organizational Skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problem-solving Skills</li> <li>• Receptive to Feedback</li> <li>• Safety Awareness</li> <li>• Time Management</li> <li>• Willingness to Learn</li> </ul>

### Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this capstone project was to determine if fieldwork educators perceive students as being prepared to initiate Level II Fieldwork, to identify the technical and professional skills fieldwork educators expect of occupational therapy students, to identify



technical and professional skills that students might be lacking, and better understand fieldwork educators' expectations in regards to student skills. Using a mixed-method research design, all data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and theme identification. All findings were presented within the results section of this capstone report.

Survey participants reported (70.9%) students possess most necessary skills to perform professional skills at the beginning of Level II Fieldwork. Regarding technical skills at the beginning of Level II Fieldwork, participants reported students possess some (47.3%) to most (45.5%) of necessary skills. Survey participants expect 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. Other skills were not specific to occupational therapy including knowledge of general medical care such as performing vitals and understanding lab parameters. From the data obtained during this research study, students are expected to not only have a vast knowledge base when entering into Level II Fieldwork, but also be able to apply and demonstrate this knowledge in the clinical setting.

When focusing on professional skills of students in general, not the select occupational therapy program, communication was identified as the top professional skill essential for Level II Fieldwork and also the skill most lacking. Planning, implementing, and grading intervention was identified as both the top essential and lacking technical skill of students by survey participants. When questions were asked of a specific program, communication was identified as a strength for students within that program. The technical skill of applying intervention in the clinical setting was identified as an area of needed improvement for the select program, which was consistent with the quantitative data findings. The students of the specific program in question

appeared to excel with demonstration of their professional skills compared to that of technical skills. More professional skills than technical skills were reported by survey participants when asked to identify student strengths. The results obtained during the research study will be used to strengthen program content and the enrichment of learning experiences.

### **Strengths and Limitations of the Project**

#### **Strengths**

This capstone project met study objectives, which is a strength of the study. By meeting these objectives, several other strengths were identified. These include but are not limited to increased prospect for program development, opportunity for collaboration, and adding to existing literature. The knowledge base of the capstone committee, including the faculty mentor, content expert, and student researcher, is also a strength of this study. Each of these individuals work within accredited occupational therapy programs delivering education to students. Each of these individuals has experience in the clinical setting. Familiarity and knowledge of both of these sites allowed the formation of the research project to develop and mature.

A significant strength of the research study was the opportunity for program evaluation and development within the research site setting. Program evaluation is essential in order to provide students the ultimate educational experience to develop skills required of occupational therapy professionals. By performing and completing the study, valuable information was obtained which can aid in future program revision. Both strengths and weaknesses of the selected program within the study were identified. All of the preceding information will be utilized to expand educational opportunities in the classroom allowing for increased student skill development.

The possibility of increased collaboration among academic educators and clinical educators is another strength of the research study. In order to expand and develop the professional and technical skills identified within the research study, collaboration among occupational therapy professionals is essential. Within the walls of a classroom there are limited opportunities for students to practice clinic specific skills due to the environment. Academic and clinical educators can work together as a collaborative team to further develop identified essential skills necessary for Level II Fieldwork. Bringing awareness to clinical educators of the challenges of the academic environment in teaching specific skills may also afford new opportunities for collaboration among the different educators.

Lastly, to be eligible to take the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy exam one must graduate from an accredited program requiring years of education. Hence, education within occupational therapy programs is a requirement all licensed occupational therapy professionals must experience. However, there is limited research on education within these programs. This includes the formation and delivery of scholarly content to develop skills and the educational expectations and experiences of students and educators. The completion of this research study will add to the existing literature for occupational therapy education in professional and technical skill development.

### **Limitations**

Limitations exist for all research studies. The sample size for this research study was small. The research participants were identified from a school database of clinical educators. As a result, another limitation to consider is generalizability. These educators' opinions may not represent the entire population of clinical educators within the occupational therapy profession.

Therefore, the results of the survey must be used with caution when guiding program development and revision.

A significant limitation of the study was participant interpretation of survey questions. As previously mentioned, the research study participants were identified through a select school occupational therapy program database. Two of the three qualitative questions of the survey were specific to the research site setting. All quantitative survey questions were not specific to the research setting. Therefore interpretation of questions by survey participants of perceptions of students may be based on a variety of students or select students of occupational therapy programs. Survey responses may also be limited dependent upon clinical educator experience. Each survey participant's experiences are unique to the students he or she has supervised as a clinical fieldwork educator which is a limitation of the study. To address this limitation, throughout the study frequency of responses and overarching themes were identified from participant responses.

