

UF

UNIVERSITY *of*
FLORIDA

DEPARTMENT OF
OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

CONTRIBUTING
TO THE
**GREATER
GOOD**

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UFOT BY THE NUMBERS

1ST
FIRST FLORIDA
PUBLIC
UNIVERSITY
TO LAUNCH
DOCTORATE IN OT

1ST
FIRST AND
ONLY DRIVER
REHABILITATION
THERAPY
PROGRAM IN THE
U.S.

1ST
FIRST
ACCELERATED
BHS - OTD IN THE
U.S.

2
DOUBLED THE
SIZE OF UFOT
FACULTY
FROM 2017-2019

3
TRIPLED THE
SIZE OF UFOT
DEPARTMENT
FROM 2017-2019

3
TRIPLED GRANT
FUNDING FROM
2017-2019

4
INCREASED
THE ACADEMIC
PROGRAMS FROM
ONE TO FOUR

6TH
RANKED 6TH
AMONG AAU PUBLIC
UNIVERSITIES FOR
ITS GRADUATE
PROGRAM BY U.S.
NEWS & WORLD
REPORT

100
100% PASS RATE
ON NBCOT EXAM
FOR MULTIPLE
YEARS



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UFOT Vision

By 2025, the UF OT Department will be a vibrant preeminent research and educational entity in the U.S.

UFOT Mission

We will lead research innovations, present thriving and varied educational programs, embrace a clinician-scientist model, be fiscally healthy, and serve the occupational needs of people, organizations and populations.

Welcome to UFOT

UFOT is nationally renowned for its excellence in occupational therapy education and research, and is ranked 10th among all public universities in the nation. The department has outstanding academic and training programs that include an accelerated Bachelor of Health Science to Occupational Therapy Doctorate, an entry level Master's in Occupational Therapy, an Occupational Therapy Doctorate, a Post-Professional Certificate in Driver Rehabilitation Therapy, and a PhD in Rehabilitation Science.

The department has federally funded programs in driving rehabilitation and community mobility, early childhood development, and intellectual and/or learning disabilities. The department is a co-leader in the NIH-funded K12 Rehabilitation Research Career Development consortium and houses the Institute for Mobility, Activity, and Participation. Some of our accomplishments include:

- the first public university in Florida to offer an Occupational Therapy Doctorate (OTD) program (launched 2017)
- launched the first accelerated Bachelor of Health Science to Occupational Therapy Doctorate (BHS-OTD) program in the country
- launched the first and only Driver Rehabilitation Therapy (DRT) program in the country
- is ranked 6th for its graduate program among public AAU universities by the U.S. News & World Report
- has for multiple consecutive years demonstrated a 100% pass rate of students on the NBCOT exams
- has a demonstrated international and national reputation for research excellence
- has multiple faculty members who are inducted into the American Occupational Therapy Foundation's Academy of Research or who are on the Roster of Fellows of the American Occupational Therapy Association
- is home to the Editor-in-Chief of our profession's research journal: OTJR: Occupation, Participation and Health
- attracts the best and the brightest students (more than 275 applicants for 47 spots in 2019)
- boasts alumni in state and national occupational therapy leadership positions
- showcases the annual Sandra Edwards Colloquium
- provides lifelong learning opportunities via our online education programs



- in the last three years:
 - doubled the number of faculty
 - tripled the size of the Department
 - tripled grant funding
 - expanded academic programs from one to four

The best predictor of future success is past performance. While celebrating our most recent accomplishments over the past three years, we can only expect an incredible upward trajectory, in all of our scholarly and academic endeavors.

