Fall 2024 OT-ALC Day 2 Session Summary of Discussions:

Call to Action for AOTA: Difficult Conversations about Challenges in OT Education

This session will cover three overarching themes of challenges faced by OT programs. Chairs and Directors from several OT programs will share challenges their programs are facing and solutions they have tried. Each session will have a breakout discussion among directors and chairs about their own experiences and will develop a call-to-action document that will be thematized and presented to the AOTA Board of Directors.

Issue 1: Faculty recruitment and retention

Challenges Faced by OT Programs

Key Themes	Example Statements
Geographical Barriers to Recruitment	"*Location of program is a challenge – rural and on border* "*getting people to relocate*" "*many programs in the state impacting recruitment of faculty* "Small, private, rural university- geographic area is limiting recruitment of faculty"
Economic Challenges	"High cost of living- relatively low salaries" "Salary an issue, especially for remote programs/faculty" "Lack of equity and parity between what programs pay" "low salaries with high workloads"
Inadequate Faculty Qualifications and Experience	"finding faculty with doctorates and experience" "Finding faculty with teaching experience difficult (in OT or otherwise)" "Finding tenure faculty is more challenging than clinical faculty (lack of doctorally trained)" "challenges w/finding doctorally prepared faculty sometimes" "difficulty finding faculty w/teaching experience & research lines"
Hybrid teaching environment difficulties	"Hybrid is demanding and hard to have work life balance. Culture challenge within the university" "Hybrid program faculty get burnt out w/weekend expectations" "First hybrid program in the university and it isn't embraced by whole campus. Scheduling meetings on days off for example. Constant battle of people not understanding the level of effort." "... *more difficulty getting appropriate resources for faculty teaching in the online format..*"
Balancing Adjunct and Full-Time Faculty Dynamics	"Adjunct positions untenable due to decreased access to benefits" "Try to find a balance of adjunct and FT faculty but hard because they don't lighten the load on FT (like for advising) "Very high research university- lots of adjuncts- how to make sure they have teaching skills, understanding curriculum, How to have enough adjuncts that want to stay and take ownership of the information"

	"Have enough full-time faculty for advising and capstone"
Navigating Faculty Transitions	"*replacing faculty when they retire*" "*Faculty retirement- 2retiring at the same time*" "*Change from more seasoned faculty to junior faculty- some clashes with changes in thought processes and philosophy*" "*....administration doesn't want to replace retiring people...*" "Research faculty can be a challenge if they get a big grant and have to teach less suddenly" "*Difficulty filling positions that are vacant due to transitions or retirements*" "Green faculty– high load of mentoring and onboarding"

Solutions Tried by OT Programs

Key Themes	Example Statements
Advocated for better faculty compensations	"AOTA Workforce report to increase salaries" "Pay for faculty to get OTD" "Offering additional benefits related to childcare expenses, continuing education funding, etc. to support faculty in earlier stages of development"
Faculty recruitment through networks	"Tend to grow our own- have alumni come back" "*Use of former grads to assist with teaching and hiring them FT*" "*Mostly through word of mouth or training alumni to be adjuncts/lab assistants and then moving them into positions*"
Empowering faculty with mentorship and research development	"*Designated person to meet with individual faculty for research mentorship*" "*Research fellows program – all new faculty must join. 2nd year assists with grants/funding*" "*Mentorship of junior faculty, both formalized & unformalized experiences*"

What AOTA can do to support Programs

Key Themes	Example Statements
Building teaching competence: demand for leadership and mentorship course offerings	"*Scholarship of Teaching and Learning course to help new faculty to anticipate in what it looks like in academia*" "More mini-credentialing for teaching, online courses, online resources to support teaching in a hybrid program" "*Have a class for clinicians. Understand what it's like to be an instructor*" "*We lost the Stoffel experience with training programs, AOTA no longer has them, the association needs to reinvest to our leaders*" "*Supporting mentoring programs at AESIS level*"
Strategic Program Development	"Review cousin profession to assess how they handle opening new programs and determine if we could have similar protocols (i.e. APTA, ASHA, etc.)" "Stop new programs from opening"
Enhancing faculty support and experience	"Help with workload challenges. Inconsistency with workload."

