

Alumni Newsletter

Volume 6

Issue 1

Summer 2011

Greetings from the Chair...

Dr. Al Copolillo

How about those Rams! I know it's kind of late for March Madness celebrations, but the event is just too important to pass by. From 11th seed to final four, the VCU Rams basketball team changed the university's landscape forever. In just a few short weeks, the Rams set and achieved a goal that is unprecedented in the history of NCAA men's basketball. This accomplishment adds to the many, both on and off the basketball court, that make VCU great. As OT alum, you are all a part of the "Ram-nation", and you contribute to the excellence that is VCU. As such, it's great to share in this experience and to feel a fierce sense of pride in our university. It's our time, right now!

In the spring semester, we begin our series of intervention courses with our first year graduate students, and, inevitably, the challenge of goal writing hits them like a ton of bricks. Each of us presents them with a method we've used and become accustomed to, each with its own special acronym – FEAST, ABCDEF, RUMBA. We explain that, while it's difficult to sort through these all at once, OTs need to learn a variety of strategies and be prepared to change their styles depending on the population and setting they work in. We make sure not to minimize the value of client factors like range of motion, strength, and cognition. But, true to our profession, we encourage goal writing to improve functional activities and occupational performance.

As many of you may recall, it's a confusing and sometimes frustrating learning experience, but everyone endures it. And, when students make it through the process, I'm sure they're better therapists for it. What starts out as "crystal ball science" becomes a mark of true expertise as they get better and better at making correct predictions. Therefore, we endure in teaching the process, knowing that the alternative – not planning, not projecting, not taking time to reflect with clients on the priorities of intervention – is far worse than having to predict "supervision with cues by discharge" or "modified independence with a grab bar and raised toilet seat".

There were lots of goal-related lessons to learn this spring, some from the VCU Rams, others from the humbler process of teaching goal-writing, all applicable to the Department of Occupational Therapy and the

wider community of occupational therapy alumni, students, faculty, and staff. In the midst of political, economic, and academic chaos, we work as a team, focusing our energy on our mission of excellence in teaching, research, and service.

- We are in our self-study year, preparing to be evaluated for reaccreditation in 2012. Our goal is for a full ten-year accreditation.
- We are building strong research agendas despite funding cut-backs and increased competition with a goal of expanding the knowledge base and practice evidence of the profession.
- We regularly evaluate our curricula with a goal for excellence in teaching in the classroom and outstanding fieldwork experiences.
- We say farewell with pride and encouragement to our Grad II students as they head to fieldwork II. Their diligence and tenacity resulted in high achievement of academic goals and objectives.
- We welcomed 43 outstanding entry level masters students to campus in June and are currently making final decisions on 10 new applicants to our post-professional programs. These are results of the goals the faculty sets, reviews, and revises each year.

This is our time, right now, to reflect on where we want to be as a department and a profession, and how we might get there. We invite all alumni to join us in this team effort of setting and achieving goals of excellence by continuing your own educations, building your clinical expertise, assisting with teaching and fieldwork, or through your ongoing financial support.

We'll take time to celebrate our accomplishments too. Next year is the 70th anniversary of our department. OT graduates from VCU and RPI will come together to remember our humble beginnings, the goals we set many years ago, and the amazing accomplishments we, as a community of caring health professionals, have achieved. We'll be sending announcements soon and hope you'll plan to join us. Thank you for your support of

our goals and objectives to make VCU a model for excellence right now and in the future.

Albert Copolillo, Ph.D., OTR/L, FAOTA
Assoc. Professor and Chair

OT Department Awards and Honors

Marie Anzalone, Ed.D., OTR/L, Dept Assistant Professor left for her 6 month Fulbright Scholarship in Ireland in the middle of May.

Al Copolillo, Ph.D., OTR/L, FAOTA, OT Dept. Chair and Associate Professor was awarded Fellowship status at the American Occupational Therapy Association's 2011 Annual Conference for his contributions to the profession as an "educator, author, researcher, leader and practitioner."

Jennifer Gray (M.S., 2011) received the VCU Health Systems Rehab Employee of the Year Award in September, 2010.

Tony Gentry, Ph.D., OTR/L, Dept. Assistant Professor received the 2011 VCU School of Allied Health Professions Research Award. **Dianne Simons, Ph.D., OTR/L, Dept. Assistant Professor** received the 2011 VCU School of Allied Health Professions Service Award.

