

USC Chan

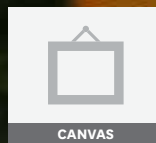
SPRING/SUMMER 2021

MAGAZINE

Student Project
Leads to Autism
Training at USC's
Department of
Public Safety







FIELD DAY

It was a scene not seen in 71 years. On May 14, the USC Chan Classes of 2020 and 2021 proceeded onto the field of the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum for their Commencement ceremony, one of 14 socially distanced, capacity-limited ceremonies hosted by the university across seven days in order to celebrate more than 15,000 new Trojan grads. The last time USC held graduation exercises at the Coliseum was in 1950. USC Chan's Associate Dean and Chair Grace Baranek, pictured at the lectern on stage, commended the audience for their character demonstrated throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Your resilience and resolve, to keep learning and keep growing, have been incredibly inspirational," Baranek said. "You have embraced innovative opportunities in education, service, research and practice that never before existed. And now, you will take that patience, selflessness, and work ethic forward into your career, transforming the lives of your future patients, clients, students, research partners and their families and communities." Rewatch the festivities using USC's on-demand virtual platform at commencement.usc.edu.

Dear Alumni and Friends,

It's been a year and a half of unimaginable challenges to health and wellness; to the social, technological and political constructions of everyday life; and to our own occupations, roles and routines. Yet in the face of seemingly never-ending adversity, it has been incredible to witness occupational scientists and occupational therapists near and far exercise their creativity, resilience and compassion. Those traits are helping fuel the entire USC Chan Division as we continue making the safe transition back to campus, in line with applicable guidelines. Yet amid so much swirling uncertainty, our faculty, staff and students have shown their steadfast leadership and active engagement toward building stronger and more inclusive communities.

The division recently launched our Responding to Society's Post-pandemic Occupational Needs (ReSPONs) initiative, a three-year, \$2.5-million commitment to kickstarting innovative, occupation-focused answers that can make real differences in people's health and well-being. You can read more about the ReSPONs initiative on p. 11.

We have also initiated the transition from our entry-level master's degree program to an accredited entry-level doctoral program, which has been granted Candidacy Status by the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education®. Believe it or not, our first cohort of entry-OTD students will begin their studies in less than one year! Read more about the accreditation process and USC's signature approach to our entry-OTD curriculum on p. 8.

I am incredibly proud of our hospital-based faculty practitioners, who have collectively emerged as nationally recognized experts in the acute care and rehabilitation of patients experiencing the devastating impacts of COVID-19. You can check out one (of many) of their recent journal articles, a COVID-19 case study published in the *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, on p. 23.

I also want to highlight the faculty members who have won national elections this year, including Associate Chair for Curriculum and Faculty Dr. Julie McLaughlin Gray, who was elected chair of the American Occupational Therapy Association's (AOTA) Academic Leadership Council; and Associate Clinical Professor Dr. Arameh Anvarizadeh, who began her term as AOTA Vice President in July. Read a refreshing interview with "Veep" Dr. Anvarizadeh on p. 14. Congratulations are also in



PHOTO BY NATE JENSEN

order to Director of the PhD in Occupational Science Program and Associate Professor Dr. Shawn Roll, who was inducted into AOTF's prestigious Academy of Research, recognizing the importance of his research in musculoskeletal injuries and rehabilitation approaches for occupational therapy practice.

Last, but not least, our students continue to epitomize the real meaning of "Fight On!" On p. 16, read about a student-led project to help train our campus public safety officers to better respond to calls involving people with autism. It's a story that shows the power of advocacy, education and intention to make USC a safer, more inclusive place for all.

It has been a difficult year and a half, to say the least. But there are abundant reasons to be proud of our Trojan Family! I hope you continue to stay well, and as always, Fight On!

Grace Baranek PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA

Associate Dean, Chair and Mrs. T.H. Chan Professor of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy
USC Mrs. T.H. Chan Division of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy
Herman Ostrow School of Dentistry of USC

USC Chan

MAGAZINE

The magazine of the USC Mrs. T.H. Chan Division of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy is published twice yearly. For questions, comments, updates or story suggestions, contact Mike McNulty at mmcnulty@chan.usc.edu or (323) 442-2850.

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Southern California

FEATURES

TRUST | P. 12

A new, USC-coordinated project will ensure that new autism research takes a person-first approach. Four community partners will contribute to the TRUST project, which will endeavor to elevate the autistic voices of individuals from underrepresented and underserved communities.

MADAM VEEP | P. 14

Newly elected AOTA Vice President Dr. Arameh Anvarizadeh talks about representation, equity and transparency. As the youngest and first African American-Iranian woman to become VP, she shares her goals for systemic change and her hopes for the next generation of OT.

DEPARTMENTS

UP FRONT | P. 5

A week of restorative occupations; ACOTE Candidacy Status granted for entry-level OTD program; OS Minor creativity course inspires dancer to become OT; Wedding bells for two alumni who met in SOTI program; Fieldwork experience at SOLA Community Peace Center's annual summer Peace Camp

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5 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT: LING YU (ELENA) MENG OTD '19 | P. 21

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A DEEPER MEANING: SONIA TREJO MA '08, OTD '19 | P. 25

COVER STORY

AUTISM TRAINING MAKES USC SAFER | P. 16

Master's students Monica Caris and Riley McGuire wanted to promote education and awareness about autism in their local community, a topic that is personal for them both. They had no idea that their leadership capstone project would become an annual training for the USC Department of Public Safety that they could continue to teach.



THE SWING OF THINGS



PHOTO BY CANDACE RO

This summer, students got back into the swing of things as some in-person learning activities returned to the USC Health Sciences Campus for the first time in more than 15 months. In OT 440: Foundations: Kinesiology, entry-level master's students learn basic biomechanical, neuromuscular and musculoskeletal principles, and apply and analyze them within the contexts of everyday occupations. Students had an especially interactive outdoor lesson about lever systems, thanks to a piñata and stick. You could say the activity was a total hit!

CONTRIBUTORS



Monica Caris
MA '21, OTD '22
Subject, *How a student project led to autism training at USC's Department of*

Public Safety, p. 16

Meaningful occupations: Walking my dog every night, spending time with my friends and family and babysitting.

How has the pandemic affected your occupations? I missed spending time with my friends and playing with the kids that I have been watching for years. I have just recently gone back to work in the past few months, and I have never been so happy to have a princess tea party or a pirate picnic!



Kaitlyn Sun Kim
MA '20, OTD '21
Writer, *Let there be peace*, p. 6
Meaningful occupations: Photography,

bowling, spending time with friends and family, journaling and painting.

How has the pandemic affected your occupations? I was able to spend more time with my family at home, while focusing on my wellness through activities such as journaling and painting. It did limit my time with friends because we were unable to meet as often, but we still connected through virtual platforms and Facetimed on a regular basis.



Riley McGuire
MA '21, OTD '22
Subject, *How a student project led to autism training at USC's Department of*

Public Safety, p. 16

Meaningful occupations: I regularly cook, bake, garden, sew and paint. I also enjoy hiking, going to the beach and, most importantly, doing it all with friends and family!

How has the pandemic affected your occupations? I have had more time to do all of the things I enjoy at home and spend more time with my husband, but I have had to limit contact with a lot of important people in my life.



Grayson Schmidt
Writer, *How a student project led to autism training at USC's Department of*

Public Safety, p. 16
Work has appeared in: *The Arizona Republic*, Arizona PBS, Shondaland, KJZZ 91.5 FM, *The Tucson Sentinel*
Meaningful occupations: Music, film, sports and comedy — or just anything that involves creativity and laughter.

How has the pandemic affected your occupations? The pandemic turned everything virtual, and though a social person will find any way to socialize, the pandemic definitely took away the in-person aspect of those activities I enjoy.



GRADUATING SENIOR CLAIRE NEEDHAM LEARNED HOW TO COMBINE BODY AND MIND AT USC

Before the COVID-19 pandemic shut down campus, you could often find **Claire Needham '21, MA '23** practicing plié, relevé and sauté in the light-filled dance studios of the USC Kaufman

International Dance Center. Afterwards, she might dart off to a neurobiology or abnormal psychology class.