	"Removal of requirement for preparation for teaching in standards became a challenge" "Like to see ACOTE require a needs assessment for faculty numbers to adequately support the number of faculty" "Continue to provide Workforce report"
Balance between clinical and academia setting	"Set up baseline requirements for partnerships between a University and a big box hospital" "Salary is better in clinical life. 12 month contracts in clinical life compared to 11 or 9 etc. in academia"

Issue 2: Student recruitment and enrollment decline

Challenges Faced by OT Programs

Key Themes	Example Statements
Financial Barriers to Access	"Retention issue with being able to continue in program because of not being able to pay for it" "High tuition and high credit demands based on University context" "Cost of tuition and cost of living vs entry salary is not a good ratio" "..Lack of scholarship opportunities.."
Increased Student Expectations and Challenges	"Our students have more "student" challenges affecting their success " "Life demands students face" "Students are different now; many have to work and work a lot, taking time from their ability to study before getting into OT and afterwards; presents challenges" "Pool is not as large. More students struggling. More students needing accommodations."
Inadequate preparation and awareness of OT Profession	"Retention issue because students are coming in young and not really knowing what OT is" "undergrad admissions not supporting the professional" "Students not prepared for the OTD rigor (writing, science, etc)" "Public lack of knowledge of OT" "Entering students with less preparation for the program.."
Confusion about professional credentials: "OTD" vs "MSOT"	"2 programs offered, but numbers are divided between MOT and OTD. Expectation was it would be double" "Confusion over MA and OTD" "(students moving to the OTD without understanding the master's is a path of entry)" "Transition from MSOT- OTD saw a decline in applicants"
Rigorous Admission Standards	"Admissions dept has unrealistic expectations" "challenges with observation hours" "More programs increases the competition for admissions and clinical placements" "Admissions marketing is difficult internally"
Recruitment efforts led by the faculty team	"faculty was responsible for recruiting with limited time" "Needing to do everything "in-house" with regard to recruitment (little support from larger Department/University)" "High service commitment for faculty and staff involved in recruitment"
Market Saturation of OT Programs	"More programs opening – diluting pool" "Competition from oversaturated market"

	"More competition is some states and regions, making admissions also a challenge" "Students prefer to go to accredited schools, huge melts"
Decreased applicants and enrollments	"Number of applicants...enrollments have decreased" "Students don't want to commit early, they are waiting to make their final decision" "Applicant pool is lower than previous years, harder to fill cohorts, harder to find qualified candidates, diversity of applicants difficult"

Solutions Tried by OT Programs

Key Themes	Example Statements
Flexible Academic Pathways	"We have reduced the program length to 24 months instead of 27 keeping the accreditation requirements that can help some students save by taking one semester less." "Exploration of 3+3 program (3 years undergrad and 3 years grad OT)" "Off ramp to a MSOT program if OTD is not successful" "FW Level II can be completed on a part-time basis for students who want to work."
Opportunities for OT academic exploration and engagement	"Orientation to OT opportunity for undergraduates/Pre OT Club" "Pre-OT summer program, invite them to institutional events, keep in contact with them to avoid melts" "Teaming up with other Universities that do not have an OT program" "Open houses & professional exploration programs, targeting high school and/or freshman recruitment" "Pre-OT clubs in undergraduate programs"
Refining admission criteria	"We also consider the applications beyond using OTCAS, have students talk with us, complete and meet the requirements" "Moving away from GRE may be helpful" "Review and refine prerequisite course (and other) requirements for Admissions" "Moved to face to face interviews- many said that's why they picked the institution"
Engaging welcome experience for Admitted students	"Faculty and students providing handwritten notes to each student that was admitted" "Started accepted students day" "offer new admit dinner with faculty in Fall and Spring before a Summer start." "Once they accept they immediately are connected with a student and a faculty member. Face to face open house 1x month, virtual back stage passes 1x month as well."
Developed recruitment marketing strategies	"increased social media presence driven by student SOTA reps." "Targeted marketing approach to create resources and be a presence on social media" "Focusing on marketing, assisting with promo materials" "Students running social media accounts" "Targeting community partners, including HOSA"
Continuous student support system	"Mandated review sessions/open labs for students that score below 75% on early exams." "Preemptive advising that look at the other things that are going on in a students life that will impact the ability to meet the rigor of programs" "Pairing enrollees with student ambassadors" "1:1 meetings with OT faculty and prospective students" "reaching out via email, staying in touch" "having 'meet the faculty' sessions"

