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Abstract

The responsibilities and challenges of Academic Fieldwork Coordinators vary considerably across occupational therapy and occupational therapy assistant programs in the United States. In the second part of a nationwide convergent mixed-method study conducted to identify the roles and responsibilities of the Academic Fieldwork Coordinator, we examined the role responsibilities, structural supports, and barriers that influence their success and satisfaction. Academic Fieldwork Coordinators described the valuable role they play in supporting students' achievement of learning outcomes, successful fieldwork experiences, and their entrance into the profession as competent practitioners. They additionally delineated the valuable contributions they make to their programs' maintenance of relevance in their curriculum and in the community. Their ambassadorship of institutions, program, students, fieldwork educators, and the occupational therapy profession brings them both reward and challenge. This study yields important data on these juxtaposed experiences and sheds light on the ways they can be addressed to improve role satisfaction and success.

Keywords

Academic Fieldwork Coordinator, fieldwork education, role satisfaction

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A Nationwide Descriptive Study: Part II Understanding the Ways Academic Fieldwork Coordinators Describe the Responsibilities and Challenges of their Role

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ABSTRACT

The responsibilities and challenges of Academic Fieldwork Coordinators vary considerably across occupational therapy and occupational therapy assistant programs in the United States. In the second part of a nationwide convergent mixed-method study conducted to identify the roles and responsibilities of the Academic Fieldwork Coordinator, we examined the role responsibilities, structural supports, and barriers that influence their success and satisfaction. Academic Fieldwork Coordinators described the valuable role they play in supporting students' achievement of learning outcomes, successful fieldwork experiences, and their entrance into the profession as competent practitioners. They additionally delineated the valuable contributions they make to their programs' maintenance of relevance in their curriculum and in the community. Their ambassadorship of institutions, program, students, fieldwork educators, and the occupational therapy profession brings them both reward and challenge. This study yields important data on these juxtaposed experiences and sheds light on the ways they can be addressed to improve role satisfaction and success.

Background

The role of the Academic Fieldwork Coordinator (AFWC) has been documented as an integral component of occupational therapy education for several decades, however, there is a paucity of research that investigates and describes the responsibilities and challenges of this central role. In their systematic review, Roberts and colleagues (2015) suggested there is a lack of scholarship on the topic of occupational therapy faculty roles including that of AFWC. Although not widely studied within occupational therapy education, role and workload requirements of clinical education faculty have been examined across other health professional disciplines and is a high priority among clinical education leaders (McLaughlin et al., 2019). In fact, before the United States (US) descriptive study we conducted in 2021 (Deluliis et al., 2021), AFWCs' role descriptions, complexities, and challenges have only been reported in three research studies (Evenson et al., 2015; Stutz-Tanenbaum et al., 2015, 2017).

In 2021, we conducted a nationwide descriptive study to identify the expectations, responsibilities, and contextual factors that impact the workload of AFWCs and to shed light on patterns of practice that lead to workload satisfaction and challenge (Deluliis et al., 2021). Trends in workload, variability in institutional and program level practices and supports (e.g., release time, administrative and clerical support, use of databases), and challenges experienced by AFWCs were discussed. Initial results from the analysis of the survey indicated the level of institutional, program, faculty, and clerical support and the ways in which institutional demands and balance of teaching, scholarship, service, and administrative responsibilities play a role in the perceived effectiveness of the AFWC (Deluliis et al., 2021).

As the pedagogy of fieldwork education continues to evolve (e.g., diverse models of supervision, population and community focused placements, simulation, telehealth), AFWCs are required to respond to new expectations and responsibilities with agility, flexibility, and creativity in areas of administration, curriculum development and implementation, and assessment of student learning (Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education [ACOTE], 2018). Striking a balance between teaching, scholarship, and service can be challenging for any academician. However, the complex and multifaceted workload of the AFWC, replete with programmatic, student, and site-based data management, creates unique challenges that impact role satisfaction, effectiveness, and professional advancement.

Literature Review

Role Satisfaction

Faculty report the enjoyment of teaching and relationships with students and colleagues as the most meaningful and satisfying aspects of their roles (Deluliis et al., 2021). Opportunities for promotion, job security, resources for research, and sense of autonomy are correlated with higher role satisfaction (McKinstry et al., 2020; Romig et al., 2011). For occupational therapy faculty, major contributions to role dissatisfaction are: unrealistic workloads, perception of value only placed on research at the expense of quality teaching, hierarchical university structures, and competing demands on time (McKinstry et al., 2020; Romig et al., 2011).

Occupational therapy faculty members must balance the expectations between the standard pillars of the faculty role: education to students with a variety of educational needs, pressures to produce quality research, and to support the institution, profession, and community through service. For AFWCs, this balance adds the additional duties of fieldwork coordination including ensuring compliance with ACOTE fieldwork standards, locating, securing, and assigning fieldwork placements, compliance with fieldwork site and institution policies (ACOTE, 2018), and maintaining relational aspects of the fieldwork sites, fieldwork educators, faculty, and students (Stutz-Tanenbaum et al., 2015).

AFWCs have limited longevity in the role (Stutz-Tanenbaum et al., 2015), with most being in the position for less than six years (Deluliis et al., 2021). It is not yet known if this is related to role satisfaction, burnout, lack of institutional support or recognition, workload, or other factors. Current gaps in the literature suggest further study is warranted on the role expectations and challenges of the AFWC. Little inference can be drawn from the literature from other disciplines because of the variability in role responsibilities.

