

POSITION STATEMENT

ACADEMIC CREDENTIALS FOR OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY EDUCATORS FOR UNIVERSITY BASED EDUCATION IN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

Introductory statement

The present World Federation of Occupational Therapy (WFOT) Minimum Standards for the Education of Occupational Therapists – 2002 states that the educators of occupational therapists in educational programs must be at a level that is greater than the degree students will receive. However, in order for the profession to advance and to give a vibrant and effective voice to occupational therapy within a national educational system, occupational therapy educators should have advanced degrees commensurate with other academics, within the educational system offering entry level baccalaureate programs

Statement of the position being taken

That occupational therapy educator requires a master's or doctoral degree.

Statement of the significance of position or issue to occupational therapy.

Occupational therapy scholarship will only be advanced with the creation of academicians qualified at the graduate and doctoral level. These credential and the skills and abilities that they build will enable the emergence of articulate practitioners and leaders who are able to forcefully and knowledgably present the occupational therapy profession's contributions to health and social well being and who will take leadership roles in the profession's developments in the 21st century and beyond.

Statement of the significance of the position to society

The 21st century is associated with the acknowledgement of:

1. the requirements of knowledge-based society;
2. the demographic imperatives that require specialized approaches to health and social service delivery;
3. the globalized competition for highly qualified and competent academics and practitioner (Daxner, 2005);
4. the major reconceptualising of the educational philosophies driving the learning process and therefore the design of complimentary active learning strategies (Biggs, 2003;Shulman, 2000); and
5. globalization's impacts on university viability (Bray, 2002).

Most importantly, there is an increasing awareness and demand for occupational therapy's domain of practice (activities / participation) as most noted in the World Health Organization's International Classification of Function, Disability and Health (ICF) (2001).

Substantiating rationale for the position.

The WFOT is a leader in the international advancement of health professions through the oversight of quality education in occupational therapy. The first publication of the Minimum Standards for the Education of Occupational Therapists in 1958 provided a platform for the advancement of a truly global perspective on education for the profession. Each subsequent revision reflects a progressive response to changes in society and a forward thinking position on embracing new developments in higher education and research. The 21st century's knowledge and evidence-based focus increasingly gives greater value to critical thinking, creativity and innovation (Creativity Centre Ltd, 2006; Elder & Paul, 2005). Occupational therapy entry level educational experiences must prepare graduates to become competent occupational therapy practitioners who are able to participate and compete in the health care (health & social services) marketplace and be enterprising to take advantage of opportunities for occupational therapy advancement (Kneale, 2006).

Each country has a unique perspective on occupational therapy, based upon its indigenous and cultural knowledge. Without educators with advanced credentials that enable the collection, interpretation and transference of such knowledge into a professional context, these vital and historical perspectives will be lost. A scholarship in education is also expected (Shulman, 2000; 1998). Furthermore current higher education environments expect faculty member to make contributions beyond their discipline. Participation is expected in a broader base of activities both internal (cross disciplinary university committees) and external to the university (representation to community and government bodies) (Bryant, et al., 1993). These individuals must be credible as education "professionals" to have their voices heard (Shulman, 1998).

For many educational facilities in the world, the ability to attract students is a key factor in sustaining the vitality of educational environments both academically and financially (OECD, 2001). The exporting of higher education is big business. Educators who are acknowledged researchers, publishers and thinkers in the profession are critical to the success of occupational therapy education as well as to the advancement of the profession. Humanitarian values alone are insufficient to attract the quality of student needed to master the complex curricula associated with developing and socializing occupational therapy professionals to work in the current and future health care and social environments. Academicians and educators with advanced credentials are needed to attract and sustain well qualified students who now have many other career options available to them. Without the opportunities for advanced learning (at the master's and doctoral level) the majority of educators and practitioners will only be able to repeat what was taught to them as they will lack the cognitive tools to revise, improvise, innovate and enhance the profession (Alex de Trocquville, 1884 as cited in AUCC, 1977).

The growth and development of the occupational therapy profession depends upon the ability of therapists to meet the ever-changing needs of their clients within continually changing health and social systems. Therapists must be innovators, and change enablers. This requires that the therapists endorse values of life-long learning, critical analysis and creative thinking. The models for these behaviours will be occupational therapy educators who through achieving advanced degrees will have demonstrated those abilities.

Occupational therapy educators with graduate degrees facilitate the universal recognition of the profession, and demonstrate leadership both internal and external to the profession (Dickson & Hamilton, 2006). Advanced credentials in a knowledge-based society are essential for individuals seeking a viable career path in a variety of areas – research, academia, health and social policy development, private enterprise or government positions (Shulman, 1998).

Challenges and strategies

Many countries in the world already require their faculty members to have advanced degrees as they offer a full range of degree programs (bachelors, masters and doctoral). The challenge for the WFOT is to facilitate the creation of opportunities for the upgrading of educators credentials where opportunities are lacking and the needs are great.

The strategy for the WFOT is to work with national associations and member organizations to:

- create environments that support educational advancement of the profession in order to meet the increasing complex needs of society for health and social services and
- identify strategies that will support the advancement of the academic credentialing for occupational therapy educators.

Conclusion.

There are compelling arguments for stating that occupational therapy educators should be qualified at the graduate level. The achievement of the advancement of the academic credentials for educator is a strategic initiative, which will require a long range master plan.

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