



All Things Ignatian



A Transformational Journey: Outcomes of a Collaborative OTD Program with the University of Alaska Anchorage

A Commitment to Jesuit and Institutional Outreach

The Challenge:

Alaska is an isolated and vastly rural location with a unique topography, demographics and need for health professionals. Creighton University (CU) was approached by the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) to assist in developing an entry-level clinical doctorate in occupational therapy (OTD) program. A review of a needs assessment conducted by the Alaska Area Health Care Consortium (AHEC, 2007) found a history of health professional shortages, increasing demand for health services, an aging population and shortage areas. The remoteness of the area, the harsh climate, rural isolation and scarce training resources also combine to make health shortages endemic. The AHEC report cited vacancy rates for rehabilitation professionals range from 15.6 – 29.3%, with the greatest shortage for occupational therapists at 29.3%.

A Collaborative Relationship:

UAA decided to explore the feasibility of starting an educational program in OT. Dr. Cheryl Easley, then Dean of UAA's College of Health formed a work group consisting of Jan Harris, UAA Vice Provost, Dr. Alfred Bracciano, Creighton University, and Jean Keckhut, President of the Alaska OT Association. CU School of Pharmacy and Health Professions (SPAHP) was selected as a partner, due to our long-standing history of distance online education in pharmacy and the technical expertise and support of the School's Office of eLearning and Academic Technologies (OLAT).

The OTD distance program in Alaska is a complete replica of the campus program with both pathways issued tablet computers. All incoming students are provided a complete technology and programmatic orientation during Welcome Week, which occurs just prior to classes beginning in the fall. A team including members from the Office of Academic and Student Affairs (OASA), OLAT, and faculty travel to UAA each August to provide a focused Welcome Week orientation for the incoming Alaska cohort.



Coursework, Assessments and Labs:

Course didactic content is delivered through the CU learning management system (LMS). Course lectures are recorded using lecture capture technology and streamed to the course website via the LMS as well as are available for download through the LMS and iTunes. The lecture capture recordings are available to both pathways.

All distance didactic assessment is completed at the UAA Distance Education Testing Center. Campus and distance students use the same secure exam software.

Students complete lab and experiential activities on campus at UAA in lab space dedicated to the program. Adjunct lab faculty from the Anchorage area are hired to work with the on-campus instructor and to facilitate the labs in Alaska.



Creighton University students in OT lab at UAA

Institutional Mission and Jesuit Values: Beyond "Bricks and Mortar"

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.

Outcomes:

The first graduating class of occupational therapists is already making a contribution to meet the needs of the communities they serve by accepting positions in underserved areas in healthcare and community agencies. The greater Anchorage area (Anchorage, Wasilla, Palmer) Infant Learning Programs (ILP), which provide services to special needs infants, are benefiting with two of the graduates employed with the local ILP, and others at the Alaska Hand Rehabilitation and the Health Quest Therapy facilities in Anchorage.

Nineteen second and third year OTD students also contribute to the betterment of their community through their experiential activities, fieldwork and clinical rotations as they are soon to graduate and serve!



Creighton University Class of 2011 Graduates of the Inaugural Distance Entry-Level Occupational Therapy Doctoral Program in Anchorage, Alaska

Gratitude:

"I think I speak for the State of Alaska ILP program that we are grateful for the collaboration between Creighton and UAA to create this program. You are definitely filling a need. Thank you!"

~ Meghan Johnson, State of Alaska Part C, Training Coordinator/ CSPD

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