Sincerely,

Sherrilene Classen, PhD, MPH, OTR/L, FAOTA, FGSA, Professor and Chair: Department of Occupational Therapy



UFOT Partners with New Veterans Rural Health Center

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs expanded its research and innovation capacity by adding a new Veterans Rural Health Resource Center (VRHRC) in Gainesville, FL. The VRHRC manages the VA's rural-centered research portfolios and disseminates new program findings nationwide. Dr. Sergio Romero, UFOT adjunct research assistant professor, has been appointed as the Operations Director of this Center. Researchers (Sherrilene Classen: PI) in the Institute for Mobility, Activity, and Participation will work with the VRHRC to deliver driving interventions and community mobility services to post-deployed veterans. This project has tremendous potential for personal and public health, as it intends to mitigate and/or prevent motor vehicle crashes, which is the second leading cause of death for returning combat veterans.

Logon to ruralhealth.va.gov/aboutus/vrhc.asp for more information on the Gainesville VRHRC.

UFOT Welcomes New Faculty

UFOT is excited to welcome four new faculty members to the Department of Occupational Therapy:

- Chiung-ju "C.J." Liu, PhD, OTR, associate professor: Liu's research focuses on identifying key factors related to late-life disability and designing interventions to promote aging in place.
- Jessica Kramer, PhD, OTR/L, associate professor: Kramer's research draws upon theoretical concepts and methodologies from occupational therapy, disability studies, education and rehabilitation.
- John Kramer, PhD, clinical assistant professor: Kramer's work focuses on involvement of families in employment for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), knowledge translation and aging family caregivers of people with I/DD.
- Heidi Horwitz, MEd, OTD, OTR/L, clinical assistant professor and academic fieldwork coordinator: Horwitz has 10 years' experience as a fieldwork educator with the focus of her doctoral project on fieldwork educators' clinical reasoning skills.



Drs. CJ Liu, Jessica Kramer, John Kramer and Heidi Horwitz

UFOT's K12 Scholars: *The Future of Rehabilitation Science*

UFOT is part of the Rehabilitation Research Career Development (RRCD) Program funded by the National Institutes of Health, Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (K12 HD055929).

The RRCD program is geared toward rehabilitation scholars who are occupational and physical therapists and builds on the extensive rehabilitation research infrastructure of the University of Florida, the University of Texas Medical Branch, and the University of Southern California, along with a network of NCMRR Research Infrastructure Cores, VA Centers of Excellence, rehabilitation research institutes, and physical and occupational therapy departments nationwide.

UFOT research assistant professor, Amber M. Angell, PhD, OTR/L, is one of these scholars. "As a RRCD K12 Scholar, I have had numerous opportunities – for mentorship, training, coursework, travel, collaboration, and scholarship – that I would not otherwise have," says Dr. Angell. "This support enables me to devote time to establish my research lab and to travel to NIH-funded labs across the country to learn about innovative and groundbreaking research being carried out by leaders in the field. As an early-career scholar with hopes to build a strong research program that will improve access to services for underserved individuals on the autism spectrum, the K12 program is an invaluable opportunity."

For more information on UFOT and its leadership programs, visit our website at ot.php.ufl.edu or contact Dr. Sherrilene Classen at sclassen@php.ufl.edu.



Faculty Awards



Dr. Sherrilene Classen - Fellow of AOTA; Fellow of GSA; Inductee to the Academy of Research; Editor in Chief OTJR; Distinguished Scholar Award from the Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists; UF Provost Selected Fellow, Southeastern Conference Academic Consortium, Academic Leadership Development Program

Dr. Amy Blue elected as Public Director of the National Board of Certification in Occupational Therapy.

Dr. Christine Myers awarded the AOTA Special Interest Section Award for Quarterly Editors.

Ms. Emily Pugh received the Roster of Fellows Award from the American Occupational Therapy Association.

Dr. Joanne Foss, UFOT professor emerita, received a Retired Educator's Commendation and the Roster of Fellows Award from the American Occupational Therapy Association.

Dr. Consuelo Kreider is the 2019 Department of Occupational Therapy Senior Outstanding Alumna.

Sandra Edwards Colloquium

UFOT will be hosting the fourth annual Sandra Edwards Colloquium on February 1, 2020. The theme is “Environmental Adaptation and Participation: Occupational Therapy and Dentistry Best Practices and Best Evidence.” Our keynote speaker will be Sharon Cermak EdD, OTR/L, FAOTA, from the University of Southern California.

