



Occupational Therapy\*

## **-OTD PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY-**

### **PHILOSOPHY OF THE PROFESSION**

The Doctor of Occupational Therapy Program operates on the fundamental principle, consistent with the Profession's Philosophical Base, that humans are active beings whose development, health, and well-being are influenced by participation in occupation across the lifespan (AOTA, 2017). Through a top-down approach, it is believed that all humans have an innate need and right to explore their environment and engage in occupation as a means to create meaning and establish foundational beliefs through individualized mind-body-spirit experiences. In turn, the goal of meaningful occupational participation is valued as a determinant of health. Participation in occupation sets the interdependent and transactional relationship of person, occupation, and environment into motion (Law, et al., 1996). The Program's philosophy encompasses the distinct value of occupation as the profession's unique modality, providing meaning, remediating illness, and promoting health for individuals, communities, and populations. The Program acknowledges and embodies how the person's assumed intrinsic qualities and culture influence occupation, just as the quality of a person's occupational performance and the context in which the occupation is performed influence further development of the intrinsic self.

### **PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATION IN SERVANT LEADERSHIP**

Upholding the University's and Program's Mission to serve, the principles of servant leadership are at the philosophical core of the Program. "Occupational therapy is based on principles of service and altruism" (Barker-Dunbar, 2015). By embracing the principles of servant leadership, the Program supports the development of leaders who embody the desire to serve others, showing compassion, integrity, and ethical practice. Educators model these tenets to create an organizational culture where learners feel included and valued. Instructors engage with their students using effective communication to develop positive relationships and empower them to think critically to identify and solve problems using evidence (Wheeler, 2012). Experiencing this culture, students are energized to enter the profession, demonstrating these behaviors, placing others' needs before their own, and serving altruistically through occupation-centered, evidence-informed practice. They use the values of servant leadership to build rapport with clients, identify their strengths, and empower them to achieve health and wellness through participation in occupation.

### **FUNDAMENTAL BELIEF OF HOW HUMANS LEARN**

With the fundamental belief that humans are occupational-beings that learn by doing, the Program philosophically aligns with the integrative approach of the Transformative Learning Theory. It is believed that learning is an active, continuous process of constructing new meaning on the foundation of existing knowledge and experiences. Assuming a learner-centered approach, students are viewed as occupational beings who dynamically interact with the teaching-learning process in a safe and inclusive environment (AOTA, 2018). Upholding a culture that promotes social equity and occupational justice, educators use Transformative Learning Theory to aid in the co-construction of knowledge by guiding learners' awareness and reflective analysis of their attitudes, beliefs, judgments, and occupational behaviors; coordinating interactive learning opportunities to introduce learners to new knowledge domains; and helping learners use their personal experiences to make connections across

\*Briar Cliff University's Doctor of Occupational Therapy Program has applied for accreditation by the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE) of the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA), located at 6116 Executive Boulevard, Suite 200, North Bethesda, MD 20852-4929. ACOTE's telephone number c/o AOTA is (301) 652-AOTA and its web address is [www.acoteonline.org](http://www.acoteonline.org).

those multiple domains for the creation of new meaning and thought (Mezirow, 1991; Hooper, Molineux, & Wood, 2020).

Across this type of learning, students experience professional formation through an empowered sense of self with improved confidence (Taylor, 1997). They are motivated to act on their new assumptions through hands-on, experiential learning opportunities in authentic environments that further support their transformation and construction of new knowledge for professional practice. Improved self-awareness frees individuals from their constraining belief systems and enhances their ability to form intentional relationships with others resulting in them becoming more inclusive, client-centered professionals.

As learners progress through the program, they continue to professionally transform using their newly constructed knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop a frame of reference that reflects the Profession's values, theories, and ethics (AOTA, 2018). Application of their critical thinking supports their evidence-informed practice as they examine and question their own assumptions, consciously analyze information, research evidence to justify the change, and clinically reason to effectively implement best practices through interprofessional, traditional, and community-engaged experiences (Kuennen, 2015). Learning through these philosophies supports the achievement of professional competencies and fosters autonomous, lifelong learning.

## References

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