Needham, who graduated in May with a bachelor's degree in neuroscience, found a way to combine her lifelong interest in dance with her fascination with the human brain while an undergraduate at the USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences.

This summer, she started a master's degree program in occupational therapy at USC Chan.

"I am very excited to continue on as a Trojan," Needham says.

Classes with **Kim Eggleston '98, MA '01, OTD '15**, assistant professor of clinical occupational therapy, helped Needham find a way to combine movement and medicine.

"She changed my life," Needham says. "I talked with her a lot at her office hours about my future career. She just really enjoyed what she did, and she was fulfilled by her work. I wanted that."

Volunteering at a pediatric clinic before the pandemic and helping children with autism and learning disabilities complete movement-based therapy solidified her desire to join the field. Needham applied for occupational therapy school and was accepted to USC's program.

She plans to keep on dancing, too: "I would love to incorporate dance into my occupational therapy education, whether through research or learning how dance therapy can help individuals."

—Margaret Crable

Read the full story at tinyurl.com/combining-body-and-mind.



TYING THE KNOT

Before it was a match made in heaven, it was a match made at the Center for the Health Professions building.

Liguo Qian MA '18, OTD '19 and **Ruiying (Lily) Xu** OTD '17 first met during USC's 2017 Summer Occupational Therapy Immersion, a four-week summer program designed for international occupational therapists and occupational therapy students learning about occupational therapy practice, education and research in the United States. The rest, as they say, was history! The happy couple, now located in Beijing, China, tied the knot in 2020.

Qian and Xu are also connected in their professional lives. Both are instructors in the USC-PUHSC dual-degree occupational therapy program at the Peking University Health Science Center.

xīn hūn yú kuài [Best wishes for a happy marriage!]

LET THERE BE PEACE

How my pandemic fieldwork experience made me an occupational and social justice practitioner

BY KAITLYN SUN KIM MA '20, OTD '21

When COVID-19 struck, my previously confirmed fieldwork placement at an inpatient adult rehabilitation setting in Chicago was cancelled just two weeks prior to my start date. I was overwhelmed by uncertainty and fear. Would I be able to secure a placement in order to graduate on time? And if I did, would it be in-person or remote? And if remote, how would it equip me to become a competent entry-level occupational therapist? Los Angeles County's "Safer at Home" order in March 2020 settled those questions, and all second-year master's students were notified that fieldwork would be occurring remotely.

The USC Chan Division rapidly worked to accommodate 140 students from the Class of 2020 to complete their Level II fieldwork to still be eligible for professional certification. I had still hoped for a miracle, allowing me to be placed in an inpatient adult rehabilitation setting, but realistically, I prepared myself to accept any placement that would qualify me to take the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy® exam.

My placement in a pediatric fieldwork site at SOLA Community Peace Center came as both a relief and a challenge. My task, along with 15 other Level II students in my cohort, would be to redesign and deliver an online version of SOLA's annual summer Peace Camp, a program for South Los Angeles youth to build peacemaking skills and make positive social impacts. Pandemic aside, I never could have imagined participating in a practice setting focused on "occupational and social justice." How could I gain the necessary experience there to become an entry-level occupational therapist?

Expectations about "real" occupational therapy practice

SOLA describes its vision "to offer life-transforming peace programs in order to create a more peaceful and just community and world ... [by providing] peace education to young people, families and community members, particularly those who are economically disadvantaged ..." SOLA's Peace Camp works with mainly Latinx children and teens living in the low-income South Los Angeles neighborhoods around USC's University Park Campus. I had just completed an advanced occupational science seminar that exposed me to cutting-edge concepts such as occupational justice and occupational reconstruction, but those ideas seemed mostly theoretical at the time.

Yet similar concepts had been put into practice for 15 years by SOLA's executive director and USC Chan alumna Susan Stouffer PhD '07. Dr. Stouffer's path to developing occupation-centered social justice programing began with her graduate student internship, which included a youth peace program sponsored by USC's on-campus United University Church. When the church relocated, Dr. Stouffer worked to found SOLA Community Peace Center as an independent, secular non-profit 501(c)3 organization. Partnering with USC Chan to provide a practice site for occupational therapy students was one of Dr. Stouffer's top priorities.

Expectations are shaped by experiences. My first Level II fieldwork was at an inpatient psychiatric hospital, where I succeeded in meeting the fast-paced, ever-shifting demands of inpatient care. My idea of "real" occupational therapy practice included formal assessments and evaluations, intensive documentation, reimbursement and successful discharges with measurable outcomes. So a 12-week placement at SOLA challenged my emerging professional identity. I thought to myself, "I don't want to be a summer camp counselor; I don't want to babysit kids; How is this even considered occupational therapy?"

Meeting people where they are

Our first week at SOLA oriented us to Peace Camp and its 14-year track record. We learned more about our goal to create and deliver an online version of the program, in collaboration with SOLA's staff and participants. It became clear to us that SOLA's response to the COVID-19 crisis was taking place in real time, just as rapidly as we were trying to adapt. The rest of that first week was filled with in-service lectures and discussions concerning pediatric practice, online and telehealth service delivery, family systems, the history and context of South Los Angeles, theories of occupational and social justice and the emerging occupational reconstruction practice framework.

This was the point where collaboration between Dr. Stouffer and my clinical instructor, Assistant Clinical Professor Kristy Payne MA '16, OTD '17, really took off. Their ability to assess and organize resources, personnel, goals and desired program outcomes was occupational therapy in its purest form. No, this was not the traditional pediatric site we had signed up for. We wouldn't be leading one-on-one sessions, completing the usual documentation, performing typical occupational therapy evaluations or implementing standardized assessments. But we were learning — by observing and by doing — how to creatively restructure a complex, high-stakes situation to reach desired outcomes. This reconstruction of Peace Camp included and respected the voices of local families, the campers in their age-graded groups from 5 to 18 years old, the staff hired from the community and us fieldwork students.

Engagement through problem-solving

As the weeks went by and my understanding of SOLA's role increased, I felt myself becoming ever more committed to Peace Camp. My insights into the community were less and less informed by what others had told me, and based more upon the ways that my colleagues and I worked to overcome specific hurdles. We had to resolve how best to adapt the program to the virtual environment, how to assess and stimulate campers' engagement and how to manage structural inequalities, including many families' limited internet access. While I worked closely with the youth interns, the transition to Zoom made it almost impossible to build rapport. My confidence plummeted with every awkward silence during our group discussions. Although we often felt defeated, this disengagement did not stop us fieldwork students from developing guidelines for better practice. We created and implemented informal needs assessments to gauge interests. Through discussions, we landed on topics focused on leadership, stress and time management, careers, sleep hygiene, resumé writing and professionalism.

A transformative change — one I will remember for the rest of my life — occurred when we experimented with role-playing scenarios to foster the youth interns' leadership skills. The fieldwork students played the roles of campers, while the interns played the roles of group leaders. We fieldwork students played our roles by throwing temper tantrums, saying unkind things to one another and refusing to participate. The interns loved it! Their engagement skyrocketed, and unlike previous sessions, their smiles and laughter filled the Zoom screen. From that moment on, their individual personalities began to radiate, and I finally saw a glimmer of hope for my own evolving leadership skills.

Our work was frequently interrupted by external issues related to internet access and connectivity. It's been a common problem facing underserved communities, and has only been exacerbated by the pandemic. Many of our campers had trouble attending sessions or fully participating, and campers often had trouble with their webcams due to limited bandwidth. We thought about how to bridge this "digital divide" and empower our campers as agents capable of improving conditions in their community.



One project involved writing to U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein, who responded back to us: “More must be done to ensure students are not left behind during this difficult time.” Feinstein described her co-sponsorship of a Senate bill to allocate \$4 billion to improve students’ internet access, allowing them to continue learning remotely. By facilitating direct contact with a senior representative, we built our campers’ awareness of, and capacity for, mechanisms for cooperative action. Obviously we were doing so much more than simply “babysitting.”