The aim of this convergent mixed method study was to identify the ways AFWCs in occupational therapy assistant (OTA) and Master and Doctor of Occupational Therapy (OTM and OTD) programs in the US describe the roles, responsibilities, supports and challenges of their essential role in occupational therapy education and their influence on effectiveness and satisfaction. We expand upon the descriptive data analyzed in the nationwide descriptive study (Deluliis et al., 2021) to further illuminate the ways in which supports and barriers and patterns of practice associated with internal and external characteristics of AFWCs and their roles influence satisfaction and challenges. We asked the following research questions:

1. How does the AFWC position impact the quality of occupational therapy student education as reported by AFWCs?
2. What responsibilities do AFWCs identify as enhancing their role satisfaction?
3. What responsibilities do AFWCs report as negatively impacting the work of AFWCs?
4. What type of supports do AFWCs identify as absent but required to be more efficient and effective in their role?

METHODS

Study Design

The study data were drawn from our larger, convergent mixed method study (Deluliis et al., 2021) conducted to identify the roles and responsibilities of AFWCs in occupational therapy and OTA programs in the US and to identify the structural supports and barriers that influence their success and satisfaction. Using a constructivist and interpretivist epistemological approach (King & Brooks, 2017), in this analysis we report on the qualitative data collected in four of the five open-ended cross-sectional survey questions that were thematically analyzed using an iterative and framing process to identify and interpret patterns of meaning and draw deeper conclusions regarding the descriptive quantitative data that was previously reported (Fetters et al., 2013; Goldsmith, 2021).

Participants

Purposive sampling was used to gather data from AFWCs from ACOTE accredited occupational therapy and OTA programs identified in the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) website. At the time of the study, there were 370 accredited programs and accredited programs under transition to a new degree level in the US (Deluliis et al., 2021). Study participants included: 1) AFWCs employed at an ACOTE accredited OTA, OTM or OTD program in the United States, 2) AFWCs employed at an existing ACOTE accredited OTA, OTM or OTD program in the US that was transitioning to a new degree program, and 3) agreement to participate via an electronic consent form. Study exclusion criteria included: 1) occupational therapy faculty that were not the AFWCs and 2) AFWCs from programs that did not have full accreditation status. Email addresses of program AFWCs were collected from academic program websites and used to solicit participation in the study.

Instrument

Data were collected via an anonymous online survey using Qualtrics (Qualtrics, Version October 2020, Provo, UT) that is described in detail in the previously published nationwide descriptive study (Deluliis et al., 2021). Survey questions were developed after an exhaustive review of an interdisciplinary body of literature addressing the role of health professions educators responsible for clinical education that addressed role, responsibilities, and the lived experiences of AFWCs. The survey was piloted among a group of AFWCs who provided feedback and led to instrument refinement and validation. Five open-ended questions were included on the 64-item survey and four of them, specifically addressing role characteristics, responsibilities, and challenges, were included in this analysis as noted above.

Procedure

Prospective participants received an electronic invitation via email to participate in the study during early Spring in 2020. The invitation included the details of the study and the study consent information. Once consent was obtained, participants received access to the electronic survey link and the survey remained open for four months. Recruitment and enrollment were conducted without regard for race or ethnic background and maintained confidentiality of potential subject information. The researchers had no direct interaction with any participants. Identifying information such as name and place of employment were not requested, and IP addresses were not recorded by Qualtrics. Qualitative data was scanned for any potential identifying data (e.g., name of participant, region, academic institution) before it was extracted from the survey tool, though, no identifying data was revealed. All information collected in the study was maintained completely confidential and aggregated data were stored in a password-protected file. Note that data were collected prior to the start of the public health emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which therefore did not influence the results.

Data Measurement and Analysis

The data gathered through the open-ended survey questions were examined by all four researchers for familiarization and discussion. The first two authors then read through individual words, phrases, and sentences line-by-line multiple times to identify common features, and individually developed a list of codes for each of the questions. Initial code lists including substantive role responsibilities (e.g., teaching, advising, placement of students, contract management, site development, networking), values (e.g., programmatic ambassadorship, building relationships with students and fieldwork educators, collaboration with program faculty and administration), and emotions (e.g., satisfaction, joy, frustration) were developed. Once fully reviewed, the two researchers met to review the codes and develop an initial thematic coding framework (Goldsmith, 2021; Warren & Karner, 2005). Most of the codes were in alignment, but those that differed were discussed until consensus was obtained. The data were then reviewed, further synthesized, and categorized and charted manually and using NVIVO (NVIVO 1.0, QSR International, Burlington, MA).

Following synthesis, the two researchers examined the patterns iteratively and identified the key patterns that emerged. We defined each of the codes, tested them against the data sample, and renamed, reordered, and abstracted them. The codes and subsequent themes were then examined by the full group considering the descriptive data collected for reliability and accuracy and once consensus was obtained the data was charted and themes mapped. Using NVIVO, we completed matrix coding queries for research questions three and four, comparing the identified themes with the demographic information obtained (e.g., years of experience, release time from teaching, hours of administrative support, satisfaction, barriers, resources) to deepen the understanding of the influences on AFWCs' role satisfaction and effectiveness. Following the final thematic analysis and the matrices comparisons, the full group examined the data once again for clarity and consensus.

