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## **Baccalaureate Occupational Therapy Assistant Education: Considerations from Other Healthcare Professions**

Deb McKernan-Ace

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**Baccalaureate Occupational Therapy Assistant Education:  
Considerations from Other Healthcare Professions**

Deb McKernan-Ace

A doctoral project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

The Doctoral of Occupational Therapy

St. Catherine University, St. Paul Minnesota

May 24, 2022

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### **Abstract**

The evidence for the benefits and challenges of an entry-level baccalaureate occupational therapy assistant education is lacking. Therefore, as many occupational therapy assistant programs consider transitioning from an associate degree level to a baccalaureate degree level, they must rely on considerations from other healthcare professions. This doctoral project reviews the evidence from nursing, dental hygiene and respiratory therapy.

The aim of this project is to increase awareness of current literature on the potential benefits of an entry-level baccalaureate health care education and its implications for the occupational therapy education community. This knowledge was disseminated through three different knowledge translation methods. The first method was to educate occupational therapy practitioners, students and faculty via a Minnesota Occupational Therapy Association virtual continuing education event. The second method was to inform readers of the American Occupational Therapy Association's Academic Education Special Interest Section Quarterly Newsletter through an article submitted for publication. The final method was to inform attendees of the American Occupational Therapy Association's 2022 Education Summit through a professional presentation.

Completion of these three knowledge translation projects provided a deeper understanding of an entry-level baccalaureate degree in three healthcare professions. This information may be translated to the potential benefits and challenges for the occupational therapy assistant degree. However, the need for continued research is needed as more baccalaureate occupational therapy assistant programs obtain accreditation and have graduates in the workforce. Future research should evaluate the outcomes of these graduates on both technical and clinical skills.

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## Chapter 1 Introduction and Background

Occupational therapy assistant (OTA) education has evolved over the past seven decades. The role in the United States was identified in 1949 due to many factors including increase census in psychiatric settings (Cottrell, 2000, p. 408). Educational programs were then established in psychiatric facilities due to the shortage of occupational therapists. By 1957 the occupational therapy assistant level of education was approved by the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) Board of Management and curriculum was then developed. The term certified occupational therapy assistant (COTA) was formally adopted and notification was made to the applicable state and federal agencies about the new assistant level of the profession. The first OTA educational program was established in 1958, which included a 12-week program consisting of both didactic coursework and clinical experience. Graduates were considered COTAs upon graduation of the program. Additionally, some were granted grandparent status as a COTA role if they obtained satisfactory referrals from an occupational therapist and had been working as an OT aide (Cottrell, 2000).

Interest grew outside of the psychiatric settings. In 1960 AOTA developed a 12-week curriculum to train COTAs in general practice and in 1961 a 12-week curriculum for nursing home practice (Cottrell, 2000). In 1964 and 1965, the first two COTA programs in junior colleges were formed at Mount Aloysius Junior College in Pennsylvania and St. Mary Junior College in Minnesota, respectively (Cottrell, 2000). Both programs certified COTAs for either psychiatric or general practice. By 1968, the number of OTA programs grew exponentially in the United States, with the majority finally administered in academic institutions moving from hospital and healthcare facilities.



Although the educational requirements to prepare COTAs has not changed since the late 1970's, the quality and consistency of the OTA education has been continually strengthened through documents such as *Essentials and Guidelines for an Approved Educational Program for the Occupational Therapy Assistant* (AOTA, 1975), the implementation of the required written certification exam in 1975, and the consistent review of the standards for occupational therapy assistant education (Cottrell, 2000).

Currently in the occupational therapy profession, there are dual entry points for both the OTA and the occupational therapist (OT) roles. The most recent implementation of a dual entry to the OTA role is the result of an unsuccessful attempt of the entry-level baccalaureate mandate in 2019 by the Representative Assembly (RA) of the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA). At that time the RA established a task force to determine the strengths and challenges for moving the degree to an entry-level baccalaureate degree. The task force presented their findings to the RA at the AOTA conference and the vote to mandate the degree level was denied. However, since that time, discussion has continued exploring the value of the baccalaureate level of preparation for the OTA role. Currently there is one fully accredited baccalaureate OTA program and several others in the development phases. Currently no literature was available focused on the needs, challenges and opportunities for OTA education to advance to an entry-level baccalaureate degree. This knowledge translation project was designed to examine the advantages of transitioning to an entry-level baccalaureate degree in other healthcare professions to inform the occupational therapy profession.

## **Background**

My interest in this topic can be traced back to my own professional journey. I entered the occupational therapy profession as an occupational therapy assistant. I worked as a school-based

occupational therapy assistant for eighteen years. Shortly after graduating from the OTA program, I began teaching in the same OTA program as adjunct instructor. Almost twenty years later, I returned for my master's degree and joined the OTA faculty as a full-time instructor, moved into the program director role and eventually landed at Rutgers University. I am currently the program director for the occupational therapy assistant program at Rutgers University. My professional passion and dedication have always been in educating future occupational therapy assistants. I have spent the majority of my clinical years working as an OTA and feel that this level of the profession is undervalued and underutilized in many settings. I have dedicated my entire professional career, clinically and academically, to establishing, promoting and advocating for occupational therapy assistants. I have over thirty years in the profession with the majority of them involved in occupational therapy assistant education in some capacity. This commitment to OTA education established the foundation for this project.

Currently the OTA program at Rutgers University is an entry-level associate of science (AS) degree program. Most recently, the decision was made to transition the program from the AS degree to a Bachelor's of Science (BS) entry-level degree. This decision was made based on several factors. One, the scope of practice in New Jersey limits the employability of OTAs in public schools to only those with a BS degree of some kind. Although many of our students have BS degrees when they enter the program, those that do not, are not able to secure employment in the schools upon graduation. The other major influencing factor for transitioning to the BS degree is to create a career trajectory for our graduates. Rutgers University enrolled

the first cohort of students in the occupational therapy doctorate (OTD) program in September 2021. It was determined that a BS degree for the OTA will allow for a career ladder and retention of students who may wish to further their education in the OTD program.

This same consideration for a career trajectory for all occupational therapy assistants has been forefront in my mind for this project. Currently, OTA AS degree graduates who want to become occupational therapists are limited to transition programs for entry-level master's degrees in occupational therapy with a post-professional doctorate beyond that. However, if there were more baccalaureate entry-level occupational therapy assistant programs, this could provide a career trajectory to the entry-level doctorate degree for OTAs. This has the potential to have a significant impact on OT practice by providing many different educational options for prospective students entering the profession.

Although the decision was made within Rutgers University to transition to the entry-level BS OTA degree, I was interested in obtaining evidence for both the strengths and challenges to disseminate to our key stakeholders for the OTA program. In addition, the evidence may benefit OTA education in general, for those programs who may be considering transitioning to a baccalaureate degree prior to an official mandate from ACOTE. I discovered that there currently is no published data providing evidence demonstrating support for or against an entry-level baccalaureate degree for the OTA. It was important for me to have evidence for advantages and disadvantages of an entry-level baccalaureate degree for prospective students, employers and clinicians which may assist me in promoting the Rutgers OTA BS program in the future. Since the OT literature was lacking, I relied on evidence from other healthcare professions who have considered the advantages and disadvantages to the entry-level baccalaureate degree.

## **Review of the Evidence**

This knowledge translation project examined the potential advantages to an entry-level baccalaureate degree in three healthcare professions, nursing, dental hygiene, and respiratory therapy. While the majority of the evidence resulted from the nursing profession, there is a growing trend to increase the level of education from an entry-level associate degree to an entry-level bachelor's degree in other healthcare professions. In recent years, the idea of moving towards an entry-level bachelor's degree has evoked rich discussions amongst allied healthcare professionals, including occupational therapy assistants, physical therapist assistants, respiratory therapists, and dental hygienists. Similarly to the OT profession, there was no evidence from the physical therapy profession to contribute, so the evidence reviewed focused on nursing, dental hygiene and respiratory therapy. From these professions, four major themes emerged including improved patient outcomes, more advanced clinical skills, improved interprofessional skills and general professional benefits for the entry-level clinicians.

### **Improved Patient Outcomes**

There is some evidence to suggest that there may be improvements in patient outcomes when healthcare professionals possess a baccalaureate degree. In a systematic review by Haskins & Pierson (2016), nine research studies measured 30-day mortality outcomes in post-surgical patients who were treated by associate trained nurses versus baccalaureate trained nurses (BSN). The results showed that patients who received care from a nurse with a BSN degree or higher had 5% lower odds of 30-day mortality. In the same study, the BSN prepared nurse lowered the failure to rescue statistic by 6%. In a 2010 literature review, Lane & Koltenberg noted that the introduction of a baccalaureate trained nursing workforce can improve patient outcomes and quality of care. Improved patient outcomes were also supported in a qualitative

program evaluation in which 64% of nursing respondents strongly agreed that the minimum standard for nurses should be raised to the baccalaureate level due to the expanded scope of practice that benefits patient care (Lillibridge & Fox (2010).

In a qualitative study in which dental hygienists were interviewed for their perspectives on their educational training, the researchers found the respondents believed the baccalaureate degree has increased graduates' judgment in the clinic (Sunnell, McFarlane & Biggar, 2017). Respondents also indicated that their ability to make evidence-based decisions better prepared them for entry-level practice. Similarly, a survey of 800 dental hygienists in New York remarked that the BS degree within the dental hygiene profession improves competence and credibility with colleagues and patients that promotes better patient outcomes (Rogers, Johnson & Gurenlian, 2015). Although the research studies provided low level evidence comparing BS and AS value (interview and self-report), it shows the potential benefits of an entry-level dental hygiene degree. As noted by two different healthcare professions, there is some moderate support for the idea that patient outcomes could potentially improve with higher levels of preparatory education.

### ***Advanced clinical skills***

Although the definition of clinical skills varied, both the nursing and dental hygiene professions produced some indications in the evidence that bachelor trained professionals demonstrate more advanced clinical skills. Snell, McFarlane & Biggar (2017), specifically identified more advanced clinical skills for dental hygienists as critical thinking, assessment, using evidence-based interventions, collaboration, communication, health promotion, and quality assurance. Many of these align with the associate degree level of the OTA education, but a

baccalaureate degree could allow for a greater emphasis. The American Nurse Association defines advanced clinical skills as ‘competency’ or a nontask0 oriented behavior supporting performance (Northrup-Snyder, Menkens & Dean, 2017). Nursing competency for the baccalaureate nurse includes reflection, self-analysis, leadership, collaboration, communication, clinical judgment and use of best evidence (Northrup-Snyder, Menkens & Dean, 2017). Again, these competencies align nicely within the OTA education but could be addressed more in depth within a baccalaureate curriculum.

In the nursing profession, the literature, including a scoping review, program evaluation and a meta-synthesis, indicated a baccalaureate education allows graduates to work across organizational settings, respond to advancing technology, empower greater self-sufficiency, expand scope of practice, and increase use of theory and research (Christiansen, Jacob & Twigg (2017); Lillibridge & Fox (2005); Perfetto (2015)). In the dental hygiene profession, respondents to studies including a purposive sampling survey, and a mixed methods study, indicated improved professional competence, credibility with colleagues and patients, and critical decision making as benefits to having a baccalaureate degree (Rogers, Johnson & Gurenlian (2015); Sunnell, McFarlane & Biggar (2017)). Although the level of evidence in this area is lower, it is clear that graduates believe a baccalaureate-level education equips them with more advanced clinical skills than an associate degree-level education.

### ***Interprofessional Collaborations***

With the complexities of healthcare, healthcare professionals will be required to have an increased ability to collaborate as part of an interprofessional team. In a systematic review in 2017, researchers sought to determine how the level of education affected professional values of

clinical practicing nurses (Sibandze & Scafide). Five out of seven studies analyzed, found a significant difference in the professional values of nurses, including improved quality of care between nurses with the baccalaureate degree and nurses with an associate degree. Similarly, a meta-analysis of 13 studies examining the experiences of RNs with bachelor degrees offered insights into the increasing demands of entry-level practice. Strong evidence across these studies showed that working nursing believe that programs must prepare RNs to be better care providers through a holistic focus on research, leadership, theory and community (Perfetto, 2015). Christianson, Jacob & Twiggs (2018) noted themes in a scoping review of studies examining trends in healthcare that there is an increased need for nurses in mental health and rural settings, increased need for interprofessional collaborative practice and patient centered care. They concluded that there is a great need for more advanced degrees in healthcare in order to lead themselves and others to work autonomously and collaboratively in interprofessional teams. They noted that BSN trained nurses should be able to problem solve, think critically and creatively and be able to deal with complex, challenging and uncertain environments (Christianson, Jacob & Twiggs, 2018).

In their review of baccalaureate education from dental education organizations and universities, Stolberg & Tillis (2016) indicated that dental hygienists would need to have more advanced skills to work with more complex patients due to the changes in the delivery of healthcare. In addition, respondents in the Sunnell, McFarlane & Biggar (2017) survey of dental hygiene graduates reported increased confidence when working within inter-professional contexts as an added value to the baccalaureate degree. There is good evidence from the nursing profession and emerging evidence from the dental profession that the ability to work inter-

professionally will be important in healthcare as the trends shift to community-based interventions.

### ***Personal benefits***

In 2009, Brody, Byham-Gray & Touger-Decker explored similarities and differences in graduates in five healthcare professions and noted that advanced degrees increased levels of autonomy, career advancement and self-esteem. Similarly, respondents in a sampling of 101 practicing registered nurses, revealed themes of career advancement, personal satisfaction and professional growth as the greatest benefit to the advanced nursing degree (Delaney & Piscopo, 2004). In a survey of 41 nurses with either an associate or baccalaureate entry-level education, respondents suggested common themes of career advancement, growth of knowledge, more global perspectives and personal accomplishments as the incentive for an advanced degree (Lillibrige & Fox, 2005). Specifically, these same respondents valued increased roles with assessing patients, developing a plan of care, and reimbursement for services compared to AS degree nurses. In this same study, RNs reported the BS degree provided a more global perspective on their career goals including taking on new roles, moving in new directions and further leadership roles.

In a qualitative study using a self-assessment, nursing graduates were asked to compare perceived strengths and challenges in moving from an associate degree to a baccalaureate degree for entry-level practice (Northrup-Snyder, Menkens & Dean, 2017). Respondents indicated increased levels of confidence, awareness of professional opportunities, self-efficacy, sense of competence and personal beliefs with the baccalaureate degree preparation. In a 2017 descriptive study by Smith, Endee, Benz Scott & Linden, respiratory therapists indicated that a BS degree as entry to practice may be essential in elevating the status of the respiratory therapy



profession by improving professional competence and credibility with colleagues and patients. Although most of the research in this area is low level research and relies heavily on personal opinions, the question of personal value of the BS degree requires this softer evidence for a richer understanding of experiences. The sampling of both nurses and respiratory therapists indicate the plethora of personal benefits for the added benefits of a baccalaureate degree compared to the associate degree.

### **Significance**

Examining the potential value of transitioning from associate to baccalaureate healthcare education is significant to future healthcare professional workforce including healthcare employers, healthcare educators as well as the health and welfare of current and potential consumers of healthcare. The academic preparation of graduates must be considered as we continue to educate future healthcare professionals to serve the complex growing needs of populations within a rapidly changing healthcare and social climate. Healthcare professionals need to be better prepared to effectively work as a team, communicate with people from diverse backgrounds and experiences and offer effective and efficient interventions for people who may have co-occurring complex physical, social, and emotional health needs.