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

Occupational therapy students are the future of occupational therapy. As a profession, we should be cognizant of the educational experiences of students along with their attainment or lack of professional and technical skill development. This capstone project offered insight into clinical fieldwork educators' expectations of student skills at the beginning of Level II Fieldwork. By unveiling these expectations, occupational therapy programs can implement program changes to better facilitate student growth and attainment of both professional and technical skills. Questions answered about student performance specific to the research site allows for the identification of needed program development and change to address specific content within the academic institution. It is important to consider that 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. Evaluating instructional and content delivery of the identified professional and technical skills within the program may lead to increased skill attainment for students and application of these skills on Level II Fieldwork.

Students are exposed to a variety of learning opportunities 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 student knowledge for these particular skills within the curriculum.

This capstone project 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 will foster better student outcomes in the future. Also by uncovering the expectations of clinical educators, academic educators can devote more time to 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 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.

### **Future Research**

The results of the capstone project provided insight into the expectations of fieldwork educators of occupational therapy students beginning Level II Fieldwork experiences. The uncovering of expectations and perceptions of clinical educators offers opportunity for future research endeavors. The opinions expressed within this study varied by many factors including years of experience and interactions with past students. A possible future research study to conduct would be to do a comparison study evaluating expectations of students based on fieldwork educator years of clinical experience working with clients. Expectations and perceptions may also vary based on years of experience as a clinical fieldwork educator and the number of students a clinical fieldwork educator has supervised. Another possibility for future research would be to compare and contrast fieldwork educators' perceptions of students from different OT programs within same site settings. Fieldwork educators' expectations may also differ depending on the site setting he or she is practicing in.

Beyond identification of specific professional and technical skills, more research is warranted to examine the utilization of teaching methods to develop student skills. As previously mentioned, there is no specific outline dictating how skills are to be taught in a classroom. Selection of teaching methods will vary dependent upon the instructor. Examining the teaching methods for certain skills may provide valuable insight on the best teaching methods to utilize in the classroom. This type of research may also be performed to address skill development of students while in the clinical setting. A final area of possible research interest would be to assess student perception of skill development prior to and during Level II Fieldwork. Uncovering students' perception of skill development and attainment would provide valuable insight to educators from a learner's perspective.

## Summary

The purpose of this capstone project was to explore expectations of clinical fieldwork educators for occupational therapy students' professional and technical skills at the beginning of Level II Fieldwork. Data was collected through a survey, which was composed of closed and open-ended questions. Questions focused on exploring perceptions of skills fieldwork educators felt essential and lacking of students beginning Level II Fieldwork. Skills fieldwork educators spend the most and least time developing for students were also uncovered through completion of the survey. Finally, the strengths and areas of improvement of student performance were identified for a specific occupational therapy program.

The results of this capstone project offer implications for future practice and education. Data provided insight into the need for academic and clinical site settings to work together as a partnership as "some" disconnect between these two settings was perceived by the research participants. By increasing collaboration between these two settings, students may benefit in their overall learning experiences. Discovering the student skills deemed necessary for clinical practice by fieldwork educators will allow academic educators the opportunity to reevaluate program design and content to ensure reinforcement of these skills. Program evaluation and revision is essential for a program to grow and prosper. Identifying the strengths and areas of improvement of student performance through the exploration of fieldwork educators' perceptions of their specific students offers a wealth of knowledge to better future students learning experiences.

This capstone projects offers the opportunity for future research that is beneficial to occupational therapy education. Researching specific teaching methods for specific skill development would be useful to occupational therapy academic educators. Also, a comparison study exploring perceptions of fieldwork educators based on years of experience of students

could be explored to see if the expectations of student performance change. This research study met the objectives it aimed to explore. The results obtained will be useful to all educators involved with the education process of students within the profession of occupational therapy whether in the academic or clinical setting.



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## Appendix A

### Fieldwork Educator Survey

1. What is your primary area of practice within 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 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  
 Select interventions for managing a client- centered plan throughout the OT process  
 Use evidence-based services to maintain and enhance competence  
 Utilizes 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  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Utilizes 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 tenants 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 within 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 tenants 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. Healthcare is quickly changing and evolving. Based on student performance, do you perceive a disconnect between the academic setting and the clinical practice setting within the occupational therapy profession?

