

Affordable Learning Implementation Grant Report

Deborah Elgin Budash, PhD, OTR/L

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Course: OT 242 Promoting Health and Wellbeing

In spring semester of 2024, my application for an Affordable Learning Implementation Grant was accepted for my fall semester course, OT 242 Promoting Health and Wellbeing. This course is offered in the second year of the five or six-year occupational therapy (OT) curriculum and serves to introduce OT students to community-based, public health OT services. Many of our students enroll in the OT program because someone they know has received services as a consequence of a medical condition or illness. This course introduces students to how OTs can work with healthy individuals to prevent illness and how to promote health and wellbeing with clients who are living with chronic health conditions. For many students, this is a different side of the profession with which they were unfamiliar.

I pursued this grant opportunity for a number of reasons. First, I wanted to integrate more active learning strategies in this course. There are times when students are not optimally engaged in course activities, prompting me to teach (which I perceive as a more passive learning experience) more than facilitating active learning experiences. Before the call for proposals for this grant, I was exploring alternative methods for leading this course that actively engaged students in problem-solving activities that applied the new concepts they were learning.

A second goal I wanted to address was the course textbook. At this time, there is only one introductory public health-oriented textbook for OT. I used this textbook for three years in the course and, while it was adequate as a central resource for the course, my opinion has been that it was not edited well. The chapters felt disjointed, somewhat dated, and I was supplementing course materials with clinical and research articles to bridge the content gaps.

Simultaneously and third, OT students are strongly encouraged to belong to our national professional organization, the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA). Their discounted student membership provides access to a wide depth and breadth of OT resources. A complaint offered by students has been that they do not know why they have to belong to AOTA and report not utilizing their membership. While I do not agree with this assessment, I do concede that, as a group, our OT faculty do not make clear often enough all of AOTA resources we use our classes, accessed through their membership. By redesigning the course through this grant, using materials accessible through the Weinberg Memorial Library (WML) and AOTA, we promote utilization of both services, reinforce the value of professional association membership, and permit the adjustment course content as trends and issues dictate. The elimination of the use of the Scaffa and Reitz (2020) textbook saved students ~\$82.00 each. My section of the course included 23 students. I shared all of my gathered materials with my colleague leading the second section of this course, Dr. Griffiths, which included an additional 23 students further optimizing the benefit of this grant for our students. The potential cost-savings to students by the elimination of the prior textbook is ~\$3,772.00.

Implementation

Over the course of the summer months of 2024, I began extensive mining of WML and AOTA resources to collect articles addressing the content areas of this course. I sought articles that were published within the last five years (based on guidelines of evidence-based practice) and ultimately added 60 new resources, mainly research and clinical-practice articles, into the course. My goal was to identify several articles for each topic that provided introductory information on the topic as well as several different perspectives in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the content areas. The lists of article titles and authors, typically in the form of hyperlinks, were embedded into our online course site under the description area in each week of the course, organized by topic.

In an effort to more actively engage students, I implemented a flipped classroom, where students were to review all of the articles posted for that week, and be prepared to present on the specific 1-2 articles their group was assigned. I encouraged all group members to be involved in presenting so that the work was evenly distributed. In exploring new strategies of active and inclusive learning practices, assigning groups for group work was recommended so no students are left out, hence I randomized group assignments each week. The groups would present the article's main ideas to the class and note these key concepts in a shared document (a series of Google docs). These shared documents would be reviewed and edited by me, and ultimately would serve as a study guide for course exams. In this plan, students would complete their readings prior to class, leaving class time for brief presentations from all groups, and discussion and assimilation of what was learned about the topic from each of the articles. These discussions were complimented with videos, case studies, and other activities to supplement learning. I provided a final summary of key points as a wrap up for each class session to assure that the content I felt was most important was made clear.

Student Feedback and Outcomes

At the time of this report, fall semester course evaluations are not yet available so I cannot report on objective student feedback. My observations were that the group and article assignments seemed confusing to some students. By mid-semester, I abandoned the changing group assignments to provide for more stability for the students; each time the group was changed, the dynamics of the group also changed, taking valuable time to establish who the group leader was and what other group members would do to contribute). In addition, consistent group assignments helped me to learn of my students' names in a more-timely manner (being assigned to a different group each week implied sitting in a different seat, which made learning names and faces more difficult). The students seemed to appreciate the common document as a tool for exam review and preparation. Objectively, there was wider final-grade distribution this semester but there is at least one confounding influence that may account for this beyond the modified course materials (explained in the next section).

Conclusions

I enjoyed the flexibility the WML and AOTA resources provided to me for addressing course content. I felt that I was better able to provide a comprehensive introduction to each of the topics by offering the perspectives from multiple authors on their experiences with these topic areas. I also believe students were actively engaged in class over the semester however not at the level I had hoped.

A main confounding influence this semester was that this was the first year that this course was offered to second year OT students. I taught the same course in the spring of 2024 under the course number of OT 340; this fall semester's offering was OT 242 and will remain OT 242. Ultimately, what this means is the students had one year less knowledge about the profession of OT to draw on. Their level of understanding was much more superficial than students further along in the curriculum. As a consequence, I needed to do much more administration of the course to achieve the goals I established. For example, I asked students to read their assigned articles and explain them in their own words. The students, for the most part, read certain lines from the articles, demonstrating very little paraphrasing and integration of what they read, rather they read direct quotes that did not provide a comprehensive explanation of the article. Sometimes they focused on less-relevant, concrete content (they were not effective at filtering and identifying what was most important to share). I adapted by week four to providing each group with prompts for each assigned article of what I expected them to present.

An additional consequence was the nature of the shared information posted in the common document for each topic. I had to review and tie their uncontextualized quotes together to offer a cohesive explanation of what the articles meant. This required me to supplement the content in the study guides on a weekly basis.

Overall, I did prefer using the accessible articles as the basis of this course. Students were more engaged in active learning and, now that I have learning prompts developed for the articles, facilitating the course will be easier. However, the idea of using articles means that I can and should change the resources in order to provide the best learning experience, so this will be an ongoing responsibility. For the next iteration of the course, I will reduce the number of articles assigned for each topic. Some topics had as many as nine articles and I saw no evidence that the students reviewed all of the readings each week as was the assignment. My observations were that they did not thoroughly understand the one or two articles they were to present, so reducing the resources provided should help focus their attention and make reading expectations more reasonable. I view this semester's course modifications as successful and, using what I have learned from the experience, my expectation is that subsequent offerings will continue to evolve and improve.

Thank you for the incentive and opportunity to explore new ways to make OT 242 Promoting Health and Wellbeing a better learning experience for my students.

References

Scaffa, M. E. & Reitz, S.M. (2020). *Occupational Therapy in Community and Population Health Practice* (3rd ed). F.A. Davis.