Dr. Cermak’s work focuses on health promotion in children with disabilities. She is the principal investigator on a National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research-funded study that is testing the efficacy of a sensory adapted dental environment (SADE) compared to a regular dental environment to decrease children’s physiological anxiety, distress behavior, perception of pain, and sensory discomfort during a dental cleaning. This intervention has the potential to revolutionize clinic-based dental care for the growing population of children with autism spectrum disorders.

The Sandra Edwards Colloquium is an annual series that is funded by an endowment from Sandra Edwards, a University of Florida alumna (Class of 1965), and her husband Al Garcia. This annual event draws interest from faculty, students, and community clinicians, who attend breakout sessions on cutting edge clinical and research topics. Students present posters of their work and there are ample opportunities for networking.

Each year, the Colloquium has presented top occupational therapy researcher keynote speakers. Previous keynote speakers have included Elizabeth R. Skidmore, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA, in 2017; Roseann C. Schaaf, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA, in 2018; and Anita C Bundy, ScD, OT/L, FAOTA, FOTARA, in 2019.



Sharon Cermak, EdD, OTR/L, FAOTA

UFOT attracts the best and brightest students (more than 275 applicants for 47 OTD spots in 2019) who not only excel academically but also excel in research and humanitarian endeavors. Here are a few articles highlighting UFOT students and their contributions to the GREATER GOOD.

BHS-OTD Accelerated Program

The UFOT accelerated program is the first of its kind to allow University of Florida Bachelor of Health Science (BHS) students to complete their BHS degree while taking first year OTD courses. We admitted our first cohort in the fall of 2019. Not only are our students participating in a multidisciplinary approach for general practice in healthcare systems through the BHS, but they are actively engaged in experiential learning opportunities in the OTD program.

Logon on to ot.php.ufl.edu/academics/bhs-otd/ for more information of the BHS-OTD program.



OTD Student Accepted into the FOTA Leadership Development Program



OTD student, Jianne Apostol, was accepted into the Florida Occupational Therapy Association (FOTA) Leadership Development program. Apostol is a second-year OTD student and treasurer of the UF Student OT Association. As a participant of the leadership program, she will engage in a day of continuing education and dynamic discussions on leadership and service in the context of the state professional association for occupational therapy. A variety of speakers, presentations, and discussions will be provided on leadership practices and principles as well as the diversity of roles in leadership that exist in FOTA. The event will culminate into volunteering for FOTA and beginning to grow into leadership roles. Participants will be connected to a current FOTA leader who can act as a mentor and facilitate increased service to FOTA while guiding leadership development.

UF Postdocs

Drs. Zack Ahonle, Gail Castañeda, M.J. Lee, and Justin Mason are UFOT postdocs working with Drs. Sherrilene Classen and Sergio Romero. Ahonle earned his PhD in Special Education and Rehabilitation Counselor Education from the University of Texas. His research interests include community reintegration and diversity in outcomes of vulnerable populations. Castañeda earned her PhD in Public Health (Social and Behavioral Sciences Concentration) from UF. Her research interests involve psychometric testing and development of health-related constructs, particularly co-occurring substance abuse and disordered eating behaviors. Lee earned her PhD in Rehabilitation Science from UF. She is currently working on developing and testing a protocol to deliver NIH-PROMIS Measures. Her research interests include measurement outcomes, remote health services and technologies, and home modifications. Mason earned his PhD in Sport and Exercise Psychology from Florida State University. His current project is assessing aging adults and those with spinal cord injury/disease’s perceptions of automated vehicle technologies.



Meet the RSD Students

PhD students from UFOT enrolled in the Rehabilitation Science Doctoral program consist of focused and enthusiastic individuals dedicated to improving the field. With the support of their mentors, our PhD students are actively involved in scholarly investigations and dissemination projects. Among these students, 15 papers have been published in peer-reviewed journals. In 2019, six students presented at the American Occupational Therapy Association Conference and two were selected to present in the Young Scientist Theater.