By reviewing the existing literature regarding the benefits of entry-level baccalaureate compared to associates level degree I was able to gain insight into the implications for occupational therapy practice and occupational therapy assistant education. Currently, many healthcare professions continue to train entry-level healthcare practitioners at the associate degree level which does not prepare graduates to work within a complex healthcare system that requires a higher level of communication and care, and the ability to navigate regulatory constraints with diverse populations and in diverse settings. Many healthcare professions for

example nursing, dental hygiene and respiratory therapy have seen the need to transition to the entry-level baccalaureate degree. This project examined the potential value of baccalaureate trained practitioners compared to associate level trained practitioners. The outcomes and experiences of healthcare professions that have either previously transitioned, are considering transitioning or currently maintaining both levels of entry to the profession offers important data to inform the potential OTA transition. Upon completion the results will be disseminated to occupational therapy practitioners, occupational therapy educators, employers and other stakeholders to help OT and other healthcare professionals to make informed decisions regarding the appropriate level of preparation needed.

Specifically, the results of this project could benefit the profession of occupational therapy as the American Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE) continues to consider mandating entry-level education for both occupational therapy assistants and occupational therapists. In 2014, the Representative Assembly for the American Occupational Therapy Association established a task force to evaluate the possible advantages and disadvantages of an entry-level baccalaureate degree for occupational therapy assistants. This task force examined the strengths and limitations within the scope of occupational therapy practice but did not examine the general professional benefits to a more advanced degree. The results of this current knowledge translation project is intended to provide insight on the potential professional benefits, if any, that could enhance the marketability of a baccalaureate trained occupational therapy assistant.

There is currently no published literature regarding the transition of the OTA education from an associate degree to a bachelor's degree level. However, in a short employer survey disseminated in spring 2021 by this author to six employers, it was noted by

three out of the six that the clinical expectations and salaries for BS trained OTA's would increase (2021). In addition, six out of six responded favorably to the need for BS trained OTA's in New Jersey (McKernan-Ace, 2021). This survey indicates that employers may be receptive to the BS OTA degree and provide incentive for further research into the benefits. The additional findings from this knowledge translation project may be helpful for other OTA programs as they consider making the voluntary move in degree levels. Currently, there is no education mandate for transitioning degree levels, as it was voted down by the AOTA Representative Assembly in 2019 (AOTA, 2021). However, the discussion to mandate both levels of occupational therapy education is an ongoing discussion within the profession. This project will provide insights to assist programs in making an informed decision prior to a mandate. In addition, it will highlight the needs of baccalaureate OTA education in both New Jersey and nationally through AOTA.

### **Innovation**

Many healthcare professions have historically maintained entry-level practice at the associate degree level. In recent years, many discussions surrounding the need for more advanced level professionals have occurred. This discussion stems largely from the demands on healthcare professionals to be prepared to work inter-professionally, within diverse community-based settings and with more complex clients. Some argue that associate trained professionals are not prepared adequately to meet these demands since associate degree education tends to focus on technical skills whereas a baccalaureate education focuses on both technical skills and required soft skills for working in more demanding settings. One such discussion continues to be ongoing in the occupational therapy profession. Currently the occupational therapy profession has dual entry points for both the occupational therapy assistant

and occupational therapist. However, the discussion for the advantages of mandating the entry-level points continues. Therefore, it is imperative for the occupational therapy profession to consider not only the advantages within the scope of occupation therapy practice, but also the advantages of new graduates to have the skills required to meet the needs of working collaboratively, communicating more effectively, and working within diverse settings to meet the complex needs and rigor in healthcare.

When considering other healthcare professions perspectives on the professional skills gained, this knowledge translation project has the potential to influence the viewpoints and attitudes of OTA educators, on the benefits of moving from the AS to the BS entry-level degree. The findings from this KT project will be presented and published so that other healthcare professions can benefit from learning experiences, benefits and possibilities for a more advanced entry-level degree.

### **Aims**

1. Increase awareness of current literature on the potential benefits of an entry-level baccalaureate health care education to occupational therapy practitioners through a professional presentation for the Minnesota Occupational Therapy Association.

My first aim is to disseminate the results of a literature review on entry-level baccalaureate education to occupational therapist professionals. My long-term goal is to present and publish the outcomes of this review to a targeted audience of occupational therapy educators, employers and other healthcare professionals. This presentation will provide the opportunity to receive feedback from occupational therapy practitioners as to the relevancy for impact on the profession. The feedback will better prepare me for dissemination to a broad range of key stakeholders in New Jersey regarding their perceptions of moving from an associate to a bachelor's OTA degree at Rutgers University.

2. Increase awareness of current literature on the potential benefits of an entry-level baccalaureate education to the occupational therapy education community.

My second aim is to disseminate the results of a literature review on entry-level baccalaureate education through an occupational therapy publication. My goal is to locate an applicable occupational therapy publication to submit the results of my findings. The dissemination of this research could benefit other occupational therapy assistant programs who are considering the transition or addition of an entry-level baccalaureate degree. In addition, since there is currently no published research in OT on the entry-level occupational therapy assistant education, dissemination of the findings of this project could influence OT practice and perhaps facilitate future research in the profession.

3. Design a professional presentation to disseminate at the AOTA Education Summit meeting in October 2022.

My third aim is to use the feedback from the previous two aims to develop a comprehensive professional presentation for fellow occupational therapy assistant educators. Currently the discussion regarding the occupational therapy assistant education has been divisive. Many believe that the associate degree has historically met the needs of the profession and society and should remain at that level. Others believe that the more advanced level of a baccalaureate degree is needed to maintain alignment with the occupational therapist education. Other than the Representative Assembly's task force in 2014, few have considered the advanced professional skills that may be gained by an entry-level BS OTA education. This presentation has the potential to encourage and influence further discussions within the profession as to the value of the entry-level baccalaureate degree for occupational therapy assistants.

## **Chapter 2. Evidence-based Considerations for Entry-Level Baccalaureate Healthcare Degrees: A Knowledge Translation Project Proposal for a Professional Presentation for the Minnesota Occupational Therapy Association**

### **Project Aim for Knowledge Translation**

The aim of this knowledge translation project is to increase understanding of baccalaureate education as entry-level for allied health professions and its effects on the future of occupational therapy assistant education through a professional presentation for a state occupational therapy association.

### **Description**

This knowledge translation project is a proposal to present for the Minnesota Occupational Therapy Association (MOTA) continuing education event. The presentation focuses on the baccalaureate education for entry-level allied healthcare professions. The project critically appraised the current evidence and potential advantages for entry-level baccalaureate education in healthcare. In addition, the project examined the recommendations for OT practice related to the benefits to an entry-level baccalaureate degree for the occupational therapy assistant.

This knowledge translation project, in the form of a twenty-minute presentation and follow up Q&A, focuses on entry-level baccalaureate education within the healthcare professions. The content examines a scholarly review of the evidence primarily from three health professions; nursing, dental hygiene and respiratory therapy. This presentation highlights the rationale for transitioning to the baccalaureate entry-level degree and the advantages that were identified by clinicians from each of the three health professions. Additionally, the presentation shares the application of the scholarly findings to OT practice and transitioning to the entry-level baccalaureate degree for the occupational therapy assistant.

## **Approach**

### ***Description of Audience and Venue***

This presentation proposal was submitted for inclusion in the Spring 2022 Function First Minnesota Occupational Therapy Association (MOTA) continuing education series. This is a continuing education series hosted by MOTA to provide low cost continuing education for members of MOTA as well as to provide an opportunity for the Post-Professional Occupational Therapy Doctoral students at St. Catherine University a public venue for one knowledge translation project. Due to the convenience of virtual learning platforms, the presentation will be offered virtually on an evening assigned in February 2022.

### ***Learning Objectives of Audience***

Upon completion of this presentation, participants will

1. gain a better understanding of baccalaureate degree education as entry-level for allied health professions
2. critique levels of evidence for current baccalaureate degree levels for healthcare professions
3. examine recommendations for OT practice related to benefits to an entry-level baccalaureate degree for the OTA

### ***Evidence of Approach Used***

The completed MOTA Virtual Presentation Application outlines the presentation (see Appendix A.1). The original presentation will be prepared in the OCTH 8440 Advanced Evidence-based Project course in fall 2021 and distributed for peer and faculty review through VoiceThread. The narration of the original presentation will be modified slightly for the expected audience for the MOTA continuing education event (see Appendix A.2).

**Evaluation Method**

This knowledge translation project will be evaluated through a Post Presentation Survey that was included as part of the original application to MOTA (see Appendix A.3). The survey will be distributed through MOTA following the event and results will be made available to this author. The participants will be asked to evaluate three learning objectives, overall impression of the presenter's ability to communicate and organization of the presentation. The survey is organized using a five-point Linear scale (e.g., 0=not at all, 4=extremely well) and provides opportunities for written comments or suggestions (see Appendix A.4).



### **Chapter 3 Entry-level Baccalaureate Degrees in Healthcare: Considerations for the Future of Occupational Therapy Assistant Education: A Knowledge Translation Project Proposal for an Article Proposal to the AOTA Academic Education Special Interest Section Quarterly**

#### **Project Aim for Knowledge Translation**

The aim of this knowledge translation project is to increase awareness of current literature on the potential benefits of an entry-level baccalaureate education to the healthcare community and more specifically to OT practice. By disseminating the evidence from this project in the Academic Education Special Interest Section Quarterly, it may encourage more published research in this area as well as contribute to the discussion regarding the value of a baccalaureate degree for the OTA.

#### **Description**

This knowledge translation project consists of a professional article to be submitted to the AOTA Academic Education SIS Quarterly. The Academic Education SIS Quarterly focuses on topics related to occupational therapy education and occupational science education within five categories. The purpose of AOTA's SISs is to 'enable members to develop, utilize, and connect with the organization, colleagues, and resources to enhance practice knowledge, promote advocacy and influence and advance the value of our services (AOTA SIS Quarterly Practice Connections, 2022). The purpose of AESIS aligns nicely with the intent of this project. This knowledge translation project discusses the potential benefits of entry-level baccalaureate degrees in healthcare and its implications for OTA education and therefore matches the values to advocate and potentially advance practice for occupational therapy assistants. The Academic Education SIS Quarterly was selected by the author for the additional following reasons; ease of submission, easy accessibility for increased distribution and a quick turnaround for publication.

This project will be submitted as original research directly involving occupational therapy education.

## **Approach**

### ***Description of Audience and Venue***

The AOTA Academic Education SIS (AESIS) is a peer reviewed, printed supplement to OT Practice that is accessible to any members of AOTA but is primarily targeted for occupational therapy educators and professionals. AESIS members ‘share a common interest in the field of occupational therapy education and include program directors, fieldwork educators, academic fieldwork coordinators, and faculty’ (AESIS, 2022). The article for this knowledge translation project will be the first published article specifically focused on the baccalaureate occupational therapy assistant education. The article will be formatted and submitted electronically directly to the editor of AESIS and will include the required components including references.

The primary audience for this article will be occupational therapy educators, specifically OTA educators. However, this topic has significance to currently practicing OTAs as well as educators in the master’s and doctoral OT programs. AESIS is an appropriate match as its target audience includes academicians and those interested in the scholarship of teaching and learning related to occupational and occupational therapy assistant education. As the profession continues the discussion regarding mandates for the entry-levels of OTAs and OTs, this article could provide some introductory information that will assist in those discussions.

### ***Learning Objectives***

Upon completion of this article, readers will:

1. gain a better understanding of baccalaureate degree education as entry-level for allied health professions
2. consider implications from other healthcare professions on OT practice specifically related to benefits to an entry-level baccalaureate degree for the OT

### ***Evidence of Approach***

The article will be completed using the guidelines set forth for the Academic Education Special Interest Section. The original article will be finalized in the OCTH 8500 Doctoral Project course in spring 2022 and submitted to AESIS for consideration for publication in summer or fall 2022 (see Appendix B.1).

### ***Evaluation Method***

Initial evaluation of the article will be received from Dr. John Fleming, faculty mentor for the OCTH 8500 Doctoral Project course in spring 2022 as well as Dr. Peggy Swarbrick, scholarly mentor for this project and other professional projects. Feedback or revisions for the article may be ascertained from the AESIS editor prior to consider for publication. Finally, any direct correspondence or feedback from OTA and OT educators could be the third level of informal evaluation for the article.

## **Chapter 4 Entry-level Baccalaureate Degrees in Healthcare: Considerations for the Future of Occupational Therapy Assistant Education: A Knowledge Translation Project Proposal for a Professional Presentation at National Education Summit**

### **Project Aim for Knowledge Translation**

The aim of this knowledge translation project is to increase understanding of baccalaureate education as entry-level for allied health professions and its effects on the future of occupational therapy assistant education through a professional presentation for the American Occupational Therapy Association's Education Summit in fall 2022.

### **Description**

This knowledge translation project is a proposal to present for the American Occupational Therapy Association's Education Summit. The project critically appraised the current evidence and potential advantages for entry-level baccalaureate education in healthcare. The presentation will focus on the baccalaureate education for entry-level healthcare professions. In addition, this presentation will expand on the appraised evidence and apply it to potential recommendations for OT practice related to the benefits to an entry-level baccalaureate degree for the occupational therapy assistant.

### **Approach**

#### ***Description of Audience and Venue***

The AOTA Education Summit is a two-day continuing education venue for occupational therapy educators. The summit typically consists of general sessions, poster presentations and round table discussions related to OT and OTA education. This knowledge translation project will best be disseminated as a general twenty-minute session for all interested educators to attend and ask questions. The presentation format will be consistent with the general session guidelines which consists of a twenty-minute presentation and ten minute Q&A. This author will finalize

the PowerPoint presentation based on both the Knowledge Translation Project #1 and #2 previously discussed. The final presentation will have a greater emphasis on the implications for OTA education.

### ***Learning Objectives of Audience***

Upon completion of the presentation all participants will:

1. gain a better understanding of baccalaureate degree education as entry-level for allied health professions through critique of the evidence
2. consider implications of the evidence on OT practice specifically related to benefits to an entry-level baccalaureate degree for the OT
3. apply implications of the evidence to discussions on the future of OTA education

### ***Evidence of Approach***

The completed 2022 AOTA Education Summit Proposal Template outlines the presentation (see Appendix C.1). The proposal template will be prepared in the OCH 8500 Doctoral Project course in spring 2022 and submitted to AOTA by the deadline of March 24, 2022. If accepted, the presentation will be developed in late summer or early fall in preparation for the October summit.

### ***Evaluation Method***

AOTA utilizes standard presentation evaluations for the Education Summit and so this author will request the results of the presentation evaluations. Also, an informal evaluation may be attained from the feedback shared directly to the author during the Q&A session.

## **Chapter 5: Evaluation Outcomes and Analysis**

These three knowledge translation projects were evaluated using the Knowledge Translation Planning Template (Barwick, 2008, 2013, 2019). The evaluation outcomes and analysis below include knowledge users, main messages, knowledge translation goals, knowledge translation strategies and knowledge evaluation.

### **Evaluation Outcomes**

#### ***Knowledge Translation Project 1: Evidence-based Considerations for Entry-Level Baccalaureate Healthcare Degrees: A Knowledge Translation Project Proposal for a Professional Presentation for the Minnesota Occupational Therapy Association***

##### ***Knowledge Users***

The intended audience targeted for this knowledge translation project included professional members of the Minnesota Occupational Therapy Association, post-professional doctoral students and faculty from St. Catherine University.