The meaning of occupational therapy

The challenge of virtual fieldwork in an emerging practice area unleashed my creativity, clinical reasoning and ability to connect with the community. Over the course of those 12 weeks, I came to realize that everything we did at Peace Camp could be defined as legitimate occupational therapy. I became adept at many of the traditional skills I feared I would otherwise miss, such as informal needs assessments, activity-based interventions, task analysis, grading and scaffolding activities, social skills, program development, socio-emotional learning, building rapport,

understanding and working with individuals in context and advocating for an underserved community. I also fell in love with the South Los Angeles community where SOLA offers peace and justice programs. Now that I am a registered and licensed occupational therapist, I am continuing to build upon this foundation as SOLA’s first doctoral resident. My leadership skills continue to develop with new responsibilities and creative opportunities, and I am excited to use my OTD residency to build curricula and programs around social justice, and to find ways to expand occupational therapy practice in the community using this partnership as a template.

This fieldwork experience opportunity opened up new doors for me, and expanded my understanding of occupational therapy. As the pandemic continues, I offer this advice to those students who may be worried about their own fieldwork placements: Be open to the experiences that are available to you, because every experience is a learning experience. No matter where you complete your fieldwork, you will have a strong foundation from your USC education to become a competent entry-level occupational therapist. You may find, as I did, some invaluable skills and experiences that are not yet taught in any textbook.



ACOTE CANDIDACY

The USC Chan Division has initiated the process to transition its entry-level master's degree program to an accredited entry-level doctoral (OTD) program. USC's entry-level OTD degree program has been granted Candidacy Status by the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education® and is currently accepting applicants for the program's inaugural cohort to start in the Fall 2022 semester.

For more than two years, USC Chan faculty and staff members have been engaged in deep dialogue with various stakeholders to develop a “cardinal and gold”-standard doctoral curriculum. While entry-level OTD students come from a variety of educational backgrounds and experiences, what they share in common is that they have not previously graduated from an accredited occupational therapy program.

The three-year curriculum includes four practice immersions — which combine didactic learning with experiential learning laboratories — as well as fieldwork experiences and the Doctoral Capstone Experience (DCE). Courses focus on professional content required for academic program accreditation, with topics including evidence-based practice, therapeutic practices, research, technology and innovation, clinical skills and justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. Hands-on experiences are introduced early in the program in order to support fundamental evaluation and intervention skills, and to integrate practice with theory.

During the third year of the program, entry-level OTD students complete their second Level II fieldwork, before embarking on the DCE in their final semester. Students also have opportunities to build specialized expertise by taking electives and/or completing optional Graduate Certificates within the USC Chan Division.

Visit chan.usc.edu/academics/entry-level-otd to learn more and to see details of the proposed entry-OTD course sequence.

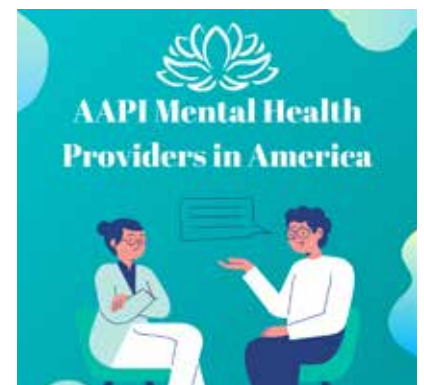
MENTAL HEALTH AND THE AAPI COMMUNITY

“We’re tired of the statistics, so let’s just get it out there: [Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders] are the least likely of any race to seek mental health help, although we need it,” wrote **Elissa Lee** MA ’19, OTD ’20 in a recent *Mental Health America* blog post.

“AAPI individuals are the least likely of any racial group to seek help (three times less likely than white individuals), with a 17.3 percent overall lifetime incidence of psychiatric disorders, and yet only 8.6 percent seek mental health help.”

Lee, along with fellow Trojans **Trevor San Antonio** MA ’20, OTD ’21 and **Kellie Miyashima** MA ’20, OTD ’21, helped to raise \$30,000 toward building both a scholarship fund for aspiring AAPI mental health professionals and an AAPI therapist directory.

Read “As AAPIs, We Need Therapists Who Look Like Us” at www.mhanational.org/blog/aapis-we-need-therapists-who-look-us.



Designed by Trevor San Antonio

TIME TO RESTORE

To counteract the widespread fatigue that has characterized the pandemic era, the USC Chan Division has begun hosting “Restorative Occupations.” USC Chan students, faculty and staff are encouraged to engage in occupations that are both fun and restorative — whether remote or in-person, familiar or new, solo or communal. The first Restorative Occupations Week was held during the Spring 2021 semester with the division hosting twice-daily live occupation-based sessions on Zoom. Activities included baking, arts and crafts, dancing, joke-writing, meditation, yoga and more. In preparation for the week, free time and stress management consultations were offered by clinicians at the USC Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice. Restorative occupations have continued to be hosted throughout the summer and fall. There; now are you feeling better?

Review the current schedule of restorative occupations at chan.usc.edu/restorative.





YOUR WORLD

News Briefs

Lectures, grants, awards — there's always so much going on at the USC Chan Division of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy. Keep your finger on the pulse with these division news briefs:



INAUGURAL USC SUMMER INSTITUTE LOOKS TO EXPAND WORKFORCE DIVERSITY

In June and July, the USC Chan Division and the USC Division of Biokinesiology and Physical Therapy welcomed attendees to the inaugural USC Summer Institute, a six-week virtual program designed to expose underrepresented minority students to occupational therapy and physical therapy, as well as research opportunities and careers in the allied health professions. Attendees hailed from California State University, Los Angeles; California State University, Dominguez Hills; Xavier University and USC. The program is led by Arameh Anvarizadeh '05, MA '06, OTD '07, director of admissions and associate clinical professor; Kimberly Kho '07, MBA '15, director of marketing and student recruitment and Terry Richardson II, instructor of clinical physical therapy at USC. Learn more at chan.usc.edu/about-us/dae/summer-institute.

PYATAK NAMED TO NIH STUDY SECTION

Associate Professor Elizabeth Pyatak '02, MA '04, PhD '10, MS '15 has been invited to serve as a member of the Biobehavioral Medicine and Health Outcomes Study Section of the NIH Center for Scientific Review. Her four-year term began in July. The NIH has more than 175 standing study sections,

groups of scientists responsible for reviewing grant applications, making recommendations to appropriate national advisory councils or boards and surveying research in their fields. Study section members are selected on the basis of their scientific achievements. Together, study sections help ensure the quality of the NIH's peer review process, and are an integral component in America's medical and allied research infrastructure. Pyatak is currently principal investigator of two NIH-funded studies, totaling more than \$6.7 million.

USC, MOMENTUM PTN AGREE TO FACULTY PRACTICE ARRANGEMENT

USC Chan has entered into a formal agreement to implement a faculty practice model at Momentum Pediatric Therapy Network, an early child development and therapy center with locations in Torrance and Long Beach, Calif. The faculty practice model mutually benefits USC Chan's academic programs and Momentum's clinical and community sites of service. The initiative also honors the legacy of the late A. Jean Ayres '45, MA '54, two-time USC alumna and former faculty member who trained the four co-founders of the clinic formerly known as PTN. Recruitment is underway for a faculty member to serve as senior clinical director, as well as up to seven Momentum PTN clinicians who will have the

opportunity to pursue joint positions as USC instructors of clinical occupational therapy.

MCLAUGHLIN GRAY ELECTED CHAIR OF ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

Julie McLaughlin Gray MA '95, PhD '06, associate chair for curriculum and faculty and clinical professor, won election as chair of the American Occupational Therapy Association's Academic Leadership Council. Her term runs from July 2021 to June 2024. The Academic Leadership Council is composed of faculty representing more than 650 occupational therapy and occupational therapy assistant educational programs across the nation.

PROFESSOR EMERITUS FLORENCE CLARK RECEIVES USC FACULTY LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Professor Emeritus Florence Clark received the USC Faculty Lifetime Achievement Award during the university's 40th Annual Academic Honors Convocation. Awarded to a select number of retired faculty, the USC Faculty Lifetime Achievement Award recognizes eminent careers and notable contributions to the university, their respective professions and to the community. Since its inception in 1982, the award has been bestowed upon retired faculty across many professional disciplines.

GenNext

Meet the Trojans pushing occupational science and occupational therapy forward.

INTERVIEW BY MIKE MCNULTY '06, MA '09, OTD '10.