Our PhD students come from backgrounds related to occupational therapy, physical therapy, public health, and engineering. They showcase amazing diversity and stem from Canada, Peru, South Korea, and Kenya. As a result, our students foster interdisciplinary work, from diverse backgrounds and cultures, which position them to better solve the complex problems of today's society.

Logon to rehabsci.phhp.ufl.edu/ for more information on the RSD program.



Pictured from left: Sharon Mburu, Mary Jeghers, Jaewon Kang, James Wersal, Carlyn Ellison, Shabnam Medhizadah, Fiorella Guerrero Calle, and Sharon Medina. Not pictured: Marci Schneider.



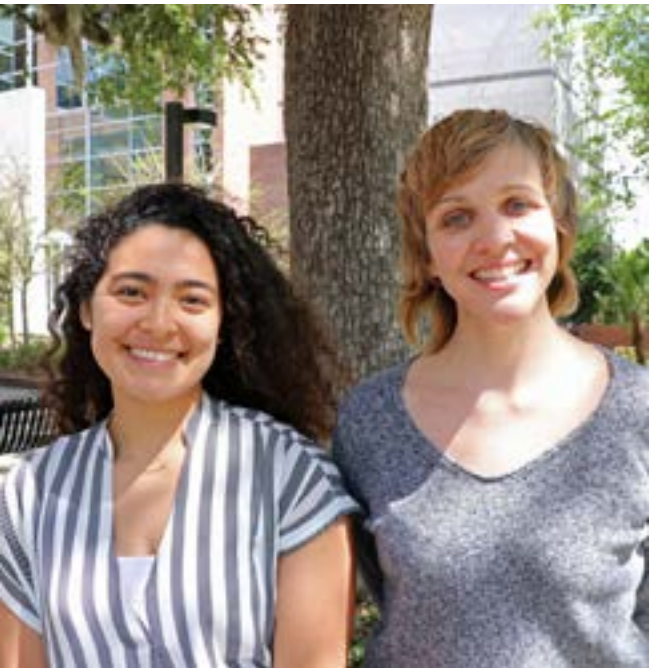
UF OTD Students Elected to Dean's Ambassador Program

UFOT student Corinne Hutchison was selected as a Dean's Ambassador at the University of Florida's College of Public Health and Health Professions. The mission of the Dean's Ambassador Program is to involve a dynamic group of students dedicated to volunteering and supporting PHHP in a diverse range of college events and activities. Through participation in the program, students strengthen their own professional skills, make connections with others, and expand their commitment to volunteerism. To fulfill this mission, ambassadors are recruited from students across the college who then have the opportunity to gain experience in varied college events and activities supporting education, research, and service.

Congratulations to Corinne for this great honor!

UFOT Integrates Undergraduate Students Into Existing Research Programs

Last summer, Emily In started her research journey studying postural control deficits in school-aged children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) with UFOT. Her faculty mentor is Dr. Zheng Wang. In is a second-year pre-medical undergraduate student majoring in microbiology. "Acquiring research experience at the College of Public Health and Health Professions will help me transition my knowledge set from the dish to human subjects," In said. In is working on a project to examine the effect of visual and proprioceptive information on the control of postural ability in children with ASD. In is also interested in addressing the relationships amongst postural instability, diagnostic severity and cognitive ability in children with ASD. "This award will lay a solid career foundation for me to pursue future clinical practice opportunities in the health professions."