At the time of the study, each of the researchers held roles of AFWCs in a different academic institution across the US. We used a process of constant comparison and consensus building to examine the data about our own practice experiences and views and to the unique meaning the research data would have for practice and the profession (Polit & Beck, 2017). We believe our roles afforded us an ethnographic lens from which we, immersed in the community of subjects we examined, designed the study, collected the data, and interpret the results. To enhance the validity of the data analysis, ethics and reflexivity were accounted for in the following critical ways (Barry et al., 1999):

- We obtained approval for our study design by the Institutional Review Board at Duquesne University.
- Before and during the study design process, we carefully examined our own biases and experiences through reflection, discussion, and critical appraisal of the literature addressing clinical education and coordination across health professions.
- We identified explicit philosophical approaches to data collection and interpretation.

- The perspectives of AFWCs were sought and considered in the survey design and dissemination.
- Constant comparison and cross examination of the quantitative dataset with previously published literature and our own experiences.

RESULTS

The survey was sent to 370 accredited programs and accredited programs under transition to a new degree level in the US. It was opened 137 times and completed by 103 participants for a response rate of approximately 28%. The findings showed that AFWCs manage significantly complex and, at times, conflicting role responsibilities that are perceived as both rewarding and challenging in the areas of: 1) student education, supports, and resources; 2) program, curriculum, and faculty ambassadorship and supports; and 3) fieldwork site and educator networking. While these three main thematic findings were expected, the nuanced intersections between these domains are where we find challenging role opportunities and obstacles. The thematic results are reported for each research question posed.

Academic Fieldwork Coordinators' Impact on Quality Education

AFWCs described overall satisfaction with their roles (Deluliis et al., 2021) and suggested their roles form an integral link between 1) clinical practice and education, 2) the program and institution and the practice community, and 3) students and clinical practice. AFWCs recognized the value of their position as contributing significantly to the institution, program, and student education and reported their role centers around preparation of the program and faculty, students, and fieldwork educators to enable effective transition of students from academia to practice. AFWCs described the need to stay abreast of practice trends to influence curricular changes, support student preparation, and provide positive fieldwork education experiences. *“The AFWC serves as liaison, confidant, and problem solver before and during the placement and supports the transition from student didactic to clinical setting.”* AFWCs suggested their role is a valuable *bridge* that enables students to close the gap from classroom to fieldwork and fieldwork to employment. One respondent shared,

We help [students] to see how clinical education interfaces with their overall [occupational therapy] education. I often have conversations with them about what the role of field work plays in their development as an [occupational therapist], not what role it plays in their immediate employment site of choice. We provide important insights at departmental faculty meetings to keep a connection between the professors and the realities of practice. We help students connect the dots!

AFWCs described their role of ambassadorship as they serve as the face of the program by networking with the academic and practice communities, developing fieldwork placements, gathering feedback from students and fieldwork sites, and bridging didactic information to practice. Citing that the *“AFWC is the face of the department,”* one respondent elaborated that AFWCs *“ensure that clinical *

demands/expectations are taught in the classroom.” They have a role, they suggested, in “keep[ing] classroom teaching relevant to the field” and maintaining a finger on the “pulse of the community and elicit lots of specific feedback.”

Making connections and relationships with and between faculty, students, fieldwork sites, and other relevant stakeholders to empower effective student transition was described as an important role of AFWC. In fact, AFWCs reported adding value to the program and institution through their relationships with faculty members, students, and community partners, and by serving as a key conduit between the curriculum and practice to ensure the connection is current, relevant, and consistent to support the educational process. One respondent poignantly stated,

AFWCs are the final compilation of didactic learning and to practice. It is important for them to provide valuable experiences which requires developing relationships with sites and supporting clinical educators to continue to learn and grow their best practice in supervising students. AFWCs promote ...

- a. The development of partnerships increases the access to community experts, who contribute to other courses as adjunct faculty or guest lecturers, or department community advisors.
- b. Supports in the identification of community needs and methods for how [occupational therapy] department can advocate for [occupational therapy].
- c. Facilitates partnerships with faculty and integrating content presented in courses, identifies specific practice skills that students need to prepare for fieldwork and is reflective of real-world experiences.
- d. Extends education beyond practice skills to include personal reflections of self and internal, soft skills needed to be successful entry level practitioners.

Summed up even more broadly, one survey respondent shared,

The AFWC’s role has a positive impact not only on the students, but ultimately on the profession of [occupational therapy] as a whole. By providing students with high quality fieldwork experiences, the students have a greater foundation for success in the completion of didactic training, passing the NBCOT, and securing a desired job. The students-turned-clinician will use their training and fieldwork to provide high quality care to clients and train students to do the same in the future.

Responsibilities that Enhance Satisfaction

AFWCs reported that role satisfaction was enhanced by their interactions with students, communication and networking with the community fieldwork educators and other stakeholders, and by the program and institutional support they receive. Students were, by far, a most significant influence on role satisfaction for AFWCs. “*Seeing students cross the bridge from student to practitioner,*” “*The light-bulb moment for students when*

they encounter the love of occupational therapy in a setting that they did not anticipate,” and “Seeing the students get those ‘AHA-moments’ during fieldwork and being able to relate the didactic coursework to real-world practice makes it all worth it!” are exemplars of the value of student interactions on AFWCs’ satisfaction.