GUY REAVIS MA '22

Age: 49

Hometowns: San Diego and Brooklyn

Previous studies: Bachelor's degrees in American Studies and Music, Williams College (Williamstown, Mass.); master's degree in Elementary Education, Teachers College at Columbia University (New York City)

Meaningful occupations: Running, cooking, dancing, exploring neighborhoods, eating at interesting restaurants and seeing live music.

Describe OT in one sentence: Working with a person on what they need to do, want to do or are expected to do, usually — but not always — after something has prevented them from being able to do what they need, want or are expected to do.

Why did you choose to make a mid-career switch to OT?

Two reasons: First, after working as a teacher and administrator in New York City public schools for two decades, I became a bit disillusioned by the work and was looking to change my career to work one-on-one with people. I just couldn't see myself spending the next 20 years of my life up to retirement doing what I was doing. At one of the schools where I worked, I met an OT who had so much joy in the work he was doing, and the children really responded to the activities and interventions he did with them. I thought to myself, 'I should be doing what he does!' The second reason is the direct result of my mother being diagnosed with Parkinson's. As the disease progressed, I had the chance to experience OT on the other end of the lifespan, and once again, had moments where I thought OT is something I would like to do. In addition, I kept encountering people in my personal life who were OTs, and everything they said about the work resonated with me. When my mother passed away, I decided that it's time for a change, and now here I am.

Has COVID-19 changed your own occupational habits or routines?

Yes and no. I was not able to get out and experience restaurants, museums and live music. But I was able to continue running and cooking, and continued to explore new places, including some great local hiking trails.

What do your own career plans and goals include?

In the long term, I plan on being an expert clinician who not only provides top notch care, but can also be a clinical instructor and mentor to future occupational therapists. In the short term, I want to continue to learn and experience as much as I can, so that after graduation I can hit the ground running. I came to grad school with the goal of working in inpatient adult physical rehab or with older adults. However, thanks to some great fieldwork experiences and professors, I have also started to think about working with people who are unhoused or incarcerated. I believe our profession has a unique perspective and the perfect skill set for addressing many of the issues facing those who are unhoused or serving time in the justice system. Providing clinical services and addressing occupational deprivation for either group would be a privilege.

Visit chan.usc.edu/people/student-blog/guy to read Guy's blog.



USC CHAN COMMITS \$2.5 MILLION TO POST-PANDEMIC RESPONSE

Three-year initiative to fast-track projects addressing occupational needs and health of individuals, families and communities.

BY MIKE MCNULTY '06, MA '09, OTD '10

The USC Chan Division of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy has launched a \$2.5 million initiative comprising a variety of projects aimed at the coronavirus, economic and racial pandemics, the combined effects of which are sure to be felt for years, if not decades, to come.

The Responding to Society's Post-pandemic Occupational Needs — known as the ReSPONs initiative — was announced earlier this year by Associate Dean and Chair Grace Baranek. The three-year project will jumpstart stakeholder-engaged research, mobilize occupation-based knowledge, financially support postdoctoral fellows and students from underrepresented groups and build more responsive and inclusive curricula while strengthening the division's commitment to diversity, access, equity, anti-racist and restorative practices.

The initiative was developed as part of USC Chan's strategic plan, in light of the confluence of multiple pandemics in the U.S. The independent and combined impacts of COVID-19, systemic racial injustices and widening occupational inequalities upon physical, mental, social, emotional and economic health, have utterly disrupted the lives of people, families and communities throughout Los Angeles, California and the nation.

"It's not enough to make it through these pandemics intact, and then just go back to our old business as usual," Baranek said. "Instead, we have to confront many serious questions about the construction of everyday life, care access and delivery and the social determinants of health, and then partner with our communities to reimagine occupation-focused answers that can make real differences."

As key health professionals, occupational therapists focus on empowering people of all ages to experience healthier, more satisfying lives by enhancing the ability to perform everyday activities, participate in meaningful routines and engage in health-promoting lifestyles. The research discipline of occupational science was conceptualized to design and implement studies focused on large-scale social issues, such as homelessness and poverty, as well as to address health, well-being and quality of life priorities at the individual level.

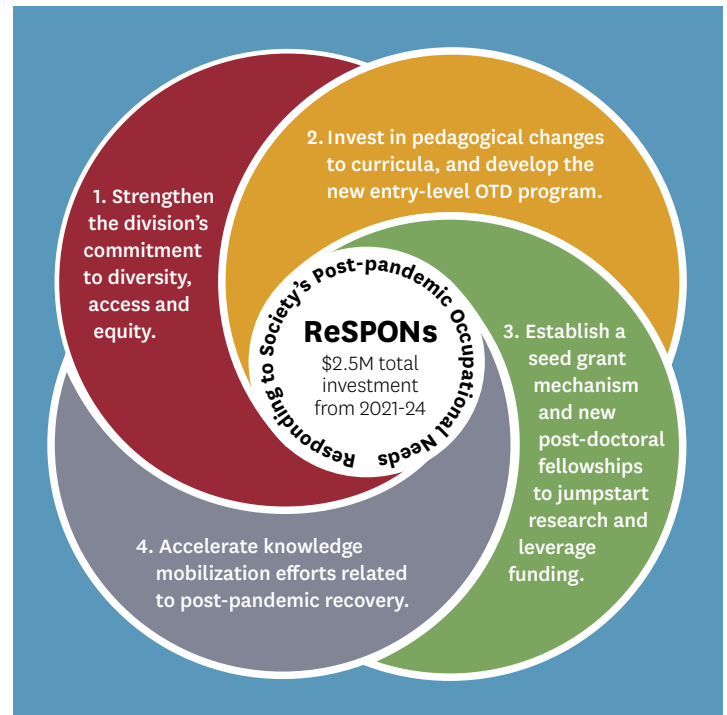
"There is no doubt that we are currently facing a once-in-a-generation inflection point," said Avishai Sadan, dean of the Herman Ostrow School of Dentistry of USC, where USC Chan is housed. "The ReSPONs initiative will empower the USC Chan Division to leverage their excellence in education, research and practice today, in order to help realize a better and more just tomorrow."

A response that starts with students

First and foremost, the ReSPONs initiative will enhance learning experiences, opportunities and outcomes of current and future USC Chan students, positioning this critical mass of future occupational therapists to better meet society's diverse needs in the years and decades ahead.

The initiative earmarks funding to expand the division's financial aid capacity over the next three years, including awards for students who epitomize the values of the American Occupational Therapy Association's official vision statement, such as cultural responsiveness and fluidity, a collaborative spirit to effect change and dynamic leadership potential.

The initiative also provides opportunities for students to work alongside USC Chan faculty members to evaluate and recommend justice, equity, diversity and inclusion resources and programming. Those recommendations can be infused throughout the division to improve climate, teaching and mentorship, including an overarching theme in USC Chan's new entry-level Doctorate of Occupational Therapy



degree program. With Candidacy Status recently granted by the national occupational therapy accrediting agency, this new entry-level OTD program will open its doors to incoming students as early as August 2022.

Additionally, the initiative will expand alternative fieldwork models, such as telehealth service delivery, as well as role-emerging settings, which are organizations and sites in diverse communities that do not have a dedicated occupational therapy employee. In the earliest stages of the coronavirus pandemic, the vast majority of student fieldwork experiences pivoted to these alternative models and role-emerging settings. One year later, these models have shown preliminary effectiveness, but establishing and sustaining them has been highly time- and labor-intensive. By better integrating them into USC Chan's curricula and infrastructure going forward, students will have more options for customizing their learning and completing their degree on time.

Accelerating research and mobilizing it for use

Another major area that the ReSPONs initiative focuses on is the generation of new research to address society's post-pandemic needs, and the mobilization of new knowledge for broader uptake beyond the bubble of academia.

ReSPONs will fund more than one dozen, single-year grants to support the earliest stages of new research projects. These seed studies, which may total up to \$50,000 apiece, can then be expanded for larger extramural funding opportunities.

The initiative will also fund several new postdoctoral fellowships focused on addressing occupational disruptions and health disparities in underrepresented populations. These fellowships are also seen as educational opportunities to accelerate the careers of diverse junior researchers in occupational science and occupational therapy.

