



Alumni News

Hello, alumni! The Fall 2023 semester has kicked off in the Department of Occupational Therapy in the College of Allied Health Sciences at Augusta University! In May, we welcomed 41 new students to campus. Our first-year students have started their fall semester coursework, and second-year students are wrapping up their mini semester and will be leaving for Level II Fieldwork in mid-September.

In February, the Department of Occupational Therapy hosted visiting scholar Roger Ideishi, JD, OT/L, FAOTA, in partnership with the Faculty Inclusive Excellence Initiative's Visiting Scholars Program. Dr. Ideishi is a Professor of Health, Human Function, and Rehabilitation Services at George Washington University and an expert in the area of accessibility. He spent the week engaging with students, faculty, and the community on creating accessible and inclusive environments within cultural arts, the community, and policy.

In the spring we welcomed new faculty member and alumna Beth Miller Willson, MHS, OTR/L. Beth is a 2010 graduate of the OT program, and we are thrilled to welcome her to the team.

In April, many faculty and students attended the AOTA Inspire National Conference in Kansas City. The following were accepted and presented at conference:

- *Effective OT Interventions to Promote Home Safety with Older Adults:* Taylor Brinkley, Cheyenne Harvey, Ashtin Johnson, Taylor Penney, Tanner Kate Sauls, and Ryan Carrick
- *Impact of Participation in an Adaptive Dance Program:* Caroline Brown, Emmy Conrad, Alexis Gordon, Anna Kate Lanier, Janelle Stewart, Alexis Suggs, Pamalyn Kearney, and Mallory Rosche
- *The Impact of COVID-19 on Childhood Occupation:* Ellie Benton, Brooke Trammell, Jaya Pitts, Hope Williams, Allison Peterka, Teal Benevides, Sharon Cospier
- *A Scoping Review: How is driving impacted among persons with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) and other neurodegenerative diseases?* : Amanda Valentini, Hannah McCoy, Carly Knight, and Stephanie Johnson
- *Factors That Influence Adherence with Self-Care Management of Chronic Lymphedema:* Caroline Corso, Jamie Freeman, Mia Marrow, Melinda Coody, Montana Moreno, Alexis Perkins, and Patricia Watford
- *Curricular and Instructional Aspects of Gross Anatomy Education for Graduate OT Students: A Systematic Review:* Bryson Dains, Sarah Eichenberger, Carol Kadamani, Anna Pethel, and Crystal Robinson

Congratulations to the Occupational Therapy Class of 2023, who graduated in May. Departmental Award recipients included the: Nancy D. Prendergast Award - Amanda Valentini; Dr. Ricardo C. Carrasco Award for Second Career Occupational Therapy Students - Mia Marrow; Occupational Therapy Faculty Award - Montana Moreno and Tanner Kate Sauls; Dr. Kathy P. Bradley Award - Brooke Trammell; and Dr. Michael K. Iwama Award - Victor Piedro.



Congratulations to Amanda Valentini who was the recipient of the prestigious John F. Beard Award for Compassionate Care. This award and scholarship is given annually to a graduating College of Allied Health Sciences, Medical College of Georgia, College of Nursing, or Graduate School student at Augusta University who exemplifies caring and compassion in health care.



In July, the Department of OT piloted Camp Discovery, a free week-long day camp for women who have been diagnosed with cancer. This camp allowed women the opportunity to engage in meaningful activities, establish social support networks with other individuals diagnosed with cancer, and provided information about resources available within the community. This year, 13 women participated, with three occupational therapy faculty and five occupational therapy students facilitating the program. Activities included yoga, ukulele, bow-making/gift-wrapping, floral arranging, and more. Camp Discovery was originally founded in Philadelphia by two occupational therapists: Rochelle Mendonca, PhD, OTR/L, and Colleen Maher OTD, OTR/L, CHT. We are excited to continue this camp here within Augusta University OT after a successful first-year experience. If you would like to be involved in the future or have engaging ideas to share, please email [Patty Watford](mailto:pwatford@augusta.edu) pwatford@augusta.edu.

In July, faculty member Ryan Carrick, PhD, MHS, OTR/L, along with 13 second-year students, volunteered at the 18th Annual Costa Layman Worksite Health Fair and Rural Outreach Program in Trenton, South Carolina. This annual event provides the local agricultural workforce, which is primarily Hispanic, with culturally and linguistically congruent access to basic health care screenings. “Occupational Therapy shined with a spotlight, as there was a line of participants waiting to hear and see how they can prevent work-related injuries, improve endurance throughout the workday and work smarter while respecting their bodies,” said Dr. Carrick. “The health fair was a great opportunity to support COTAD efforts and to serve the rural community. Imagine as a student, already having the experience of working through a translator, being onsite in a non-traditional format, and making an immediate impact on another's occupational performance and satisfaction.”

Faculty member Patricia Watford, OTD, MS, OTR/L, recently served as an editor for the textbook Occupational Therapy With Older Adults: Strategies for the OTA, Fifth Edition. The textbook was published and printed in early 2023. Other faculty members who contributed to chapter content and editing include Sharon Cosper, Meghan Hall, Stephanie Johnson, Pamalyn Kearney, Mallory Rosche, and Laurie Vera. Twelve students from the class of 2022 also contributed to this text.

The OT Department has seen significant growth in both interprofessional and intraprofessional efforts over the past few years. OT students completed an interprofessional escape room with PT, dietary, PA, and MD students in February. They also completed an intraprofessional geriatric activity with the Augusta Technical College OTA program over the summer.



Congratulations to Bryant Alonso, Class of 2016, who was recognized by the Augusta University College of Allied Health Sciences with the 2023 Outstanding Clinical Educator Award, and to Kimberlee Beall Bugher, Class of 2016, for receiving the 2023 OT Department Outstanding Alumni Award. We are proud of your accomplishments and contribution to the profession.

L: Bryant Alonso with Level II student Caroline Brown, Class of 2023
R: Kimberlee Bugher with Pam Kearney

Alumni Spotlight

Krisi Tolbert Probert, OTD, OTR/L, CHT, MCG Class of 1995, is now the EVP of Operations Excellence at Upstream. While exploring the field of OT as a clinician, she has also spent time traveling to teach continuing education and obtaining an OTD.

As our profession continues to evolve and grow, Dr. Probert is aware that just as our patients value independence, therapists do as well. "I am introducing a new scheduling model that gives significant autonomy to our therapists. It will improve how our employees do their jobs, and greatly enhance the patient experience."

She hopes to provide better scheduling flexibility to allow for a better work-life balance for therapists and their families, resulting in a higher quality of care and productivity.



Georgia Occupational Therapy Association Updates

While Governor Kemp did not act on the following, the Senate and House passed the following and GOTA will work towards these again in the next legislative session:

1. Secured increased rate reimbursements for therapy services in CIS Medicaid Program with collaboration from the Trialliance.
2. Secured \$5.06 million in FY 2024 budget to reimburse OTA and PTA services in the Georgia CIS Medicaid program (LIM, ABD, and Peachcare portions of Medicaid).
3. Introduced HB 809 to allow OTPs to perform DN under certain criteria. This bill will be on the docket for the 2024 legislative session.

Have exciting news to share? Want to host a fieldwork student? Email us at otalumni@augusta.edu!



AUGUSTA UNIVERSITY

**COLLEGE OF ALLIED
HEALTH SCIENCES**

Department of Occupational Therapy