##### ***Main Messages***

The intended messages conveyed through this project included a critical appraisal of the current evidence and potential advantages for entry-level baccalaureate education in healthcare. In addition, the project offered recommendations for OT practice related to the benefits to an entry-level baccalaureate degree for the occupational therapy assistant.

##### ***Knowledge Translation Goals***

The intended goals for the knowledge user audience included the following:

1. gain a better understanding of baccalaureate degree education as entry-level for allied health professions

2. critique levels of evidence for current baccalaureate degree levels for healthcare professions
3. examine recommendations for OT practice related to benefits to an entry-level baccalaureate degree for the OTA.

### ***Knowledge Translation Strategies***

The strategies for this project included delivery of the information in the form of a twenty-minute presentation and follow up Q&A, focused on entry-level baccalaureate education within the healthcare professions.

### ***Knowledge Translation Evaluation***

This knowledge translation project was evaluated through a Post Presentation Survey that was included as part of the original application to MOTA. The survey was distributed through MOTA following the event and results were made available to this author. The participants were asked to evaluate three learning objectives, overall impression of the presenter's ability to communicate and organization of the presentation. The survey was organized using a five-point Linear scale (e.g., 0=not at all, 4=extremely well) and provides opportunities for written comments or suggestions (see Appendix A.3). Specifically, the questions included a better understanding of BS healthcare education, levels of evidence, application to OTA education, overall organization and effective communication by the presenter. The survey resulted in scores of 'extremely well' on all questions with the exception of one score of 'well' on a better understanding of BS healthcare education. No additional comments were noted.

### ***Knowledge Translation Project 2: A Knowledge Translation Proposal for the AOTA Academic Education SIS Quarterly Newsletter***

#### ***Knowledge Users***

The intended audience targeted for this knowledge translation project include members of the American Occupational Therapy Association and subscribers of the Academic Special Interest Section Quarterly newsletter.

### ***Main Messages***

The intended messages of this knowledge translation project are to increase awareness of current literature on the potential benefits of an entry-level baccalaureate education to the healthcare community and more specifically to OT practice. By disseminating the evidence from this project in the Academic Education Special Interest Section Quarterly, it may encourage more published research in this area as well as contribute to the discussion regarding the value of a baccalaureate degree for the OTA.

### ***Knowledge Translation Goals***

The intended goals for the knowledge translation users include:

1. to gain a better understanding of baccalaureate degree education as entry-level for allied health professions
2. to consider implications from other healthcare professions on OT practice specifically related to benefits to an entry-level baccalaureate degree for the OT

### ***Knowledge Translation Strategies***

The strategies for this project consisted of a professional article to be submitted to the AOTA Academic Education SIS Quarterly. The Academic Education SIS Quarterly focuses on topics related to occupational therapy education and occupational science education within five categories.

### ***Knowledge Translation Evaluation***



Initial evaluation of the article will be received from Dr. John Fleming, faculty mentor for the OCH 8500 Doctoral Project course in spring 2022 as well as Dr. Peggy Swarbrick, scholarly mentor for this project and other professional projects. Feedback or revisions for the article may be ascertained from the AESIS editor prior to consider for publication. Finally, any direct correspondence or feedback from OTA and OT educators could be the third level of informal evaluation for the article.

***Knowledge Translation Project 3: A Knowledge Translation Proposal for the AOTA Education Summit: Entry-level Baccalaureate Degrees in Healthcare: Considerations for the Future of Occupational Therapy Assistant Education***

***Knowledge Users***

The intended audience targeted for this knowledge translation project include all occupational therapy and occupational therapy assistant faculty involved in the American Occupational Therapy Association's Education Summit.

***Main Messages***

The intended messages for the knowledge users include a summary of baccalaureate education for entry-level healthcare professions. In addition, this presentation will expand on the appraised evidence and apply it to potential recommendations for OT practice related to the benefits to an entry-level baccalaureate degree for the occupational therapy assistant.

***Knowledge Translation Goals***

The intended goals for the knowledge user audience include the following:

1. gain a better understanding of baccalaureate degree education as entry-level for allied health professions through critique of the evidence
2. consider implications of the evidence on OT practice specifically related to benefits to an entry-level baccalaureate degree for the OT and

3. apply implications of the evidence to discussions on the future of OTA education

### ***Knowledge Translation Strategies***

The strategies for this project include dissemination of information through a PowerPoint presentation for all interested educators to attend and ask questions. The presentation format will be consistent with the general session guidelines which consists of a twenty-minute presentation and ten-minute Q&A.

### ***Knowledge Translation Evaluation***

This project will be evaluated through the feedback on the Call for Papers from AOTA, the standard presentation evaluations utilized by the Education Summit, and informal feedback shared directly to the author during the Q&A session.

## **Evaluation Analysis**

### ***Comprehensiveness***

Overall comprehensiveness of this doctoral project includes both strengths and weaknesses. The strengths include the variety of dissemination, one presentation to a state OT association, one scholarly article submission to a national publication and one presentation to a national OT association. Each of these methods considered the needs of the knowledge users in the transmission of the information. In addition, each project had clear learning objectives, attainable outcomes within the allotted time frame of the course and limited required resources.

Weaknesses of the project include the audience for the state OT association presentation. The suggested audience would have been OT and OTA faculty. An additional weakness for all three projects is the process for evaluation. The MOTA presentation evaluation was not identified until after the presentation occurred and was not disseminated until several days after the presentation. The remaining two projects do not include a formal evaluation process and rely

on feedback from proposals which may or may not indicate required revisions to be accepted for publication. These two projects will be reliant on feedback from faculty and mentors at the time of publication for this manuscript.

### *Alignment*

Overall alignment for the three knowledge translation projects is unknown at this time. The three projects clearly align the main messages with the knowledge users, KT goals, and KT strategies. The first project, a professional presentation for MOTA, has been completed. Three participants completed a survey that allowed for evaluation of the learning objectives being met. The Q&A immediately following the presentation allowed for discussion of the information. However, the participants at the MOTA presentation not being the primary audience created limitations on the value of the feedback.

The second project, the proposal for the AOTA Academic Education SIS article, appears to have good alignment with the anticipated learning objectives and goals. Feedback and input from both faculty and mentors were significant when writing the article. Final outcomes of alignment will be determined if the article is accepted for publication.

The third project, the proposal for AOTA Education Summit, also appears to have good alignment with the anticipated learning objectives and goals. Input from Dr. Fleming and Dr. Peggy Swarbrick was instrumental in preparing an organized and thoughtful Call for Papers. The Call for Papers submission guidelines was utilized to ensure that the proposal meets the KT goals for the knowledge users. The Call for Papers required the presenter to commit to either a 20 minute presentation or poster presentation. If accepted for presentation at the Education Summit, a general survey from AOTA will evaluate how well the presenter achieved the learning objectives.

### *Feasibility*

The feasibility of the three knowledge translation projects could be rated as absent to excellent. The first knowledge translation project, a presentation to MOTA, was completed as part of OCH 8440 Advanced Evidence-based Practice course in fall 2021. The project was an individual project but peer feedback was received from three peers and one faculty member prior to the virtual presentation to MOTA in February 2022. The resources required were limited which allowed for the project to be completed in a timely manner and without a budget. The potential benefits for knowledge users was absent due to the audience not being academicians as was the focus of the presentation.

The second knowledge translation project could be rated as good to excellent. This project, an article proposal for the AOTA Academic Education SIS Quarterly newsletter, was completed as part of OCH 8500 Doctoral Project course in spring 2022. The proposal was written with sufficient support from a project mentor and faculty mentor. Although the timeline felt limited, the proposal was completed and was ready for submission by the end of the course. There were no required budget resources, only correspondence and feedback from mentors and the editor of the SIS newsletter. The potential benefits for knowledge users are excellent for this project as the primary focus of this project is on entry-level baccalaureate OTA education.

The third knowledge translation project could be rated as good to excellent. This project, a professional presentation for AOTA's Education Summit, was completed as part of OCH 8500 Doctoral Project course in spring 2022. The Call for Papers for the presentation was submitted successfully in March, after feedback and revisions from both the project and faculty mentors. There were no required budget resources for this project. The potential benefits for knowledge users are excellent for this project. The primary focus of the AOTA Education

Summit is for faculty to obtain advanced knowledge, which aligns well with this project and the topic of entry-level baccalaureate degree for the OTA.

## Chapter 6. Reflections and Recommendations

### Reflection

#### *Reflection on Mission and Vision*

##### **AOTA's Vision 2025-**

As an inclusive profession, occupational therapy maximizes health, well-being, and quality of life for all people, populations, and communities through effective solutions that facilitate participation in everyday living.

Pillars include:

- **Effective:** Occupational therapy is evidence-based, client centered, and cost-effective.
- **Leaders:** Occupational therapy is influential in changing policies, environments, and complex systems.
- **Collaborative:** Occupational therapy excels in working with clients and within systems to produce effective outcomes.
- **Accessible:** Occupational therapy provides culturally responsive and customized services.
- **Equity, Inclusion and Diversity:** We are intentionally inclusive and equitable and embrace diversity in all its forms.

This doctoral project encompasses AOTA's Vision 2025 in that it embraces all pillars of the vision. The project included a review of evidence-based literature of the entry-level baccalaureate degree of three healthcare professions in lieu of the lack of evidence in the OT literature. It sought to bridge the knowledge learned from these three professions to the entry-level baccalaureate OTA degree. If accepted for publication, two of the knowledge translation projects will introduce discussions for potential considerations for a change in the OTA education level. The focus of this project was to gather additional information on the potential

benefits to an entry-level BS OTA degree and to disseminate the outcomes collaboratively within the OT profession.

The accessibility of OTA education was a secondary consideration for this project. The needs within the profession of both an AS and BS OTA degree were considered as a potential outcome as the role of the OTA must meet the rapidly changing needs of society. The evidence from this project indicates the need for embracing diversity in the OTA classroom and for OTA graduates to work in diverse settings.

### **St. Catherine University Henrietta Schmoll School of Health**

The Henrietta School of Health educates diverse learners and engages clinical and community partners to influence health, health systems and health policy. The School is distinguished by an emphasis on relationship-centered care, socially responsible leadership and interdisciplinary initiatives.

This doctoral project aligns with the mission of the School in its attempts to educate diverse learners and engage community partners to influence health systems. The author of this doctoral project began her professional journey as an OTA and has great passion for the role of an OTA. She brought diversity from her academic experiences in OTA education to this project and has now linked St. Catherine University to Rutgers University by way of this project.

Rutgers University and St. Catherine University are one of a few universities that have both an OT and OTA program. The outcomes of this project on the potential benefits of an entry-level BS OTA degree has the potential to influence St. Catherine University directly.

### **St. Catherine University Department of Occupational Therapy**

The Department of Occupational Therapy provides an excellent education in occupational therapy to students from diverse backgrounds, conducts scholarly inquiry on human

occupation, and serves the broader community by promoting occupational health and well-being. We prepare students to respect the dignity of every individual, value humans as occupational beings, understand the development of occupational competence, apply ethical, spiritual and social justice principles, engage in a healthy balance of life occupations, and lead and influence the advancement of occupational therapy.

This doctoral project aligns nicely with the Department's mission as it has advanced the knowledge of occupational therapy assistant education. The project considered the benefits of an entry-level baccalaureate degree for the OTA by examining three other healthcare professions. The dissemination of these findings through professional presentations and publications may offer additional discussions as to the benefit of maintaining a dual entry point for the OTA. Throughout this project the author was engaged in scholarly inquiry to advance her knowledge of entry-level baccalaureate healthcare education in order to generalize its potential impact on OTA education.

### **Reflection on Knowledge Translation on a Focus for Advanced Practice**

This project has provided me the opportunity to gather the evidence related to baccalaureate healthcare education. This is significant within my role as the Program Director for the OTA program at Rutgers University as we consider transitioning from an entry-level AS degree to a BS degree in a few years. When the project began, it was quickly noted that there was no current literature on an entry-level BS OTA degree since there is currently only one fully accredited BS OTA program. Therefore, the author had to seek out evidence from three other healthcare professions and generalize its applicability to the OTA education. By way of the three selected knowledge translation projects, a MOTA presentation, a scholarly publication for the Academic Education Special Interest Section Quarterly and a presentation at the AOTA



Education Summit, this author aims to disseminate the findings of this project in order to begin more discussions about the future of OTA education in the profession. The author has hopeful expectations that this will be the beginning of considerations for the growth of the OTA role and relevant education to support this growth.

This project has facilitated professional growth for this author as she considers curriculum development for the role of a baccalaureate trained OTA. Through the knowledge translation projects, this author has been able to articulate the benefits of transitioning the Rutgers University OTA program to the BS degree. She has disseminated the evidence for potential career growth to administrators, current students, graduates and employers in New Jersey. This project has afforded her a new platform for advocating for this level of OTA education and future growth of the OTA role in the clinic setting.

### **Reflection on Professional Development**

The old adage from Francis Bacon “knowledge is power”, has been my personal and professional motto my entire life and drove my decision to pursue my post-professional doctoral degree. I chose St. Catherine University for its commitment to empowering women and its rich spiritual history. Both spirituality and education are values that I hold dear as a strong, professional woman. I want to be a role model for my students as a leader in the profession as well as instilling the value of life-long learning. The completion of the program will also allow me the opportunity for promotion at Rutgers University beyond my role as the program director for the occupational therapy assistant program.

My purpose for choosing the topic of entry-level baccalaureate degrees in healthcare was directly related to my role as the program director. Currently our OTA program at Rutgers University is an Associate of Science entry-level degree. After moving the New Jersey four

years ago, I learned that the role, scope of practice and employment for COTAs in New Jersey is much more limited than in other states. One limitation involves the inability for COTAs to be employed in school-based practice without a bachelor's degree. Therefore, the initial consideration for transitioning our program to an entry-level baccalaureate degree began four years ago.

As I began some initial review of literature, I realized that there have been no publications written about the strengths, challenges or considerations for the entry-level baccalaureate degree. With that, my project idea was born. I knew that I could benefit from evidence to convince our administration that the transition was a good idea with evidence to support the decision. In the end, I utilized three healthcare professions for the evidence to support the transition. I plan to disseminate the findings through three knowledge translation projects. I presented to the Minnesota Occupational Therapy Association members. Unfortunately, the participants for that event were not academicians, which was my target knowledge users. Secondly, I submitted a Call for Papers to present at the American Occupational Therapy Association's Fall Education Summit in 2022. This presentation is aimed at presenting the findings but also sharing the implications for the future of OTA education. Lastly, I have composed an article for the AOTA's Academic Education Special Interest Section quarterly newsletter. This article is intended to consider the potential benefits of a baccalaureate entry-level degree for the OTA and how the dual entry point for the OTA may be a plausible decision for the profession in the future.

## **Recommendations**

### ***Summary of Needs for Future Knowledge Translation***

It is imperative for the translation of this new knowledge to continue beyond the conclusion of this project. The evidence from this project should be disseminated to a larger audience within the OT profession to elicit more discussions about the future of OTA education. It will be important for discussions to occur and informed decisions made prior to a mandate from ACOTE. All occupational therapy and occupational therapy assistant educators would benefit from this knowledge. In the analysis of this KT project, one weakness noted was that the aims of the KT projects did not match the users for at least one of the projects, the MOTA presentation. Therefore, consideration was made for the best way to disseminate this information for the intended users, which is educators. One KT project already includes a professional presentation as the AOTA Education Summit. Therefore, it was determined that disseminating through an open access OT education journal would be the most appropriate to reach a larger audience. With successful publication of a manuscript to an open access OT journal, the information would be disseminated through three different venues to OT and OTA educators.