The initiative will help support the 2021 USC Chan Occupational Science Symposium, the division's premier academic event for fueling and disseminating occupational science theory, research and practice innovations. It will help activate partnerships among interdisciplinary scholars and community stakeholders, and increase the impact and visibility of scholarship by publishing on free, open access sources.

"Although we've been physically apart, the ReSPONs initiative unites the entire USC Chan Division in our ongoing vision to transform health and well-being through meaningful occupations and engaged partnerships," Baranek said.



NEW PROJECT AIMS TO INCREASE

TRUST

FOR FUTURE AUTISM RESEARCH

Two-year project will build formal alliances that accentuate perspectives of people with autism, their family members and caregivers, service providers and researchers.

BY MIKE MCNULTY '06, MA '09, OTD '10

For too long, too few autistic people have had a say in how autism research is designed, developed and disseminated, and researchers have not tapped into the expertise that only autistic people and their families have. A new USC-coordinated project looks to upend that disparity by intentionally allying with stakeholder groups, engaging community partners and exploring ways of better responding to this diverse community in the future.

The TRUST project — short for Transforming Research: Understanding Sensory Experiences in ASD, Stakeholders Working Together — is a new, two-year project supported by a \$243,000 award from the Eugene Washington PCORI Engagement Awards

program, an initiative of the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute. The institute is an independent, nonprofit organization authorized by Congress in 2010 to fund comparative effectiveness research that will provide patients, their caregivers and clinicians with evidence to make better-informed health and healthcare decisions.

“We will particularly attend to the ‘autistic voices’ of underrepresented or underserved communities, and ensure that individuals who have been marginalized due to stigma, social behavior or verbal abilities are included,” said Professor Mary Lawlor, TRUST project lead at the USC Chan Division of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy. “Autistic

people have really important expertise, and it’s exciting to engage people in the community who really want to share their expertise too.”

The TRUST project begins by convening four groups of stakeholders: autistic self-advocates; family members and caregivers; researchers; and interdisciplinary service providers, including occupational therapists. Lawlor, who is jointly appointed to the Keck School of Medicine of USC’s Department of Pediatrics, will facilitate conversations using narrative-based strategies, which give space for people to tell their own stories with their own words about what matters most in their own lives. These stakeholder groups will then coalesce to identify new research priorities,

amplify engagement of the autism community in research, foster mutual trust and expand tools for enhancing future patient-centered outcomes research.

A sustainable alliance will propel stakeholder engagement in future research that extends beyond the project's funding window, and serve as a model for research projects outside of Southern California to replicate.

"Although many researchers have developed their own valuable perspectives," Lawlor said, "they need to have opportunities like this, with multiple perspectives at the same table, to learn divergent or new perspectives and ensure all stakeholders are seen and heard."

TRUST project takes a person-first approach

According to Lawlor, the TRUST project will narrow several glaring gaps in the existing literature about the sensory experiences of autistic people.

First, autism research has traditionally focused on children, with relatively less attention to the experiences of autistic adolescents and adults. Second, autism research has over-sampled White/Caucasian participants, and regrettably under-sampled populations with racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds. Third, research has disproportionately focused on so-called "high functioning" participants — autistic people who perform and participate in everyday activities and roles wholly or largely independently. Lastly, the uptake of sensory processing research has been slow in clinical arenas, in part because service providers are rarely engaged in university-based research studies.

"Clinicians, as much as anybody, should be involved at the starting point of research," said USC Chan Clinical Professor Erna Blanche MA '88, PhD '98, a lead contributor to the TRUST team and co-lead of the Clinician and Provider Stakeholder Group.

Blanche is also a member of the Sensory Processing and Autism Network, one of the four officially designated community partners contributing to the TRUST project. It's a community-based research network based out of USC Chan that works to improve outcomes for people with sensory processing challenges and their families in everyday life.

Though each person with autism is unique, sensory processing challenges and sensitivities to a wide range of stimuli are cited as a common experience. Occupational therapists like Blanche frequently work with children on the autism spectrum to address sensory-processing differences to more fully engage in their daily activities, relationships and roles.

"Although many researchers have developed their own valuable perspectives," Lawlor said, "they need to have opportunities like this, with multiple perspectives at the same table, to learn divergent or new perspectives and ensure all stakeholders are seen and heard."

Blanche says that the TRUST project is an extension of SPAN's ongoing efforts for knowledge mobilization, an approach to research whereby university and community partners work hand in hand, start to finish, in order to co-produce knowledge and maximize their impact outside of academia.

"In a way, people with autism have been unjustly disenfranchised," Blanche said. "This will now bring them into the research fold in a much more meaningful and systematic way."

Partnering up

In addition to SPAN, three other non-profit organizations are officially named as TRUST project partners, and this network is likely to expand over the coming years:

- 5-Eleven Hoops is a non-profit basketball-based organization based out of Long Beach, Calif. Founded by former pro basketball player Stacy McAlister, who has a son with autism, 5-Eleven Hoops uses active play strategies to enhance positive outcomes for youth with autism and other special needs and their families by building sportsmanship, social skills, coordination, strength and cognitive development.
- Autism Speaks is the largest autism advocacy organization in the U.S., and sponsors autism research and conducts awareness and outreach aimed at families, governments and the public.
- Harbor Regional Center, located in Torrance, Calif., is one of the State of California's 21 regional centers that contracts with the California Department of Developmental Services. The non-profit organization serves nearly 15,000 people who have developmental disabilities and their families in the South Bay, Harbor, Long Beach and southeast areas of Los Angeles County.

Engaging representatives from these community partners will be critical to the TRUST project, and their roles are more than just advisory ones.

"We were actually able to hire three stakeholder co-leads as USC resource employees," Lawlor said. "We didn't want to just make a token request for their suggestions,

so we will compensate them as USC employees in recognition of the expertise that only they can offer."

Proving what's possible in autism research

The TRUST project, like other projects approved for funding by the PCORI Engagement Award Program, was selected through a highly competitive review process in which applications were assessed for their ability to meet PCORI's engagement goals and objectives, according to Jean Slutsky, PCORI's chief engagement and dissemination officer.

"This project was selected for Engagement Award funding because it will build a community equipped to participate as partners in comparative effective research and develop partnerships and infrastructure to disseminate PCORI-funded research results," Slutsky said.

While TRUST takes a fresh approach to engaging partners, it's not USC Chan's first foray into community-based, autism-focused projects.

For years, USC occupational therapy faculty and students have undertaken projects specifically designed to learn with — and from — this population. For example, since 2016, USC occupational therapy students have gone on outings, like trips to local museums, to advance and advocate for social participation of children with autism in the local community.

Associate Clinical Professor Emily Ochi MA '12, OTD '13 says that co-learning experiences like the TRUST project and these museum outings, which she helps coordinate, highlight how little the academic world really understands about life with autism, and conversely, how much can be learned directly from autistic people and their families.

"People think it's too hard, for any number of reasons, to include autistic voices in research," Ochi said. "I'm excited for this project to show that it isn't."

For further information about the TRUST project, please contact Emily Ochi, TRUST Project Coordinator, at eoichi@chan.usc.edu or Mary C. Lawlor, TRUST Project Lead, at lawlor@chan.usc.edu.

MADAM VEEP

In July, Director of Admissions and Associate Clinical Professor Arameh Anvarizadeh '05, MA '06, OTD '07 made history as the youngest and first African American-Iranian woman to become vice president of the American Occupational Therapy Association. She recently sat down with the *USC Chan Magazine* to talk about her action-packed agenda as Vice President, her hopes for the association and where she sees the next generation taking occupational therapy.

INTERVIEW BY MIKE MCNULTY '06, MA '09, OTD '10

You officially became AOTA Vice President in July; what does being elected to that position mean to you?

First, thank you so much for the space to chat about what this means to me, because it's not really about me. Being elected AOTA Vice President is about making an impact upon the people I can help bring up after me. I can say, 'listen, you probably haven't seen somebody like me in this role, but you can do it too, you can be a leader in this way or that way.' So it's personally significant because of the impact upon the next generation in our profession — to have an opportunity to open the door for others.

It's the idea that representation really matters. How do you see greater representation of diverse identities in leadership positions changing occupational therapy at large?