Penelope ("Penny") Kyler, ScD, OTR, FAOTA (B.S., 1972) was selected as a 2011 Alumni Star by the VCU School of Allied Health Professions. This award recognizes Penny's national leadership in analyzing and influencing health care policies. She currently works as a Health and Human Services Administration

Public Health Analyst in Region IX in San Francisco, CA. Previously she was a Federal Project Officer in Maternal and Child Health, the Discipline Chief of Rehabilitation Services for MD, and the Ethics Officer of the American Occupational Therapy Association. She continues to remain active and prolific both in adjunct teaching and in publishing, particularly in areas of administration/management, ethics, cultural diversity and translational genetics. This prestigious award is simply the latest she's earned across the course of a stellar and influential career.

Linda Olson, Ph.D., OTR/L (SAHP Ph.D., 2011) successfully defended her dissertation on *Sensory Modulation Disorder and Schizophrenia: Linking Behavioral Measures* on April 8, 2011.

Rosa Romaan-Oyola (SAHP Ph.D. Candidate) was recently awarded a Dissertation Research Grant from the American Occupational Therapy Foundation to support her proposed study on risk factors for Sensory Modulation Disorder in a Hispanic population. The study will take place in Puerto Rico under the guidance of her research advisor, Dr. Stacey Reynolds. Rosa is currently on faculty at the University of Puerto Rico and continues to work part-time in a clinic for children with disabilities.

WHERE IN THE WORLD ARE OUR ALUMNI?



Lisa (Phillips) Carter (M.S., 2002) works for Carilion Clinic at the Carilion New River Valley Medical Center in Christiansburg, VA in acute care and outpatient

therapy. She helped implement their EMR and coordinates their OT student program, and reports that she especially enjoys working with patients in UE ortho. She and husband John are proud parents of Maxton, born February 2, 2010 and feels fortunate that he attends day care at the hospital where she works so she "can peek in on him during the day". Lisa is also a member of the Blacksburg Junior Women's Club, a local service organization.

Susan Payne Easton (B.S., 1988) has enjoyed working at St. Mary's Home for Disabled Children in Norfolk, VA for the past 13 years. She reports that their OT Support Services "provide the individuals who live here all of their assistive technologies: wheelchairs, orthotics, adaptive toys, feeding equipment and anything else they need to be happy

and as independent as possible". Her current focus is on providing foundations for movement that encourage neuroplasticity. Suzanne and her husband of 15 years have two "beautiful boys and a crew of critters that keep us active".

Nailah Hassan (M.S. 2005) has been working for 5 years as Juvenile Probation Counselor at the BETA post-dispositional program, a six-month therapeutic sentencing program for adolescent males and females at-risk for incarceration. She works on a team with 2 unit partners, a mental health therapist, 3 teachers and an alcohol/drug counselor. The clients receive individual counseling and groups four times a week. Nailah was instrumental in starting a book-club circle for her unit and securing funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to host a "Changing Lives Through Literature" initiative. Not surprisingly, she says "literacy has since become a passion of mine". Nailah also reports that she's "adopted" a male MaineCoon cat and a female tortoiseshell-colored cat.

Kathy Pearce Koman (B.S., 1993) posted on the VCU School of Allied Health Professions Facebook page in October, 2010 to say that she would love to reconnect with her classmates. At the time she was in OT school, she was a single parent with two young kids and her last name was Ditmars.

Susan Kurtis (B.S., 1995) works as an OT for the National Institutes of Health within an inpatient schizophrenia research program. She recently completed a Master's degree in education with a focus on higher education and adult learning at Johns Hopkins University. She's currently a doctoral candidate at Towson University where her dissertation focuses on medication adherence, social support and recovery for persons with schizophrenia and their families, She and her "wonderful husband" (Herb) of 12 years have three children.

Christi Haynes O'Neill (B.S., 1996) lives in Pickerington, OH and has her own private practice which involves providing services to school systems, "brick and mortar schools as well as virtual academy charter schools." She reports that she works the clinical end of the practice, and her husband coordinates the business end.

Becky (Jones) Orth (B.S., 1994) is the Senior Occupational Therapist and Clinical Education Coordinator at Lewis-Gale Medical Center in Salem, VA. She and her husband Brad have been married for 13 years and have two sons – Kyle is 10 and Ryan is 3.



Hansung Ryu (M.S., 2010) married Minjung Chung on May 14, 2011 at the 103 Saints Korean Catholic Center in Torrance, CA.