***One Proposed Future Knowledge Translation Project:***

**Entry-level Baccalaureate Degrees in Healthcare: Considerations for the Future of Occupational Therapy Assistant Education: A Knowledge Translation Project Proposal for a Manuscript Proposal to a Professional Journal**

**Knowledge User:** OT and OTA educators

**Main Messages:**

The aim of this knowledge translation project is to increase awareness of current literature on the potential benefits of an entry-level baccalaureate education to the healthcare community and more specifically to OT practice. By disseminating the evidence from this project in an occupational therapy education journal, it may encourage more published research

in this area as well as contribute to the discussion regarding the value of a baccalaureate degree for the OTA.

**Knowledge Translation Goals:**

Upon completion of this manuscript, readers will:

1. gain a better understanding of baccalaureate degree education as entry-level for allied health professions
2. critique levels of evidence for benefits of baccalaureate degree levels for nursing, dental hygiene and respiratory therapy
3. consider implications from other healthcare professions on OT practice specifically related to benefits to an entry-level baccalaureate degree for the OT

**Knowledge Translation Strategies:**

This knowledge translation project consists of a manuscript proposal to be submitted to the Journal of Occupational Therapy Education (JOTE). The Journal of Occupational Therapy Education focuses on topics related to occupational therapy education and occupational science education within five categories. JOTE's aim to 'seek to encourage occupational therapy educators to share viable theoretical frameworks, innovative educational methods, and new knowledge to support best practice' (JOTE, 2022) aligns nicely with the intent of this project. This knowledge translation project discusses the potential benefits of entry-level baccalaureate degrees in healthcare and its implications for OTA education and therefore matches the focus of this journal. JOTE was selected by the author for the additional following reasons; ease of submission, easy accessibility for increased distribution and an average turn around for publication of eight weeks. This project will be submitted as original research directly involving occupational therapy education. The manuscript will be completed using the guidelines set forth

for the Journal of Occupational Therapy Education (see Appendix ???). The original manuscript will be finalized in early summer 2022 and submitted to JOTE.

### **Knowledge Translation Evaluation:**

Initial evaluation of the manuscript will be received from Dr. John Fleming, faculty mentor for this author. Ongoing feedback will be obtained from Dr. Peggy Swarbrick, scholarly mentor for this project and other professional projects. Feedback and revisions to the manuscript may be ascertained if accepted for publication. In addition, JOTE maintains data on the number of downloads for every manuscript and could be considered the second level of evaluation for determining its value and contribution to the profession. Finally, any direct correspondence or feedback from OTA and OT educators could be the third level of informal evaluation for the manuscript.

### **Rutgers OTA Program Transition Considerations**

As per ACOTE standard A. 2.7, “the majority of full-time core faculty who are occupational therapy practitioners teaching in the program must hold a minimum of a master’s degree awarded by an institution that is accredited by a USDE recognized regional accrediting body” (ACOTE, 2018). This standard is applicable for both the associate and baccalaureate occupational therapy assistant degree levels. Therefore, the majority of OTA faculty currently teaching in the associate degree program would not require additional education to qualify for teaching in the baccalaureate program. Per ACOTE standards, at the conclusion of the baccalaureate curriculum, a final capstone project is required. A faculty member must be assigned to oversee the capstone projects for the program, which could include the academic fieldwork coordinator. Currently, there are no different or additional requirements for fieldwork completion for the baccalaureate degree. However, fieldwork educators will need to be educated

and versed on the new curriculum and the site-specific objectives for each fieldwork site updated.

As the planning ensues, Rutgers will need to address the needs of applicants who already possess an undergraduate degree as well as alumni who would like to bridge from the associate to the bachelor's degree. One possible consideration may be in using competency-based educational modules for those students. This would allow for self-directed learning and limit the amount of faculty FTE for those students. The intended curriculum focus for the baccalaureate program will be on community-based practice. Our goal is to embed them in community settings throughout the curriculum to emphasize program planning and the unique role of occupational therapy in non-traditional environments. In addition, the curriculum will place a heavier emphasis on leadership and management skills in order for graduates to have the skills to create unique employment niches in New Jersey. This emphasis on community-based practice is intended to be our marketing strategy for Rutgers to separate ourselves from the associate degree OTA programs.

Ongoing program evaluation will be a necessity as the baccalaureate program unfolds. As part of that evaluation, several different metrics will need to be measured. Some considerations for data collection may be fieldwork performance scores, NBCOT pass rates, employment rates, graduate satisfaction, and employer satisfaction. It will be important to obtain both qualitative and quantitative data in the first few years of the program to share with key stakeholders. Our program currently utilizes SPSS to analyze data for the program. A further review of potential data collection tools may be warranted to ensure its applicability and inclusivity to the program outcomes. The administration at Rutgers will most likely request such

data for marketing purposes as well as for Middle States accreditation for the School of Health Professions.

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**Appendix A. 1 MOTA Presentation Application****MOTA Virtual Course Application****Event Name/Course Title:**

Presentation #1: Evidence-based Considerations for Entry-Level Baccalaureate Healthcare Degrees

Presentation #2: Occupational Therapy and Transition Planning: How Can We Provide Support for Positive Post-Secondary Education Outcomes?

**Date of Event:** Wednesday, Feb 2, 2022

**Start Time:** 6:00pm **End Time:** 7:00 pm

**Category:** Presentation – Webinar (virtual but presenters are live)

**Timed Agenda:**

6:00-6:25 Presentation - EBP for baccalaureate level of education for healthcare

6:25-6:30 questions

6:30-6:55 Presentation – EBP for transitioning teenagers with disabilities to post-secondary education

6:55-7:00 Questions

7:00- Course evaluation

**Event Description:**

- Presenters will share the evidence found for the topics above, including the search strategy, level 1 and level 2 evidence, summary of themes and recommendations.
- It will be a 25-minute Powerpoint presentation
- Please include 2- 3 references that support evidence-based practice.

**Speaker Credentials and Biographies:**

Presentation #1: Deb McKernan-Ace, OTA Program Director, Rutgers University, Piscataway, New Jersey

Deb McKernan-Ace has practiced occupational therapy for more than 30 years, with a primary focus on school-based therapy and child/adolescent behavioral health. She has been involved in occupational therapy assistant education for 30 years, having worked within 3 different higher education institutions. Currently she is program director for the Occupational Therapy Assistant program at Rutgers University in Piscataway, New Jersey.

Presentation #2: Jessica McGuire, MOT, OTR, Boston Public Schools, Boston, Massachusetts  
Jessica McGuire has practiced occupational therapy for 20 years, with 17 years specifically focusing on school-systems in urban settings. Currently, she works for Boston Public Schools where she provides occupational therapy services at an educational campus (pre-kindergarten to 8th grade) and a middle school/high school program (6-12th grade). She particularly has focused

on students developing their active collaboration in their educational experience by working on goal development, self-advocacy for an IEP meeting, and career and leisure exploration. By the students increasing their ownership in the therapeutic process, they understand occupational therapy and how this service can be a benefit to them throughout their primary and secondary education.

**Learning Objectives:**

## Presentation #1

Participants will:

- Gain a better understanding of baccalaureate education as entry-level for allied health professions
- Critique levels of evidence for current baccalaureate degree levels for healthcare professions
- Examine recommendations for OT practice related to benefits to an entry-level baccalaureate degree for the OTA.

## Presentation #2

Participants will:

- Describe research supporting the skills needed for positive postsecondary education outcomes for high school students transitioning into postsecondary education.
- Critique levels of evidence for four identified themes in positive postsecondary education
- Examine recommendations for OT practice related to the transition process to post-secondary education in the four identified themes

**Target Audience:** All**Level of Content:** Advanced**AOTA Practice:** Presentation #1: Education

Presentation #2: Children and Youth

CEUs presentation – 1 hr

**MOTA Members only?** No**Primary Speaker #1 Contact information**

- Name: Deb McKernan-Ace
- Phone: 608-332-8140
- Email: [damckernanace480@st.kate.edu](mailto:damckernanace480@st.kate.edu) and [dam440@shp.rutgers.edu](mailto:dam440@shp.rutgers.edu)

**Primary Speaker #2 Contact information**

- Name: Jessica McGuire
- Phone: 412-303-9590
- Email: [jlmcguire526@stkate.edu](mailto:jlmcguire526@stkate.edu) or [jmcguire2@bostonpublicschools.org](mailto:jmcguire2@bostonpublicschools.org)

- **Would you like to use any additional technology tools on the day you present? These can be set up to use the beginning of the presentation, during the presentation, or at the end.**
- Will you be using a Powerpoint or other presentation tool?
  - X Yes, I will be using Powerpoint.
  - Please email your presentation to [motafunctionfirst@gmail.com](mailto:motafunctionfirst@gmail.com) at least 24 hours prior to your presentation.
  - No \_\_\_\_\_

1. Please indicate how well the presentation met the stated learning objective. From (1)Not all to (5) Very Well					
● Gain a better understanding of baccalaureate education as entry-level for allied health professions	1	2	3	4	5
● Critique levels of evidence for current baccalaureate degree levels for healthcare professions	1	2	3	4	5
● Examine recommendations for OT practice related to benefits to an entry-level baccalaureate degree for the OTA.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Please indicate your overall impression of the presenter's ability to communicate this material * From (1) Poor to (5) Excellent					
	1	2	3	4	5
3. Please indicate how well the content of the presentation was organized * From (1) Poor to (5) Excellent					
	1	2	3	4	5

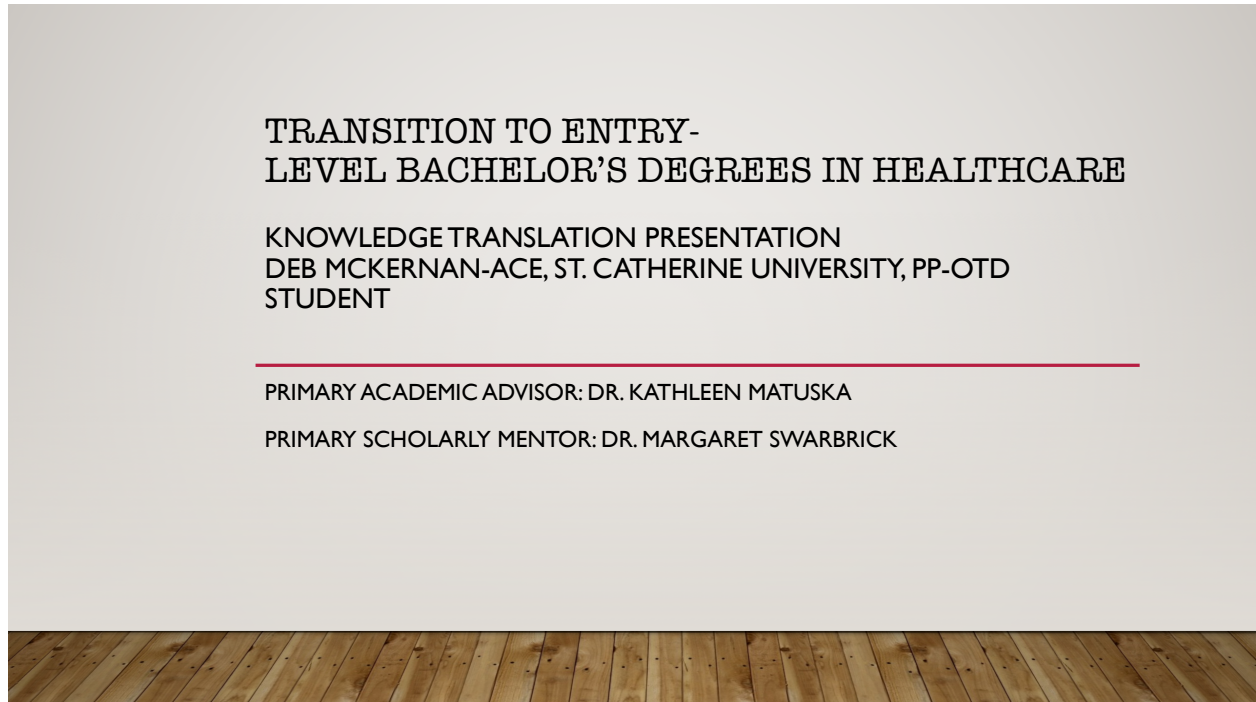
**Post Presentation Survey Questions:**

Presentation #1 Evidence-based Considerations for Entry-Level Baccalaureate Healthcare Degrees

Please add any additional comments or suggestions

## Appendix A. 2 MOTA Narrated Slide Presentation

### Slide 1



### Narration

Good evening. My name is Deb McKernan-Ace. Welcome to my KT presentation. I will be presenting this evening on the Transition to Entry-level Bachelor's Degrees in Healthcare. My primary academic advisor for this project was Dr. Kathleen Matuska and my primary scholarly mentor was Dr. Peggy Swarbrick.



**Slide 2**

## BACKGROUND ON PRACTICE

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- Rutgers OTA program is currently transitioning to the BS degree
- Limited evidence on benefits of entry-level bachelor's healthcare degrees
- Background literature for project stemmed from Nursing, Radiology Technician, Healthcare Administration, Health Informatics, AOTA and ACOTE.
- Entry-level bachelor's degree was in response to the increasing demands in healthcare that require both technical skills as well as soft skills such as critical thinking and advanced communication skills.
- Literature indicates that associate degree programs must focus on technical skills and the bachelor's degree program affords the time to focus on both technical skills and more advanced soft skills.

**Narration**

The OTA program at Rutgers University is transitioning to the bachelor's degree in 2024. In preparation for this transition, I was interested in finding evidence about the advantages of a bachelor's degree for entry-level healthcare professions. This information would support justification of the more advanced degree to share with our key stakeholders. Currently, there is limited evidence on the benefits of entry-level bachelor's healthcare degrees. Background information for this project was collected from the Nursing, Radiology Technicians, Healthcare Administration and Health Informatics professions. Additional OTA academic information was collected from the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education.

The entry-level bachelor's degree was developed in response to the increasing demands in healthcare that require both technical skills as well as soft skills such as critical thinking and advanced communication skills.

Background Literature indicates that associate degree programs must focus on technical skills and the bachelor's degree program affords the time to focus on both technical skills and more advanced soft skills.

**Slide 3**

## PICO AND EBP QUESTION

---

PICO	EBP QUESTION
P= Graduates	Are there advantages of transitioning to entry-level bachelor's degrees in some healthcare professions?
I= Bachelor's degree	
C=Associate degree	
O= Advantages OR benefits OR outcomes	

**Narration**

The PICO and EBP question for my project evolved after some trial and error with database searches. Originally, I was looking specifically at increased clinical, leadership and management skills. Eventually, I learned in my database searches that simpler was better. The end result is the current PICO. Population= healthcare professions; Intervention= bachelor's degree, Comparison=associate degree, Outcome= advantages.

The EBP question evolved into 'Are there advantages of transitioning to entry-level bachelor's degrees in some healthcare professions?'

