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# Importance of Membership in State Associations

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NOTA Nebraska Occupational Therapy Association Inc.

## BACKGROUND

As of January 2020, there were 1,516 occupational therapists (OTs) and occupational therapy assistants (OTAs) registered in Nebraska (Nebraska Department of Health & Human Services, 2020); however, only about 9% (n=135) are members of the Nebraska Occupational Therapy Association (NOTA).

NOTA's mission is to improve the field of OT by promoting professional growth and education; to enhance communication among OTs; to reinforce standards of clinical practice; and to advocate for the field of occupational therapy for all OT providers in Nebraska.

Previous research describes barriers OTs experience with respect to joining state associations. In one study, practitioners mentioned their state association lacked opportunities for continuing education and new ideas for practice (Ross, 2009). Decreased membership could impact the state association's ability to lobby for patient services, advocate for competent practice, and provide educational and networking opportunities for practitioners (Breeden, Fultz, Gersbacher, Murrell, Pedersen, Thomas, & Hanna-Stewart, 2000). This information demonstrates the importance of continued research into what practitioners desire from their state association, what practice and policy issues practitioners care about, and how state associations can best provide this information to their members.

Previous research has not addressed what OT practitioners value within state association membership. The purpose of this cross-sectional survey was to assess the perceptions and values of OTs and OTAs in Nebraska regarding NOTA membership.

## FOCUSED QUESTION

What do licensed occupational therapy providers in Nebraska perceive about the value of the Nebraska Occupational Therapy Association membership?

## METHODS

A cross-sectional survey assessed practitioners' perception of state associations and how NOTA could better serve occupational therapy practitioners, specifically its members. The survey consists of 24 multiple choice, ranking, and open-ended questions. The survey was sent via email. One week after the initial email, a follow-up email was sent to participants and then a week after the follow-up email, a final email was sent to participants in order to achieve optimal participation.

This survey was sent to all the licensed occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants in the state of Nebraska.

Data analysis included descriptive statistics for all variables. Chi-square tests were also used to evaluate whether NOTA members differed from non-members in terms of advocacy, attendance at state conference, and knowledge of current legislation.

## RESULTS

289 total practitioners responded to the survey, of whom 72 were members of NOTA and 217 were non-members. Slightly more than half (54%) were members of AOTA. Most were occupational therapists (89%) and many had been in practice for 21 years or more (29%). On average, members attended NOTA's state conference more frequently than non-members (3.3 compared to 1.4 times in the previous five years).

Members reported that overall, they valued NOTA's political lobbying, CEU opportunities, and state conference. Members also reported that as individuals, they benefitted from NOTA's advocacy and lobbying efforts, continuing education opportunities, networking opportunities, low cost to join, and access to resources for improving their clinical practice.

All respondents identified areas where NOTA could add value. Members' frequent responses to this question included adding CEU opportunities outside of conference (38%), membership engagement (35%), and networking opportunities (25%). Non-members' frequent responses to this question included CEU opportunities outside of conference (54%), membership discounts (31%), and job postings (26%).

The vast majority of members (71%) and most non-members (60%) agreed that NOTA advocates for the profession of occupational therapy. Members and non-members differed in their knowledge of recent legislation: 52% of members and only 11% of non-members reported they were familiar with NOTA's recent legislation initiatives (p<0.001).

| Table 1: Sample Description N=289 | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| NOTA Members | 72 | 25% |
| NOTA Non-Members | 217 | 75% |
| AOTA Members | 113 | 54% |
| AOTA Non-Members | 96 | 45% |
| Occupational Therapists | 188 | 89% |
| Occupational Therapy Assistants | 21 | 11% |
| Number of Years in Practice | | |
| 0-1 Years | 4 | 2% |
| 2-5 Years | 46 | 22% |
| 6-10 Years | 40 | 19% |
| 11-15 Years | 25 | 12% |
| 16-20 Years | 35 | 17% |
| 21+ Years | 59 | 28% |

Table 2: Comparison of NOTA Members and Non-Members

| | Members (n=72) | | Non-Members (n=217) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | n or mean | % or SD | n or mean | % or SD | p-value |
| Do you feel NOTA advocates for the OT profession? | | | | | 0.037 |
| Yes | 51 | 71% | 130 | 60% | |
| No | 2 | 3% | 22 | 10% | |
| Missing | 19 | 26% | 65 | 30% | |
| Did you know NOTA introduced its first legislative bill in 2020? | | | | | <.001 |
| Yes | 37 | 52% | 24 | 11% | |
| No | 16 | 22% | 131 | 60% | |
| Missing | 19 | 26% | 62 | 29% | |
| Average number of NOTA conferences attended in the last 5 years | | | | | |
| | 3.28 | 1.54 | 1.42 | 0.67 | <.001 |
| What do you value within NOTA? | | | | | |
| Politcal lobbying | 40 | 66% | - | - | |
| CEU opportunities outside of conference | 39 | 64% | - | - | |
| Networking opportunities | 39 | 64% | - | - | |
| State conference | 39 | 64% | - | - | |
| Over the past year, how has NOTA benefitted you? | | | | | |
| Advocacy/lobbying for profession | 48 | 79% | - | - | |
| Continuing education opportunities | 41 | 67% | - | - | |
| Networking opportunities | 24 | 39% | - | - | |
| Low cost to join | 23 | 38% | - | - | |
| Access to resources | 20 | 33% | - | - | |
| Where could NOTA add value within the organization? | | | | | |
| CEU opportunities outside of conference | 27 | 38% | 117 | 54% | |
| Membership engagement | 25 | 35% | 41 | 19% | |
| Networking opportunities | 19 | 27% | 52 | 24% | |
| Membership discounts | 10 | 14% | 66 | 31% | |
| Job postings | 11 | 15% | 56 | 26% | |

