We very much value your input so please feel free to contact me at any time if you have any issues or “praises” you would like to share with the Department.

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The Department would like to form a new advisory committee to provide feedback on curriculum issues relating to practice. If you would be interested in serving on the committee, please send me an e-mail at coleen.schneck@eku.edu or by calling 859-622-3300.

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From the Chair

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Third Annual Research Day

The third annual Occupational Therapy Research Day was held on November 21, 2008, and brought on by the Research Day Committee, which included Anne Shordike, Ph.D., OTR/L, Dana Howell, Ph.D., OTR/L, Elaine Fehringer, M.S., OTR/L, and Peggy Wittman, Ed.D., OTR/L, FAOTA.

The keynote speaker, Dr. Scott D. Tomchek, who is the Chief OT and Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Louisville, gave a wonderful keynote regarding his Autism research.

Student presentations and poster presentations to both the academic and clinical communities followed. We are proud to note that all curricula in the department were represented—including Occupational Science, Occupational Therapy, and Rehab Sciences.

The fourth annual Occupational Therapy Research day is schedule for Nov 13, 2009.

Below: Cassandra Clark and Emily Vaugh at the Research Day poster session.
EKU’s graduate OT program has been named one of “America’s Best” and ranked 24th in the country in US News and World Report’s “America’s Best Graduate Schools 2009” edition. These rankings are based on expert opinion about program quality and statistical indicators that measure the quality of a school’s faculty, research, and students.

With a score of 3.4, EKU tied with eight other institutions. Boston University and Washington University tied for first with a score of 4.6. One-hundred and fifty-two schools or programs were surveyed for the occupational therapy rankings.

“If you look at the programs above us, they are all research institutions, and we’re a teaching institution,” David Gale, Dean of EKU’s College of Health Sciences said.

The ranking will help the Department in the areas of recruiting faculty, staff, and students. It will also help in obtaining federal and state dollars for the program.

Summer Handwriting Program Collaborative with Model Lab students

This summer the OT Department offered an exciting summer handwriting camp at Model Laboratory School on EKU’s campus. A total of seven occupational therapy master’s students and Julie Baltisberger, MS, OTR/L provided services to 13 children ages 5 to 8 years of age. This program, aptly named “Handwriting in Motion,” focused on the sensory and motor skills needed for handwriting, as well as direct instruction in handwriting by incorporating movement and theme-based activities. The program consisted of five weekly 3-hour sessions, with each week focusing on a different theme—Going on a Safari, Summer Sports Fun, A Day at the Beach, Firefighter for a Day, and the Circus Comes to Town. This program served the dual purpose of providing hands on experience for the OT students in working in a summer camp setting and valuable OT services to children with handwriting difficulties. The children made great gains in their handwriting, but also said that they had a lot of fun! We hope to continue this program in summers to come!

KECSAC and OT Conduct Transition Research Study

Five years ago the Eastern Kentucky University Department of Occupational Therapy entered into a partnership with the Kentucky Educational Collaborative for State Agency Children (KECSAC), a statewide collaborative that works with nontraditional education programs to ensure a quality education for state agency children in Kentucky. Each year over 22,000 children are served in such programs, often moving from one setting to another throughout their academic careers. These children, disproportionately diagnosed with disabilities, face significant obstacles. As a first step toward designing effective interventions, the Research Team developed a study to comprehensively describe key elements of student transitions. In Spring 2009, this report, titled Kentucky Youth At-Risk Transitions: A Report to the Commonwealth, was distributed to and uniformly supported by all 105 KECSAC programs and partner agencies throughout Kentucky. The Kentucky Board of Education provided the team with a formal response to recommendations of the report. In addition, the study was presented at national, state and local conferences, including the EKU College of Education Dean’s Signature Symposium on Transition. The Research Team is now engaged in a study designed to develop best practices in transition in collaboration with the staff of selected KECSAC education programs, and is supported by grants from the Kentucky Departments of Education and Juvenile Justice and the College of Education at EKU.
Welcome New Faculty!

Welcoming our new Graduate Coordinator, Dr. Mary Ellen Thompson! Dr. Thompson earned her Bachelor’s from University of Puget Sound and spent all of her clinic years working in her home state of California; primarily working in pediatrics, including school based practice, the NICU, outpatient clinics and health, but also treated adults. Planning to teach someday, she returned to school in 1984 and earned her post-professional Master’s degree from USC. As a part of her Master’s program, she trained in Sensory Integration at the Ayres Clinic. Most recently Dr. Thompson completed her PhD at Arizona State University. “Having just finished my first year at EKU, I can honestly say I love my new work environment as well as my new home in Kentucky. The faculty and students have all made me feel very welcome. After eleven years of teaching, I am looking forward to my new position as Graduate Coordinator. It will be an exciting challenge and will allow me to spend more time mentoring students through their graduate career.”

- Julie Baltisberger is the field-work coordinator assistant funded by the Madisonville/Traver Grant. She completed her Master’s degree in Occupational Therapy at EKU and currently is a part-time student in the Collaborative Doctoral Program in Rehabilitation Sciences with UK.

- Melba Custer is an assistant professor. She is completing her doctoral degree in Rehabilitation Sciences in the Collaborative program between EKU and UK. Her research interests are developing assessments and outcomes research.