Communication and networking with the fieldwork educators and community stakeholders also enhanced satisfaction. *“I enjoy being the face of the program in the community and building relationships with the sites.”* Another participant reported they like *“the ability to network with community practitioners and provide training and education to help them in their role as a Fieldwork Educator.”* Another respondent stated,

I enjoy the relationships created with fieldwork educators over the years. I also like keeping a ‘pulse’ on changes in [occupational therapy] practice so that we can modify our curriculum accordingly. In addition, it is wonderful to be a resource to our FW Educators.

While both students and fieldwork educators enhance AFWC satisfaction, program and institutional support was noted to be another key to role satisfaction. Participants identified many types of institutional/program support necessary for satisfaction including *“department teamwork,” “I am extremely supported by my program director,” “administrative support, new database, empathy from faculty...and a second AFWC on staff,” “having opportunities to go to conference and ALC meetings,”* and *“Respect from faculty colleagues on the complexity and the demands of the role.”*

To further understand the influence of role satisfaction and program and institutional support, we examined respondents’ level of satisfaction with supports provided. Using NVIVO’s matrix coding query, we compared specific program and institutional supports identified in the theme related to program and institutional support with the respondents’ level of satisfaction and found that role satisfaction is increased when AFWCs have a clear understanding of their role, are provided necessary administrative support, and receive release time to meet their role requirements. The more satisfied the respondents were, the less likely they were to mention these criteria. Table 1 shows the percentage of respondents who mention related criterion. Because the number of participants’ comments discussing these constructs vary in the sample, we provide the percentage of the occurrence of the comment versus the numbers themselves.

Table 1*Level of Satisfaction and Program and Institutional Support*

Level of Satisfaction	Percentage of Respondents who Mention the Criterion				
	Understanding and Support of Role	Administrative Support Needed	Release Time Needed	Workload	Site Shortages
Satisfied	20.99%	35.8%	17.28%	43.21%	32.10%
Neutral	30%	50%	20%	60%	10%
Dissatisfied	33.3%	66.6%	33.33%	58.33%	66.67%

While workload demands in general appeared to have a neutral to negative influence on role satisfaction, challenges with site shortages and the subsequent work required to address and creatively mitigate shortages plays a significant role in reducing role satisfaction for AFWCs. We found that generally, the more years a respondent served as an AFWC, the more often they mentioned this criterion in their reflections of challenges (less than one year - 18% [n=4/22]; 1 – 3 years – 30% [n=10/33], 4 – 6 years – 41% [n=12/29]; 7 – 10 years – 38% [n=5/13], and over 10 years – 57% [n=4/7]). Furthermore, the higher the degree program, the more often respondents mentioned workload in their comments (Associate’s College or Technical Institutes – 43% [n=13/30]; Master’s programs – 45% [n=13/29]; Doctoral University – 55% [n=22/40]).

Participants also identified numerous personal characteristics that enhanced their satisfaction. Some of the characteristics identified were creativity, problem solving, organization, communication, relationship building and maintenance, project, time, and stress management, flexibility, supporting, networking, and resilience. One respondent wrote, “*Skills in organization, communication, relationship building and maintenance, project management.*” Another shared, “*I believe having good communication skills, being organized, flexible, creative and sincere enhance my satisfaction with the role of AFWC.*” Yet another commented, “*Ability to live with the unknown and not stress out with change, intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation.*” One summed up the valuable internal characteristics as,

I am a flexible person and I'm able to go with the flow. I understand this job can be difficult at times, but I understand my role and try to stay mentally, emotionally, and physically prepared to take on any challenges that come my way.

Responsibilities that Limit Satisfaction

AFWCs reported that satisfaction can be negatively impacted by similar constructs. A lack of program and institutional support, addressing the challenging needs of students as they prepare for, transition to, and experience fieldwork, and manage the complexity of site partnership were reported as negatively impacting the work and satisfaction of

AFWCs. Respondents reported that lack of administrative support along with lack of faculty, program, and institutional respect and understanding limit role satisfaction. Heavy workload (e.g., teaching, service, administrative responsibilities, committee work) and the feeling that they are “*always on call*” were significant indicators of job dissatisfaction.

We cross-tabulated the coding intersections of years of experience with respondents’ feelings of lack of understanding and respect and workload and discovered that the longer one was in the role of AFWC, the higher the dissatisfaction with these variables (see Table 2). Even when the perception of workload was reported less impactful, AFWCs who had been in their role longer commented on the negative impact of understanding of and respect by others for the role.

Table 2

Years of Experience and Perception of Negative Impact of Understanding, Respect, and Workload

Years of Experience	Percentage of Respondents who Mention the Criterion	
	Lack of Understanding and Respect	Workload
0-3 years	27.27%	54.54%
4-6 years	34.48%	51.72%
7-10 years	7.69%	15.38%
>10 years	57.14%	14.29%

While working with students can bring much satisfaction to the role of AFWC, respondents also acknowledged they could negatively impact their work and satisfaction. For example, one respondent stated, “*one ‘difficult student’ can burn a bridge for all future fieldwork with that site/company*” and another commented, “*student behaviors or student fieldwork problems that can be time consuming.*” Other comments regarding students such as, “*Students who are allowed to move forward to fieldwork but were not ready and faculty did not express this until after the student was failing in fieldwork,*” “*student entitlement regarding fieldwork,*” “*decreased professionalism in some students,*” and “*challenges trying to meet students’ specific requests regarding fieldwork, whether it be for legitimate reasons or not, and then seeing disappointed students*” significantly impacted work and role satisfaction.