**Slide 4**

## REVIEW OF RESEARCH SEARCH PROCESS

---

**DATABASES/KEYWORDS:**

1. **CINAHL:** Used [MeSH] terms related to healthcare, associate degrees, baccalaureate degrees, leadership and management. **BEST KEYWORDS:** associate degree, bachelor's degree, healthcare education; **LIMITERS:** full text, English, published dates from 2011-2021
2. **PUBMED:** Used [MeSH] terms related to healthcare, associate degrees, baccalaureate degrees. **BEST KEYWORDS:** healthcare professions, bachelor's degree, systematic review; **LIMITERS:** systematic reviews, English, publication dates 2011-2021

**Narration**

I performed a Level I database search using CINAHL and PubMed. For CINAHL, I used MeSH terms related to healthcare, associate degree, baccalaureate degrees, leadership and management. The best keywords were associate degree, bachelor's degree and healthcare education. For PubMed, I used MeSH terms related to healthcare professions, bachelor's degree and systematic review. In both database searches limiters were used including full text, English, and publication dates from 2011-2021. In addition, PubMed allowed me to limit my search to only systematic reviews which was helpful.

**Slide 5**

## PRIMARY RESEARCH STUDIES SEARCH PROCESS

---

- Searched CINAHL, PubMed and Google Scholar
- Keywords: related to PICO- healthcare professions, bachelor's degree, associate degree and advantages

**Narration**

The Level II search process included using CINAHL, PubMed and Google Scholar. Again, I used a variation of keywords from the PICO= healthcare professions, bachelor's degree, associate degree and advantages.

**Slide 6**

## RESULTS OF SEARCHES

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- Level I search
  - CINAHL- yielded 31, 5 relevant to PICO
  - PubMed- yielded 42, 6 relevant to PICO
- Level II search
  - CINAHL=5 variations yielded 58 articles and 17 dissertations
  - PubMed= 4 variations yielded 19 articles
  - Google Scholar= 16 articles

**Narration**

My Level I search in CINAHL yielded 31 articles with 5 being relevant to the PICO. PubMed yielded 42 articles with 6 being relevant to the PICO.

In the Level II search, after 5 variations of search terms in CINAHL, 58 articles and 17 dissertations were found. PubMed yielded 19 articles after 4 searches (using MeSH terms and with some duplication with CINAHL articles) and Google Scholar yielded 16 relevant articles after 5 variations of search terms.

In addition, I reviewed the references from one systematic review and selected articles whose title reflected the PICO.

**Slide 7**

## KEY ARTICLES- LEVEL I SYSTEMATIC REVIEWS

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- **Critical Appraisal:** The RN to BSN Transition: A Qualitative Systematic Review

Purpose: to develop a model outlining the process of RNs returning to obtain a BSN (Anbari, 2015, p. 2)

Design: qualitative systematic review (Anbari, 2015, p. 2)

Conclusion: students= need right program, right time, right place; employers= identify and remove barriers; academia= illustrate the transition process (Anbari, 2015, p. 9)

- **Critical Appraisal:** Registered Nurses Returning to School for a Bachelor's degree in Nursing: Issues Emerging from a Meta-Analysis of the Research

Purpose: to determine what is known about nurses' attitudes and perceptions about returning to school" (Altmann, 2011, p. 256).

Design: literature review (Altmann, 2011, p. 256)

Conclusion: academia= curriculum changes, financial advising, academic advising, and access to programs; employers= recognition/awards, emotional and financial support" (Altmann, 2011, p. 263).

### Narration

Two systematic reviews were critically appraised as part of the Level I search. The first critical appraisal was a qualitative study looking at a model for outlining an effective process of RNs returning to obtain a BSN. The author concluded 3 major themes: 1. students need to identify the right program at the right time and in the right geographic location; 2. employers need to identify and remove barriers to allow RNs to return to school; and 3. academic programs need to illustrate the transition process more clearly for returning students.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> systematic review looked at nurses' attitudes and perceptions about returning to school for a BS degree. This study was a literature review and concluded 2 major themes: 1. academic programs need to offer curriculum changes, financial advising, academic advising and easier access to programs; and 2. employers need to provide recognition/awards to RNs returning to school, as well as emotional and financial support.

**Slide 8****KEY ARTICLES- LEVEL II**

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- Total of 10 key articles
- 6 nursing
- 2 dental hygiene
- 2 respiratory therapy

**Narration**

There are 10 key articles that were reviewed for this project. 6 of them from nursing, 2 from dental hygiene and 2 from respiratory therapy. The nursing articles had a variety of research methods including systematic reviews, meta-analysis, literature reviews, and qualitative surveys. Both dental hygiene articles were of lower evidence including graduate surveys and review of literature about dental hygiene education. One respiratory therapy article was a secondary analysis of data from the American Association of Respiratory Therapy and a survey sampling of NY State respiratory therapists.

**Slide 9**

## SUMMARY OF LITERATURE MATRIX- NURSING

---

- Moderate to strong evidence from nursing profession
- Several systematic reviews, meta-analysis and mixed-methods studies
- Lower level evidence supports other themes from the evidence

**Narration**

There is moderate to strong evidence from the nursing profession on the advantages to an entry-level bachelor's degree. The strongest evidence comes from systematic reviews, meta-analysis, mixed-methods and cross-sectional studies. Of the 15 articles reviewed, 9 came from the nursing profession.



**Slide 10**

## SUMMARY OF LITERATURE MATRIX-DENTAL HYGIENE & RESPIRATORY THERAPY

---

- Lower level evidence but emerging in Dental Hygiene and Respiratory Therapy professions.
- Majority of literature is qualitative, including surveys, interviews, and descriptive reviews.

**Narration**

There is lower level but emerging evidence from both the dental hygiene and respiratory therapy professions on advantages to an entry-level bachelor's degree. The majority of this evidence is in the form of surveys, graduate interviews and descriptive studies. 5 of the 15 articles reviewed came from these two professions combined.

## Slide 11

## THEME #1 BETTER PATIENT OUTCOMES

---

### NURSING

- Decreased post-surgical mortality rates by 5% and failure to rescue by 6% (Haskins, Pierson, 2016)
- 64% of nursing respondents strongly agreed that BS degree should be minimum nursing standard due to expanded scope of practice and benefits to patient care (Lillibridge & Fox, 2010)

### DENTAL HYGIENE

- Respondents believed BS degree improves graduates' judgment and evidence-based decision making in clinic (Sunnell, McFarlane & Biggar, 2017)
- Increased competence & credibility with colleagues and patients (Rogers, Johnson & Gurenlian, 2015)

### Narration

There were 4 themes in the literature reviewed. The first theme that emerged is the potential for better patient outcomes. In a systematic review of 9 studies involving patient mortality of post-surgical patients, it was found that there was a 5% decrease in mortality rates and a 6% decrease in failure to rescue if the patients were treated by a nurse who had a bachelor's degree versus an associate degree. In a qualitative program evaluation, 64% of nursing respondents strongly agreed that entry level nurses should be educated at the bachelor's level. They felt it expanded their scope of practice which benefits patient care.

In Dental Hygiene, an interview of practitioners believed that the bachelor's degree improves graduates' judgment and evidence-based decision making in the clinic. Similarly, in a survey of 800 dental hygienists in New York, the respondents indicated that the BS degree increased competence and credibility with colleagues and patients.

## Slide 12

## THEME #2 MORE ADVANCED CLINICAL SKILLS

---

### NURSING

- Ability to work across settings, respond to advancing technology, empower self-sufficiency, expand scope of practice and increases use of theory and research

(Christianson, Jacob & Twiggs, 2017; Lillibridge & Fox, 2005; Perfetto, 2015)

### DENTAL HYGIENE

- Increased competence, credibility with colleagues and patients, and improved decision making (Rogers, Johnson & Gurenlian, 2015; Sunnell, McFarlane & Biggar, 2017)

**Narration**

The 2nd theme to emerge is more advanced clinical skills. There were some variations in the definition of clinical skills between professions, as expected, however, there were similarities. In a scoping review, program evaluation and meta-analysis from nursing, the authors identified more advanced skills such as ability to work across a variety of settings, ability to use advanced technology, improved self-sufficiency, expanded scope of practice and increased use of theory and research.

In two dental hygiene studies, one survey and one mixed-methods study, skills identified included increased professional competence, increased credibility with colleagues and patients, and improved critical decision making.

Although there is lower evidence in this area, there is a clear indication from graduates surveys that they believe a bachelor's degree equips them with more advanced clinical skills.

## Slide 13

## THEME #3 INTER-PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATIONS

---

### NURSING

- Significant differences in professional values of bachelor trained nurses (Sibandze & Scafide, 2017)
- Academia must prepare RNs to be better care providers through research, leadership, theory & community (Perfetto, 2015)
- Increased need for nurses in MH and rural settings, increased need for IP collaborations & patient-centered care (Christianson, Jacob & Twiggs, 2018)

### DENTAL HYGIENE

- Need for advanced skills to work with more complex patients (Stolberg & Tillis, 2016)
- Improved confidence to work in inter-professional contexts as an added value to an entry-level bachelor's education (Sunnell, McFarlane & Biggar, 2017)

### Narration

The 3<sup>rd</sup> theme is inter-professional collaborations. In a systematic review looking at professional values of nurses, 5 out of 7 studies found significant differences with bachelor trained nurses. 13 studies in a meta-analysis showed that working nurses believe that academia must prepare RNs to be better care providers through research, leadership, theory & community. There is also an increased need for nurses to work in mental health and rural settings with a focus on inter-professional collaborations and patient-centered care.

Dental hygiene organizations and academic programs emphasized the need for dental hygienists to have advanced skills to work with more complex patients to meet the changing needs in healthcare. A survey of dental hygienists validated the need for improved confidence to work in inter-professional contexts as an added benefit to an entry-level bachelor's education.

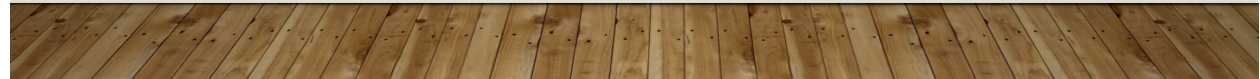
Overall, there is good evidence in nursing and emerging evidence in dental hygiene for the value of interprofessional collaborations within bachelor's education.

**Slide 14**

## THEME #4 PERSONAL BENEFITS

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- Advanced degrees increase levels of autonomy, career advancement and self-esteem (Brody, Byham-Gray & Touger-Decker, 2009)
- Themes of career advancement, personal satisfaction and professional growth (Delaney & Piscopo, 2004; Lillibridge & Fox, 2005)
- BS degree may elevate status by increasing competence and credibility with colleagues and patients (Smith, Endee, Benz Scott & Linden, 2017)

**Narration**

The final theme that emerged is the personal benefits. In a study looking at similarities and differences of 5 different healthcare professions, advanced degrees increased levels of autonomy, career advancement and self-esteem. In two similar nursing surveys, themes of career advancement, personal satisfaction, and professional growth emerged. Finally, a descriptive study of respiratory therapists, noted that the BS degree may elevate their professional status by increasing competence and credibility with colleagues and patients. Although this literature may be lower level evidence the insights about the value of personal benefits allows for a richer understanding of lived experiences.

## Slide 15

## RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

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#1- Strong evidence in nursing, limited or low-level evidence from other allied healthcare profession

#2- More research is needed from other healthcare professions for determining advantages to the baccalaureate degree

#3- Additional consideration for further research to determine impact of an entry-level bachelor's degree on diversity in the applicant pools (Becker & Nguyen, 2014)

#4- Rutgers OTA program has committed to transitioning to the BS degree BUT this evidence will assist us in convincing key stakeholders on the potential long term benefits of BS educated OTAs in New Jersey

### Narration

In summary, there is moderate to strong evidence from the nursing profession and emerging evidence from other healthcare professions for advantages to an entry-level bachelor's degree in healthcare. More research is definitely needed from other professions in order for them to make informed decisions about transitioning from the associate degree to the bachelor's degree. An additional consideration for further research that was identified in the literature, is determining the impact of the entry-level bachelor's degree on diversity in applicant pools. In conclusion, I believe dissemination of the results of this project may be helpful for other healthcare programs as they consider transitioning and especially helpful to OTA programs as changes to entry-level practice occur. Personally, I plan to use the results of this KT project to provide our key stakeholders with potential long term considerations as to the advantages of BS trained OTA professionals in New Jersey.

## Slide 16

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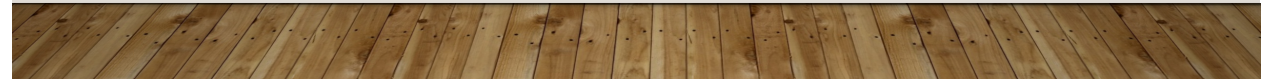
## Narration

This begins my reference pages.

## Slide 17

## REFERENCES CONT'D

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## Narration

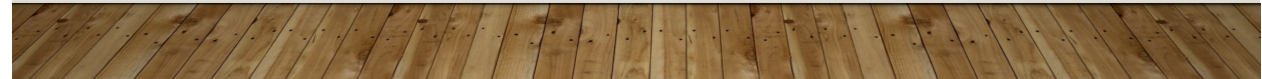
More references.



## Slide 18

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## Narration

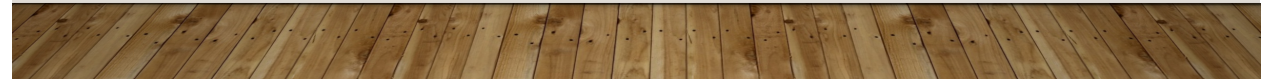
More references.

**Slide 19**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- Dr. Matuska and other St. Kate's faculty
- Classmates- Emily, Jessica, Paula
- Rutgers University colleagues
- Dr. Peggy Swarbrick

**Narration**

I would like to acknowledge Dr. Matuska and other St. Kate's faculty, my small group of supportive classmates, Emily, Jessica and Paula, my colleagues at Rutgers University, and my professional mentor and friend Dr. Peggy Swarbrick. You have all provided me support in various ways throughout this project and I am immensely grateful. Thank you for your attention.



4. Please indicate your overall impression of the presenter's ability to communicate this material  
\* From (1) Poor to (5) Excellent \*

*Mark only one oval.*

Poor      1      2      3      4      5      Excellent

5. Please indicate how well the content of the presentation was organized \*From (1)Poor to  
(5) Excellent \*

*Mark only one oval.*

1      2      3      4      5

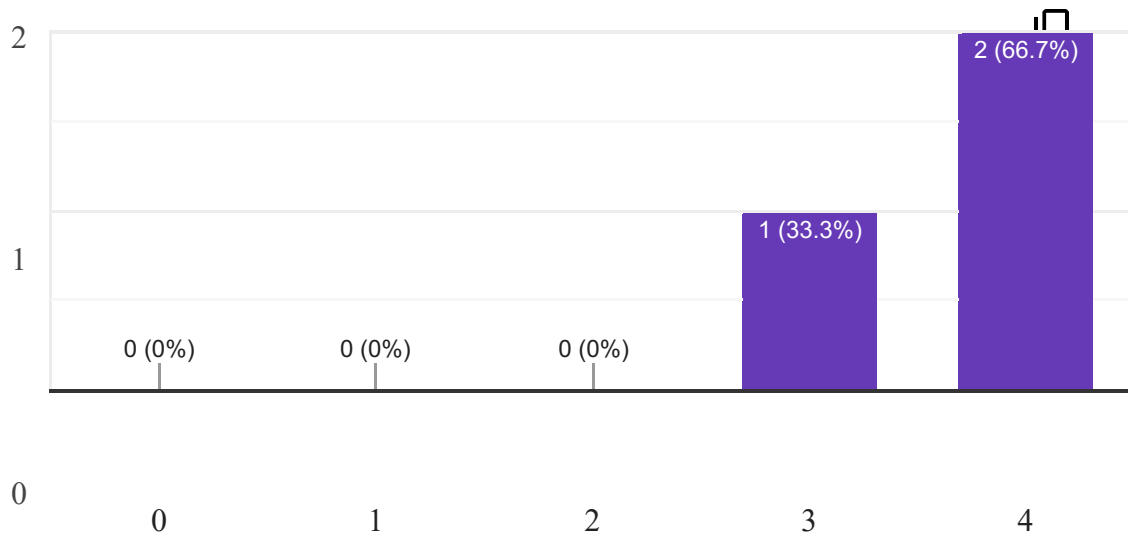
## Appendix A. 4 MOTA Presentation Survey Results

OTD-PP Doctoral Presentation-February 2,2022

Did you gain a better understanding of baccalaureate education as entry-level for allied health professions?