(pictured from left: Daniela Moreira and Dr. Amber Angell, research assistant professor in OT)

Daniela Moreira, a bachelor of health science honors program student, was awarded a 2019-2020 University Scholars Program scholarship to carry out a mentored research project in Dr. Amber Angell's lab in UFOT. Moreira conducts Spanish language interviews with Latino families of girls with autism. This project, which serves as Moreira's honors thesis, is part of a larger project in Angell's lab that aims to address gender, racial, and ethnic disparities in autism diagnosis. Girls are under-identified with autism compared to boys, yet little autism research has focused on females, and even less is known about Latina girls with autism. Understanding how Latina girls are distinctly affected by autism is a critical first step in addressing disparities. In addition to her Spanish fluency, Moreira brings to the project a complex understanding of culture and disability and a passion for addressing health disparities for underserved populations.



(pictured from left: Emily In and Dr. Zheng Wang, UFOT assistant professor)

Inclusive Wheelchair Basketball at the University of Florida

The UF Student Government-run Wheelchair Basketball Association (WBA) was created by UFOT in February 2019 to provide a team sport opportunity for UF students with neurological disease/injury and mobility impairment. Students with and without disabilities learn how to propel a manual wheelchair while executing dribbling, passing, and shooting skills.

Sara Mairs, BHS-OTD student and Vice President of the WBA says, "Wheelchair basketball has become a staple in my weekly routine, it gets me moving and helps me appreciate the need for inclusive sports here at UF. The community that has already been built around this sport is supportive, encouraging, and keeps people coming back every week."

Twenty students practice weekly on UF's Broward Courts using newly acquired basketball wheelchairs provided by the UF Medical Guild and UFHealth Re-

hab Hospital. The student players are being trained by four former wheelchair basketball players of national and international acclaim. Two of those coaches are occupational therapists practicing in North Central Florida.

The faculty advisor for the WBA, Carolyn Hanson, PhD, OTR/L, has extensive experience conducting sports camps for adults with physical disabilities. "Wheelchair basketball at UF is an inclusive sport as students with and without disabilities play basketball with everyone in specialized wheelchairs," says Dr. Hanson. "Participants have a great time learning new physical and tactical skills! This facilitates socialization, promotes health and may change attitudes about disability."

Contact Dr. Carolyn Hanson at carolynhanson@phhp.ufl.edu for more information.

UFOT OTD Students Help Make Boating Accessible

Doctor of Occupational Therapy students are working with Bird Dog Boats of Florida, Inc., a nonprofit organization that provides boating activities for individuals with disabilities, on their uniquely designed, first ever, completely wheelchair accessible boat. The company travels across the state to participate in community outdoor recreational events in addition to offering private bookings for individuals in wheelchairs to participate in meaningful leisure pursuits with their families. OTD students are working to increase Bird Dogs Boats' exposure within the

state of Florida by creating and distributing an informational pamphlet and establishing the company's social media presence. They directly assisted Bird Dog Boats at an October 2019 event in Kissimmee, where they conducted participant experience surveys to facilitate better understanding of their clients' unique perspectives. The students presented their findings at the Florida Occupational Therapy Association Conference in November 2019.

Students Provide OT Service at the Equal Access Clinic

The occupational therapy specialty clinic is a part of the Equal Access Clinic (EAC) Network of free student-run clinics, providing healthcare services to the uninsured and under-insured in the Gainesville area. The EAC strives to improve the physical, mental and social well-being of all, by enhancing access to high-quality, comprehensive, patient-centered care and by facilitating community-level action. The OT EAC is a weekly clinic run by UF occupational therapy students under the supervision of UF OT faculty members and local clinicians. The clinic provides occupational therapy evaluations, assessments, and interventions to promote clients' engagement and participation in their meaningful occupations. The UF OTD students are proud to be running the first free, student-run occupational therapy clinic in the state of Florida and look forward to continuing to grow and serve our local community for many years to come. Logon to ot.phhp.ufl.edu/service/equal-access-clinic/ to learn more.





UF's Professional Certificate in Driver Rehabilitation Therapy:

The first of its kind offered by a U.S. university

In the U.S., driving is the primary means of transportation and is a vital link to community participation. Yet, this activity can be restricted due to illness, injury, aging or developmental delays. To assist with this important instrumental activity of daily living, Driver Rehabilitation Specialists perform comprehensive driving evaluations to assess or intervene with clients so they stay mobile within the community.