Finally, site-related challenges emerged as a theme that limited the role satisfaction of AFWCs. “*I feel negatively about the AFWC’s role when I cannot secure new and emerging fieldwork settings, when fieldwork sites do not wish to take a student, and when fieldwork sites cancel last minute.*” Another respondent wrote,

Fieldwork shortage [and] new programs opening in our area...also add to the difficulty of the job. There are also increased demands of the sites (e.g., only take Level IIB students, only want students who KNOW they want to work in pediatrics).

Respondents indicated that responding to increased and constantly changing site requirements, and “*managing HR requirements for different sites*” was very challenging. Finally, last-minute cancellations added difficulty to the role particularly considering that many of the cancellations were beyond the control of the academic unit and AFWC (e.g., staff turnover, changes in payment models, administrative requirements).

Resources Required for Role Effectiveness and Efficiency

AFWCs described an array of both external (e.g., program, institutional, and professional support) and internal (e.g., communication, relationship building) resources required for role effectiveness and efficiency. The most commonly identified external support required to be a more efficient and effective AFWC was program and institutional support. Respondents identified several ways this support could be expressed including administrative support, technology, release time, sharing the workload with others, and general understanding of the role from program directors and other faculty. Respondents commented they needed support from the program director and faculty. “*More understanding of the role by other faculty and the program director in the department.*” They suggested that better understanding could lead to other supports such as “*an assistant to help with site visits,*” “*less teaching load for community outreach, site visits and other AFWC tasks that fall off the plate,*” an “*assistant fieldwork coordinator,*” and “*sufficient release time, ability to have supportive funds to travel for site visits...support of the administrative assistant.*” One respondent suggested “*additional faculty support to be in touch with students while on Level II (faculty in contact with their advisees, faculty facilitate discussion boards, etc.).*”

We found interesting relationships between type of institution and the typical amount of support needed. Fifty percent of respondents (n=15/30) from colleges or technical institutions awarding associate degrees indicated they needed additional support, whereas fewer, but still a significant number of AFWCs from master’s and doctoral degree awarding institutions indicated a need for additional support (38 [n=11/29] and 35 percent [n=14/40] respectively). Likewise, there was a relationship between the type of institution and the program and institution respect, understanding, and support of the role. At associate level colleges and technical institutions, 13.33% of AFWCs (n=4/30) indicate that there was a lack of understanding of the role. In institutions awarding master’s degrees, 24.14% of AFWCs (n=7/29) reported limited understanding and in doctoral degree awarding institutions, 32.5% AFWCs (n=13/40) reported their institutions lacked understanding of the role.

Simply providing release time did not, however, promote understanding of the role and address workload demand. A cross tabulated matrix query of release time from teaching and program understanding and respect and workload demand revealed that AFWCs that received less release time from teaching often experienced decreased understanding and respect for their roles and their workload by their colleagues, program, and institution (see Table 3). Few respondents, in fact, mentioned a need for additional teaching release time though many suggested more time to do the work of an AFWC is necessary. *“Academic field work coordination is a full-time plus job, plus teaching and advising. I have to work over 60 hours a week to get everything completed.”*

Table 3

Relationship of Teaching Release Time to Role and Workload Understanding

Percentage of Respondents who Mention the Criterion		
Release Time from Teaching	Lack of Understanding and Respect	Workload
<10%	57.14%	85.71%
10-20%	50%	64.29%
21-30%	14.29%	50%%
31-40%	33.33%	44.44%
41-50%	22.73%	27.27%
51-60%	37.5%	25%
61-70%	28.57%	0%
>70%	0%	80%

Instead, resources such as dependable and knowledgeable administrative and technological support (e.g., program and student data and contract management, support for time away from the role), opportunities and support for branding, marketing, and community outreach (e.g., develop and support fieldwork sites and educators, community relationship building), additional resources and supports from the state/regional educational councils/consortia, the AOTA, and the ACOTE (e.g., collaborative, accessible, and affordable fieldwork educator training [comparable to that which is provided by the American Physical Therapy Association], AFWCs training opportunities, resources to support accreditation compliance and standards clarity), and support to develop advocacy resources are needed to promote effective fieldwork experiences for students, programs, and sites.

Respondents indicated that additional support and resources from ACOTE and AOTA are necessary to advance the work of AFWCs. AFWCs reported needing “*clarity of accreditation standards*” and “*uniformity within ACOTE or AOTA regarding clinical placements, reservation process, etc.*” While there appeared to be an appreciation for the recently expanded Level I fieldwork opportunities (ACOTE, 2018), similar methodological changes in supervision models, community and population health opportunities, and fieldwork structures were noted. “*It would be helpful if we could also broaden the fieldwork supervision requirements of Level II as well*” such as including the “*option of considering tele-supervision as an option especially for the [occupational therapy assistant].*” Further, respondents reported some specific needs from AOTA such as, “*AOTA housing fieldwork data forms,*” “*better resources available on AOTA [such as] workshops for guidance that are offered monthly,*” and help advocate for realistic balance between fieldwork responsibilities and non-fieldwork responsibilities (e.g., guidelines, talking points, and help identifying how to “*make a case for why we need more time for fieldwork*”).

