



A Model Mentorship Program for Prospective Occupational Therapy Students: Design and Benefits

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ABSTRACT

A mentorship program has been developed through the collaborative efforts of the University of Washington occupational therapy faculty and community occupational therapists for the purposes of enhancing opportunities for positive pre-service experiences and increasing the pool of highly qualified applicants to occupational therapy schools. Hallmarks of the model program include (1) opportunities for individuals interested in occupational therapy to enter into mentorship relationships with clinicians working in community settings who are recognized for their practice excellence; (2) university support for pre-program experiences; and (3) exposure to the field of occupational therapy through involvement in various activities (e. g. – clinic work, legislative activities, scholarly writing activities). This program supports potential applicants in career decision-making and enhances potential applicants' readiness for the challenges of occupational therapy school. Further, it promotes the development of leadership skills in prospective occupational therapy students, provides additional volunteer assistance to local clinicians and scholars, and acts as a recruiting tool for participating academic and clinical programs.

Introduction

It has been well documented and reported that there are personnel shortages and growing demand for occupational therapy services, and employers report difficulty filling vacant staff positions (Powell, Griffith, & Kanny, 2005). The field of occupational therapy continues to struggle with academic enrollment issues, despite a projected 21% to 35% increase in need for occupational therapy personnel through the year 2012 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005). These issues of recruitment affect both academic programs and employers, warranting collaboration between the two parties to promote change. To meet these needs, Valley Medical Center and the University of Washington began formal collaboration 3 years ago to develop a mentorship program for prospective occupational therapy students.

Key Factors that Make Mentoring Successful:

- A clear, agreed-upon set of objectives;
 - Communication and training.
 - Matching of mentors and mentees;
 - Evaluation and review of the program;
 - Reciprocity in the relationship;
 - Dedication to the process.

Objectives of the Mentorship Program

1. To fill a need faced by the occupational therapy profession to recruit highly capable students into graduate programs;
2. To procure motivated, capable volunteers to assist within Valley Medical Center's Rehabilitation Department;
3. To recruit new therapists, from the beginning of their careers, with the aim that they will look to Valley Medical Center as their future employer of choice.
4. To foster an excitement for the profession and to promote attitudes and experiences that allow new students to "hit the ground running".

"...a mentor points to doors – they don't open them. But they enable you to find the strength to open them yourself...(SCOPME, 1998, p. 1.).

Components of the Model Mentorship Between Valley Medical Center and the University of Washington

University Components:

- UW website; links to volunteer sites
- Introduction to Occupational Therapy course

Valley Medical Center Components:

- Clinical volunteer site
- Employer of program mentors

Examples of Mentorship Experiences

- Assisting with occupational therapy treatment sessions
- Completing literature reviews and engaging in scholarly writing
- Collecting data for research studies
- Shopping for toys and evaluating their properties
- Making conference presentations
- Videotaping
- Investigating community resources
- Being involved in legislative activities

To date the mentorship program has fostered the growth of 6 students; their current status is outlined in the table below:

Student	Mentorship Length	Projected Graduation Date
#1	1 year	Fall 2006
#2	3 years (active)	Fall 2006
#3	3 months	Fall 2007
#4	1 year (active)	Fall 2008
#5	2 months (active)	Fall 2009
#6	6 months (active)	Fall 2009

RESULTS

A Student's Perspective: Benefits of Mentorship

- "Having a great mentor who was passionate, flexible, open, and knowledgeable";
- "Having access to quality clinics as a mentee";
- " Having practical experiences to learn clinical skills, ethics, professionalism and organization"

An Employer's Perspective: Benefits of Mentorship

- Long-term recruitment of potential new employees as the first mentees are entering the job market;
- Great volunteers who help keep department projects moving along along;
- Retention of new employees potentially increased due to their long-term relationship with the employer

An Academic Program's Perspective: Benefits of Mentorship

- The increased pool of eligible applicants has increased and enrollment numbers are up;
- Students have had an opportunity to learn about the field...so when they apply to the program they know they are a "good fit" with OT;
- Less likelihood for students to withdraw from school, leaving vacancies in the program;
- Students who have had good mentors start out "running"; they are better prepared to enter the curriculum...and they often take a leadership role in the class.



Student 1
Graduates!!!!

Conclusion

The first mentees of this program are now approaching graduation from occupational therapy school. Student 1 will be completing her final Level II Fieldwork placement at Valley Medical Center and holds a conditional offer of employment at completion. We have recommended continuation of our program to support these and other bright and eager students, assisting them to apply to school, and offering mentorship and clinical opportunities throughout the course of their studies.

REFERENCES

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