UF's Professional Certificate in Driver Rehabilitation Therapy trains students to screen, assess and evaluate drivers who are medically-at-risk for driving. Students learn to provide evidence-based interventions for licensed drivers in populations across the lifespan.

After completion of the program, students are able to:

- Utilize best practices and best evidence to make fitness to drive determinations.
- Analyze and synthesize research on driver rehabilitation.
- Assess and provide intervention for clients who have complex conditions.
- Communicate assessment results, intervention plans, rehabilitation strategies, vehicle adaptations, and client outcomes to clients, families, healthcare providers and community stakeholders.

With a Professional Certificate in Driver Rehabilitation from the University of Florida, clinicians can work in many practice settings including inpatient, outpatient, or their own driver rehabilitation business.

Logon to drt.ot.phphp.ufl.edu/ for more information.

UFOT Research

The University of Florida (UF) is a member of the prestigious Association of American Universities and UFOT is ranked 6th among public research universities for its graduate program. UFOT is housed in the College of Public Health and Health Professions, providing a rich environment for research collaborations. Research funding within the College is first among all similar colleges in North America. UFOT research funding is among the top in the United States.

Scientific projects and scholarly activities have been funded by:

- National Institutes of Health
- National Science Foundation
- National Institute on Disability, Independent Living and Rehabilitation Research
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- U.S. Department of Defense
- Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute
- U.S. Department of Education
- U.S. Department of Justice
- U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration
- U.S. Veteran's Administration
- U.S. Army Medical Research Acquisition Activity
- Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute
- Centers

Faculty have also been awarded \$1.3 million dollars in total funding from the Florida Department of Transportation. They conduct innovative research to improve safety

and independence on the road and advance our understanding of the interaction between autonomous vehicle functions and drivers with medically at-risk conditions.

UFOT hosts three training grants to prepare future researchers and scholar-practitioners to contribute to the field, including:

- U.S. Department of Education funded INSPIRE: Interdisciplinary Related Services Personnel Preparation for Early Childhood
- NIDILRR funded AART: Advanced Rehabilitation Research Training Project
- NIH K12 Rehabilitation Research Career Development Program (RRCD) (in partnership with UTMB and USC)

Faculty's scholarship makes an impact at both the local and national level through funding from foundations and organizations including the Paralyzed Veterans of America, the University of Florida Medical Guild, the American Automobile Association, and the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy.

The next few pages include just a few of the newest UFOT research projects. For a complete listing of research-related activities, please refer to ot.phphp.ufl.edu/research/profiles/ for researcher profiles.



UFOT Researcher Leads Study on Health Outcomes in Girls with Autism

Amber Angell, PhD, OTR/L, UFOT research assistant professor, was awarded an R41: Autism Secondary Data Analysis Research Program award from the Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA). Angell's team includes Dr. Jennifer Elder from the College of Nursing, Dr. Baiming Zou from the Department of Biostatistics, and Dr. Deepthi Varma from the Department of Epidemiology, along with a team of investigators from Children's Hospital Los Angeles. They will study co-occurring medical and behavioral conditions in girls and young women with autism spectrum disorder using the OneFlorida Data Trust, a repository of statewide healthcare data for more than 15 million Floridians. The project is a critical first step in identifying and addressing health and healthcare disparities among girls and women with autism, who are receiving increased attention as an understudied, underserved population.

INSPIRE:

Preparing Students To Fill Gap In Early Childhood Programs

For children with disabilities, early intervention by therapists can make a significant difference in their motor, cognitive, sensory processing and communication development, leading to better health and well-being for the children and their families.

Yet in Florida, there are not enough qualified occupational, physical and speech-language therapists to meet the growing demand for services for infants and toddlers with disabilities.