A central internal resource for effective and efficient AFWCs is effective communication. Respondents indicated they need more accessible pathways to network and communicate with the practice community, colleagues across higher education, AOTA, and ACOTE. Nearly all respondents noted the shortages of fieldwork placements and the need for stronger collaboration and networking to strengthen the pool of available placements. While some AFWCs commented on the need for resources to build competency in communication and networking, others indicated a need for “*better collaboration with clinical [occupational therapists] and [certified occupational therapists] to bridge the gap and disconnect of academia and clinical practitioner roles.*” Still others suggested AFWCs need advocates for “*fieldwork and student placement within the fieldwork sites*” and advocates “*at the hospital/clinic level for increasing number of placements offered.*” One respondent summed up their needs this way:

*Recognition from fieldwork sites on the quality of students from our program.
Recognition from fieldwork sites regarding my effectiveness in my role. Respect from faculty colleagues on the complexity and the demands of the role.
Networking with fieldwork educators across our fieldwork region. Time to put in effort and produce outcomes that are above and beyond “meets expectations.”
Time to fully focus on and invest in my role as AFWC.*

DISCUSSION

The Occupational Therapy Education Research Agenda (initially published in 2014, and more recently in 2018) by AOTA, has continued to put forward essential scholarship initiatives for occupational therapy education, which include systematically studying faculty needs and resources for faculty development. Despite fieldwork education being a required component of occupational therapy education for nearly 100 years, and the AFWC role being formally introduced in 1998, there have been few published studies investigating the role of the AFWC (Deluliis et al., 2021; Evenson et al., 2015; Stutz-Tanenbaum et al., 2015, 2017). Role and workload requirements of clinical education

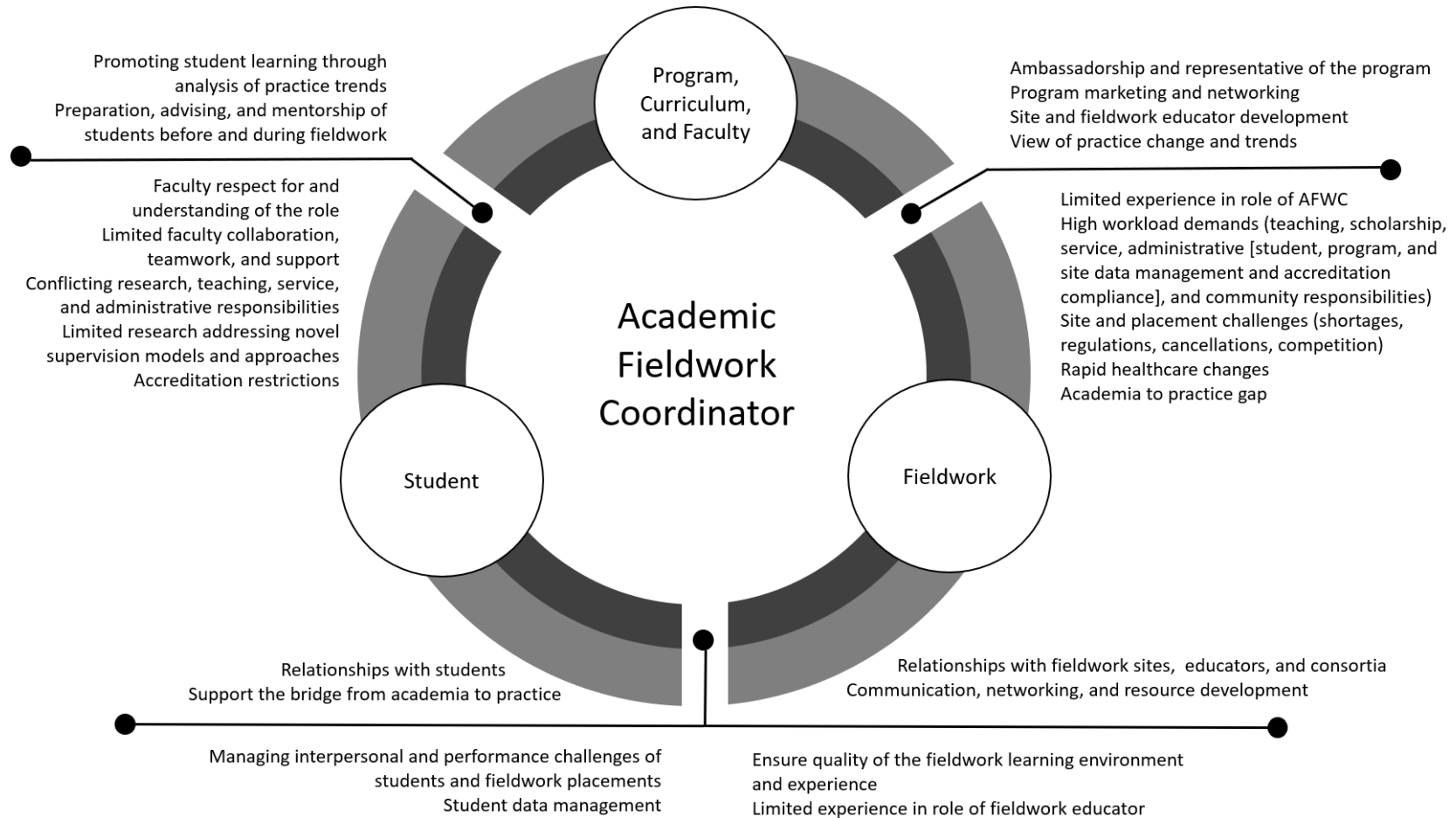
faculty have been examined more extensively across other health professional disciplines such as athletic training (Nottingham et al., 2018; Radtke, 2017), nursing (Bittner & Bechtel, 2017; Candela et al., 2013; Dahlke et al., 2012; Hamlin, 2021), physician assistant (Snyder et al., 2010) and physical therapy (Engelhard et al., 2018; McCallum et al., 2018; Timmerberg et al., 2018), however, little inference can be drawn from this literature as the role responsibilities of academic clinical education faculty vary considerably across disciplines.