[Copy](#)

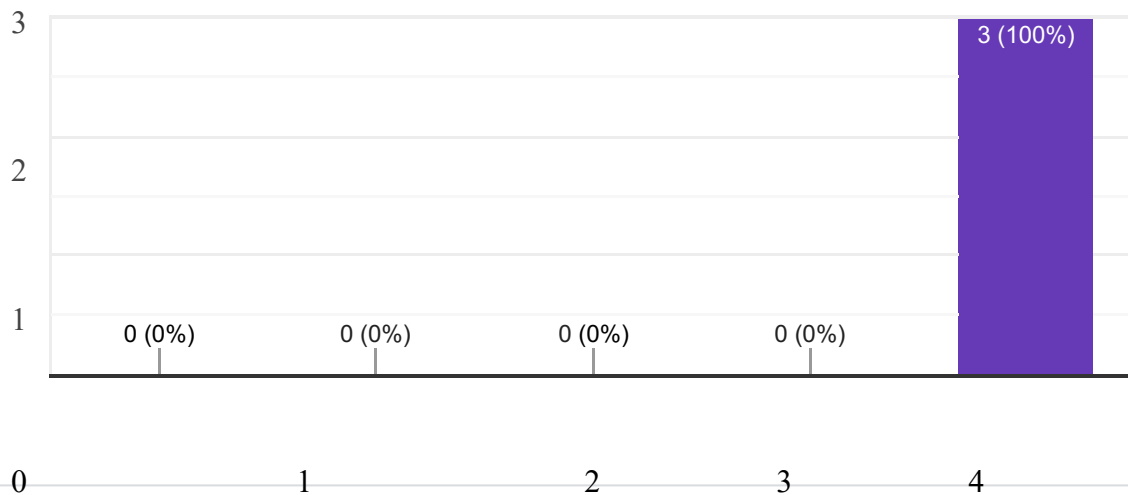
3 responses



Did you gain a better understanding of levels of evidence for current baccalaureate degree levels for healthcare professions?

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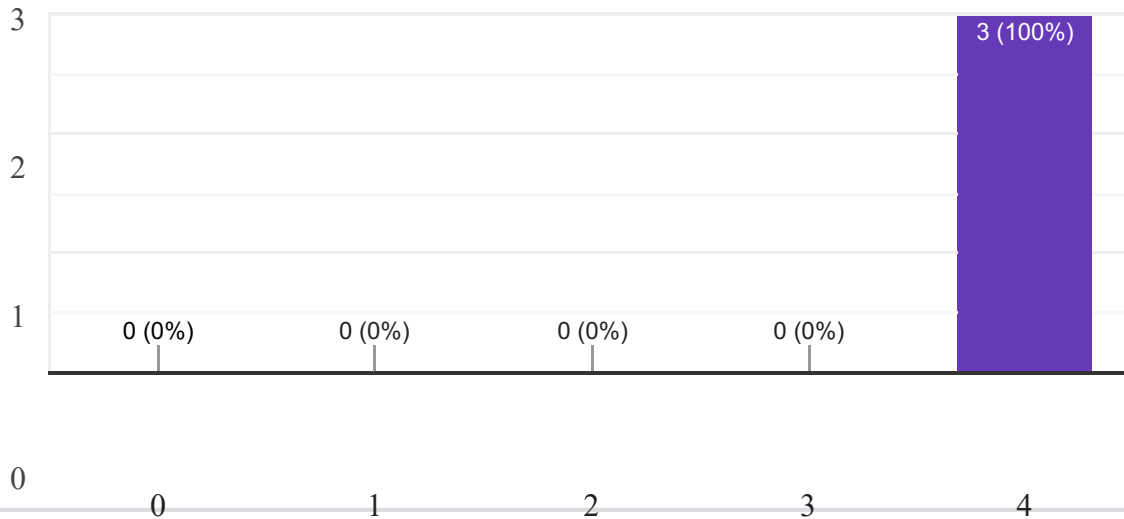
3 responses



Did you gain a better understanding related to benefits to an entry-level baccalaureate degree for the OTA?

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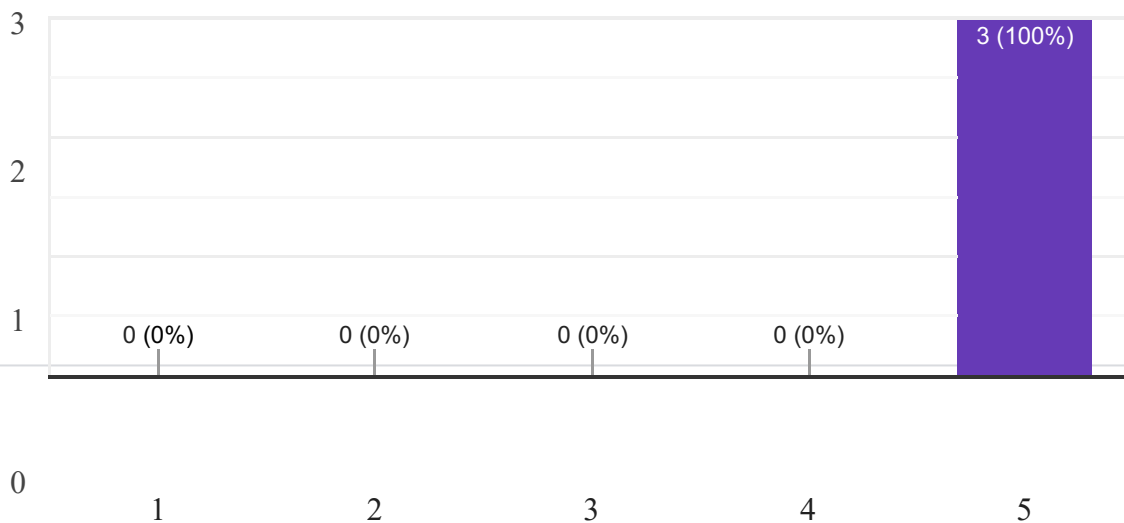
3 responses



Please indicate your overall impression of the presenter's ability to communicate this material \* From (1) Poor to (5) Excellent

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3 responses

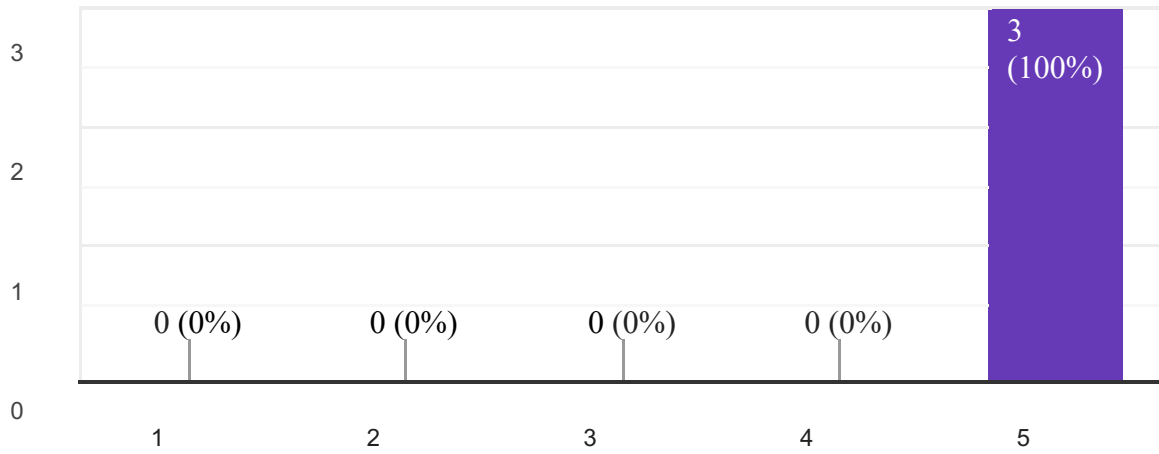


Please indicate how well the content of the presentation was organized



\*From (1) Poor to (5) Excellent

3 responses



## **Appendix B.1 Academic Education Special Interest Section Article Submission**

### Considerations for the Baccalaureate Occupational Therapy Assistant Education

#### **Introduction**

What is the future of occupational therapy assistant (OTA) education? The transition of OTA education level from associate to bachelor's degree has been a topic of discussion within the profession for many years now. The dilemma that has ensued is whether or not there are benefits in terms of the OTA role overall and for the profession. Many people will be impacted by this decision. Students will be looking at more cost for their education, employers may be wondering how this impacts their workload and salary, and academic institutions and educators will need to transform curriculum to create new programs. It is important to the profession to investigate the possibilities and challenges of OTA BS level preparation in order for key stakeholders to make informed decisions.

#### **Educational Standards for the OTA**

Since the late 1970's, preparation for the entry-level OTA role has been continually strengthened through the *Essentials and Guidelines for an Approved Educational Program for the Occupational Therapy Assistant* (AOTA, 1975), the implementation of the required written certification exam in 1975, regular review of the OTA educational standards (Cottrell, 2000) and rigorous revisions of accreditation standards (AOTA, 2018). Currently in the occupational therapy (OT) profession, there are dual entry points for both the OTA and the OT roles. The most recent implementation of an OTA dual entry is the result of an attempt for an entry-level baccalaureate mandate in 2019 by the Representative Assembly (RA). Since that time, discussion has continued exploring the value of the BS level of preparation for the OTA role. Currently



there is one fully accredited BS OTA program and several others in the development phases.

This article discusses the initial considerations from one northeast university and the impact of other healthcare profession's decision to transition to the entry-level baccalaureate degree.

### **Considerations from One Northeast University**

Rutgers University currently offers an entry-level associate of science (AS) Occupational Therapy program. One year ago, the decision was made to transition the program from the AS degree to a Bachelor's of Science (BS) entry-level degree based on several factors unique to the university and the OTA role in New Jersey. Rutgers University is an undergraduate and graduate university. Initial development of the AS OTA program at the university was challenging when determining a process for matriculation from the general education curriculum to the OTA curriculum. Currently, the program collaborates with ten community college partners for matriculation into the OTA program at Rutgers University. Transitioning to the bachelor's degree would eliminate the need for these partner colleges. Also, the scope of practice in New Jersey limits the employability of OTAs in public schools to only those with a BS degree of some kind. Although many of our students have BS degrees when they enter the program, those that do not are not able to secure employment in the schools upon graduation. The other major influencing factor was to create a career trajectory for graduates since Rutgers University enrolled the first cohort of occupational therapy doctorate (OTD) students in September 2021. The BS degree would offer a career ladder for students who decide to pursue the OTD program.

This same consideration for a career trajectory for all occupational therapy assistants has to be considered when determining the just right education level. Currently, OTA AS degree graduates who want to become occupational therapists are limited to transition programs for entry-level master's degrees in occupational therapy with a post-professional doctorate beyond

that. The transition to the baccalaureate degree at Rutgers would eliminate this step for graduates, as they could potentially continue their education trajectory directly into the doctoral program. If there were more BS entry-level OTA programs, this could provide a more direct career trajectory to the entry-level master's or doctorate degree for occupational therapists. This has the potential to have a significant impact on OT practice by providing many different educational options for prospective students entering the profession.

The Rutgers administration based the decision on the aforementioned factors, however requested additional evidence from other healthcare professions that transitioned to the entry-level baccalaureate degree. For other OTA programs considering the transition, evidence for both the strengths and challenges to disseminate to your key stakeholders may be of great significance. The author could not locate any available research describing needs, challenges, and opportunities for OTA education to advance to an entry-level baccalaureate degree. Therefore, a review of studies of other healthcare professions offered perspectives on the experiences, strengths and challenges transitioning to the entry-level baccalaureate degree. The following provides a summary of the themes that emerged from the literature reviewed.

### **Themes from the Evidence**

The addition of the entry-level BS degree as the terminal requirement was in response to the increasing demands in healthcare. Nursing, Respiratory Therapy and Dental Hygiene all currently have both associate and bachelor degree entry points of education. Examining the experiences of other healthcare professions transitioning to an entry-level BS degree can inform the occupational therapy profession. The following outline's themes that emerges when examining experiences of these other professions that now also have the entry-level BS degree as the terminal requirement.

### ***Better Patient Outcomes***

Researchers (Lane & Koltenberg, 2020), noted that the introduction of a baccalaureate trained nursing workforce can improve patient outcomes and quality of care. In a systematic review of nine research studies measured 30-day mortality outcomes in post-surgical patients who were treated by associate trained nurses versus baccalaureate trained nurses (BSN) (Haskins & Pierson 2016), showed that patients who received care from a nurse with a BSN degree or higher had 5% lower odds of 30-day mortality. Better patient care was rated high in a qualitative program evaluation. Sixty four percent of nursing respondents and 64% of nursing respondents strongly agreed that the minimum standard for nurses should be raised to the baccalaureate level due to the expanded scope of practice that benefits patient care (Lillibridge & Fox (2010). Dental hygienists were interviewed to gather information on their perspectives on their educational training. The researchers found the respondents believed the baccalaureate degree has increased graduates' judgment in the clinic (Sunnell, McFarlane & Biggar, 2017). Respondents also indicated that their ability to make evidence-based decisions better prepared them for entry-level practice. Similarly, a survey of 800 dental hygienists in New York remarked that the BS degree within the dental hygiene profession improves competence and credibility with colleagues and patients that promotes better patient outcomes (Rogers, Johnson & Gurenlian, 2015). Although the research studies provided low level evidence comparing BS and AS value (interview and self-report), it shows the potential benefits of an entry-level dental hygiene degree. As noted by two different healthcare professions, there is some moderate support for the idea that patient outcomes could potentially improve with higher levels of academic preparation.

### ***Advanced Clinical Skills***

The second theme that emerged was the advantages of a BS degree on clinical skills. Although the definition of clinical skills varied, both the nursing and dental hygiene professions produced some indications in the evidence that BS trained professionals demonstrate more advanced clinical skills. In the nursing profession, the literature, including a scoping review, program evaluation and a meta-synthesis, indicated a baccalaureate education allows graduates to work across organizational settings, respond to advancing technology, empower greater self-sufficiency, expand scope of practice, and increase use of theory and research (Christiansen, Jacob & Twigg, 2017; Lillibridge & Fox, 2005; Perfetto, 2015). In the dental hygiene profession, respondents to studies including a purposive sampling survey, and a mixed methods study, indicated improved professional competence, credibility with colleagues and patients, and critical decision making as benefits to having a BS degree (Rogers, Johnson & Gurenlian (2015); Sunnell, McFarlane & Biggar (2017). Overall, graduates believe a baccalaureate-level education equips them with more advanced clinical skills than an associate degree-level education.