Key Themes	Example Statements
More financial opportunities	"hire student workers for social media" "Investigating more funding sources for scholarship to offset tuition" "Offering Scholarships in lieu of lower tuition" "Reducing costs/tuition all inclusive" "Graduate school assistantships or scholarships" *"HERSA grant application to create pathway programs for diverse students"*

What AOTA can do to support Programs

Key Themes	Example Statements
Better understanding of OT Academic Pathways (OTD vs Master's)	"Having greater clarification on the differences in degrees for entry level practice...and post professional OT degrees as well" "Better messaging about MS vs. OTD – students still don't understand the difference, and some schools promote the OTD as the only option, which hurts Master's programs." "--Clarify differences between entry points of the profession."
Leveraging online platforms for OT promotion	"Skill development on social media to better utilize the platforms currently being used by students" "create an assignment in either a leadership, advocacy or communications courses/modules, where students create a social media campaign to market OT. The students are so creative & would likely create awesome campaigns to support our schools & our profession!" "Need a resource on how to leverage and use social media such as TikTok, LinkedIN and IG" "More mainstream OT representation- spike in Google searches for "occupational therapy" during the Paralympics – how do we do this throughout the year instead of just at certain points"
Proactive outreach and education about OT Profession	"AOTA/NBCOT videos we could share with potential students" "Highlighting and publicizing testimonies from current practitioners, educators, and students about "untraditional" pathways into the OT profession" "Association- should be promoting profession/ protecting the profession" "Get into high schools and health careers clubs to help spread the word about OT" "ACOTE information on what it means if applying to a new program (Candidacy, pre-Accred etc)" "Need for AOTA vs ACOTE to market the profession"
Flexibility with OT program development	"Trying to stagger the timeline for opening OT schools if they are in the same geographical areas. A lot of competitors." "Stop approving new programs in geographic areas that are already oversaturated. It's not good for faculty recruitment, student recruitment, AND it is a strain on fieldwork placements." "How can programs better collaborate with each other in smaller geographic areas to support admissions and clinical placements/rotations" "Examine the length of program requirements compared to our other degrees in our colleges. Is it truly still appropriate. PT and PT are 2 years. In our state you can get an MD in 6 years start to finish."

Availability of Scholarship opportunities	"More direct scholarship from AOTA" "Timing of scholarship from AOTF so that students can utilized funds sooner and while actively enrolled in the program." "More scholarship funding"

Issue 3: Supporting Diverse Needs of Students

Challenges Faced by OT Programs

Key Themes	Example Statements
Challenges to Student Well-being	"MH always been there but seems higher incidence. Students go through so much during the program." "More serious MH diagnoses in the cohorts." **"***Student's lives are more complicated*" *"*Students facing a lot of stressors*"* *"Balancing work – academic lives for students"*
Student academic expectations	"*students expect to get A's and all the points* à *challenged with higher-level learning*" *"*Intense student fear of failure*"* "Expectations in all programs, including accelerated hybrid" "*Fully in-person program and being prepared for class*"
Lack of student preparedness for Graduate School	"*challenging transition to grad school*" "Student academic skills – not as prepared as in the past" "GPAs slowly going down over the years." "Elimination of GRE -> real drop in skills, especially writing; not seemingly prepared to be in program; faculty don't have time and resources to "train" students in this way; need to be able to offer" "*low pool of applicants with lower GPAs compared to the past*"
Pressures leading to faculty burnout	"Faculty burn-out with switching program type, accreditation needs and pressures, navigating high student support needs" "Faculty get frustrated working with students and hearing their needs; this then leads to or reflects faculty burnout" "Conflict resolution strategies not effective; limited professional development for faculty related to managing complex conflicts amongst students, faculty, and staff"
Student financial concerns	"*Cost-benefit: student attrition due to comparison of tuition cost and future salary." "*Concerns about student loans and cost of college*" *"*Students with significant financial challenges – food insecurity, housing/working several jobs"
Issues with student diversity	"Do not have a lot of diversity within cohort" "Current OTD cohort- under representation" "Everyone wants to increase diversity- neuro diverse students- difficulty with NBCOT exam- how to assist the student?" *"Diverse student learners- non-traditional students but no tools or training to support them*"