AFWCs described the valuable role they play in supporting students to achieve learning outcomes, have successful fieldwork experiences, and enter the profession as competent practitioners. They described the valuable contributions they make to their programs' maintenance of relevance in their curriculum and in the community. They acknowledge their responsibilities as ambassadors of their programs and liaise with numerous stakeholders to promote effective learning outcomes for their students. Consistent with the findings in the occupational therapy literature, AFWCs balance wide-ranging responsibilities for student education, fieldwork site development and support, and academic program review and development, and leverage relationships with each of them to ensure the successful achievement of program objectives and ACOTE standards (McKinstry et al., 2020; Romig et al., 2011). It is from these relationships that AFWCs reported deriving much of their job satisfaction. These data suggest it is in the nuanced intersections of these role responsibilities that produce challenge to role satisfaction and success.

In our first publication addressing this study (Part 1), we reported that while roles, responsibilities, resources, and supports vary considerably across programs and these variations and their impacts are not widely understood, role satisfaction is generally high (Deluliis et al., 2021). AFWCs balance core responsibilities of academic life with the complex work demands to support student transition to clinical practice, networking with and administratively managing fieldwork sites, educators, and experiences, and inform program curricula and faculty of practice trends and student practice outcomes (Deluliis et al., 2021). Examining the perspectives of 103 AFWCs from across the US revealed that satisfaction is derived in large part from these three central responsibilities: student interaction and support, networking with fieldwork sites and fieldwork educators, and supporting program curricula and faculty. Examining the intersections of these challenging role demands led to interesting discoveries about the ways in which role responsibilities both enhance satisfaction and unequivocally challenge AFWCs' satisfaction, effectiveness, and efficiency (see Figure 1). In this image, we illustrate the three central responsibilities of the AFWC (student, program, and site) and the intersecting responsibilities that bring satisfaction and resilience (attributes above the line) and the intersecting responsibilities that present challenge and bring frustration for which support is required (attributes below the line).

Figure 1

Filling the Gap



Student and Program and Faculty Support

AFWCs find deep value in the opportunity to provide support to students, their programs, and the faculty they work with. Student preparation, advisement, and mentorship before and during fieldwork is a valuable and satisfying aspect of their work responsibilities. Promoting student learning by informing faculty of practice trends is seen as a critical component to continuous curriculum development and program advancement. However, the powerful attributes of this intersection are challenged when faculty lack respect and understanding of the role of the AFWC and when there is little faculty collaboration and teamwork in support of AFWC responsibilities. AFWCs shared that conflicting teaching, scholarship, service, and administrative responsibilities and too little time to manage the breadth and depth of these responsibilities leads to frustration. Finally, accreditation restrictions and limited research (and limited opportunity for research) to develop novel approaches to address fieldwork preparation, student support, and novel student supervision and placement models limit role satisfaction.

Program and Faculty and Fieldwork Placement Support

AFWCs reported that an essential and satisfying role function was to serve as the “face” of their programs. They suggested they are important representatives of their programs, marketing its attributes and returning knowledge of the practice community and trends to improve the curriculum. AFWCs derived satisfaction in networking with fieldwork sites and fieldwork educators to advance fieldwork education practices and ensure positive fieldwork experiences. These intersecting responsibilities require extensive preparation and experience, yet few preparation and training opportunities exist. AFWCs reported that balancing high program workload demands (e.g., teaching, scholarship, service, and administration [program, student, and site data management]) with the rapidly changing demands of healthcare and the fieldwork community can at times be foreboding. Site and placement challenges such as shortages, unique regulations and requirements, cancellations, and competition for placements contribute to feelings of frustration and role dissatisfaction. Finally, the pressure many AFWCs felt to close the academia to practice gap (“*I was not taught this in school;*” “*My supervisor does not use an occupation-based approach*”) adds to the challenges experienced by AFWCs.