A new University of Florida program hopes to change that. The Interdisciplinary Related Services Personnel Preparation for Early Childhood, or INSPIRE, program trains UF occupational therapy, physical therapy and speech-language pathology graduate students, giving them the skills to treat very young children with disabilities. The five-year program is supported by a \$1.24 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

“If we can increase the workforce in early intervention and early childhood programs and provide high-quality services, I believe we can improve the lives of young people and their families,” said INSPIRE Director Christine T. Myers, PhD, OTR/L.

INSPIRE scholars are trained to treat children with high-intensity needs who have significant disabilities or multiple disabilities. These may include physical, cognitive, emotional, sensory or learning disabilities.

“Attracting therapists to careers in state-funded early intervention and early childhood programs has traditionally been a challenge because the compensation is typically lower than in other settings,” Dr. Myers said. “In addition, many degree programs do not have the ability to provide in-depth training on working with this patient population, so therapists may not feel adequately prepared.”

To address financial concerns, the INSPIRE program will cover one full year of tuition for INSPIRE scholars, helping to reduce their student loan debt and



relieve some of their financial burden after graduation.

Led by Dr. Myers, along with co-directors Lori-Ann Ferraro, M.A., CCC-SLP, a clinical lecturer in the Department of Speech, Language, and Hearing Sciences, and Claudia Senesac, PhD, PT, PCS, a clinical associate professor in the Department of Physical Therapy, INSPIRE scholars will participate in specialized coursework and fieldwork over the course of a year and a half.

“Using coaching models with parents and caregivers has been shown to be the most promising type of approach for working with infants and toddlers,” Myers said. “Providing caregivers with the knowledge and skills to be able to support children’s growth and development is highly effective. I think any graduate who has the ability to use coaching models is going to be in very high demand because it’s something even experienced therapists need training and guidance to use.”

Contact Dr. Myers at ctmyers@phhp.ufl.edu for more information.

Institute for Mobility, Activity and Participation

Understanding User Experiences and Adoption Practices of Adults Pertaining to Autonomous Vehicle Technology

Sherrilene Classen, PhD, MPH, OTR/L, FAOTA, FGSA UFOT professor and chair and director of the Institute for Mobility, Activity and Participation, has recently received funding, as PI on three projects. The Department of Transportation / University of Florida STRIDE is funding a study to develop a model to support experiences of drivers of all age groups with autonomous vehicle technology. Co-investigators are Dr. Virginia P. Sisiopiku, Dr. Justin Mason and Dr. James Wersal. Dr. Classen is also leading a project funded by the Veterans Administration, through the new Office of Rural Health in Gainesville, FL, to improve driver fitness and community mobility of returning combat

veterans in rural settings. Co-investigators are Dr. Sandra Winter and Dr. James Wersal. The third project funded by the Florida Department of Transportation supports a continuation of the Aging Road User Information System to provide database refinement and enhancement via geographic information system technology for the Florida Senior Safety Resource Center. Co-Investigators are Dr. Sandra Winter and Dr. Ilir Bejleri.

Logon to mobility.phhp.ufl.edu/ for more information.





Neurocognitive and Behavioral Development Research

Zheng Wang, PhD is the Director of the Neurocognitive and Behavioral Development Laboratory (NBDL) and a UFOT assistant professor. Dr. Wang’s research interest is focused on identifying neurobiological and neurophysiological mechanisms underlying sensorimotor issues in children and adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and related disabilities.

Dr. Wang’s research employs system neuroscience approaches including functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), structural neuroimaging, kinetic, and kinematic movement analyses to identify biobehavioral markers for neurodevelopmental disabilities to facilitate early diagnosis, predict disease risk and monitor disease progression.

The laboratory currently has two active research

projects. The first project focuses on the cerebellar and basal ganglia contributions to neuromotor declines in adults with ASD. This project evaluates sensorimotor degeneration and anatomical cerebellar and basal-ganglia nuclei changes in middle-aged and older adults with ASD. These studies will provide foundational knowledge on the pathophysiological mechanisms of aging in ASD.

