

# OT 493: Research Methods in Occupational Therapy

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*Background:* This information literacy stipend was granted based on a proposal submitted in the Fall of 2006 by Rita P. Fleming-Castaldy, Assistant Professor in the Occupational Therapy Department. Bonnie Oldham served as the Consulting Librarian for the proposal and the subsequent implementation of the information literacy project. This project sought to develop core information literacy competencies in the senior level Fall occupational therapy research course OT 493. The need to develop students' proficiencies in this area was based on the recognition that there is an increased market demand for occupational therapy practitioners who are fluent in information literacy.

*Project Implementation:* The first phase of this information literacy project was completed during the summer of 2007 by Dr. Fleming-Castaldy and Bonnie Oldham. They compared the content of the senior OT 493: Research Methods in Occupational Therapy (OT) to the information literacy standards of the Accreditation Council for OT Education (ACOTE) and the *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* of the ACRL. Outcome measures to assess students' level of information literacy to help determine their ability to competently complete a research proposal were developed. Graduated learning activities to provide students with opportunities to develop and refine the core information literacy competencies needed to successfully complete their graduate research projects and scholarly theses were also put forth. See attached Appendix A for a detailed description of the Information Literacy Standards, project specific goals and objectives and their corresponding learning activities and outcome measures.

Due to a major revision in the OT research curriculum in the Fall of 2007 (which was not anticipated when the Information Literacy proposal was submitted in Fall 2006), the course OT 493 was completely overhauled. As a result, the second phase of this project required significant revision to the plan that had been put forth in the summer. This Fall 2007 phase was implemented by Dr. Carol Reinson, Assistant Professor in the Occupational Therapy Department. Bonnie Oldham continued to serve as the Consulting Librarian to Dr. Reinson. See OT 493 syllabus in Appendix B which describes the actual activities employed to attain the identified information literacy objectives and the outcome measures used to determine the achievement of desired skills. At the conclusion of the Fall 2007 semester, Dr. Reinson conducted a survey of the OT 493 students to obtain their perspectives about their attainment of the project's goals and objectives and about the learning activities provided throughout the semester. See Appendix C for a copy of the measure used and appendix D for the results of this survey.

*Outcomes:* The development of information literacy competencies is clearly relevant to OT students as reflected in their comments that they need these essential skills to complete research assignments. However, there was not a strong consensus among the OT 493 students regarding the efficacy of this class' work in attaining specific information literacy standards. As reflected in Appendix D, the students' responses to questions regarding the attainment of the information literacy standards all ranged between 3 (neutral) and 4 (somewhat agree). As indicated in these survey results, the students most strongly benefited from lessons and learning activities that focused on developing the knowledge and skills needed to identify information and resources appropriate to meet course requirements and learning how to access needed information effectively and efficiently (M = 3.87 and M = 3.7, respectively).

Upon reviewing the students' subjective comments about the information literacy assignments,

it is apparent that the OT senior class is composed of students with different skill levels and diverse learning needs. The data base instruction and the APA manual review seem to be the learning activities that students reported as most helpful. Students also reported that they benefited from the critical review of primary resources. It was interesting to note that student comments about the academic integrity tutorial reflected that this information was unnecessary and that turnitin.com was unhelpful. It is our hope that this perception is based on students' internalized commitment to academic integrity. In addition, it seems as if the reviews conducted by turnitin.com were not the most accurate as they reportedly did not recognize written work that had been properly cited.

The variability in students' information literacy needs and skills, as reflected in the survey results, was also observed by the Fall 2007 OT 493 instructor, Dr. Carol Reinson. For example, Dr Reinson found that the students' submitted work typically reflected strong abilities in data-based searches and computer technology. However, weak writing skills were frequently evident in this work. It is apparent that many students do benefit from education about information literacy that is provided in their earlier coursework but that opportunities to develop essential writing skills need to be enhanced. As a result, future instructors of OT 493 should encourage students to actively seek and use library and CTLE faculty to develop their needed skills. Active self-reflection on personal capabilities and self-directed learning should also be strongly supported for all students.