- Dr. Christine Myers is an Assistant Professor, and she recently completed her doctoral degree in the Collaborative Program in Rehabilitation Sciences at EKU and UK. Her dissertation work on the role of therapy in early childhood transitions was in Occupational Therapy Transition Practices with Young Children.

- Karen Summers is a part-time OT at the Model Laboratory School. In addition, she is working with Dr. Doris Pierce on the study of sleep disorders. Summers is presently a part-time student in the Rehabilitation Sciences Collaborative Program with UK.

- Amy Marshall is an assistant professor in the Department of Occupational Therapy. She is completing her Ph.D. in the University of Kentucky Rehabilitation Sciences Doctoral Program with a dissertation focus on transition services to adolescents with disabilities in Kentucky’s nontraditional educational settings.

Shirley O’Brien receives Doctorate

Shirley O’Brien received her doctoral degree from the University of Kentucky in the Department of Educational Policy Studies and Evaluation. Dr. O’Brien’s dissertation title was: Tenure-track at the knowledge factory: A case study of faculty perceptions at a comprehensive university. Her research adds perspectives that past researchers have overlooked about faculty work at comprehensive (Master’s I) universities. Understanding the challenges meshing institutional and disciplinary expectations was a focus of her work, particularly as it applies to reward structures in higher education.
The EKU Student Occupational Therapy Association was reformed during the Fall 2008 semester. The faculty advisor is Dr. Peggy Wittman. Officers include: President: Ruth “Vellisa” Hensley; Vice President: Cynthia Moore; Treasurer: Debra Bower; and Secretary: Anna Fraley. Committees include: Finance, Community Service, Social, and Promotion.

Activities for the Fall 2009 semester include Toys for Tots, EKU OT T-shirt sales, a Christmas party, and volunteering at the Cardinal Hill Holiday Store.

In addition, SOSA members also assembled care packages for deployed service men and women, volunteered for Richmond’s Halloween Ho-Down, held a food drive for the Thanksgiving holiday and donated the collected goods to a local food back, and collected Toys for Tots through the holiday season.

We would like to both thank and congratulate the SOSA Officers who have now graduated and welcome the newly-elected SOSA Officers who will serve as representatives for the 2009-2010 academic year.

SOSA News

The Students of Occupational Science Association had a very busy and very successful year after participating in numerous volunteer programs throughout the year, most notably the Special Olympics’ Young Athletes Program, which has quickly become a continuing service project for SOSA members and undergraduate occupational science students.

Morgan hopes to engage in collaborative teamwork to promote optimal success in leading OT through its centennial vision, and into a role of a powerful, respected, scientifically-driven, and meaningful profession that many lives can be impacted through.

Student Elected to AOTA’s ASD

Ryan Morgan, a Master’s Candidate in Occupational Therapy, has been elected as the chairperson of the Assembly of Student Delegates (ASD), AOTA’s national student body—a position of notoriety, and respected as AOTA’s “future leaders.” In this position, Morgan will collaborate with committee members from across the nation to promote AOTA’s centennial vision, attend several conferences during his active year as chairperson, and represent the student body to AOTA’s Board of Directors.

Morgan is honored and humbled to have been elected by his mentors, peers, and future professional colleagues. He is excited to represent OT students, Occupational Therapy as a profession, and his university.

Retired professor Gladys Masaganti recently had lunch with Dean Gale while he was attending a conference in Hawaii. He reports that she is happy and very much enjoying retirement!
Congratulations to the 2009 Summer Graduating Class!

This class was the first to participate in the Hooding Ceremony, which took place the afternoon before Commencement Ceremonies in the Meditation Chapel. Katie Yancosek gave an incredible inspirational talk for the students. Good luck to all graduates!

Students Promote Backpack Awareness

The EKU graduate occupational therapy students participated in the Annual AOTA Backpack Awareness Day on September 16, 2009 as a part of the OTS 870 course, Trends and Issues in Occupational Therapy. AOTA expanded the backpack education effort in 2009 to include “packs through the lifespan”. This afforded students the opportunity to share and apply their professional expertise in properly carrying school backpacks, purses, briefcases and suitcases.

Overall, most students commented on how they educated the participants on how to pack and wear a backpack properly. Several of the groups that addressed adults identified the societal conflict between fashion trends and proper carrying postures of packs and purses.

Sessions were conducted at: Junction City Elementary School, Stonewall Elementary School, Madison Middle School, Foley Middle School, Model Laboratory School, First Baptist Church Youth Group in Richmond, and EKU Freshman Orientation class, among others.

Other News:

Over the 2008 Fall Break, OT Students participated in a canoe trip to the Kentucky River. SOTA funded the trip, allowing it to be free for interested students. The trip allowed students to relax and enjoy their fall break. This trip was featured in the November 6, 2008 student newspaper, The Progress.

The second annual Hooding Ceremony for the Fall 2009 Graduates will take place on Friday, December 18th from 2pm to 4pm.

EKT students during AOTA's Backpack Awareness Day.

OT grad students: Melissa Anderson and Vicki Schwetschenau enjoying the trip.

Grad student Leah Holderbaum and her boyfriend relaxing on the river.