

## Chair's letter

Greetings from North Dakota,

It is a cold chilly afternoon. I thought spring had arrived but evidently was mistaken. The weather is similar to what we saw during the annual AOTA conference. Nashville was rainy and chilly, but at least in the 60s. It was a busy conference. I am proud to say we had a number of graduates and faculty presenting posters and workshops at the conference. It is an honor to work with such bright, talented and creative people. On Friday evening, we had an Alumni and Friends Reception and had more 60 people attend, including students (pictured)! It was fun to see so many people and get a chance to catch up on what people are doing. Save the date for Chicago, April 7-10, 2016. This was our fourth reunion at the AOTA conference so Chicago will make 5!

As I write this letter, I am amazed by the growth of our profession and all we are doing to improve health care and quality of life. The theme of the AOTA conference was Occupational Therapy: A Distinct Value. There are many changes on the horizon in our future. It is important that we are involved and advocating for our clients and our profession!

Our Casper crew moved to new space in January, and it is beautiful (see story and photos). Plans and construction are on track for the new SMHS building in Grand Forks. We will be moving in one short year! It will be nice to build collaborations and have the proximity to other health professions housed at the school. The Hyslop has been good to us, but it will be fun to be closer to others. This will help strengthen interprofessional education and promote the distinct value that OT brings to health care and wellness programming.

We have been extending out into the community with many programs and service projects with faculty and students. Cindy Janssen and Nicole Harris are working to promote health and wellness with the aging populations in the Casper and Grand Forks areas. Sue Morrison has been working with SOTA in Casper to promote inclusion and access for Casper College students with disabilities. LaVonne Fox, Sarah Nielsen and our fieldwork coordinators (Deb Hanson and Cherie Graves) have piloted a program working with new Americans as a community-based level I fieldwork experience (we will be replicating this in Wyoming this upcoming year). SOTA at both sites has been active in promoting our profession and providing service to organizations that support active engagement and social participation in the community. This service also extends to being involved with leadership in state organizations, the NBCOT, and accreditation. I think we definitely are providing a distinct value for our communities!

We have an official mascot of our OT Department. Buddy, the amazing golden retriever, has a dual role on campus with serving as a service/therapy dog. This past year, I worked with two graduate students to obtain authorization to have him on campus in this dual role. Students are collaborating with faculty to identify how to further enhance our curriculum and educate the community on service dogs and working with people with disabilities. This is the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. We have

made progress, but we still have a long way to go! Help us in promoting access for all individuals and recognizing the distinct value of OT.

Spring is always a time of celebration as we graduate students and bring in a new class! As of May 16, we now have 50 new colleagues from UND. On May 26, we admitted 60 students to our professional program: 18 at Casper and 42 in Grand Forks.

In closing, I want to thank each of you for making a difference in the lives of the people you serve. We have a strong program. We have great students and collaborative faculty and staff! We are anticipating and planning for upcoming changes in the profession and will have an enhanced curriculum that will continue to provide a strong foundation for occupational therapy and the distinct value we provide in all areas of practice!



Janet Jedlicka  
Chair and Associate Professor  
UND Department of Occupational Therapy

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**M**erri (Reese) Vacura, MOT '06

## How did you become interested in OT?

I have a sister who is a physical therapist and another sister who is a speech therapist, so I often joke that I just wanted to finish out the therapeutic triad. But all jokes aside, I was drawn to the profession because it truly helps people live their lives to their fullest capacity. I have a nephew with autism, who has had occupational therapy services since he was about 2 years old, and I was impressed with what the profession could do. I thought, "I want that." I took a mild detour after high school, completing a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Special Education, but after that it was a straight path through OT school. I have been a practicing therapist ever since.

## What do you remember about your time with the UND OT Department?

What I remember most about the OT Department is the sense of camaraderie. I graduated with a relatively small class, so we were pretty close knit and it has been fun to see my classmates grow both professionally and personally over the years. I don't get to see many of them anymore so thank goodness for Facebook where I can check in now and again. It's hard to believe it has been almost 10 years.

## Where are you practicing? How did you come to be in that setting?

I knew from the day I left that someday I wanted to move back home. Home is a tiny town just shy of the Canadian border, so it has been rural health care for me since day one. It has truly made me appreciate the full capacity of occupational therapy since it exposes you to every aspect of the profession, pediatrics to geriatrics, inpatient, outpatient, school services, work hardening ... I have at some point or another done it all. It really keeps you on

your toes. I would encourage any student unsure of what setting they want to work in to consider a rural health care fieldwork. You get to see so many different things.

## What do you most enjoy about OT as a profession?

The people. It can be hard sometimes when so much of what we do is dictated by insurance companies, but it is all worth it when you see someone really achieving their goals. Knowing you contributed to someone becoming stronger and more independent is truly gratifying.

