



All Things Ignatian



Development of a Collaborative Entry-Level Doctorate of Occupational Therapy Distance Program at the University of Alaska Anchorage

The Challenge:

Alaska is an isolated and vastly rural location with a unique topography, demographics and need for health professionals. Alaska has a history of health professional shortages. Increasing demand for more health services exacerbate such shortages in rural and urban populations.

Reasons for the health professional shortage are due to a number of factors: including a growing demand for services, an aging population, lack of supply (i.e., healthcare workers) not keeping up with demand, and the intrinsic factors of the state's geography, remoteness, harsh climate, rural isolation and scarce training resources (AHEC, 2007).

The AHEC report cited shortages in many healthcare professions such as nursing, dentistry, physicians, physician assistants, case managers, lab technicians and others. Vacancy rates for rehabilitation professionals range from 15.6 - 29.3%, with the greatest shortage for occupational therapists at 29.3%.

Occupational therapists in Alaska work in school districts, tribal health organizations, private practice clinics/offices and hospitals. Not only is there a large vacancy rate for occupational therapists, there also appears to be a mal-distribution of therapists and services.

The Process:

Given the shortages in Alaska, the UAA decided to explore the feasibility of starting an educational program in OT. Dr. Cheryl Easley, Dean of UAA's College of Health and Social Welfare formed a work group consisting of the Dean, Jan Harris, UAA Vice Provost, Dr. Alfred Bracciano, Creighton University, and Jean Keckhut, President of the Alaska OT Association which reviewed the contextual background, healthcare and work force needs of the state and considered organizational and educational programs and delivery capabilities, identifying potential options. CU was selected as a partner, due to our long-standing history of online education in pharmacy and array of clinical doctorate degrees in pharmacy, physical therapy and occupational therapy. Other assets of CU included the ability to allocate sufficient faculty, staff and resources, the technical expertise and experience of the school's Office of eLearning and Academic Technologies (OLAT), and an institutional "fit" of missions.

A hybrid program of distance and on-campus education was designed. The OTD program for Alaska students is a full replication of the curriculum offered concurrently to the on-campus cohort. Didactic courses are accessible in an online format with experiential components and laboratory sessions are held on the UAA campus and taught by adjunct faculty hired in Alaska.

A Commitment to Jesuit Outreach



Alaska Entry-Level OTD Class of 2012 on a Service Learning Activity during the SPAHP Welcome Week in August

Effective Collaborative Relationships:

Collaboration enhances organizational learning when organizations work collaboratively rather than alone. Complementary resources from partners create inter-organizational synergies (Casey, 2007). Success factors of inter-organizational partnerships are evident in seven areas: trust and valuing the partner, leadership and managing change, a partnership framework, communication and interaction, equity and involvement in decision-making, and power and the role of partnership coordinator (Casey, 2007).

Upon the affiliation agreement approval by both institutions, external program approval from various accrediting bodies was sought. Submission of appropriate documentation was sent to the Alaska Post Secondary Education Commission, the Higher Learning Commission; culminating in 10 year accreditation approval by the Accreditation Council for OT Education (ACOTE), November, 2010.

Curriculum Transition Process:

A primary task for faculty was transitioning on-campus courses from traditional-face-to-face classroom to hybrid delivery. This hybrid program development had the unexpected outcome of strengthening the on-campus curriculum. Standardization of course websites and testing was established.

Examinations are administered through a software management system that allows for secured and unsecured testing. Faculty concerns need to be addressed continuously through formal and informal methods.

The Lived Experience - Institutional Mission and Jesuit Values:

The OT program development in Alaska embraces the principles of St. Ignatius of Loyola, and Creighton University, by educating men and women to serve others in the world and providing opportunities for intellectual, spiritual and moral growth beyond the "bricks and mortar" limitation of our campus in Omaha. The OT program in Alaska extends our outreach to underserved regions and individuals previously overlooked and ignored.

Program development requires a vision and commitment to live the Ignatian and institutional values of Creighton in a dynamic environment. Collaborative program development requires open communication, trust and negotiation between the institutional partners. Hybrid programs may become a catalyst for improvement in existing courses if technology and pedagogy is critically reviewed. The methodical process of program development has energized the OT faculty, department, school, and university.



The AK Development Team: Dr. Lou Jensen, Dr. Brenda Coppard, Dr. Alfred Bracciano, Dr. Joan Lanahan, Dr. Chris Bradberry, Dr. Cheryl Easley, UAA, Dr. Susan Kaplan, UAA, Mr. Shawn Cook. Not pictured: Ms. Bette Poutre

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