Greetings partners and friends of the KSU OTA program!

I hope this newsletter finds you well this spring season. It has been several years since we published a newsletter with program updates and features; and we are so happy to have this opportunity to share with you.

The program has a lot of initiatives and news. First, effective earlier this year, the OTA programs at KSU Ashtabula and East Liverpool have combined from two separately accredited programs to now one program. This change brings new and exciting opportunities for faculty, students and others to work together, sharing ideas and resources to strengthen the program.

In this new model and following accreditation standards, we have one program director (Julie Mirabell), one academic fieldwork coordinator (Nina Sullivan) who is supported and assisted by faculty member Lori Armstrong, and Kathy Swoboda serves as the site coordinator for the East Liverpool campus cohort. This new program model allows students more flexibility in scheduling and access to more faculty with diverse backgrounds and experiences.

Next, we are thrilled to share news of the OTA program’s inclusion in a $1.2 million grant from the Ohio Department of Education for Choose Ohio First scholarships. This funding will be shared among nine associate degree programs with KSU’s College of Applied and Technical Studies. Beginning this fall, these scholarships will substantially assist students throughout their two years in the program.

Please read on to hear from program faculty and alumni and catch up on upcoming events! Check our website for more information:

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Faculty Spotlight
Heather Rosser

“I am excited and honored to become a part of the future OTA’s.”

Heather is a 2010 graduate from the OTA Program at Kent State University at East Liverpool. Heather holds a BS of Business Administration from Youngstown State University graduating in 1998.

Heather began her career as a Human Resource Assistant and through this position was introduced to the world of Occupational Therapy. Her passion for the field inspired her to return to school to become an Occupational Therapy Assistant.

Heather began her career in 2010 working in pediatrics, and with children with developmental disabilities and autism spectrum disorders (ASDs). Heather has experience in multiple settings to include outpatient, home health, skilled nursing facilities and schools.

This past fall Heather returned to the East Liverpool OTA program as an adjunct faculty member. Heather reports, “I am excited and honored to become a part of the future OTA’s. My background of providing care to individuals in the special needs’ population across a lifespan and with individuals in underserved communities has given me years of experience that I anticipate will benefit the students in our program.

My aspiration as a new Adjunct Facilitator for the OTA program is to inspire students to grow to become confident and compassionate practitioners. I believe in challenging students to reach their goals through creativity and teamwork by teaching them the skills to become problem solving, critical thinking, advocates for the Occupational Therapy field.

My hope is that with my commitment to being a lifelong learner, I will continue to grow, master, and improve my teaching skills and encourage my students to never set limits.”
Prior to graduating and entering the therapy world, I worked as a practice manager for a dental office for over 10 years. Upon graduation, I returned full time to Austinburg Rehabilitation Center as a COTA, after having had a wonderful clinical experience at the facility. After about a year, I was fortunate enough to transition into the facility rehab director position. I was able to experience an “in house” setting, as well as working with a few contract companies during my time at Austinburg. Currently, I am loving my role as Area Manager for Broad River Rehab. I currently oversee 11 buildings, including my home base Austinburg!

Since 2016, I have been an active member of the Ashtabula KSU Occupational Therapy Advisory Board. This experience has given me opportunities to engage in great discussions that help to shape the future of the program. In my experiences, I have been able to perform mock interviews for students and have had the pleasure of speaking during a few OTA/PTA courses. Connecting with the OTA students has been very fun! Being a clinical instructor throughout the years has been a rewarding experience as well!

My husband and I have been together for over 20 years, and we have two beautiful teenage daughters that keep us very busy! Being their mom has been the most incredible experience! I was born and raised in Geneva and I am lucky to be surrounded by my immediate family and best friends!

A leadership role requires constant growth. Throughout my years of experience, I have learned some key components in being successful, through self-discovery. My goal is to always make sure that my team feels that I will celebrate their successes, stand beside them during their challenges and ensure they know that they truly matter. I strive to be a leader, that creates other leaders. I consider this an opportunity to serve others and I am truly grateful for the teams that I get to be a part of! I have worked with a variety of Occupational and Physical therapists, each one with their own areas of expertise! I am constantly learning new things!

Working as a therapist in a long-term setting started off fun. Every day, planning fun and creative things to do with my patients. Shortly after, is when I realized that it is so much more! We are the lucky ones that get to take your loved one and be there during the most vulnerable part of their lives. Cheering on their accomplishments and praying over their weaknesses. Being a COTA gives us the chance to challenge ourselves to understand what motivates someone, and to break through any barriers for the best possible outcome. But... we still don't forget to turn up the music and have a lot of fun!
Fieldwork is an especially important part of the educational program and mandated by Kent State for our degree and graduation, our accreditation council [ACOTE], and to sit for the NBCOT exam. Recently, we made some changes to the fieldwork portion of our program to provide a greater variety of experiences for our students.

The Level II fieldwork experiences have not changed, still occurring in the last semester of the program after all didactic courses are completed and just before graduation. ACOTE requires 16 weeks of full-time fieldwork, which our students complete with two (2) experiences of 8 weeks each. After some reflection and discussion, we have changed the Level I fieldwork experiences from 2 [one psychosocial health and one physical health] to 3 fieldwork experiences with the addition a Level I in pediatrics. Each of these experiences is 40-hours in length of time to allow the student to get some valuable hands-on experience in that setting. The current cohort of students were the first to experience a pediatric Level I and were excited to experience 40 hours in a pediatric setting. Several students found the pediatric fieldwork important to helping them determine their future in this setting, either solidifying their interest in working with kids, or realizing it is not what they expected. Committing to something new and making that decision in a short-term 40-hour experience is less stressful than in an 8-week Level II fieldwork.

The first pediatric Level I rotation at the East Liverpool campus occurred in October 2023. OTA students were oriented to a local daycare/school providing daily care and services for children 6 weeks – 12 years old in infant through school-age classrooms. The OTA students rotated through all ages and classrooms with 1-2 OTA students to each class for full days from drop off to pick up. OTA students were responsible for immersing themselves in play, feeding/eating, rest, games, and learning. They were also exposed to typical child issues like coughs, colds, respiratory illness, pink eye, behaviors, and crying to name a few. The OTA students completed the fieldwork rotation with a new respect for those who work with children and an understanding of what it is like to provide services to a wide range of ages and challenges. At the end of their time at the center, the Kent State students loved the pediatric population and listed this setting as a choice option for one of the level II experiences.

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Celebrate Occupational Therapy Month