AOTA's Vision 2025 wants all people, populations and communities to have access to quality healthcare, including occupational therapy. So how do we do that? It's no secret that we are a primarily White, female profession. But the communities we serve are not, and not only in terms of race or gender, but in all sorts of intersectionalities. Representation is not just an empty slogan. By increasing representation throughout our profession, we can better connect with and understand our clients, which evidence shows can lead to better outcomes, access and satisfaction. The ultimate goals are to decrease health disparities by making AOTA the premier resource for occupational therapy issues, concerns, spaces and research.

Let's talk about superficiality versus substance. What has happened in the last year, inside and outside of the profession, which has empowered so many substantive dialogues and actions on diversity and equality?

We've been in the midst of two pandemics — COVID-19 and social injustice — and I think that we're at a pivotal point in the moral arc bending more toward justice. The coronavirus kept us stuck at home and forced to be still in our thoughts, to sit with injustice in a new way. But injustices are not new; what happened to George Floyd is not new. But what is new is that, even though we were all socially distant, we were all connected, we were all present.

We were all watching in a really unprecedented way.

Yes, we were watching. I really feel like it erupted; something that was already bubbling hit a boiling point at which we could no longer remain silent. Whether you identify as marginalized or not, we all can utilize our voices not only to advocate for, but to be accomplices in, making the changes we want to see. As occupational therapists, educators and students, we can be at the forefront of that work to decrease barriers, so that all people can have equal opportunities and access to occupations. The idea of uniting OTs was central for me in working with others to found the Coalition of Occupational Therapy Advocates for Diversity (COTAD), a non-profit organization striving to empower occupational therapy leaders to engage in practices that increase diversity,

equity, inclusion, justice and anti-oppression. When we all come together, we can all serve our communities in equitable ways.

When it comes to making those types of significant changes for the profession, what is on your AOTA Vice Presidential agenda?

Great question. First, given the environment that we've been in for a year and a half, we have to evaluate how things like the Annual Conference and Expo can and should be changed for the better. We have to thoughtfully answer the question, "What should the new normal look like?" I recently served on the AOTA governance restructuring committee, so we're also continuing to explore ways of reshaping and restructuring that can be incorporated throughout the association. Hopefully, we can take actions that make progress toward a lot of the priorities that AOTA members want to see, which will lead to greater relevance and transparency.

Transparency across all organizations seems more important now than perhaps ever before. Personal transparency was also part of your Vice Presidential platform — people see something real in you.

Here's the deal. I bring authentic leadership, and I stick to my core values. I don't believe in being performative — I like to see things happen. I don't want to be on a task force for two or three years and just sit still. I want to make systemic, sustainable changes, and see things come to fruition. It's so important to have an association that, like I said, is transparent and accessible. Members need to see how things are organized, and know how to get involved. Our up-and-coming generation plays no games — they want transparency, they want diversity, they want impact. And I want to be very clear with them that we are indeed addressing AOTA members' needs. My goal is to be sitting at the table to say, 'these are the things that matter.' We've got to walk the walk. If people don't feel like you're walking the walk, then it's a wrap.

One example of how you have led the way on systemic change is implementing a holistic admissions process at USC Chan, which is now in its second year of admitting students to our entry-level graduate program. What has building that process been like?

Getting things done is no easy feat. It takes advocacy, getting buy-in and a ton of behind-the-scenes resilience. But we got it done at USC, and we can be a blueprint across this country for holistic admissions. I'm very proud to say — and I say this with 100 percent confidence — that

the 2021 cohort was the most diverse cohort ever for USC occupational therapy. And I said the same thing last year, when we had just started holistic admissions! We have admitted the most Black and Brown people, people who identify as LGBTQIA+, people with disabilities, older adults, people who are undocumented, military veterans, I can go on and on. That means there are more life experiences, more perspectives and more dynamics in our classrooms, and eventually that will better serve our communities. I want to thank our phenomenal admissions and recruitment teams and our admissions committee, and I'm so grateful for leadership support from Dr. Grace Baranek and Dr. Julie McLaughlin Gray. It was a team effort.

Maybe it's premature to be asking this at the beginning of a three-year term in office, and nobody has a crystal ball, but what do you think will be the legacy of AOTA Vice President Arameh Anvarizadeh?

I want to be able to get into some good trouble! I want to leave a mark that inspires others to also get into good trouble of their own, by being action-oriented, by shifting the culture of the association and by doing everything with intention. I hope I can be an authentic leader who stuck to her core values, connected hearts and minds and created lasting change. And then I'll mentor the next person in line to continue filling the spots behind me.

Before we end, on a personal note, you just became a new mother, and released a beautiful announcement video on your Instagram profile @drarameh. How is motherhood changing your outlooks or perspectives?

In a work culture where productivity is everything, I don't think you get a chance to really situate yourself to understand that you're creating life — life! My husband and I went on a babymoon trip, and it took me three days to disconnect from my professional responsibilities. During the babymoon, strangers who saw my pregnant belly would come up to me and say, 'wow, how beautiful, you're expanding yourself, you're expanding your family, what a blessing!' That was the first time I really felt like I am engaging in a new occupation, that my identity is shifting and that I'm embracing a new role. Motherhood is giving me perspective on how to be grounded in what it is that I value most, which are relationships. Those relationships have been with family, at work or in the community, and now, it's this new relationship with my baby boy. I'll keep growing into this role, but right now, it's about being grounded even more in what I value most.

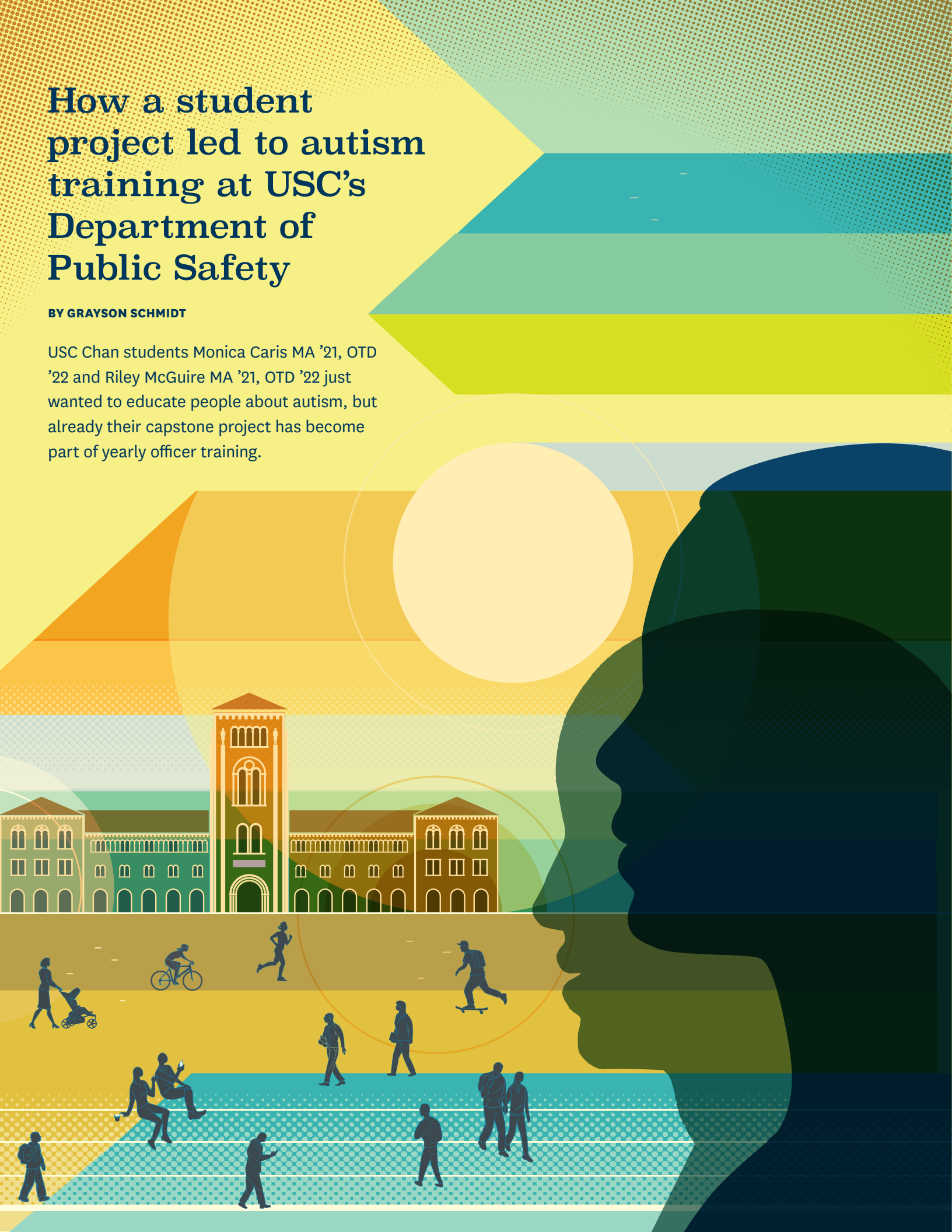


PHOTO BY PHIL CHANNING

How a student project led to autism training at USC's Department of Public Safety

