



Dr. Kari Inda, Ph.D., OTR, assistant professor of OT.

Occupational Therapy: Building Skills for the Job of Living

As the field of occupational therapy has evolved through the years, so too has the graduate occupational therapy program at Mount Mary College. Mount Mary has a long and respected track record in preparing occupational therapists. The College's undergraduate OT program was founded in 1941 and has been continually accredited by the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE) since that time.

The graduate OT program, begun in 1995, originally aimed to help practicing occupational therapists develop advanced skills. In 1998, the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) mandated the acquisition of such skills for all therapists. As Dr. Jane Olson, Ph.D., OTR, director of Mount Mary's graduate OT program explained it, "The things our alumnae previously acquired through years of on-the-job experience were now expected of everyone. That required a new level of education."

Gradually the M.S. program that had been developed for practicing therapists merged with the program serving undergraduate students, and in 2005 Mount Mary officially launched its combined BS/MS program in OT. Today, said Olson, a master's degree in OT is required to sit for the registration exam and licensure. The Mount Mary program also continues to serve already practicing OTs with a bachelor's degree who want an advanced degree.

From 2000–2006, said Olson, changes in healthcare reimbursement due to the move toward managed care had a profound effect on the OT profession and OT education. "OT programs had expanded rapidly and there were many therapists. When the Medicare system began to reduce coverage of OT services in the late '90s, institutions began to cut OT positions," said Olson. As a result, the number of OT students declined, as well.

"Previously, OT services were reimbursed after treatment. Now therapists are asked to predict what services a client will need and they have to be fairly accurate. That's why graduate level education became so important," said Olson. "The development of critical thinking and inductive reasoning skills is imperative. Therapists have to hone their clinical judgment. Our challenge was how to prepare a new graduate to do that."

The result was the development of the graduate program's curriculum, especially its Level II Fieldwork component. "This is where the integration of clinical reasoning and critical thinking come together," said Olson. "We also address pragmatic and ethical reasoning, forcing practitioners to think about their core values and resolve the compromise between the real world and the ideal."

The role of the occupational therapist also has evolved, said Olson. "OTs are not simply putting clients through exercises. Today they must be ready for complex decision making, to develop treatment plans, and to communicate with other health care professionals."

"The profession was born out of the war time and initially focused on the psycho-social benefits inherent in occupying clients' time," said Dr. Kari Inda, Ph.D., assistant professor of OT. "Today it is much, much more. Occupational therapists now work with clients to determine what is most valuable and meaningful to them in their lives, and to develop strategies to help them achieve it. This gives a client motivation, and acting on it leads them to recovery. OT is essentially science and psychology combined to promote healing. Health professionals have realized that medicine alone doesn't create health. Thus we see teams of medical professionals working together, and OTs are widely accepted as part of that team."

"Graduate OT education emphasizes leadership skills and research. These are the critical skills for the future of the

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practice.” said Inda. “Research helps therapists justify to the team and the client the effectiveness of intervention, such as explaining to a stroke patient how treatment in rehab will result in success when they go home. Leadership skills help therapists advocate for the development of new services, such as collaborating with parents of children with autism who seek services in addition to those offered in the school setting.”

How does Mount Mary’s graduate OT program differ from others? “At Mount Mary we deliberately integrate the College’s mission into our program,” said Olson. “We build on each student’s background to help develop each individual into a ‘unique’ therapist with her or his own strengths.” The faculty value professional development, as well. Four program faculty hold a Ph.D., and all are writers, presenters, and respected members and leaders within the AOTA.

Mount Mary’s program excellence is acknowledged by field-work supervisors “who consistently say our students are

among the most ready to put their skills into practice and are flexible in their thinking,” said Olson. Today the program has rebounded from the lean years of the early 2000s and expects to serve its maximum capacity of 48 new students in Fall 2008. “The program’s reputation is solid,” said Olson. “About 88% of our graduates pass the registration exam the first time, and when we factor in those who retake the test, our total pass rate is 98%.”

