April, 2008

Teaching Research: A Research/Thesis Sequence of Entry-Level Master’s Occupational Therapy Students

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/ruth_ramsey/39/
Teaching Research: A Research/Thesis Sequence for Entry-Level Masters’ OT Students

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AOTA Annual Conference
Long Beach, CA
April 10, 2008
Dominican University of California
Dominican University of CA

- Comprehensive master’s university
- Located in a large metropolitan area
- 2100 students, undergraduate and graduate
- Strong programs in nursing, business, psychology
- Core liberal arts and humanities emphasized
OT at Dominican

- Blended BS/MS program
- Entry-level MS track
- Six-semester program
- 85 majors, 20-30/cohort
- Three full time faculty
- Curricular themes include community, culture, & client-centered practice
- Focus on preparing graduates for excellence in clinical practice, management, and leadership
ACOTE Standards: B.8.0

• “Application of research, includes the ability to read and understand current research that affects practice and the provision of occupational therapy services.”
Articulate the importance of research

Research, find, evaluate and use evidence.

Understand qualitative and quantitative research methods and statistical analysis

Design a research proposal, including literature review, research question, sample, design, measurement, and analysis

Implement one or more aspects of research methodology
Teaching Research

• Issues
  ♦ Research-practice gap (Kielhofner, 2005; Stern, 2000)
  ♦ Few published models for teaching research
  ♦ Negative student perceptions about research
  ♦ Lack of literature and materials on writing the master’s thesis
  ♦ Faculty overload and time crunch
One Model: Scholarship of Practice

- UIC model (Hammel et al., 2001; Kielhofner, 2005)
- Collaborative community of scholars
- All members research-active
- Researchers and clinicians inform one another
- Release time for research
- Grant-funded activities
Scholarship of Practice (cont.)

- Large, research one institution
- Long history of OT scholarship
- Multiple levels of entry-level and post-professional graduate education
- NIH funding
• BUT…..

- Other models needed for smaller programs, with limited time and resources (Crist et al., 2005)
- Challenge to meet ACOTE Standards, prepare students to understand and use research in practice
Alternative Model

● Community-Based Research
   • “Partnering with the community to engage in collaborative research, for the purpose of solving problems or effecting change”
     - (Strand, Marullo, Cutforth, Stoecker, & Donohoe, 2003).
Community-Based Research can...

- Strengthen existing partnerships, develop new ones
- Identify ongoing research and project threads, build on previous work done by students and faculty
- Make a positive contribution to the health and well-being of the community
Teaching Research at DUC: Challenges

- Student-directed thesis process
- Developing community partnerships
- BS to MS and entry-level master’s students
- Timing of fieldwork
- Lack of release time for faculty research
- Student time constraints
- Off-sequence students
Teaching Research at DUC: Opportunities

- Student-directed thesis process: positive marketing strategy
- Create and build community partnerships
- Integration of research throughout the curriculum
- Faculty-developed research studies
Teaching Research at DUC: Adaptive Response

• Five-course research/thesis sequence
  ➤ OT 5105: Research in the Health Professions
    ▪ three units, graded
  ➤ OT 5106: Advanced Theory and Research
    ▪ three units, graded
  ➤ OT 5110: Thesis Proposal
    ▪ three units, graded
  ➤ OT 5111: Thesis Completion
    ▪ two units, P/F
  ➤ OT 5112: Thesis Presentation
    ▪ one unit, P/F
OT 5105: Research in the Health Professions

- Second semester in OT program
- Learn to find, read, critique, and apply research literature to clinical problems
- Learn the process of designing research, collecting and analyzing data, and scholarly writing.
- **Outcome**: Class research project
OT 5015: Pedagogical Strategies

- Database search strategies instruction from library staff
- Journal clubs
- Article critique papers
- In-class research project
- Quizzes, final examination
OT 5106: Advanced Theory & Research

- Develop research or clinical problem
- In-depth exploration of selected theories
- In-depth exploration of selected research methodologies

Outcome: Preliminary literature review and theoretical framework for use in thesis
OT 5106: Pedagogical Strategies

- Cross-class modeling
- Peer feedback
- Multiple drafts
- Potential thesis partners
- Opportunity for faculty to identify students who may need more support through the process
OT 5110: Thesis Proposal

- Evidence-based research or project thesis
- Thesis advisor and second reader
- Group and individual meetings
- Topic approved at beginning of 4th semester
- Outcomes: Full thesis proposal, IRB approval for research projects, presentation of proposal to peers in PowerPoint format
OT 5110: Pedagogical Strategies

- “Best fit” projects for students and faculty
- Encourage team theses
- Small class sections
- Partnerships with community agencies for research and projects
- Thesis feedback/support groups
- Second readers as content experts—often adjunct faculty
OT 5111: Thesis Completion

- Complete data collection/project implementation
- Submit final written thesis
- Oral presentation to Dominican community
- Largely independent study
- Completed final semester in the program after first Level II fieldwork

*Outcome: Completed thesis*
OT 5112: Thesis Presentation

- Submission of thesis to library
- Complete poster and display at Dominican academic showcase
- Submit to conference or journal for presentation or publication
- Spring 2008: first time: work in progress
- **Outcome:** Thesis presented to professional community
Lessons Learned

- Focus on research skills and EBP throughout the curriculum
- Develop campus resources for graduate scholarship
- Develop community partnerships for research and project-based theses
- Develop working relationship with IRB
- Thesis coordinator position created
Lessons Learned, cont.

- Encourage students to work in pairs or teams
- Encourage faculty to develop research, involve students
- Secure research and project sites early
- Provide additional structure, faculty direction for students who need it.
Lessons Learned, cont.

• Create administrative structure for students who need more time to complete the process.
• Separate thesis presentation from completion.
• Focus on process, not product
• Reward excellence.
Community Sites and Partners Examples

- Marin County Division on Aging
- In-Home Support Services Agency
- Swords to Ploughshares
- Occupational Therapy Training Program
- Hospital NICU unit
- Local early intervention programs
- Summer Handwriting Camp
Examples of in-class group research projects

• Holiday occupations: An exploration of participation

• Halloween Study

• Activity patterns and occupational balance: The transition to college
Sample Master’s Thesis Titles

• Community partnerships
  ✷ Occupational performance related to community living: A pilot study of the time spent providing assistance for the in-home supportive tasks of bathing/grooming, dressing, and meal preparation
  ✷ Driving adaptations of older drivers in Marin County
  ✷ Enhancing the therapeutic value of equine assisted activities to promote maximum occupational performance
Sample Master’s Thesis Titles

- Qualitative studies of caregiver experience
  - An investigation of the impact of caring for a child with a feeding dysfunction on parental occupations
  - Including children with autism in family activities: A qualitative study
  - Quality of life issues in adult caregivers of persons with terminal cancer
  - Caregiver strategies for feeding and nutrition for people with dementia
Sample Master’s Thesis Titles

- Culture and Occupation
  - Supporting the cultural context of occupation: A Spanish language guide to sensory integration for families
  - Perceived occupations of older adults living in the community: A comparison of persons in single and multi-generational households
References

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Thank You!

• Questions, comments?