Introduction to Fieldwork

Entry level education for occupational therapists requires the successful completion of both academic and fieldwork components. Fieldwork provides the opportunity for students to gradually become independent practitioners and to achieve entry-level competency. All students must participate in both Level I (practicum) and Level II fieldwork experiences. The SJSU OT curriculum is rich in the number of practicum and fieldwork experiences offered to graduate students. Each experience builds on the previous one, and provides an essential learning opportunity for students to apply theory to practice in the “real” world.

Practicum and Fieldwork Experiences

Level I fieldwork

OCTH 134 is the first practicum Level I experience. In this course students are placed in a designated agency where they will lead occupation-based groups. This is accompanied by a seminar that assists students in applying knowledge of group leadership and professionalism.

OCTH 244 is the second practicum Level I experience. In this course students enroll in one of our clinics (Mental Health, Physical Disabilities, Pediatric, or Geriatric) and are assigned a client for whom they are responsible for developing and implementing an intervention plan whose outcome is to facilitate the client’s ability to participate in meaningful occupations. Through this experience the student will gain skill in observation, interviewing, evaluation, documentation and the application of theory to practice. This course requires the student to demonstrate clinical reasoning, judgment, professional behavior and the ability to establish a therapeutic relationship in preparation for their upcoming Level II fieldwork experience. The seminar that accompanies this class also gives the students the opportunity for peer interaction, mentoring and feedback as professional competence begins to emerge.

Level II fieldwork

This six-month fieldwork experience places students at two clinic sites, each for three months. OCTH 201A is the first Level II experience. It is a three-month placement and is completed during the summer after completion of the graduate level coursework. The purpose of level II fieldwork is to provide occupational therapy students with the opportunity to integrate knowledge with application skills and attitudes at progressively higher levels of performance requirements and responsibility. Supervised fieldwork experience in occupational therapy is considered to be an integral part of both the educational process and professional preparation. The goal of the educational process is to produce competent occupational therapists. This competence includes the knowledge, skills and attitudes to practice occupational therapy at or above the minimum basic entry level of the profession as defined by the academic and fieldwork educational programs. Fieldwork experience provides an opportunity for growth, and for learning to apply knowledge, develop and test clinical skills, and validate those functions that comprise professional competence. This is a 6-unit course, but does not count towards the 31 units
required for the MS degree.

OCTH 201B is the final Level 2 fieldwork placement. It is completed during the fall after successful completion of OCTH 201A. This is a 6-unit course, but does not count towards the 31 units required for the MS. Upon its completion, and the completion of all coursework, students are eligible to sit for the NBCOT Certification Examination for Registered Occupational Therapy (OTR). Successful completion of the examination qualifies the candidate to apply to the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy (NBCOT) to be registered as an occupational therapist (OTR) and the California Board of Occupational Therapy for California state licensing.

Other Fieldwork Considerations

Timeline
Students must complete all graduation and fieldwork requirements within a two year period following completion of academic coursework. If there are extenuating circumstances interfering with a student’s ability to comply with this time frame the student may petition for an extension and provide supporting documentation of circumstances. The student must adhere to all University policies regarding enrollment.

Criminal background check
A felony conviction may affect a graduate’s ability to sit for the NBCOT certification examination and may preclude attainment of state licensure. Some Level I and Level II fieldwork sites may also perform background checks and refuse internships to students with a felony conviction. Students are urged to contact the above mentioned certification and licensing boards prior to the start of the program to determine one’s potential to practice as an occupational therapist should a felony conviction be in his or her background. While we recognize this to be a privacy issue, it is recommended that the student disclose this information to the Fieldwork Director before fieldwork placements are sought.

Competitive interview process
Because some fieldwork sites are in high demand, they have adopted a competitive interview process for selecting fieldwork students. These interviews typically take place 6 – 9 months prior to the fieldwork placement and may occur in person or over the phone.

Fieldwork accommodations
San Jose State University students with identified disabilities are eligible for services through the Disabilities Resource Center (DRC). Each student must contact the DRC directly to self identify and collaborate with one of the DRC staff to initiate a student file. Students are responsible for providing the appropriate documentation regarding their disabilities to the DRC (please see web site or call for details www.drc.sjsu.edu, (408) 924-6000). The staff at the DRC can work with students to identify reasonable accommodations in both their academic and fieldwork settings. However, it is entirely the student’s responsibility to request accommodations in both academic and fieldwork settings. Once accommodations are requested by the student for their fieldwork placement, the DRC can work with the fieldwork director and/or fieldwork site to establish
reasonable accommodations that will enable the student to perform the essential functions as an occupational therapy fieldwork student.