\_\_\_\_\_ No disconnect

\_\_\_\_\_ Some disconnect

\_\_\_\_\_ A significant disconnect

\_\_\_\_\_ A total disconnect

13. Using your knowledge of your clinical setting, please describe what you believe are the strengths of students in the occupational therapy program at the University of Southern Indiana as they start their level II fieldwork.

14. Using your knowledge of your clinical setting, please describe what you believe our occupational therapy program at the University of Southern Indiana could improve to make students more successful in transitioning from the classroom to the clinic.

15. 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?

Thank you for completing this survey!

## Appendix B



### **Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

Exploring Clinical Fieldwork Educators Perceptions and Expectations of Student Skills

#### **Why am I being asked to participate in this research?**

You are being invited to take part in a research study about technical and professional skills of level II fieldwork students. You are being invited to participate in this study because you have served or will serve as a fieldwork educator for the University of Southern Indiana. If you take part in this study, you will be one of about 50 people to do so.

#### **Who is doing the study?**

The person in charge of this study is Jessica Mason, MSOTR/L who is an instructor at the University of Southern Indiana. She also practices occupational therapy at an inpatient rehabilitation hospital. This study is part of her Occupational Therapy Doctoral Program at Eastern Kentucky University. She is being guided in this research by Cindy Hayden, DHEd, OTR/L, CHT. There may be other people on the research team assisting at different times during the study as part of the research team providing feedback to Jessica on the research process.

#### **What is the purpose of the study?**

The results of this study will allow academic educators to learn what clinical educators consider the most crucial professional and technical skills students should possess prior to the start of level II fieldwork along with the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education standards.

By doing this study, we hope to:

1. Identify technical and professional occupational therapy skills most valued by fieldwork educators of students at the beginning of level II fieldwork experiences.
2. Determine if fieldwork educators currently perceive students as adequately prepared to begin level II fieldwork experiences.
3. Identify the technical and professional skills fieldwork educators perceive students to be lacking at the beginning of level II fieldwork experiences.
4. Better understand fieldwork educator expectations of students in order to make appropriate changes within an academic program to further enhance student skills within the profession of occupational therapy.

#### **Where is the study going to take place and how long will it last?**

This research will be conducted online or by mail, whichever method you prefer beginning February 2017 through December 2017. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is 10-15 minutes.

### **What will I be asked to do?**

As a participant of this research study you will be asked to complete a short survey. This survey will occur one time during the duration of the study. The survey consists of ranking of skills and short responses. These skills are specific to occupational therapy student performance on level II fieldwork.

### **Are there reasons why I should not take part in this study?**

You should not participate in this study if you have not served or will not serve as a level two clinical fieldwork educator.

### **What are the possible risks and discomforts?**

The survey will pose no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life or if you do not complete the survey.

### **Will I benefit from taking part in this study?**

The benefit from participating in this research is the knowledge that you are contributing to the scholarship of teaching and learning for the occupational therapy profession.

### **Do I have to take part in this study?**

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer.

### **If I don't take part in this study, are there other choices?**

If you do not want to be in the study, there are no other choices except to not take part in the study.

### **What will it cost me to participate?**

There are no costs associated with taking part in this study.

### **Will I receive any payment or rewards for taking part in the study?**

You will not receive any payment or reward for taking part in this study.

### **Who will see the information I give?**

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When the study is written all information will be deidentified.

This study is anonymous. That means that no one, not even members of the research team, will know that the information you give came from you.

However, there are some circumstances in which we may have to show information to other people. For example, the law may require us to show your information to a court. Also, we may be required to show information that identifies you to people who need to be sure we have

done the research correctly; these people would be the chair of the doctoral committee and necessary members at the Eastern Kentucky University or the University of Southern Indiana.

**What if I have questions?**

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the investigator, Jessica Mason at 812-461-5420. If you have any questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the staff in the Division of Sponsored Programs at Eastern Kentucky University at 859-622-3636. A copy of this consent will be provided for you.

**What else do I need to know?**

Consent to complete this research study was also obtained at the University of Southern Indiana where Jessica Mason is employed in their Occupational Therapy Program.

*I have thoroughly read this document, understand its contents, have been given an opportunity to have my questions answered, and by completing this survey I agree to participate in this research study.*