## What else are you doing?

The past couple of years have been busy. I have recently accepted a new OT position, but prior to that I had the opportunity to take a sabbatical of sorts, during which I tried out a few things that have always been on my "bucket list." I wrote and illustrated a children's book titled "The Mighty Quinn" as a gift for my daughter and it was published in November 2014. I have been instructed by my son that I have to write one more for him, so that will happen sometime in the near future. I also helped launch a furniture refinishing/upcycling business called REESEstored with two of my sisters, which has been tremendously fun. I have taken up painting and even sold a few canvases (mostly to my family who are ridiculously supportive), and last but not even remotely least, I am raising a couple of pretty cool kids, Quinn (7) and Jude (4). Motherhood is truly my favorite profession but occupational therapy is a close second.



## SOTA

### SOTA students impact communities through service, advocacy

Motivating. Inspiring. Driven. Altruistic. These are just a few words that come to mind when considering the service that the UND Student Occupational Therapy Association (SOTA) in Grand Forks and Casper have contributed during the 2014-2015 academic year. At more than 150 members, the organization continues to grow and provide valuable work in University, local and national communities. This year, Grand Forks SOTA members held three in-services for members, engaged in 14 out-service events, and raised and donated a great deal of funding for local and national individuals and organizations. Together with Pi Theta Epsilon, SOTA was the second-largest fundraising organization nationally for the St. Catherine's Challenge, an event designed to raise funds for occupational therapy research.

In Casper, SOTA mentored students with disabilities to engage in the college environment through advocacy of class participation and student success, help with assistive technology devices, and access to campus social events. Called Student Organization for Accessibility and Resources (SOAR), Casper College students are

assigned to a UND SOAR team using a client-centered approach to meet their individual needs. Additionally, the Casper SOTA donated money for Casper's first-ever all-inclusive playground, and hosted the ninth annual OT Conference and Expo with speakers on caregiving for children with rare diseases; Neuro-INFRAH®; and hippotherapy, aquatic therapy, and animal-assisted therapy.

The UND Occupational Therapy Department is incredibly proud of our students and the services they have provided, and it is eager to see what SOTA does in the upcoming year.

# Fieldwork Connection

**W**e want to hear from YOU!!!

From the academic perspective, professors think about how students learn and endeavor to provide learning experiences throughout the curriculum that students will connect to the clients that they eventually serve, and the skills that they will need to provide that service. From a fieldwork perspective, we as academic fieldwork coordinators try to take this one step further; we want to encourage every practitioner to consider a fieldwork educator role, and provide those of you who are already fieldwork educators with tools that you can use to help students bridge their learning between the academic and fieldwork context.

Any fieldwork site can provide many opportunities for learning, but which opportunities will be most appropriate for the student? And how can you ensure that the student is receiving a well-balanced learning experience? How can you measure this learning? To a large degree, this is influenced by the 1) learning objectives that are uniquely developed for each site, and 2) the week-by-week learning activities at each site. But then, there are unexpected learning opportunities that come up, and what about the unique learning goals of each student? And the fact that different students learn at a different pace? If you are looking for

tools to manage these variables, check out the fieldwork portion of our [website](#). Are these the tools you are looking for? Are there other tools that we do NOT provide that you believe would be helpful to you in navigating your fieldwork educator role? What about those of you who have not yet stepped into a fieldwork educator role? What would encourage you to consider this possibility? What incentives or supports would be motivating for you?

Please help us out by providing feedback about the fieldwork resources and incentives we already provide, and suggest incentives or resources that would be helpful and motivating to you. You can go to <http://www.med.und.edu/occupational-therapy/fieldwork-feedback-survey.cfm>. There you can participate in a Qualtrics survey, which provides you the opportunity to evaluate any of the existing departmental resources related to fieldwork and to give us your anonymous perspective as to any changes or additions that you would like to see. We are really looking forward to hearing your suggestions!

Deb Hanson and Cherie Graves  
Academic Fieldwork Coordinators  
UND School of Medicine and Health Sciences Department of OT

# Parting Shots

Occupational Therapy students from both the Grand Forks and Casper campuses represented UND OT at the AOTA annual conference in Nashville in April.



Hannah Eickenbrock, MOT '14, works with a child (manikin) who had open heart surgery by using an iPad to redirect his attention away from his chest discomfort during a simulation lab in OT 432: Medical Sciences.

## Casper Building Remodel

The Casper program started the spring 2015 semester in newly renovated space through the generous support of Casper College. The space, more than 4,000 square feet, is comprised of two large classrooms with state-of-the-art distance technology, faculty offices, storage rooms, a distance conference room also used for instruction, and a wonderful ADL mock apartment. In this environment, complete with full bathroom, living room, bedroom, and kitchen and dining areas, students are learning hands-on techniques including transfers, and home assessment and modification. Best of all, each new room contains a window with a beautiful view of the city! If you're in Casper, come see the new space. We would love to give you a tour!