Fieldwork Placement and Student Support

AFWCs lauded the relationships they forge with students and fieldwork educators. In fact, the development and maintenance of relationships was a central theme throughout the open-ended questions transcript. Building relationships to support students through the academia to practice transition, establishing relationships and patterns of communication and networking with fieldwork sites, educators, and consortia, and collaborating with all occupational therapy stakeholders to create learning objectives, instructional and supervision plans, and educational resources were described as valuable and rewarding aspects of the work of the AFWC. Relationship building was, at times, encumbered, however, by challenges associated with managing interpersonal and performance related issues with students (e.g., professionalism, self-efficacy, anxiety, skill and knowledge deficits) and fieldwork educators (e.g., lack of preparation, challenging life events, burnout). In addition, role satisfaction of AFWCs was impacted by limited support and resources within the fieldwork site.

LIMITATIONS

While we carefully attended to methodological rigor and ethics in our research, we acknowledge that we were all AFWCs at the time of the study design and data analysis placing us close to the data and increasing the risk of bias despite triangulation and constant comparison. In addition, we used a researcher developed survey that, while carefully constructed, systematically piloted, and reviewed iteratively, may increase risk of the study's validity. The methodology did not account for respondent validation, though, once again, using constant comparisons and consensus achieving dialog, we monitored researcher bias that may have influenced data interpretation, resolved conflicting analyses, and search for, examined, and accounted for contradictory evidence (which was minimal in our data set).

We are also aware that while the sample of the study is representative of the types and levels of programs throughout the US, the overall response rate was lower than hoped. Yet, it did surmount the suggested 20% response threshold for questionnaire-based research (Fowler, 2009). As the survey was distributed online, it was also impossible to control who completed the questionnaire, despite the survey tool being sent to email addresses of documented AFWCs. There is also the possibility of self-selection bias in that those AFWCs most interested in the topic chose to complete the questionnaire.

IMPLICATIONS FOR OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

In addition to the implications for occupational therapy discussed in Part 1 of this study (Deluliis et al., 2021), the results of the analysis of the qualitative data and the coded matrix queries yield the following implications for occupational therapy education:

- AOTA has implemented numerous measures to prepare practitioners to become academicians, such as the Academic Education Special Interest Section (AESIS) mentorship program for new Academic Fieldwork Coordinators and faculty members and the Academic Leadership Institute (ALI). It is recommended that additional robust multi-modal training resources that are designed both for initial and ongoing training for AFWCs be developed. It is suggested that training resources be provided that specifically address:
 - Forming relationships, developing effective communication, and networking with programs, faculty, students, fieldwork educators, and other relevant educational stakeholders.
 - Advancing advocacy skills and scholarship competencies.
 - Professional practice guidelines data management for AFWCs.
 - Tools to efficiently exchange information with fieldwork educators to promote understanding of changing healthcare needs for fieldwork preparation.
- It is recommended that program administration and faculty examine the role expectations for, understanding of, and respect for their AFWCs. Examination of teamwork opportunities and expansion of supports and resources for fieldwork preparation and implementation is suggested.
- It is critical that the workload demands of the AFWC be carefully examined and collaborative processes be developed to support data management, accreditation

compliance, and program management. These processes may include inter and intra program as well as regional and national approaches.

- Clarity in the interpretation of ACOTE standards is recommended. AFWCs noted that while management of the C Standards (ACOTE, 2018) often falls on their shoulders, at times the standards are unclear and difficult to measure and report. In addition, clarity addressing AFWC “sufficient release time and support” (ACOTE, 2018, p. 9) is recommended.
- It is recommended that flexibility in administration of Level II fieldwork be expanded in ACOTE Standards as it has been for Level I fieldwork. Though the body of literature for occupational therapy fieldwork education has been only gradually expanding, it has been expanding none the less. ACOTE fieldwork standards limited programs’ and AFWCs’ opportunity to expand fieldwork opportunities using novel yet evidence-based approaches.
- It is recommended that AOTA, Fieldwork Councils and Consortia, and occupational therapy programs prioritize and collaborate on the identification of pathways to expand fieldwork opportunities across the nation. We suggest the immediate establishment of a national task force to create fieldwork opportunities that not only meet the educational needs of our programs and our students but also serve as a resource to practitioners to usher in practice advancement and foster innovation that changes the face of our profession.
- The Occupational Therapy Education Research agenda delineates goals and priorities for scholarship in occupational therapy education (AOTA, 2018). The development of faculty and educational resources are identified priorities for the organization and for occupational therapy professionals. Yet, attention to fieldwork education and faculty roles such as the AFWC is minimal. In 2015, Stutz-Tanenbaum and colleagues proposed the development of a national fieldwork education agenda. We suggest that fieldwork leaders from across the nation meet to establish and prioritize such an agenda and develop partnerships to expand the scholarship of fieldwork education, including core AFWC competencies and methods to advance them.

CONCLUSION

As we further analyze the rich data provided to us by AFWCs across occupational therapy programs in the US, the role responsibilities and challenges and the variabilities among programs are becoming increasingly transparent. AFWCs described the valuable role they play in supporting students’ achievement of learning outcomes, successful fieldwork experiences, and their entrance into the profession as competent practitioners. They additionally described the valuable contributions they make to their programs’ maintenance of relevance in their curriculum and in the community. Their ambassadorship of institutions, program, students, fieldwork educators, and the occupational therapy profession brings them both reward and challenge. This study yields important data on these juxtaposed experiences and sheds light on the ways they can be addressed to improve role satisfaction and success.

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