

Examples From Educators of Coursework To Promote Leadership

The following are adapted examples of courses, assignments, and learning activities that are used in some occupational therapy assistant (OTA) programs to promote leadership, advocacy, and volunteerism. They have been shared by the following OTA programs:

- Green River Community College
- Florida Hospital College of Health Sciences
- LincolnLand Community College
- Pueblo Community College
- Durham Technical Community College

COURSE EXAMPLE

Professional Advocacy Experience

Course Description: Students will become acquainted with occupational therapy practitioners' responsibilities in professional activities and for promotion of occupational therapy (OT) to other professionals, consumers, third-party payers, and the public.

Assigned Texts and Related Course Materials

AOTA Promotional Material

AOTA *OT Practice* Magazines

Kasar, J., & Clark, E. N. (2000). *Developing professional behaviors*. Thorofare, NJ: Slack.

Sladyk, K., & Ryan, S. (Eds.). (2005). *Ryan's occupational therapy assistant: Principles, practice issues, and techniques* (4th ed.). Thorofare, NJ: Slack.

Course Learning Outcomes

Student will:

- Learn to clearly and accurately articulate the benefits of occupational therapy services;
- Develop an appreciation for the professional and personal value of involvement in health care associations and organizations;
- Develop an awareness of types of promotional strategies; and
- Become knowledgeable of the role that occupational therapy practitioners play in influencing health care legislation.

Assignment

Professional Advocacy Experience Project

The purpose of this project is to give you experience in promoting the occupational therapy profession. Below is a list of project ideas. You may choose from the list or choose your own original project.

- Plan some type of SOTA activity for the quarter, such as:
 - Organize work parties to complete GRCC OTA Program Scrapbooks, which are used to promote the program.
 - Organize a fundraising project for SOTA.
 - Plan and implement some type of service project, which would promote OT and involve the SOTA club members.

- Arrange some type of workshop or guest speaker on a topic of interest. The activity would be sponsored by SOTA and open to all interested GRCC students.
- Prepare a talk on the value of OT and make a presentation to a local community service organization, such as Kiwanis, Rotary Club, senior centers, and so forth. Make a minimum half-hour talk, using visual aids such as adaptive equipment.
- Make arrangements to become involved in a community service activity, such as Habitat for Humanity, and use the opportunity to promote the unique role that OT can play in areas such as home modification and installation of assistive devices for seniors or individuals with disabilities.
- Contact GRCC Women's Programs, International Programs, Counseling, or Health Services to participate in any upcoming activities where you would have the opportunity to highlight the occupational therapy profession. This would exclude the upcoming Health Fair in which the class will participate.
- Talk with your Level I fieldwork supervisor(s) or other instructor(s) for ideas about possible ways in which you can serve the community while educating others about the value of OT.
- Complete a written paper to include the following:
 - Outline of timeline of project planning steps and exact amount of time spent on project; project must be a minimum of 4–5 hours.
 - Detailed description of actual project, including audience, day, time, place, what happened, copies of speech, presentation outlines, posters, handouts, brochures used, and so forth.
 - Critique of project—what went well, what improvements could have been made, difficulties encountered.
 - Reference page in APA format, including names and positions of key people you spoke or worked with leading up to project.

A presentation of the project will be made to the class, including a description/demonstration of what you did, problems encountered, positive results, examples of visual aids used, and so forth.

EXAMPLES OF LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Goal: Plan or participate in at least one professional activity.

Learning activity: To meet this objective, the class is divided into working groups of 6–8 students, and they select a professional activity. In the past, the activity chosen has been the Clinical Council meeting offered by the OTA Program primarily for our fieldwork supervisors, though others attend as well. Students take on roles and responsibilities in the group as they choose the topic and speakers, plan the meal and all other refreshments, develop promotional and informational materials, communicate with the invited clinicians, solicit donations from the community to support the event, and host and staff the event. This is the primary assignment focused on developing leadership skills in our program. The instructor for the course serves as an advisor and reviews all work that the group completes, but does not lead or direct the group except as needed to avoid wasted effort.

Goal: Plan or participate in at least one community-oriented activity.

Learning activity: To meet this objective, student groups choose at least one community activity in which to participate. They work together to decide on a project and complete all associated tasks. Past project examples include building a ramp for a person who lived in a low-income area near the college, creating an accessible sensory garden at a local school, running a family fun day at a local shelter, and hosting a carnival at the Ronald McDonald House. The instructor for the course serves as an advisor and reviews all work that the group completes, but does not lead or direct the group except as needed to avoid wasted effort.

Goal: Demonstrate professionalism.

Goal: Participate in professional and community services in the planning and implementation of an education activity (in-service).

Learning activity: To meet this objective, each student identifies a community setting (senior center, community center, day care center, etc.) and communicates with the staff of that location to develop an in-service on a topic that the facility, or its users, would benefit from. The student does the needed research, writing, and development of interactive and multisensory instruction for the in-service, schedules a date, creates a flyer or announcement for the targeted audience, develops an evaluation form, and presents the in-service.

Goal: Complete an advocacy project.

Learning activity: Students choose an advocacy project and complete it within the semester when they take this course. Examples from the past include participating in AOTA's Capitol Hill Day (this project would include fundraising to finance their trip, developing some materials to share with our legislators, scheduling appointments with legislators or their staff) and running a backpack awareness activity at a local school.

OTHER IDEAS

- Require students to join the state and/or national organization to instill the value of membership, potential for giving back to the profession, and opportunities for mentorship.

- Have students participate in legislative activities and complete a legislative analysis to help them feel connected to the legislative process. Check to see if the lobbyist for the state association at the state capitol can assist in teaching. Writing letters to a legislator and making a mock proposal can be useful and gives the students the “tools” they need to continue advocacy when they graduate.
- Have a program objective that all Level I fieldwork is completed at agencies that utilize volunteers as their main source of help. This helps students see the value of volunteering and the value of the skills and knowledge they are developing in the program and how to put them to use after graduation. The agencies really recognize our program and the college as an institution that gives back to the community.
- A unique model of encouraging students to value professional membership along with mentoring opportunities is working with the state organization in a program called “pay it forward,” where members of the state association have the opportunity to pay not only for their membership, but for a student’s membership as well. The hope is that the student will contact this person to thank him or her, and that would turn into a professional, mentoring relationship. This can get the student involved at a state level, and demonstrate how others mentor within our profession. The student is then asked to return this favor to a new student after he or she graduates and is out in the field.
- In the Student OTA club, each second-year student is teamed with a first-year student and acts as a mentor throughout the program. Second-year students who excel in certain classes are invited to return as lab assistants with the new students.
- OTA students are asked to lead high school tours to explain the profession, and they participate in nursing education (i.e., demonstrating CVA transfers, and explaining vision, perception, and cognition).