Sheila Selznick (B.S., 1975) was honored as one of the founding staff and for her many stellar years of service at the 35th Anniversary Celebration of Circle Center Adult Day Services in Richmond, VA held in May. Sheila accepted the position when completing her last Level II fieldwork and has since served Center participants as a care coordinator, ensuring communication and connections between Center members, their families and their physicians. She also supervises or leads the Center's therapeutic activities (e.g., Montessori, Snoezelen, chair exercises) and is active in overseeing OT-student groupwork and fieldwork.

Barbara H. Shoestock (B.S., 1975) retired in May, 2010 after 20 years of service in North Carolina. For the last 17 years of her career, she served as Director of Occupational Therapy at two of the state's four psychiatric facilities. She especially enjoyed "providing clinical education for students and affiliating with many OT academic programs." Barbara had also previously worked in Virginia at the VCU/MCV Children's Hospital and for Henrico County's pilot early intervention program. She is proud of her role in advocating for and developing the OT curriculum at Winston Salem State University in NC, but is also enjoying retirement. She visits friends and family in New England and hopes to do more travelling, and is active in several women's groups.

Steven J. Wasilewski (M.S., 1998) recently moved to Fort Hood, TX to work at the Carl R. Darnell Army Medical Center. His interests center on providing care for soldiers with brain injury, PTSD, amputations and burns. In December, 2010 he was one of six students to earn the Doctor of Science in Occupational Therapy (DScOT) degree offered jointly by the U.S. Army and Baylor University.

Anita Wyrick (PPP-M.S., 2000) was featured in the April 25, 2011 issue of *OT Practice* as one of two OTs actively integrating evidence-based practice into their positions. Since her exposure to EBP in VCU's Post-

Professional Masters program, Anita not only used it as a practitioner in schools-based practice, but since her recent retirement has developed and taught an online course on EBP for VCU and has presented workshops on it at VOTA and AOTA.

Here's what the **M.S.O.T. Class of 2010** said about their new jobs or job prospects at the time of their Pinning Ceremony in January, 2010:

- **Amy Bass** – started inpatient rehab 12/20/10
- **Jocelyn Carter** – starts new job on 1/17/11
- **Meredith Cofield** – working in Newport News and Chesapeake
- **Charlene Dismaya** -- Accepted job at Sentara Norfolk General Hospital in acute care
- **Ruth Ann Evjen** -- Working for Sheltering Arms in acute care
- **Marshall Felvey** – trying to move to San Diego
- **Charlotte French** – starting to work immediately in MCV acute care
- **Cathy George** – “I’ve got a job!”
- **Jennifer Geiger** -- working with Outpatient Orthopedic Rehab in Reston, VA
- **Rachel Givens** – employed at Riverside
- **Lynn Tolman Harmon** -- will be working in inpatient rehab at Parham Henrico Doctor’s Hospital
- **Matthew T. Kerley** – Working at Hanover Health Care practicing general rehab OT
- **Jessica Jones** – started job in acute care at Good Samaritan Hospital in Baltimore, MD.

- **Eric Ludgate** – working at Hanover Health Care
- **Kathryn Martin** – will be working in spinal cord unit at McGuire VA
- **Meg McIntyre** – employed at Greater Richmond ARC in EI
- **Lea Peck** – just accepted job at John Randolph Medical Center
- **Crystal Denise Sawyer** – accepted position at Southside Regional Medical Hospital in Petersburg, VA
- **Shannah Simington** – “I start my job in February”
- **Nicole Stengle** – Starting job with Health South (inpatient) in Pennsylvania on 1/10/11
- **Nivea Nicole Velez** – “I have been a real OT for 2 weeks now!!”
- **Erin Wagonhorst** – got a job in a nursing home in Newport News, VA
- **Vail Weiglein** – travelling to Kenya to volunteer at a rehab hospital

Please let us know if there are any details you'd like us to add in the next newsletter. We'd also love to hear from those of you who have secured positions and/or are doing other interesting things since the time of your Pinning Ceremony

Embracing our Legacy: Celebrating Our Excellence VCU Department of Occupational Therapy 70th Anniversary GALA

Greetings Alumni! It has been 20 years since our last alumni reunion, and if you can believe it, it is time to celebrate the 70th Anniversary of VCU/RPI's (Richmond Professional Institute) Department of Occupational Therapy. We, the faculty, the students, the university and the alumni association want you! Help us plan the celebration and prepare to reunite with your school friends, catch up on what has been happening at VCU/RPI since you graduated, and share your own professional adventures. Plans for the 70th Anniversary Gala are already underway for 2012, and we would love your feedback.