BY GRAYSON SCHMIDT

USC Chan students Monica Caris MA '21, OTD '22 and Riley McGuire MA '21, OTD '22 just wanted to educate people about autism, but already their capstone project has become part of yearly officer training.



For Monica Caris MA '21, OTD '22 and Riley McGuire MA '21, OTD '22, a leadership capstone in occupational therapy extended beyond academia.

As master's students at the USC Chan Division of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, the two wanted to make a difference in their local community by promoting education and awareness about a topic that's personal to both: autism.

After seeing extensive news coverage on negative interactions with law enforcement last year, the pair knew they wanted to share their experiences and knowledge with a local agency, but the Los Angeles Police Department seemed like a tall order. The two ultimately decided to focus their attention much closer to home and start with the USC Department of Public Safety.

The hope was to educate the department, commonly known as DPS, on what signs to look for and how those signs can often be misinterpreted by those who are unfamiliar with autism.

They were initially worried about how their proposal would be received, but that concern quickly faded as DPS welcomed the idea with open arms.

"We didn't want to present this in a way that would make them feel defensive or that they had done something wrong because that's not productive," Caris says.

"We wanted this to be positive and productive, which is hard when you're talking about things that people have done wrong and what not to do, but I think at the end of the day, we were very pleased with the feedback we received."

Earlier this year, the pair gave a series of eight presentations, starting by defining autism and explaining the terminology used in and by the community. That was followed with examples of behaviors that people with autism may exhibit and why, along with examples of positive and negative interactions with law enforcement.

It was so well-received that DPS has decided to implement the duo's autism training on a yearly basis, and offer it to other agencies around the L.A. area as well.

USC students, faculty work to spread autism awareness

Caris is autistic, and both she and McGuire have close friends with autism. They often wonder how certain behaviors might be perceived by others with little knowledge of autism or interactions with people with autism.

"I'm able to verbally communicate a lot of things, but I know there are a lot of people who have autism, and other special needs as well, who really struggle with that," Caris says.

"When the students approached me, it was an immediate, 'Absolutely,'" Burke says. "I was really proud of our two students' amazing work ... and now we're going to teach this training every year, and we're going to continue to talk about it."

Autism affects people differently and to varying degrees, making it a "spectrum condition" that can impact social skills, communication, relationships and self-regulation, among other challenges. It is also much more common than many realize, with prevalence in the United States estimated at 1 in 54 births, even though numerous studies have shown that autism is actually underdiagnosed, especially among females and in Black and Hispanic populations.

USC Chan has an Autism Initiative, part of which includes opportunities for doctoral residents to contribute to research teams and develop programs that have positive impacts for those on the autism spectrum and their families. Professor Mary Lawlor heads the initiative, which she says works to promote greater inclusivity for people on the autism spectrum through various community engagements, including this project with DPS and partnerships with museums to adapt their environments to support the sensory needs of people with autism.

Caris was a fieldwork student under Lawlor, who says the work with DPS shows what can be accomplished when both sides are willing to learn and engage.

"I think Monica and Riley did a wonderful job of establishing a collaborative process," Lawlor says. "It's important, when thinking about moving forward with opportunities for people with autism, to make sure that we're really collaborating and understanding how we can be supportive of our partners, which in this case is the police."

DPS assistant chief embraces autism training

Some characteristics of autism include being nonverbal, not making eye contact or not responding to one's name or any requests. This was one of the first points Caris and McGuire wanted to make to help officers understand: how certain characteristics of autism could be misinterpreted as noncompliance.

"For someone in law enforcement, they might take that as, 'Oh, he's not listening to me, or he's not showing respect, or he's high or something like that,'" McGuire says. "So we're really trying to illustrate that if you see someone doing a lot of these behaviors, just stop and take a second to think about what might be going on."

For some at DPS, like Assistant Chief Alma Burke, those signs are nothing new. Burke, who stepped into her role in late 2019 following a 24-year career with the Los Angeles Police Department, grew up with a brother with autism, so she was fully on board when Caris and McGuire proposed the autism training.

"Not only did they present the topic, but they really came with several solutions to how we interact with people with autism," Burke says. "When I would tell them about the experience, we just had a really great conversation about how we can deliver this type of training. Riley and Monica formatted the information to where they could deliver it but also really connect with the officers."

Autism wasn't well understood when Burke was growing up, so all she knew was that her brother had trouble interacting with others. He was nonverbal and sometimes prone to aggressive behaviors. Despite what many of her family members said, Burke made the decision early to help maximize his participation out and about in the community — taking him everywhere from the beach to the park, from sporting events to Disneyland.

"I would tell my parents, just because this is a challenge doesn't mean we can't do it," Burke says. "For a long time, my parents just didn't want to take him anywhere. I would take him everywhere because I wanted to show my family that it could be done, that we could get him to experience society."

Burke's brother passed away in early 2020, less than one month after she began working at USC. So later that year, when Caris and McGuire approached her about their capstone project, Burke admits she was a little emotional.

“When the students approached me, it was an immediate, ‘Absolutely,’” Burke says. “I was really proud of our two students’ amazing work ... and now we’re going to teach this training every year, and we’re going to continue to talk about it.”

Helping the Trojan community better understand autism

The autism training was held over eight sessions earlier this spring; due to the pandemic, all of it was done online. As important as it was for Caris and McGuire to format their presentation appropriately, it was just as important for DPS to take in the information and recognize the needs of the community they serve.

“Our command staff recognized this both as a need for our industry but also as an opportunity that we could not fumble,” says DPS Sgt. Rick Roseli. “When somebody with a very important relevant topic has reached out to us wanting to be part of a solution, we need to recognize the importance of that.”

Roseli says any new training in law enforcement can be met with some skepticism from officers. But having Caris, McGuire and especially Burke share their stories gave the message a much more personal tone. And ultimately, Roseli says many officers had an “aha” moment after learning the various behaviors associated with autism.

“We’ve all dealt with scenarios in the past that now cause you to reflect and think, if you had to do it over again with this knowledge, what options would you have?” Roseli says. “This is what we’re doing on a constant basis, tailoring our approach each and every time to the individual that we’re contacting.”

Going forward, the hope is to spread the autism training to other agencies that might be interested. Both Burke and Roseli say they’d love to have Caris and McGuire come back to teach it year after year, and the two students seem to be up for it, now that they have started the occupational therapy doctorate program at USC Chan.

“We’ve already talked about that, and I said, ‘I’m latching on to the two of you,’” Burke says with a laugh. “We’re going to make sure that what we started here continues somewhere else.”

Caris and McGuire want to make sure that happens, too. They’re proud of what they started, and the changes that it will hopefully bring to the USC community.

“That was the biggest thing for us, that we’ve made a difference,” Caris says. “People are reflecting, and reflecting back on your past is the first step toward changing your actions in the future.”





This program began as a leadership capstone project in Fall of 2021. The idea was presented to members of DPS, including Chief John Thomas, Assistant Chief David Carlisle, Training Coordinator Sergeant Ralph Roseli and Assistant Chief Alma Burke, now Director. It was welcomed with open arms, particularly by Burke whose autistic brother had recently passed away. We could quickly see how impactful this would be for our campus community.