**Injuries**

Students are responsible for obtaining their own medical insurance during fieldwork since they are NOT covered by Worker’s Compensation through their fieldwork site or the University. Students are required to immediately report any on the job injuries as well as injuries incurred outside of their fieldwork to their site supervisor and the Academic Fieldwork Coordinator in the Department of Occupational Therapy at SJSU. After a student is injured, they must be examined by a doctor and cleared to work at their fieldwork site without restrictions. The fieldwork site supervisor as well as the Academic Fieldwork Coordinator must be supplied with a copy of this clearance note. If the doctor recommends accommodations for a short term injury, the student must get these recommendations in writing from the doctor and provide them to the site supervisor and the Academic Fieldwork Coordinator. A maximum of three days are allowed in the event of injury, illness, or emergency during each 12 week internship. Any time taken off by the student beyond these three days is to be made up by the student.

**Student costs for fieldwork**

Students are responsible for all costs associated with Level II fieldwork and should plan accordingly. These expenses include: tuition to the university, transportation to and from their fieldwork sites, medical insurance, and housing expenses. Some fieldwork sites also require live scan fingerprinting, drug screens, background checks, and/or additional medical testing. Students enrolled in Level II fieldwork are eligible to apply for financial aid. There are also many different scholarships as well as departmental fieldwork loans available (please refer to the Occupational Therapy Department Student Manual).

Students must have liability insurance prior to beginning their clinical practicum and fieldwork experiences. The California State University system carries liability insurance for all students. Some fieldwork sites also require students to carry their own professional liability insurance in addition to the University’s policy (check with the Fieldwork Coordinator). Students must also carry their own medical insurance.

**Level II fieldwork placements—policies and procedures**

Level II fieldwork is designed to facilitate the development of competent, entry-level, generalist occupational therapists. In order for students to fully benefit from their fieldwork experience it is essential that certain behavioral and performance standards are achieved and maintained. Thus, it is required that all San Jose State University occupational therapy students acknowledge their understanding of the Occupational Therapy Departmental policies regarding fieldwork in writing before commencing their Level II fieldwork experience by signing the Student Fieldwork Contract.

- Each student will be placed in two consecutive twelve week internships at the end of their academic program (one in a psychosocial setting and one in a physical disabilities setting).
• Many factors are considered before determining where a student will be placed for their fieldwork assignments: site availability, geographic location of student, appropriateness of student/site fit, as well as student preferences. While students’ fieldwork preferences are taken into consideration, they must be balanced by the availability and variety of placements that are needed to develop well rounded, competent entry level occupational therapists.

• Based on pedagogical soundness, the Department of Occupational Therapy has historically followed a policy of not placing students at sites where they have previously had a working relationship (i.e., volunteered, worked) or where students have a family member who is part of the OT staff (and in some cases facility staff) since this puts the students both at an unfair advantage as well as disadvantage.

• Only one performance based OT course may be repeated (i.e., OCTH 134, OCTH 244, OCTH 201A and OCTH 201B). If a student fails two performance based courses (or the same course twice), he/she is disqualified from the OT program.

• Grades for Level II Fieldwork are given on a Credit / No Credit basis and are based on the student’s score on the AOTA Fieldwork Performance Evaluation for the Occupational Therapy Student (FPE). There are two formal evaluations: one at 6 weeks (midterm) and one at 12 weeks (final) based on the (FPE). There are also optional informal evaluations at 4 weeks and 8 weeks to facilitate communication between the student and their fieldwork educator.

• It is the responsibility of the student to review the data base (Filemaker Pro), the fieldwork files, and contact their fieldwork site to verify if their site has specific requirements which must be met (i.e., competitive interviews, background checks, drug checks, fingerprinting, lab coat, additional medical tests/documentation, etc.). Failure to complete facility requirements may lead to fieldwork cancellation.

• Students are responsible for maintaining their own health and immunization records (download Student Health Form from Fieldwork website), and providing their health records directly to the clinical site before the first day of the fieldwork.

• Professional and ethical behavior must be maintained by students at all times during the clinical affiliation according to AOTA and facility standards (refer to the Occupational Therapy Code of Ethics [2010]).

• During their Level II fieldwork placements, students are expected to take an active part in their learning as well as the supervisory process by seeking and utilizing available resources to support their learning and client outcomes.
• The Department of Occupational Therapy at SJSU follows the AOTA recommended fieldwork experience dates. Exceptions to fieldwork dates will only be made if requested directly by the facility (not the student).

• A maximum of three days are allowed in the event of illness or emergencies— these are not to be used as vacation time. Any time taken off by the student beyond these three days is to be made up by the student. If the student receives approval from their fieldwork site for vacation time, he/she must make up the time taken off. Students are permitted holidays in accordance with the fieldwork site’s policies.