### ***Interprofessional Collaboration***

With the complexities of healthcare, healthcare professionals will be required to have an increased ability to collaborate as part of an interprofessional team. In a systematic review in 2017, researchers sought to determine how the level of education affected professional values of clinical practicing nurses (Sibandze & Scafide). Five out of seven studies analyzed, found a significant difference in the professional values of nurses, including improved quality of care between nurses with the BS degree and nurses with an AS degree. Similarly, a meta-analysis of 13 studies examining the experiences of RNs with bachelor degrees offered insights into the increasing demands of entry-level practice. Strong evidence across these studies showed that

working nursing believe that programs must prepare RNs to be better care providers through a holistic focus on research, leadership, theory and community (Perfetto, 2015). Christianson, Jacob & Twiggs (2018) noted themes in a scoping review of studies examining trends in healthcare that there is an increased need for nurses in mental health and rural settings, increased need for interprofessional collaborative practice and patient centered care. They concluded that there is a great need for more advanced degrees in healthcare in order to lead themselves and others to work autonomously and collaboratively in interprofessional teams. They noted that BSN trained nurses should be able to problem solve, think critically and creatively and be able to deal with complex, challenging and uncertain environments (Christianson, Jacob & Twiggs, 2018).

In their review of BS education from dental education organizations and universities, Stolberg & Tillis (2016) indicated that dental hygienists would need to have more advanced skills to work with more complex patients due to the changes in the delivery of healthcare. In addition, respondents in the Sunnell, McFarlane & Biggar (2017) survey of dental hygiene graduates reported increased confidence when working within inter-professional contexts as an added value to the BS degree. There is good evidence from the nursing profession and emerging evidence from the dental profession that the ability to work inter-professionally will be important in healthcare as the trends shift to community-based interventions.

### ***Personal Benefits***

Researchers explored similarities and differences in graduates in five healthcare professions and noted that advanced degrees increased levels of autonomy, career advancement and self-esteem (Brody, Byham-Gray & Touger-Decker, 2009). Similarly, respondents in a sampling of 101 practicing registered nurses, revealed themes of career advancement, personal

satisfaction and professional growth as the greatest benefit to the advanced nursing degree (Delaney & Piscopo, 2004). In a survey of 41 nurses with either an AS or BS entry-level education, respondents suggested common themes of career advancement, growth of knowledge, more global perspectives and personal accomplishments as the incentive for an advanced degree (Lillibridge & Fox, 2005). Specifically, these same respondents valued increased roles with assessing patients, developing a plan of care, and reimbursement for services compared to AS degree nurses. In a qualitative study using a self-assessment, nursing graduates were asked to compare perceived strengths and challenges in moving from an AS to a BS degree for entry-level practice (Northrup-Snyder, Menkens & Dean, 2017). Respondents indicated increased levels of confidence, awareness of professional opportunities, self-efficacy, sense of competence and personal beliefs with the baccalaureate degree preparation. In a 2017 descriptive study by Smith, Endee, Benz Scott & Linden, respiratory therapists indicated that a BS degree as entry to practice may be essential in elevating the status of the respiratory therapy profession by improving professional competence and credibility with colleagues and patients. Although most of the research in this area is low level research and relies heavily on personal opinions, the question of personal value of the BS degree requires this softer evidence for a richer understanding of experiences. The sampling of both nurses and respiratory therapists indicate the plethora of personal benefits for the added benefits of a BS degree compared to the AS degree.

### **Implications for OT Practice**

With the increasing demands in healthcare, the OT profession must be ready to adequately prepare graduates so they are better equipped with advanced skills such as interprofessional collaboration, working with diverse populations, evidence-based practice and self-efficacy. With an advanced terminal degree, they will be better prepared to meet the holistic needs of people

who often have complex medical, mental health and social needs, working both autonomously and collaboratively in a range of interprofessional teams as well as in emerging community practice contexts.

Graduates must also be proficient at the entry-level point to problem solve, think critically and creatively and be able to deal with complex, challenging and uncertain environments. Current trends in healthcare indicate that there is an increased need for healthcare professionals in mental health and rural settings, increased needs for interprofessional collaborative practice and patient-centered care (Christianson, Jacob & Twiggs, 2018). The pandemic, healthcare inequities, and social unrest within the past 2 years has also made it even more important to prepare socially minded competent professionals who are prepared to meet new and emerging needs of individuals groups and populations in a culturally attuned manner. These trends match the vision of occupational therapy. For more than 60 years, the OTA education has prepared graduates at the associate level. However, the changing needs of specific populations and within diverse settings may provide cause for us to consider the possible advantages to the entry-level BS OTA education. The increased length of time for academic preparation may offer the opportunity to address these needs.

## **Conclusion**

The findings from this literature review was shared with the administration at Rutgers University. It provided the requested evidence for strengths and challenges that may be expected of future bachelor's degree graduates. There is a growing body of evidence supporting the advantages of entry-level BS degrees to adequately prepare a competent healthcare workforce to meet the healthcare needs of society. Advantages include improved patient, group and community outcomes, enhanced ability to work inter-professionally, increased clinical skills and

personal benefits. It is clear these advantages support academic preparation for OTA at the BS level, to better prepare the profession to meet the increased demands in healthcare and reach populations historically neglected, marginalized or ignored. The challenges to move to the entry-level BS degree must not be overlooked in the decision either. The impact of diversity, including race, gender and socioeconomic status on the applicant pools for BS degree programs must remain a consideration for programs considering the transition to the entry-level BS degree.

It is critical to the future of OTA education to examine the benefits and challenges of advancing to the bachelor's degree. Since it is currently a viable option within the profession, there are benefits in pursuing the evidence to determine what effects, if any, there could be on the future of the OTA professional role. It is time sensitive to produce such evidence, prior to another mandate discussion within the profession. As noted, there is great value to many stakeholders to produce evidence to consider if it is in the professions and societies best interest to transition to the BS degree for OTA's. For Rutgers University, the decision for the transition to the entry-level baccalaureate degree has been made with the outcomes to be determined. The increased length of time in the program may further support and emphasize our mission to *'prepare graduates with the knowledge, skills, and intellectual approach necessary to become progressive, innovative and interprofessional practitioners and leaders in the ever-changing health care landscape'*.



## Appendix C.1 AOTA Education Summit Call for Papers

### Potential outcomes for an entry-level baccalaureate OTA degree: Considerations from other healthcare professions

**Conference:**

2022 AOTA Education Summit

**Type of Proposal:**

Completed Research

**Session Format:**

Oral Presentation

**Primary Speaker:**

*Deborah McKernan-Ace*

Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey

**Abstract Synopsis:**

This presentation will review the results of post-professional OTD project focused on exploring movement towards entry-level baccalaureate degree for the OTA. This session will outline evidence for entry-level baccalaureate degrees from other healthcare professions, experiences of a university transitioning to the baccalaureate degree OTA degree, implications for all OTA education and effects on OT practice.

**Learning Objectives:**

Gain a better understanding of entry-level baccalaureate education for allied health professions

Consider one Northeast university's decision for transitioning to the baccalaureate degree.

Examine recommendations for OT practice related to benefits to an entry-level baccalaureate degree for the OTA.

**Abstract and References:**

This presentation analyzes the evidence gathered through a post-professional doctoral project focused on exploring the potential advantages of an entry-level baccalaureate degree for occupational therapy

assistant education. Partly due to lack of evidence within the OT profession a scoping review method of research was used. Three different allied healthcare professions were reviewed, including nursing, dental hygiene, and respiratory therapy. Literature from each of these

professions indicated specific conclusions that resulted in four overall themes: advanced clinical skills, better patient outcomes, improved interprofessional collaborations and personal benefits. Specifics of these themes and their potential implications for OTA education will be discussed.

These themes and general findings from the scoping review of other healthcare professions assisted one Northeast university's decision to transition to the entry-level baccalaureate OTA degree.

Advocating for potential positive outcomes for graduates as they enter clinical practice were critical for the administration's consideration for the value of this entry-level BS OTA degree amongst our competitor's AS OTA degree. More background information of this decision and how it affects faculty roles will be disseminated for potential implications to other OTA education programs. As the discussion of the entry-level degree for the OTA continues within the profession, this presentation will provide OT and OTA educators with evidence for further consideration.

Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education. (2021, September 24). 2018

ACOTE standards and interpretive guide. <https://acoteonline.org/accreditation-explained/standards/>

American Occupational Therapy Association. (2015). Standards of practice for occupational therapy. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 69(3).

Anbari, A. (2015). The RN to BSN transition: A qualitative systematic review. *Global Qualitative Nursing Research*, 2, 1-11. Cottrell, R. (2000). COTA education and professional development: A historical review. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 54, 4, 407-412.

Lillibridge, J. & Fox, S. (2005). RN to BSN education: What do RNs think? *Nurse Educator*, 30(1), 12-16.

McCombie, R. (2016). Attitudes of occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants toward the entry-level bachelor's degree for OTAs. *Open Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 4(1), 1-11.

Northrup-Snyder, K. Menkens, R. & Dean, M. (2017). Student competency perceptions from associate degree to bachelor degree completion. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 56(10), 581-590.

Rogers, C., Johnson, T., & Gurenlian, J. (2015). New York state dental hygienists' perceptions of a baccalaureate degree as the entry-level degree required for practice. *The Journal of Dental Hygiene*, 89(2), 13-21.

Sibandze, B.T. & Scafide, K.N. (2017). Among nurses, how does education level impact professional values? A systematic review. *International Nursing Review*.

Smith, S., Endee, L., Benz Scott, L. & Linden, P. (2017). The future of respiratory care: Results of a New

York state survey of respiratory therapists. *Respiratory Care*, 62(3), 279-287.

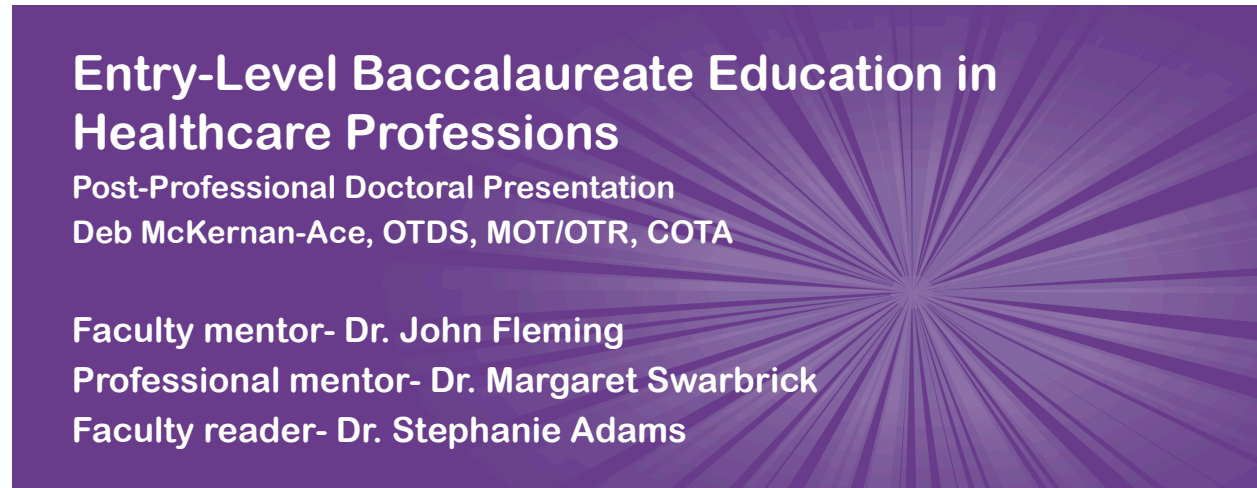
Stolberg, R. & Tilliss, T. (2016). The baccalaureate-educated dental hygienist- Emphasis on education. *Journal of Evidence-Based Dental Practice*, 165, 136-143.

**PRIMARY CONTENT FOCUS:**

Faculty development and resources

**SECONDARY CONTENT FOCUS:**

Scholarship in academic programs

**Appendix D.1 Doctoral Project Narrated Slide Presentation****Slide 1**

**Entry-Level Baccalaureate Education in  
Healthcare Professions**  
Post-Professional Doctoral Presentation  
Deb McKernan-Ace, OTDS, MOT/OTR, COTA

Faculty mentor- Dr. John Fleming  
Professional mentor- Dr. Margaret Swarbrick  
Faculty reader- Dr. Stephanie Adams

ST. CATHERINE UNIVERSITY

**Narration**

Good afternoon everyone. My name is Deb McKernan-Ace and I want to thank you for joining me in this final presentation of my doctoral project. My presentation is focused on Entry-level Baccalaureate Education in Healthcare. A special thank you to my committee- Dr. John Fleming, my faculty mentor; Dr. Peggy Swarbrick, my professional mentor; and Dr. Stephanie Adams, my faculty reader.

**Slide 2**

## Introduction and Background

- Rutgers OTA program decision to transition from AS to BS degree
- Are there educational benefits to the entry-level BS degree?
- Evidence from other healthcare profession
- Key stakeholders benefitting from the evidence:
  - Administration
  - Prospective students
  - Employers
  - Graduates
  - Faculty
  - Consumers of OT services

ST. CATHERINE UNIVERSITY

**Narration**

My doctoral project grew out of my real life experience at Rutgers University. I am currently the program director for the OTA program at Rutgers University. About a year ago, we officially decided to transition our AS OTA program to a BS OTA program. This decision required a significant amount of persuasion to the administration. One of the things that they requested was some evidence to support the decision for an entry-level program. Due to the absence of literature for entry-level OTA degrees, I needed to look outside of the profession and find evidence from other healthcare professions who have transitioned from an associate to a bachelor's entry-level degree. I felt that this evidence would not only support the administration's request but also be beneficial to share with prospective, employers, graduates and consumer of OT services in New Jersey.

**Slide 3**

## Need for Knowledge Translation

- No published literature discussing entry-level baccalaureate OTA education
- What is the evidence from other healthcare professions that will be beneficial for OTA education ie. nursing, dental hygiene and respiratory therapy
- Continued discussion of OTA education mandate

ST. CATHERINE UNIVERSITY

**Narration**

There is currently no published literature discussing entry-level baccalaureate education for the OTA. So, I needed to consider the evidence from other healthcare professions, nursing, dental hygiene and respiratory therapy. My intention was to gain insights that could be applied to OTA education. Any relevant information could be beneficial as the profession continues the discussion about mandating the entry-level education for both OTAs and OTs.

**Slide 4**

## Review of Evidence: Emerging Themes

1. Improved patient outcomes
2. Advanced clinical skills
3. Increased interprofessional collaborations
4. Personal benefits

ST. CATHERINE UNIVERSITY

**Narration**

There were 4 major themes that emerged from these three healthcare professions that have transitioned to an entry-level baccalaureate degree. These include improved patient outcomes, advanced clinical skills, increased interprofessional collaboration and overall personal benefits.

**Slide 5**

## Theme #1 Better Patient Outcomes

### Nursing

- Decreased post-surgical mortality rates by 5% and failure to rescue by 6% (Haskins, Pierson, 2016)
- 64% of nursing respondents strongly agreed that BS degree should be minimum nursing standard due to expanded scope of practice and benefits to patient care (Lillibridge & Fox, 2010)

### Dental Hygiene

- Respondents believed BS degree improves graduates' judgment and evidence-based decision making in clinic (Sunnell, McFarlane & Biggar, 2017)
- Increased competence & credibility with colleagues and patients (Rogers, Johnson & Gurenlian, 2015)

ST. CATHERINE UNIVERSITY

### Narration

The first theme that emerged is the potential for better patient outcomes. In a systematic review of 9 studies involving patient mortality of post-surgical patients, it was found that there was a 5% decrease in mortality rates and a 6% decrease in failure to rescue if the patients were treated by a nurse who had a bachelor's degree versus an associate degree. In a qualitative program evaluation, 64% of nursing respondents strongly agreed that entry level nurses should be educated at the bachelor's level. They felt it expanded their scope of practice which benefits patient care.