The second project focuses on developing innovative pediatric-friendly approaches to the assessment of masticatory (chewing) ability in children with ASD. This project identifies impairments in masticatory performance and efficiency as well as altered intra-oral structure in children with ASD.

Contact the NBD Lab at nbd.lab@phhp.ufl.edu for more information.



Enhancing Functional Gains From Structured Exercise For Older Adults At Risk Of Losing Independence

Dr. Chiung-ju (CJ) Liu, a UFOT associate professor is examining the factors to increase older adults’ functional ability. She studies the relationship between cognitive aging and health literacy and examines the use of text cohesion, illustrations, and stereoscopic videos to reduce the cognitive load required to process health information.

Additionally, Dr. Liu has published a series of systematic reviews examining the effect of exercise on late-life disability. She recently developed “3-Step Workout for Life” to enhance functional gains from structured exercise for older adults who are at risk of losing independence at home. Her research has been supported by the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research, the National Institutes of Health, and the Retirement Research Foundation. Her work has contributed to practice guidelines published by the American Occupational Therapy Association, and the World Health Organization.

A Model For Advancing Campus-Based Supports For Those With Learning Disabilities

Led by UFOT faculty member Consuelo Kreider, PhD, OTR/L, an interdisciplinary team at the University of Florida has developed, implemented, and tested a novel model for assisting students with learning disabilities (LD), achieve success as college students in science, technology, engineering, and math. Supports developed through this project focused on the “whole” student and encompassed supports for academics, career development, social functioning and self-advocacy, and individual health and well-being. This whole-student focus was extended to the UF campus with development of LD-informed mentorship. Moreover, the team created a university council with a focus on improving the campus’ understanding of and support for those with LD.





Grip Strength In Children

Orit Shechtman, PhD, OTR/L, UFOT associate professor is currently completing data collection in a study on grip strength in children, which is funded by the Clinical and Translational Science Institute (CTSI) Clinical Pilot Award. In this study, grip strength is measured utilizing the DynEx dynamometer with its newly developed child's handle adapter. This handle has additional settings to accommodate for children's hand sizes. The aim of the study is to establish grip strength norms as well as testing guidelines for children. Participants include 220 girls and boys ranging in age from 5-15 years. Once established, grip strength norms can be utilized by clinicians for comparisons among children with various health conditions. This study will provide a foundation for future research establishing grip strength as a subclinical, noninvasive, proxy marker of health status in children.

The Perspectives of Youth with Neurodevelopmental Disabilities in Rehabilitation Evaluation and Outcome Measurement

Jessica Kramer, PhD, OTR/L, UFOT associate professor, in partnership with the small business AbleLink Technologies, is designing a novel tool to include the perspectives of youth with neurodevelopmental disabilities (DD) and related cognitive impairments in rehabilitation evaluation and outcome measurement (NIH 1R41HD090772-01). The Pediatric Evaluation of Disability Inventory- Patient Reported Outcome Measure (PEDI-PRO) uses AbleLink Technology's accessible survey platform to capture youth's perception of their Daily Activities, Social/Cognitive, & Mobility function in the context of everyday life situations important for a successful transition to adulthood. Features such as automatic text-to-speech, streamlined program flow, and 3-D images maximize independent operation by people with DD and related cognitive impairments. Clinicians can use the PEDI-PRO to compliment the information gathered from other gold-standard rehabilitation assessments to obtain a comprehensive picture of needs and functional outcomes.



Faculty in Print

UFOT's research reaches across the globe contributing to the greater good. Here is a listing of UFOT faculty publications for 2018-2019.

Alvarez, L., **Classen, S.**, & Medhizadah, S. Clinical utility of the DriveFocus intervention on young drivers with and without experience. (2019). *Frontiers in Public Health: Public Health Education and Promotion. Community Case Study (7)*, Article 123. DOI: 10.3389/fpubh.2019.00123

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Masters in Occupational Therapy (MOT)
Rehabilitation Science Doctoral (RSD)
Professional Certificate: Driver Rehabilitation Therapy (DRT)
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