• Once a student is confirmed at a fieldwork site, the student may not change their placement to another fieldwork. Our fieldwork sites are an integral part of our OT program at SJSU, and the time that clinical instructors volunteer and dedicate to our students is highly valued and much appreciated. It is disrespectful as well as unprofessional to back out of a prior fieldwork commitment because a student prefers another site. This reflects poorly on the student as well as the university. If there are extenuating circumstances regarding a fieldwork placement, then the student can present his/her case in the form of a petition to the faculty for consideration.

• Students who decide to end or abandon a fieldwork site will receive a No Credit grade and will not be provided with another fieldwork site immediately. They will need to submit a petition to the department faculty describing an action plan of how they will be successful on subsequent fieldwork experiences. No further fieldwork placement activities will be provided until the faculty approves the student’s action plan.

• Students who fail a fieldwork will receive a No Credit grade and will need to submit an action plan with specific strategies detailing the steps that they will take to ensure that they will be successful on subsequent fieldwork experiences. No further fieldwork placement activities will be provided until the student’s action plan is approved.

• Students must complete all of their fieldwork requirements within 24 months after the completion of coursework.

**How do I research fieldwork opportunities?**
The SJSU Occupational Therapy Department utilizes a data base called Filemaker Pro which contains information about the many different fieldwork sites that are affiliated with the University. This database can be accessed by students on the computers in room CCB 212. Students can also review the fieldwork files in the fieldwork office (rm. CCB 220) to learn more about various fieldwork sites. Students can make an appointment to discuss their fieldwork options and preferences with the Fieldwork Coordinator. All requests for fieldwork placements are made directly by the Fieldwork Coordinator – not the student. This departmental policy was
put into place based on many years of feedback from site coordinators. If a student has an interest in a specific facility, he/she should contact the Fieldwork Coordinator who will then contact the fieldwork site directly. Advising for Level II fieldwork begins during the Spring Semester before the student’s last academic year. This is when students submit their Fieldwork Request Form to the Fieldwork Coordinator.

What happens after I finish my fieldwork?

1. REQUEST YOUR TRANSCRIPT FROM SJSU

You must submit a request for your transcript to the Admission and Records Department. Please check on the University’s website for the online form (http://www.sjsu.edu/registrar/transcripts/). Remember to mark (under special instructions) “send after degree is posted”. You must also indicate that a copy is to be sent directly to NBCOT. This is very important.

- As a requirement to sit for the exam, applicants must submit official transcripts to:
  
  NBCOT
  Attn: Transcript Processing
  12 South Summit Avenue, Suite 100
  Gaithersburg, MD  20877-4150

- Complete the Request for Transcript. Be sure to provide the address of NBCOT where indicated on the form. The transcript from SJSU contains the registrar’s official stamp and will contain all the pertinent information that is required by NBCOT.

- To confer your degree and issue a complete transcript, all necessary degree requirements (GE and major courses, removal of any incompletes, etc), financial obligations, and graduation paperwork must be completed. It is the student’s responsibility to be sure that these requirements have been met.

- Go to the My SJSU website and make sure that your account is clear.

- Be sure that Admissions and Records has your current address so that they can contact you in the event of a problem. Also – be sure that the Occupational Therapy Department has your current information. It is very important that we be able to contact you if we need to. Information is often sent out from the office, and if you have changed your address this information will not get to you.

2. SIGN UP FOR THE CERTIFICATION EXAM

NBCOT Certification Exam: You can go to the website and obtain the most up to date information about the exam at www.nbcot.org. The candidate handbook, application, certification exam information and practice exam information can be found at this website. It is critical that you read the instructions and follow proper procedures. It is important that you obtain the handbook so that you can properly apply for the exam. The OTR exam is given on
Your paperwork (application and transcripts) must be submitted to NBCOT so that you are eligible to sit for the exam.

- The application cost for the exam is $540.00 (paper) or $500.00 (online).
- Official Score Transfer Request $40 per score report
- Confirmation of Examination Registration and Eligibility Notice $45 per notice.
- The fees must be sent in with your application. You can also apply online.
- Required documentation for application:
  - Official transcripts sent from SJSU
  - NBCOT is no longer accepting the Academic Credential Verification Form (ACVF) while you are waiting for your degree to post on your transcripts. Your official transcripts must indicate that your degree has been conferred in order for NBCOT to grant permission for you to sit for the exam. Make sure that you indicate on your request for transcripts that you want your transcripts sent directly to NBCOT and to send the transcripts once your degree has posted.
- Upon confirmation of eligibility to test NBCOT will issue an Authorization to Test (ATT) letter by email or regular mail. The ATT authorizes you to take the certification exam (and will be required by CBOT if you want to get a limited permit).

3. APPLYING FOR YOUR CALIFORNIA LICENSE

- **License:** Please refer to the Board of Occupational Therapy website www.bot.ca.gov for detailed information about applying for a License. An application is available online. You must have proof of successfully passing the certification exam before you can apply for your license.
- **Limited Permit:** refer to the website for details. You cannot legally work as an OT without a limited permit or a license.