

MARCH / APRIL 2025



COX COLLEGE OTD PROGRAM

THE CAPSTONE CURRENT

Leading the OT
Profession Forward

ONE CAPSTONE
AT A TIME



April is Occupational Therapy Month!

How does Capstone Advance the OT profession?

Students are placed in capstone experience sites where they will have an in-depth exposure to their population of interest. These placements are carefully hand-picked to create innovative solutions to problems those populations face on a day-to-day basis. The combination of innovation, evidence-based practice, and meticulous capstone project design result in effective, impactful capstones that showcase the true value of occupational therapy.

How does Capstone educate those outside of the Occupational Therapy profession on the age old question, "What is OT?"

Site mentors are experts in content related to the population thus, are termed 'Capstone Content Experts', however, they may not be aware of the broad scope of occupational therapy. What better way to learn the value of OT than to see it in action for 14 weeks? Capstone sites may not have known the value of occupational therapy prior to the capstone student's influence....but the evidence supports that they do after! In a study surveying doctoral capstone coordinators, 64% of students were reportedly employed at their capstone site or in a similar setting after graduation (Kiraly-Alvarez, Clegg, Molitor, & Friberg, 2022).

How does Capstone build Leadership Skills?

The Cox College OT capstone curriculum encourages self-directed learning by gradually developing necessary skills for critical thinking and problem-solving. Strength's focus and growth mindset training occur throughout the capstone continuum. Guided through mentorship, students learn to break down steps of large projects and goals, building resiliency and capacity through the curriculum. As the coursework progresses, students approach and secure site mentors/content experts, and lead their team of mentors and experts with capstone development. This is training is vital for when they are working more autonomously under mentorship in the Capstone Experience.

Did you know....according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of occupational therapists is projected to grow 11% from 2023 to 2033? Capstones can create job opportunities for occupational therapists in places that may not have considered hiring an OT prior to the student's placement!

What is happening with Capstone Currents?

- C2 OTD students are volunteering to have "mini capstone experiences" with their population of interest and fueling their passion for service!
- C2 OTD Students are narrowing their populations of interest to begin the process of focusing the capstone.
- C1 OTD Students are practicing pitching their capstones to a potential site mentor and coordinating meetings with mentors to get ready.
- Faculty will be attending a training on the threading of capstone doctoral through the sequence and scope of content in the Cox College OTD curriculum design.



Written By: Jamie Bergner, OTD, OTR/L, CHT, COMT

Capstone Coordinator Corner

Imagine building an evidence-based, innovative capstone that solves problems for a population of interest. The program objectively demonstrates significant impact! The group of people served by the capstone student benefits greatly from the capstone. Now imagine the student leaving and, thus, the service ends for that population. Not so great, right?

Sustainability of capstone is carefully planned from the start of the capstone inception and design. Developing a program? Part of the program development is to embed measurement practices to evaluate the effectiveness of the program, and develop standard operating procedures (SOPs) for detailed step-by-step methods on sustained implementation by staff once the student is no longer in capstone experience. Conducting research? Capstones are designed to disseminate the findings with future implications for other researchers to pick up and investigate further. Every capstone project has a sustainability plan, by design. This is accomplished with integrating effective and efficient business practices into capstone to ensure future success. Capstone sustainability is about *Ethics* and serves as a layer of protection to the populations served by capstone students. This responsibility falls on the students, the faculty mentors, site mentors and an ethical standard upheld by the Doctoral Capstone Coordinator. Collectively, we all ensure that the populations impacted by capstone continue to sustain the benefits long after the capstone ends!

Map of the Capstone River

Capstone Project Type

- A designated category for the capstone project
- Defined by the Accreditation Counsel for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE) of an area of an in-depth exposure
- Determined by the evidence/literature to match an established need for a population of interest
- Matched with student passion, strengths, and interest for project direction

Self-directed Learning

- Student takes ownership for learning
- The emphasis is not on a grade or defined hours of instruction, but rather the results and/or time it takes to achieve established learning objectives
- Learning that is aligned with student strengths, values and passions to facilitate an intense desire to learn more or accomplish established goals.

Doctoral Capstone Team Collaboration - Preparation

- Capstone is designed through collaboration with the student, a faculty member in the OT program holding a doctoral degree, and an individual with documented expertise in the content area of the capstone.

Rafting Reflections

Lead Rower Reflections: Leading the OT Profession through Research Collaboration & Capstone Sustainability

Written By: Ashley Bailey, COTA, OTS

Current Problem the Capstone Project is addressing:

The purpose of this Research type capstone project is to investigate accessibility barriers for healthcare in older adults residing in rural communities. This capstone will result in an in-depth understanding of the lived experience of community dwelling older adults in managing their chronic conditions.

The occupational therapy profession has a significant opportunity to **advance the health** of clients in primary care settings, particularly in rural areas. This inspired my capstone. Through investigation of the literature, I focused on how environmental factors influence health management in older adults in rural communities. However, many questions remained. How does the environment affect the health of older adults in my rural community? If I better understood the challenges older adults face to manage chronic conditions, would OT be **better positioned to lead** in primary care? Would this information create an opportunity to lead? The power of mentorship led to connecting with DeShayla Vassell, a recent graduate of the OTD program at the University of St. Augustine who conducted a qualitative study in Florida to explore these same questions in rural Florida, and is now serving as a content expert and mentor for my project. Qualitative research cannot be generalized to other populations; it will be very interesting to compare research findings with a rural Nebraskan community! My research type project will **contribute to sustaining capstone work – across OT schools and across the country**. Ultimately, my capstone aims to contribute a deeper understanding of the challenges older adults face, highlighting both similarities and differences based on geographical location.

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