Updates From the Fieldwork Front

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Quality student learning experiences are the heart of fieldwork education, and a key component of this quality is the partnership between academic programs and fieldwork educators. Support structures within AOTA, such as the Commission on Education (COE) and the Education Special Interest Section, influence the quality and availability of fieldwork resources. This article highlights resources and activities currently under development that will better support quality fieldwork experiences.

Facilitating communication between fieldwork sites and academic programs:
Many documents are currently under revision or have recently been revised, such as the fieldwork data form (www.aota.org/education-careers/fieldwork/supervisor). An activity currently underway is the exploration of developing a standardized, competency-based evaluation for Level I fieldwork experiences. This is a complicated task because there are so many varieties of Level I fieldwork, including traditional practice placements, emerging practice sites, and community-based Level I fieldwork. An Ad Hoc Committee for Future of OT Education task force presented recommendations to occupational therapy and occupational therapy assistant programs at the combined Program Director/AFWC meeting in Orlando, Florida, in 2012. A standard for measuring competency for Level I fieldwork was part of the committee’s suggestions. Consequently, the COE conducted a survey of AFWCs and fieldwork educators to understand these groups’ opinions about measuring Level I competencies. Approximately 179 AFWCs (29.9% of respondents) and 420 fieldwork educators (70.1% of respondents) completed the survey, which asked whether respondents believed there should be a uniform tool to evaluate Level I competencies and, if so, what skills should be included in that tool.

Supporting evaluation of Level I fieldwork:
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Results of the survey indicated that a tool like this should be developed and, therefore, “a task force should be charged with developing a competency-based standardized evaluation measure that will span the continuum of learning expected on FW to include both Level I and Level II experiences” (Ad Hoc Committee for Future of OT Education Fieldwork Task Group, 2012). The survey results showed at least 12 areas of competency in which the respondents were in agreement. Core competencies would include items such as time management, engagement in the fieldwork experience, self-directed learning, reasoning and problem solving, written communication, observation skills, and professional and personal boundaries. Discussion at the AOTA Joint Academic Leadership/AFWC meeting centered on determining whether a standardized Level I fieldwork evaluation would be mandatory and also whether a standardized Level I fieldwork competency should also include skills that would help a student prepare for Level II fieldwork. The committee was charged to present the modifications to the COE by January 2015.

Supporting evaluation of Level II fieldwork:
An ad hoc committee has been charged by the COE with the task of revising the Level II Fieldwork Performance Evaluation (FWPE) tool. This group has been working since February 2014 and is making progress. There are targeted outcomes for the revised FWPE. For example, the new version will be an online format to allow better data collection for both occupational therapy and occupational therapy assistant Level II fieldwork experiences. The online format will facilitate timely completion by the fieldwork educator. The ad hoc committee is reviewing reports from previous committees that have attempted revision of the FWPE. Level II performance evaluation tools used in other countries and by other disciplines are also being explored. Revising the scoring scale and exploring more effective ways for fieldwork educators to receive training in using the proposed instrument is under discussion. This would increase its reliability as an evaluative tool.

The COE has also authorized revision of the Student Evaluation of the Fieldwork Experience tool. A task group is being formulated and will begin work shortly. The timeline for this project includes a draft to be presented at the AFWC forum at AOTA’s 95th Annual Conference & Expo, to be held in Nashville from April 16 to 19.

References


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