To help us plan the Gala, please go to the following website and fill out a brief survey:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/VCUOT70th>

The survey should take 5 minutes, and gives you the opportunity to update your personal information for future contact regarding happenings for the celebration. To commemorate the 70 years of the

Department of OT, we are putting together a special video to include the history of occupational therapy at

Celebrating 70 years in 2012!

your classmates. If you have pictures or individual memorabilia to share, please label and send either a digital or hardcopy to the Department of Occupational Therapy or contact Jayne Shepherd, at jshepherd@vcu.edu. Since 2000, every graduating class has given the Department a picture of their class and they are all displayed on the walls of our department. We would love to have a picture of your class. We do have the Class of 1946 and the undergraduate class of 1971.

Please join us in spreading the word and gathering your classmates by filling out the survey and telling your friends about the VCU OT 70th Anniversary Gala. Be a part of history and help us fill in the gaps and

complete the story of occupational therapy at VCU/RPI. Look for upcoming opportunities to get involved and make this a celebration to remember for years to come.

VCU Department of Occupational Therapy
730 E. Broad Street, Room 2050
Richmond, VA 23298-0008
(804) 828-2219

Welcome Class of 2013



VCU welcomed 43 new entry-level MSOT students on June 1st. The strength and size of the applicant pool this year seems to reflect several different factors.

- Many students continue directly on to graduate school rather than seeking employment at this time due to the current state of the economy.
- OT has been identified by the Bureau of Labor Statistics as a well paying “recession proof” job with employment opportunities that are expected to increase by 23 percent over the next decade.
- Awareness that VCU was ranked at #13 among the 150+ OT programs ranked by the US News and World Report list of Best Graduate Schools.

This new group of future practitioners began their summer studies with an intensive week-long introduction to OT course entitled Nature of OT taught by Dr. Dianne Simons. They will also complete 6 intensive weeks of Human Anatomy with Dr. Steve Gudas before the fall semester begins.

Why Support the Department?

These are exciting times for the Department of Occupational Therapy. Over the past year, we managed to reconnect with several members of our alumni, and we have continued to advance our reputation for excellence through research, teaching, and service. This year we were fortunate to acquire several new assistive technology items, making our assistive tech lab a state-of-the-art training center for occupational therapists working in a wide range of practice settings. We begin the academic year with a plan to share our knowledge and skill in assistive technology through quality continuing education, provided by the top experts in the field. The on-going challenge of maintaining our labs at the cutting edge of technological advancement continues.

Research and laboratory space continues to be a priority under our current Chair, Dr. Al Copolillo. We plan to build upon our research in sensory processing, vision rehabilitation, and assistive technology and to garner additional research funding that will provide our students with essential research skills. We will work closely with Dr. Lane, our School of Allied Health Professions’ Assistant Dean of Research, to promote this agenda.

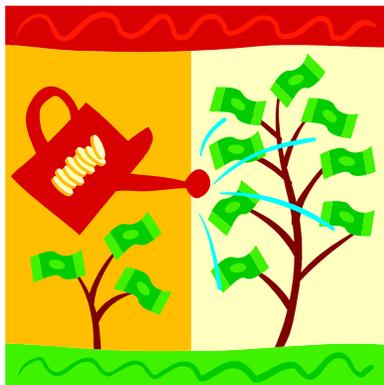
Support from alumni is greatly appreciated and will continue to be paramount to our students, faculty and staff. We appreciate what you do for us and look forward to your continued participation and unwavering support in these very difficult economic times. The Department has created the Occupational Therapy Priority Fund to help sustain academic

programs, faculty and student development, and equipment and technology needs. These funds help bridge the gap between appropriated state support and what is additionally needed when providing the very best educational experience.

In addition to the Priority Fund, we continue to need Student Scholarship support. Our students continue to receive extensive clinical training and play an active role in the Department, thanks to an increased amount of service learning opportunities. Many students are choosing occupational therapy as a second career. Student scholarship support is always needed, especially now more than ever because of the current economic situation.

We hope you will consider making a financial commitment to the Department through a gift that meets your philanthropic desires. All gifts make a difference in the lives of our students and our profession.

“Cultivating Future Therapists Through a Tradition of Excellence”



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Return to: VCU SAHP Department of Occupational Therapy
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1016 E. Clay Street, Richmond, VA 23298

www.VCU-MCVAlumni.org



730 East Broad Street, Suite 2050
P.O. Box 980008
Richmond, VA 23298-0008

U.S. News Ranking

#13

VCU's OT Graduate Program ranked
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