## BOTTOM LINE FOR OT

Occupational therapy providers who are members of NOTA indicated they valued political lobbying, CEU opportunities, state conference, and networking opportunities. This information could be used by NOTA to inform their areas of emphasis in coming years. Although it is imperative for NOTA to understand what their membership appreciates and values, it is also important for NOTA to learn of the areas of improvement in order to better serve all the practitioners in the state.

One of the top three responses of where NOTA could add value was CEU opportunities outside of conference. Many individual respondents mentioned CEUs not being offered on the western portion of Nebraska. NOTA should take the time to research more accessible options for practitioners from all over the state to be able to attend CEU opportunities. This could be by providing courses in various areas of the state or by providing online or zoom opportunities.

The results of this study demonstrate that lobbying and advocacy efforts are important to the occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants in Nebraska, but more NOTA members were knowledgeable about recent legislation than non-members. Occupational therapy providers in Nebraska who are interested to learn about and be more involved in advocacy efforts may consider joining their state organization.

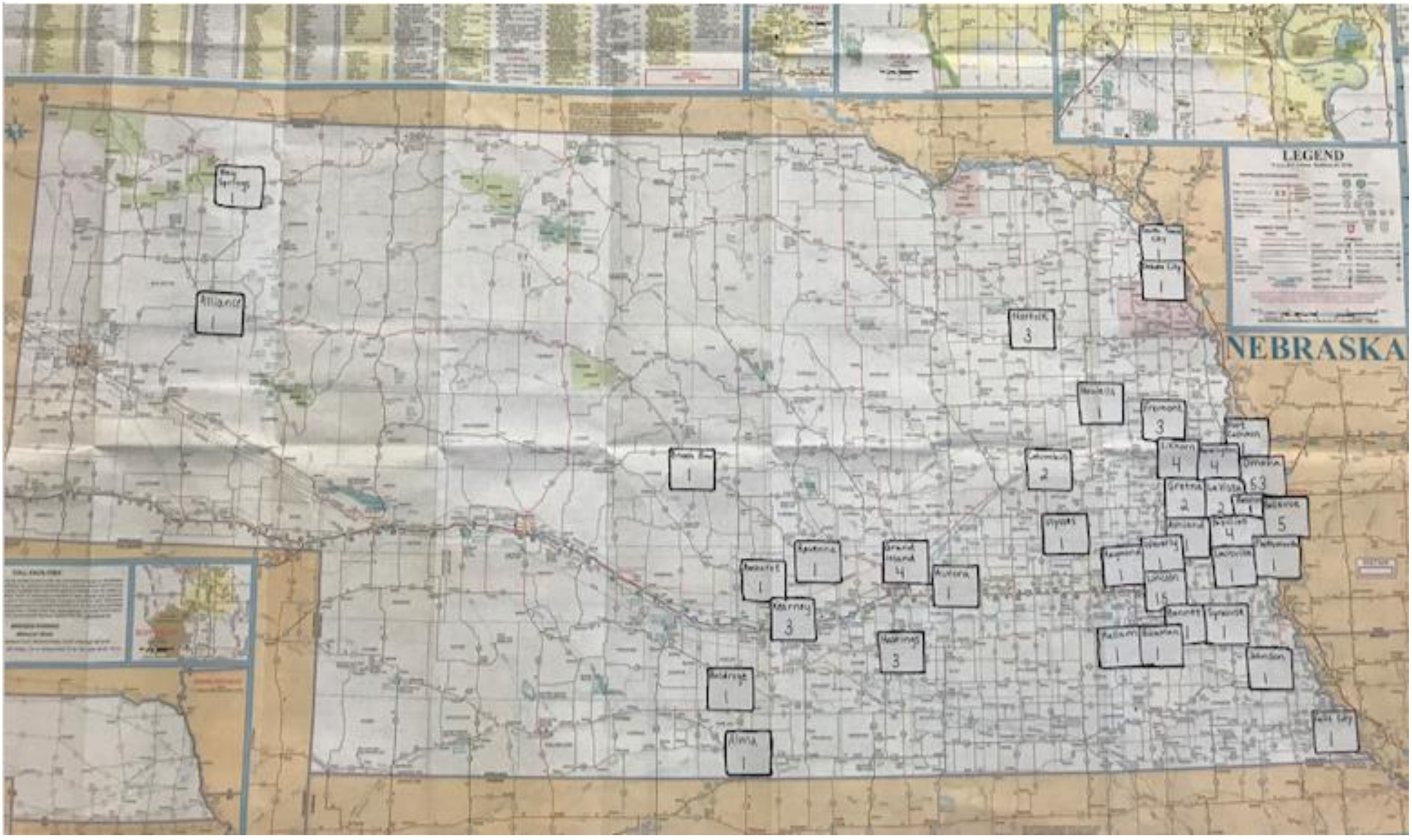
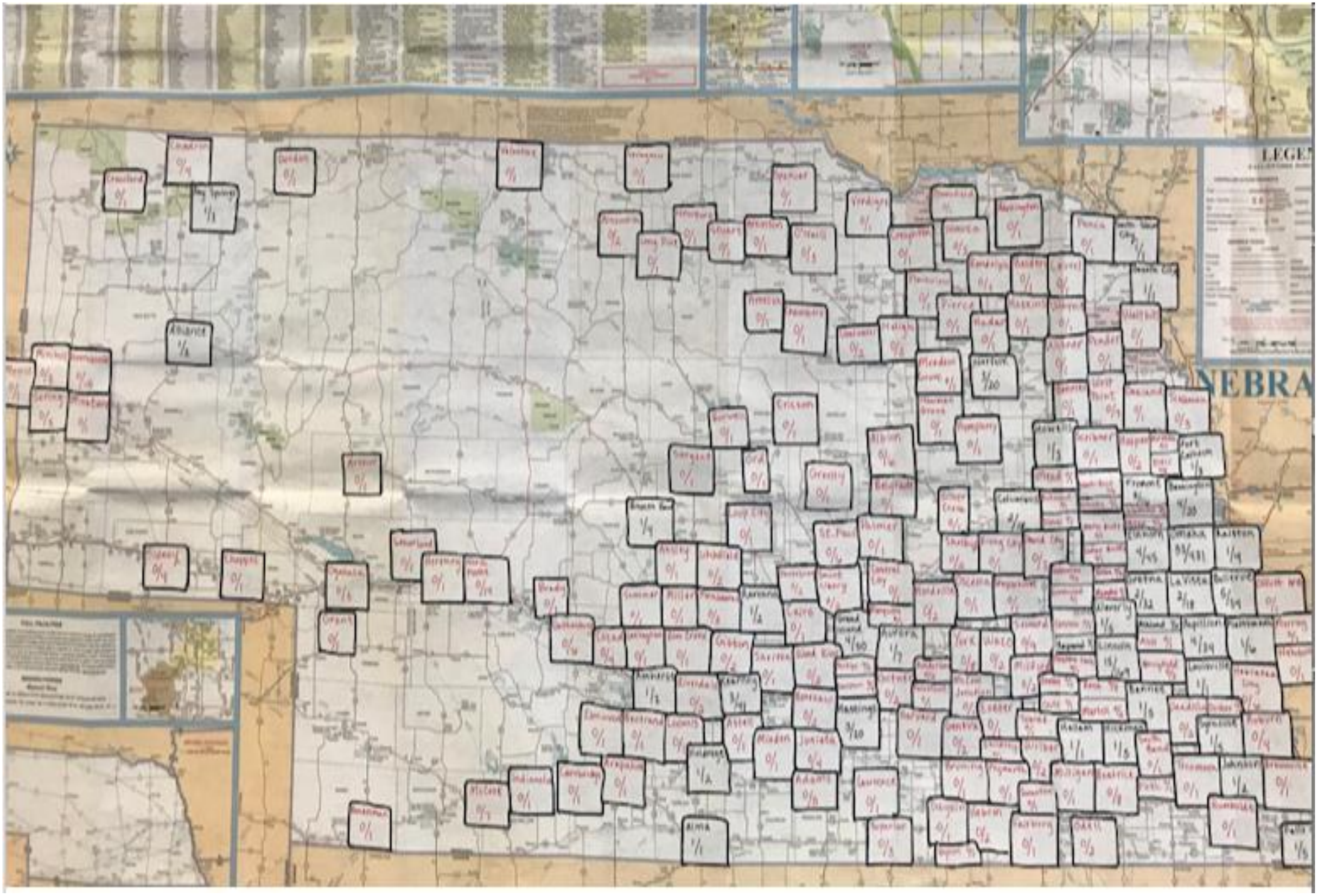
## REFERENCES

Breeden, L. E., Fultz, R. L., Gersbacher, C. A., Murrell, J. L., Pedersen, K. D., Thomas, K. E., & Hanna-Stewart, J. A. (2000). The relationship among demographic variables, professionalism, and level of involvement in a state occupational therapy association. *Occupational Therapy in Health Care, 12*, 53-72.

Nebraska Department of Health & Human Services. (2020, February 20). Occupational therapy. Retrieved from http://dhhs.ne.gov/licensure/Pages/Occupational-Therapy.aspx

Ross, S. T. (2009). *Factors affecting occupational therapists' decision to join their state association*. Master Thesis. Grand Valley State University.

# NOTA Members in NE



# Member vs. Non-member Ratio