In Dental Hygiene, an interview of practitioners believed that the bachelor's degree improves graduates' judgment and evidence-based decision making in the clinic. Similarly, in a survey of 800 dental hygienists in New York, the respondents indicated that the BS degree increased competence and credibility with colleagues and patients.



**Slide 6**

## Theme #2- Advanced Clinical Skills

### Nursing

- Ability to work across settings, respond to advancing technology, empower self-sufficiency, expand scope of practice and increases use of theory and research (Christianson, Jacob & Twiggs, 2017; Lillibridge & Fox, 2005; Perfetto, 2015)

### Dental Hygiene

- Increased competence, credibility with colleagues and patients, and improved decision making (Rogers, Johnson & Gurenlian, 2015; Sunnell, McFarlane & Biggar, 2017)

ST. CATHERINE UNIVERSITY

### Narration

The 2nd theme to emerge is more advanced clinical skills. There were some variations in the definition of clinical skills between professions, as expected, however, there were similarities. In a scoping review, program evaluation and meta-analysis from nursing, the authors identified more advanced skills such as ability to work across a variety of settings, ability to use advanced technology, improved self-sufficiency, expanded scope of practice and increased use of theory and research.

In two dental hygiene studies, one survey and one mixed-methods study, skills identified included increased professional competence, increased credibility with colleagues and patients, and improved critical decision making. Although there is lower evidence in this area, there is a clear indication from graduate's surveys that they believe a bachelor's degree equips them with more advanced clinical skills.

**Slide 7**

## Theme #3-Interprofessional Collaborations

### Nursing

- Significant differences in professional values of bachelor trained nurses (Sibandze & Scafide, 2017)
- Academia must prepare RNs to be better care providers through research, leadership, theory & community (Perfetto, 2015)
- Increased need for nurses in MH and rural settings, increased need for IP collaborations & patient-centered care (Christianson, Jacob & Twiggs, 2018)

### Dental Hygiene

- Need for advanced skills to work with more complex patients (Stolberg & Tillis, 2016)
- Improved confidence to work in inter-professional contexts as an added value to an entry-level bachelor's education (Sunnell, McFarlane & Biggar, 2017)

ST. CATHERINE UNIVERSITY

### Narration

The 3<sup>rd</sup> theme is inter-professional collaborations. In a systematic review looking at professional values of nurses, 5 out of 7 studies found significant differences with bachelor trained nurses. 13 studies in a meta-analysis showed that working nurses believe that academia must prepare RNs to be better care providers through research, leadership, theory & community. There is also an increased need for nurses to work in mental health and rural settings with a focus on inter-professional collaborations and patient-centered care.

Dental hygiene organizations and academic programs emphasized the need for dental hygienists to have advanced skills to work with more complex patients to meet the changing needs in healthcare. A survey of dental hygienists validated the need for improved confidence to work in inter-professional contexts as an added benefit to an entry-level bachelor's education.

Overall, there is good evidence in nursing and emerging evidence in dental hygiene for the value of interprofessional collaborations within bachelor's education.

**Slide 8**

## Theme #4- Personal Benefits

- Advanced degrees increase levels of autonomy, career advancement and self-esteem (Brody, Byham-Gray & Touger-Decker, 2009)
- Themes of career advancement, personal satisfaction and professional growth (Delaney & Piscopo, 2004; Lillibridge & Fox, 2005)
- BS degree may elevate status by increasing competence and credibility with colleagues and patients (Smith, Endee, Benz Scott & Linden, 2017)

ST. CATHERINE UNIVERSITY

**Narration**

The final theme that emerged is the personal benefits. In a study looking at similarities and differences of 5 different healthcare professions, advanced degrees increased levels of autonomy, career advancement and self-esteem. In two similar nursing surveys, themes of career advancement, personal satisfaction, and professional growth emerged. Finally, a descriptive study of respiratory therapists, noted that the BS degree may elevate their professional status by increasing competence and credibility with colleagues and patients.

Although this literature may be lower level evidence the insights about the value of personal benefits allows for a richer understanding of lived experiences.

**Slide 9**

## Aims for 3 Knowledge Translation Project 1

- Increase understanding of baccalaureate education as entry-level for allied health professions and its effects on the future of occupational therapy assistant education through a professional presentation for the Minnesota Occupational Therapy Association.

ST. CATHERINE UNIVERSITY

**Narration**

As part of this doctoral project I created three knowledge translation projects. The aims for project 1 was to increase understanding of baccalaureate education as entry-level for allied health professions and its effects on the future of occupational therapy assistant education. This project was a professional presentation for the Minnesota Occupational Therapy Association. MOTA invited any members of the state associate to attend and earn continuing education units. This project was required for the post-professional students but was not the intended audience for my topic.

**Slide 10**

## Aims for 3 Knowledge Translation Project 2

- Increase awareness of current literature on the potential benefits of an entry-level baccalaureate education in the healthcare community and more specifically to OT practice through an article for the Academic Education Special Interest Section Quarterly.

ST. CATHERINE UNIVERSITY

**Narration**

The aims of project 2 is to increase awareness of current literature on the potential benefits of an entry-level baccalaureate education in the healthcare community and more specifically to OT practice. This project is a professional article for the Academic Education Special Interest Section Quarterly for AOTA. This newsletter was selected due to the applicability of the intended audience and as a potential precursor to a longer journal article for the Journal of Occupational Therapy Education.

**Slide 11**

## Aims for 3 Knowledge Translation Project 3

- Increase understanding of baccalaureate education as entry-level for allied health professions and its effects on the future of occupational therapy assistant education through a professional presentation for the American Occupational Therapy Association's Education Summit in fall 2022.

ST. CATHERINE UNIVERSITY

**Narration**

The aim for project 3 is to increase understanding of baccalaureate education as entry-level for allied health professions and its effects on the future of occupational therapy assistant education. This project is a professional presentation for the American Occupational Therapy Association's Education Summit in fall 2022. The venue was selected as the most beneficial due to the attendee's connection to academia.

**Slide 12**

## Summary of Knowledge Translation Project 1

- Description
  - Presentation for Minnesota Occupational Therapy Association (MOTA)
- Audience
  - OTPs, OT students, OT educators
  - 8 attendees
- Learning Objectives:
  - gain a better understanding of baccalaureate degree education as entry-level for allied health professions
  - critique levels of evidence for current baccalaureate degree levels for healthcare professions
  - examine recommendations for OT practice related to benefits to an entry-level baccalaureate degree for the OTA

ST. CATHERINE UNIVERSITY

**Narration**

My first knowledge translation project was a professional presentation to the Minnesota Occupational Therapy Association in February. My 20 minutes presentation was delivered virtually through the Zoom platform. The intended audience for this event were practitioners, students and educators. There were 8 attendees in total: Five post-professional OTD students, 1 OTD faculty member and two community practitioners. The learning objectives for the participants included:

To gain a better understanding of baccalaureate degree education as entry-level for allied health profession

To critique levels of evidence for current baccalaureate degree levels for healthcare professions

To examine recommendations for OT practice related to benefits to an entry-level baccalaureate degree for the OTA

**Slide 13**

## Summary of Knowledge Translation Project 2

- Description
  - Article for AOTA Academic Education Special Interest Section (SIS) Quarterly Newsletter
- Audience
  - OTPs, OT educators
- Learning Objectives:
  - gain a better understanding of baccalaureate degree education as entry-level for allied health professions
  - consider implications from other healthcare professions on OT practice specifically related to benefits to an entry-level baccalaureate degree for the OT

ST. CATHERINE UNIVERSITY

**Narration**

My second knowledge translation project is a professional article for the Academic Education Special Interest Section Quarterly Newsletter. The article was written by this author and revised and edited by Dr. Fleming and Dr. Swarbrick prior to final submission. The intended audience for this article is OT and OTA educators and OT practitioners. The learning objectives for readers of the article include:

To gain a better understanding of baccalaureate degree education as entry-level for allied health professions

To consider implications from other healthcare professions on OT practice specifically related to benefits to an entry-level baccalaureate degree for the OT



**Slide 14**

## Summary of Knowledge Translation Project 3

- Description
  - Presentation for AOTA Education Summit in Fall 2022
- Audience
  - OT and OTA educators
- Learning Objectives:
  - gain a better understanding of baccalaureate degree education as entry-level for allied health professions through critique of the evidence
  - consider implications of the evidence on OT practice specifically related to benefits to an entry-level baccalaureate degree for the OT
  - apply implications of the evidence to discussions on the future of OTA education

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**Narration**

My final knowledge translation project is a professional presentation for the AOTA Education Summit in Fall 2022. The intended audience for the summit and this presentation is OT and OTA educators. I indicated first preference of a 20 minute presentation but also that I would be willing to present through a poster format as well. The learning objectives for participants include:

To gain a better understanding of baccalaureate degree education as entry-level for allied health professions through critique of the evidence

To consider implications of the evidence on OT practice specifically related to benefits to an entry-level baccalaureate degree for the OT

To apply implications of the evidence to discussions on the future of OTA education

**Slide 15**

## Evaluation of Outcomes of KT Project 1

- Virtual continuing education presentation
  - 5 question Google Forms survey using a 5 point Likert scale
    - Better understanding of BS healthcare education
    - Understanding the levels of evidence presented
    - Application of benefits to OTA education
    - Organization of the presentation
    - Overall communication of the information
  - 3 responses

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**Narration**

Project 1 was evaluated using a 5 question Google Forms survey. The survey was developed by the presenter and used a 5 point Linear scale. The participants were asked to rate the following 5 items:

Better understanding of BS healthcare education, understanding the levels of evidence, application of the benefits to OTA education, organization of the presentation and overall communication of information by the speaker.

The presenter received 3 survey responses- the question regarding understanding of the BS healthcare education received 1 well and 2 extremely well responses and the remaining 4 questions all received 'extremely well' responses.

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## Evaluation and Outcomes of KT Project 2 and 3

- KT Project 2- Call for Papers submitted to AOTA for Fall 2022 Education Summit presentation in March 2022
  - Evaluation Method:
    - Faculty revisions
    - AOTA participant feedback and survey
- KT Project 3-Article submitted to AOTA Academic Education SIS Quarterly Newsletter in April 2022
  - Evaluation Method:
    - Faculty revisions
    - Editorial revisions

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**Narration**

The evaluation and outcomes for projects 2 and 3 are still a work in progress. Project 2, the AESIS article has been submitted to the editor and is waiting on a response. Edits and revisions were provided by Dr. Fleming and Dr. Swarbrick prior to submission. Project 3, the Call for Papers for the Education Summit presentation has been submitted to AOTA as well. Edits, revisions and suggestions were provided by Dr. Fleming and Dr. Swarbrick. Both of these projects will include editorial revisions if accepted for publication or live presentation.

**Slide 17**

## Recommendations and Implications for Practice/Profession

- Consider the strengths and challenges identified from other healthcare professions
- Consider maintaining a dual entry point for OTAs for a period of time until outcomes from BS graduates can be evaluated

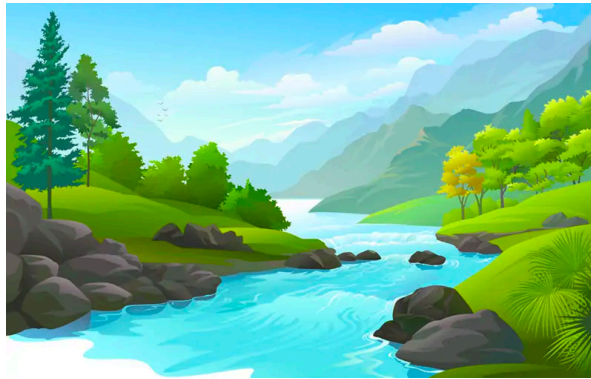
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**Narration**

The themes noted from this projects' literature review, can shed some insights for consideration of an entry-level baccalaureate OTA degree. If we consider the strengths and challenges identified from the other healthcare professions, we can move forward with caution and anticipation. One consideration may be to maintain a dual entry point for OTAs for a period of time, until outcomes from BS OTA graduates can be evaluated. This would provide the profession further evidence prior to making a decision to mandate the BS entry-level degree.

**Slide 18**

## Personal Reflection



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**Narration**

As I reflected on this scholarly process, I am reminded of my personal favorite OT model- the KAWA model. These past two years have been packed with ‘rocks’ and ‘driftwood’ that at times felt too overwhelming and was causing my river to almost completely stop flowing. I began my doctoral journey during a major pandemic at the same time I was trying to navigate my own students and faculty through the ups and downs of virtual teaching and learning. I won’t even list the personal rocks that were occurring simultaneously as well. More than once during this process I was talking myself into taking a leave of absence, thinking that this was not the right time to be doing this. But each and every time, I kept coming back to this model of OT. I am fortunate enough to call Dr. Michael Iwama, the KAWA creator, a friend. So each and every time I felt like this was not going well, I was reminded of this beautiful metaphor of the river he created for us to use with clients. I started thinking about my own river. I started to develop strategies to move the rocks, add to my driftwood, and rely on people for my support.

I met new classmates who will hopefully stay lifelong friends now, and new faculty that will be connected to me professionally moving forward. I learned so much about myself as a person and as a professional on this journey. This process has made me a role model for my own students who will walk the stage tomorrow. It has not been an easy journey, but my river is wider and deeper now than I could’ve ever imagined two years ago.

**Slide 19**

## Next Steps

- Continue with editor of AESIS for newsletter article
- Present at Education Summit in Fall 2022
- Publish manuscript for Journal of Occupational Education
- Translate knowledge of potential benefits to entry-level degree with key stakeholders in New Jersey
- Develop curriculum that reflects the 4 themes from the evidence

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**Narration**

Moving forward, I plan to continue my collaboration with the editor of AESIS to get my article published in the newsletter. If I get accepted to present at the Education Summit in the Fall, I will develop my presentation. I want to disseminate this information to a greater audience and so I plan to write a manuscript for the Journal of Occupational Therapy. I will definitely be sharing the findings of this literature review to the key stakeholders in New Jersey for our OTA program. As I begin to develop the bachelor's curriculum, I plan to use the findings from the four themes to influence the curriculum design.

**Slide 20**

## Acknowledgements

- Doctoral committee members:
  - Dr. John Fleming, St. Catherine University
  - Dr. Stephanie Adams, St. Catherine University
  - Dr. Margaret Swarbrick, Rutgers University
- Family children: Justine, Lauren, Mitchell, Kendra and Collin
- Classmates- Amy Carrier, Paula Stommes, Emily Peterson, Jessica McGuire, and Traci Pepin
- Rutgers University OTA faculty

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**Narration**

I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Fleming, Dr. Adams and a special thank you to my colleague and friend Dr. Peggy Swarbrick who has mentored me through this entire process. My five children who are my inspiration every day. Thank you to all my classmates but with special thanks to Amy, Paula, Emily, Jessica and Traci. You have been my rocks! Finally, to my wonderful faculty in the OTA program at Rutgers. Thanks for trusting me in this decision to transition to the bachelor's degree and being willing to take this journey with me.

**Slide 21**



Q & A

THANK YOU!

Time for questions😊

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**Narration**

Thank you for listening. I am happy to answer any questions now.