Communication between students and OT program	"*Self-efficacy/Self-advocacy v. "entitlement" with student communications/requests; late requests for letters of support; how communication is approached with adjunct/PT faculty" "Face to face" means in the classroom – this is not easily understood by all students; how do we address students with chronic/specific conditions requiring more flexibility in being in the program. It's mentioned on website, etc. but sometimes missed by applicants"

Solutions Tried by OT Programs

Key Themes	Example Statements
Promoting academic flexibility for students	"*Demonstrate flexibility with assignment submissions as needed"* "Give students 3 days off per semester for attendance policy" "Trying more group activities in classes, rather than as a graded assignment" "Hybrid/blended class structure to allow students to work and take care of other obligations" "*Accommodations to miss class: students sign off on standard expectations; go through accommodations/disability office. Also helps to have procedures for being out of class due to illness (need to use Zoom)."
Prioritizing overall student well being	"Being able to offer a robust mental health program " "Thinking about the student experience from the very beginning (incorporate wellbeing); both faculty and student perspective" "Asking about wellbeing during advising meetings" "Student MH services – referral to staff versus OT program" "*Access university resources, such as counseling services on campus –"* *"*Dedicated room for stress release, meditation, sensory regulation, aromatherapy, coloring/activities, games, socializing, etc."
Equitable Access to Resources	"Funds for students in crisis, i.e. hardship or emergency funds; may be state funds available for this" "*Automatic electronic textbooks on a rental basis (with recommendation for lifetime access vs semester) "* "Concentrate on the physical spaces. Trying to find out what they want in their lounges, study rooms..." "Student support infrastructure to address needs for academic support, community-building, belonging; dedicated "Director of Student Support and Engagement" – faculty member with 20% load to oversee program that includes student workers, midday programming, tutoring, collaboration with other university offices that provide writing support, counseling, etc."
Promotion of inclusive engagement during recruitment/admissions	"*Transparency in recruitment – Info Sessions; face to face interviews (screening for intentions/interests) – re: what the profession is about; its not about making tons of money " "Intentionality of providing orientation with students in mind"

	"Academic advising/mentors as soon as they are admitted" "Student orientation prior to program start"
Professionalism preparation	"Focusing on professional behaviors/professional identity development each semester/course (not just a single course)" "*Professional behavior as <u>part of learning</u>: in Handbook, recall existing guidelines as needed on an individual level" "Using the term development of professional identity instead of professional behaviors" *Netiquette in syllabus – for some guidelines on communication expectations

What AOTA can do to support Programs

Key Themes	Example Statements
Clearer distinctions of all OT entry level degrees	"*one entry point to help with clarity and expectations of the student"* *"*Call for ACOTE to settle on one entry level degree may not be the answer – let students choose" "Clarify the difference between all the entry degree points." Needs to be way more clear on the website than it currently is. *"leverage differences in programs to support students"*
Holistic support for Student Well-Being and Academic Excellence	"Create resources for student clubs- starting a wellness program, create a wellness day, how students can help support themselves." "More resources for high risk students (particularly gender identity)." *"Student mentoring/connection in relation to diversity"* *"university connections for mentoring through AOTA"* "*We need a part time accredited program option for non-traditional students"* *"*Market and share resources such as COTAD and other groups regularly to programs and students" "Use ACOTE standards to advocate for services at our institutions"
Professional growth opportunities for Faculty members	"More resources for clinical educators on the needs of todays students." "More resources for faculty for MH training, use of technology to be used immediately" "Faculty development/education regarding needs of students and how to change our pedagogy (curricular and co-curricular activities) to promote student success and overall success in and growth of the profession." "Making suggestions for faculty to have more load time for advising" "ACOTE could require documentation that faculty have training to address student mental health"
Access to financial support and resources	*"better advertising of scholarships through AOTA and other organizations"* *"We need more scholarships students"* *"Consider ways to cut costs"*