Mount Mary’s OTs are recruited throughout the Midwest and all other states, and enjoy a 100% placement rate within six months. “About a third of the graduates will work with children in schools and in the home, another third work in hospitals and long-term care, and the remaining third work in specialized practice, industry, psychiatric facilities and a variety of other settings,” said Olson. “We are preparing professionals who are eager to use their skills to make a difference in many places around the world.”



Teaching Independence

Working with older people keeps Jennifer Rayl, MS, OTR, young at heart. The Mount Mary alumna has made it her mission to help seniors live fulfilling, independent lifestyles with dignity, respect and care.

Jennifer, 34, received her undergraduate degree in occupational therapy from UW-Milwaukee and her master’s degree in occupational therapy from Mount Mary in 1999. She wrote her thesis on the effectiveness of home care and how in-home support could be an effective way for keeping seniors in their own homes.

That same year, she and her husband, Stephen, purchased a franchise of Home Instead Senior Care, an international company that helps older adults live independently in their homes. The couple oversees a staff of approximately 100 caregivers who provide assistance and companionship to seniors living in Ozaukee and Washington counties.

“I really like the planning, strategizing, entrepreneurial side of it,” she said of her business. “I still use my OT skills but I can also impact the person on a much larger scale, for example, by making assessments, and I have the ability to look at an individual holistically and put together a care plan to meet his or her needs. We’re teaching someone how to use his or her body again, but really we’re teaching independent life skills and giving them guidance and coaching.”

Looking back, Jennifer said that going to school at Mount Mary suited her perfectly. “Mount Mary’s program was so flexible. I maintained a full-time day job and a weekend job while going to school,” she said. “The classes work around your schedule and the assignments were geared toward the professional working person.”

Jennifer relished the one-on-one with her fellow classmates as well. “The classes were small, personal and I connected with my classmates,” she said. “I could share stories and problem-solve with them.”

To share her love for and knowledge of the profession with others, Jennifer occasionally teaches undergraduate and graduate occupational therapy courses at Mount Mary.



For Your Information...

For more information about the graduate programs featured in this issue please contact:

Master of Science in Art Therapy

Program Director: Dr. Bruce Moon, Ph.D., ATR-BC, HLM, LPC
(414) 256-1215
Email: moonb@mtmary.edu
Website: www.mtmary.edu/arttherapy.htm

Master of Arts in Education: Professional Development

Program Director: Dr. Debra Dosemagen, M.A., Ph.D.
(414) 256-1214
Email: dosemagd@mtmary.edu
Website: www.mtmary.edu/education.htm

Master of Science in Occupational Therapy

Program Director: Dr. Jane Olson, Ph.D., OTR
(414) 256-1246
Email: olsonj@mtmary.edu
Website: www.mtmary.edu/ot.htm

Coming in our next issue

Part Two

In our Fall 2008 issue we will continue our examination of the Mount Mary College Graduate Programs. Featured in that issue will be: Master of Science in Dietetics, Master of Arts in English, Master of Business Administration, Master of Science in Community Counseling.

Watch for program overviews, hear from the directors, and learn some exciting news about each of these programs.



Attention Alumnae

Want to move ahead in your career?
Need a better business background to advance?

Consider the Mount Mary College MBA!

In today's work world, business knowledge can make the difference between moving ahead and staying where you are. Employees, managers, and entrepreneurs in all fields can benefit from the acquisition of advanced business skills. To ensure student success, the Mount Mary MBA Program requires prerequisite undergraduate coursework in management, marketing, financial accounting, finance, statistics and economics.

Mount Mary College alumnae may take these prerequisite business courses at a reduced tuition rate! Individuals holding a baccalaureate degree from Mount Mary College receive a **50% tuition reduction on undergraduate courses**, up to a maximum of four credits per semester. **In addition, our graduate tuition is very competitively priced at only \$485 per credit.**

Contact us today to find out more about getting started on the road to career enhancement or advancement. No matter your undergraduate major, the Mount Mary MBA can help get you where you want to be.

For more information call 414-258-4810, Ext. 399 or e-mail gradinfo@mtmary.edu