When creating this training program, we integrated research findings, recommendations from autism agencies and media footage of past law enforcement encounters, and then utilized a focus group of USC Chan students and faculty to ensure that our curriculum was as comprehensive and as representative of the needs of autistic people as possible. This focus group also provided valuable suggestions regarding the structure of our presentation, as well as modifications to the method of delivery, which could best support learning. The presentation draft was then sent to DPS members to review prior to scheduling the dates of the training sessions. The live sessions were recorded, and DPS made it mandatory for their entire department to either attend a live session or view a pre-recorded session. We hope to deliver in-person training sessions in Spring 2022 and we look forward to continuing our relationship with DPS!

—Monica Caris & Riley McGuire





Research Buzz

BREATHE EASY

Providing compassionate cessation services to cancer patients who smoke.

BY SAMANTHA VALASEK MA '15, OTD '16
ASSISTANT CLINICAL PROFESSOR

My grandmother Mary Lou was a VA nurse in the psychiatric ward, where she cared for young veterans who had just come home from the Vietnam War. A mixture of love and resolve was present in all she did, whether with her patients living with addiction or in her own family relationships. She exemplified how compassion, integrity and wisdom matter across all domains of life, and her experiences with cancer inspired my own interest in health care.

Today, as a clinical faculty member at USC Chan, I am following in her footsteps by using *Lifestyle Redesign* occupational therapy in the context of an interdisciplinary team to help cancer patients with tobacco dependence.

For those who smoke, quitting is considered the single most important action to prevent cancer and to improve treatment outcomes after a cancer diagnosis. Of course, as many who have tried will attest, quitting tobacco is notoriously challenging to accomplish alone. In fact, in 2015, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that while almost 70 percent of American smokers wanted to quit, about 55 percent attempted it, and only 6 percent succeeded. The USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center does not want patients to have to make this difficult journey alone.

Matt Kirkpatrick, associate professor of research in the Department of Population and Public Health Sciences at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, established an interdisciplinary team, including oncology, internal medicine, addiction research and occupational therapy, with the aim of improving patients' chance of success through better tobacco assessment and treatment.

Our team is supported by a grant from the NIH National Cancer Institute Moonshot Program's Cancer Center Cessation Initiative, also known as C3I, which is a nationwide initiative to help cancer centers build, implement and sustain treatment programs that routinely address tobacco cessation with cancer patients. While collecting data and interviews for mixed-methods implementation studies, our team is applying evidence-based practices to blend population health approaches with intensive individual care, ensuring we can meet patients' needs wherever they are in their cessation journeys.

It's no surprise that a holistic approach to tobacco treatment utilizing both intensive behavioral counseling and medication is most effective for helping individuals to quit. As an occupational therapist with advanced training in tobacco treatment, my role is to provide the former while supporting the safe and routine use of the latter.

During our occupational therapy sessions, my patients are able to discover and enact unique lifestyle changes needed to initiate and maintain abstinence, particularly during the trials and tribulations of cancer treatment. Through supportive problem-solving, self-regulation skills training



PHOTO BY CHANTELE RICE COLLINS

and recommendations for environmental or routine modifications, patients who once felt as if nicotine cravings and withdrawals ruled their day, come out of occupational therapy with a sense of mastery and freedom, as if they are finally breathing easily.

One thing that I have heard repeatedly from patients, after experiencing a lapse in abstinence, is surprise — “I thought you’d be mad!” Patients are so accustomed to the stigma and shame associated with smoking that they visibly exhale when a clinician meets them with understanding and grace, instead of criticism and blame.

By reframing the meaning of tobacco use as an occupation, we work to create space for exploring healthy alternatives that align with their health goals and to satisfy their needs and narratives currently fulfilled by smoking. My goal is to always accomplish this without counterproductively triggering those stressors and trauma that so often maintain addiction.

I am excited to continue expanding occupational therapy's work in addiction care. Beyond tobacco dependence, I also see *Lifestyle Redesign* clients for binge eating, alcohol use and behavioral addictions. My hope is to continue growing this specialty and integrating it into primary care and in cancer teams with my colleagues at Norris and Keck Hospital of USC. Those who are walking the path of recovery need not go it alone, especially when they can have an entire team beside them every step of the way.



PHOTO BY YING XIN



THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT:

LING YU (ELENA)
MENG OTD '19

BY MIKE MCNULTY '06, MA '09, OTD '10

Elena Meng OTD '19 joined USC Chan in 2020 as an assistant professor of clinical occupational therapy, supporting the *China Initiative*, which is the division's ongoing effort to lead the professionalization of occupational therapy in mainland China. Here are five more things to know about Meng:

1 She is Chinese Quebecer. Meng was born in China, and her family immigrated to Montreal, Canada, when she was 10 years old. She earned both her bachelor's and master's degrees in occupational therapy from McGill University in the predominantly French-speaking city. "There was a time when my French was better than my English!"

2 She plays violin in a community orchestra. In her free time, Meng plays violin in the Los Angeles Doctors Symphony Orchestra. Although the group has been on hiatus since early 2020 due to the pandemic, Meng is looking forward to in-person rehearsals once again. "Getting lost in the flow of making music with others is very restorative for me."

3 She says cultural adaptation requires "unlearning." With collaborators at Peking University Health Science Center, Meng is working to adapt occupational therapy to better meet the needs and preferences of Chinese populations and contexts. "It's been a process that has required us to unlearn some of our own assumptions and approaches, while retaining the core underpinnings of occupational therapy that transcend cultures."

4 A field study highlighted room to grow. In 2016, Meng completed a three-week field study in Weishan County, Yunnan

Province, which revealed the many ways that occupational therapy has yet to impact rural areas that are difficult to access, both geographically and culturally. "OT in China has made tremendous progress in recent years, and there are future opportunities to localize it for rural communities that hold more traditional health beliefs and practices."

5 A missed meeting changed her life. While attending the American Occupational Therapy Association's 2017 conference in Philadelphia, Meng slept in late one morning, missing an early lecture she had originally planned to attend. So she ended up at another talk instead, where she met a clinician working in China, who then invited her to attend a reception that evening during which Meng mingled with USC's *China Initiative* faculty members. One conversation led to another, Meng was inspired to come to USC, and the rest is history. "I love telling this story of how a small change in plans led me to another country!"

OS SYMPOSIUM TO EXPLORE PANDEMICS FROM OCCUPATION-BASED PERSPECTIVES

All-virtual format for November symposium makes USC Chan's signature academic event more accessible than ever.

BY MIKE McNULTY '06, MA '09, OTD '10

The 2021 USC Chan Occupational Science Symposium, “Occupations, Disrupted: Pandemics and the Reshaping of Everyday Life,” will be held on Nov. 5, 2021, through an entirely virtual format that includes live and pre-recorded lectures, panel discussions and presentations. This rendition will mark the 27th time that the symposium has brought together scholars, leaders, practitioners and students from various professions and disciplines to advance the scholarship of occupational science.

“We couldn’t not do a symposium focused on the intersection of the public health crisis, the ensuing economic crisis and the continuing racial oppression and injustices that are shaping our society,” said Associate Clinical Professor Rebecca Aldrich ’05, MA ’06, who serves as lead faculty member on the symposium’s planning team. “To not take the opportunity to think about implications from an occupational perspective seemed like it would be both a missed opportunity and out of line with the USC Chan Division’s mission.”

If the theme felt like a forgone conclusion, then the persistent uncertainty of 2021 eventually made an all-virtual format the clear choice too.

“We just didn’t know what the state of the world would be this fall, but during the previous symposium in 2019, we laid the groundwork for virtual elements that make the symposium available to a wider audience,” Aldrich said. “So to me, this virtual format is a natural progression toward living up to our vision of making the symposium more broadly accessible.”

The 2021 symposium will feature experts from disciplines including medical anthropology, health psychology, urban economics and social determinants of health and health disparities. One dozen asynchronous presentations led by USC Chan faculty, staff and students will be available for viewing during a month-long period of self-paced learning. The event concludes with a closing keynote lecture and subsequent panel discussion by Professor Emeritus Gelya Frank, titled “Occupational Science’s Stalled Revolution and a Manifesto for Reconstruction.”

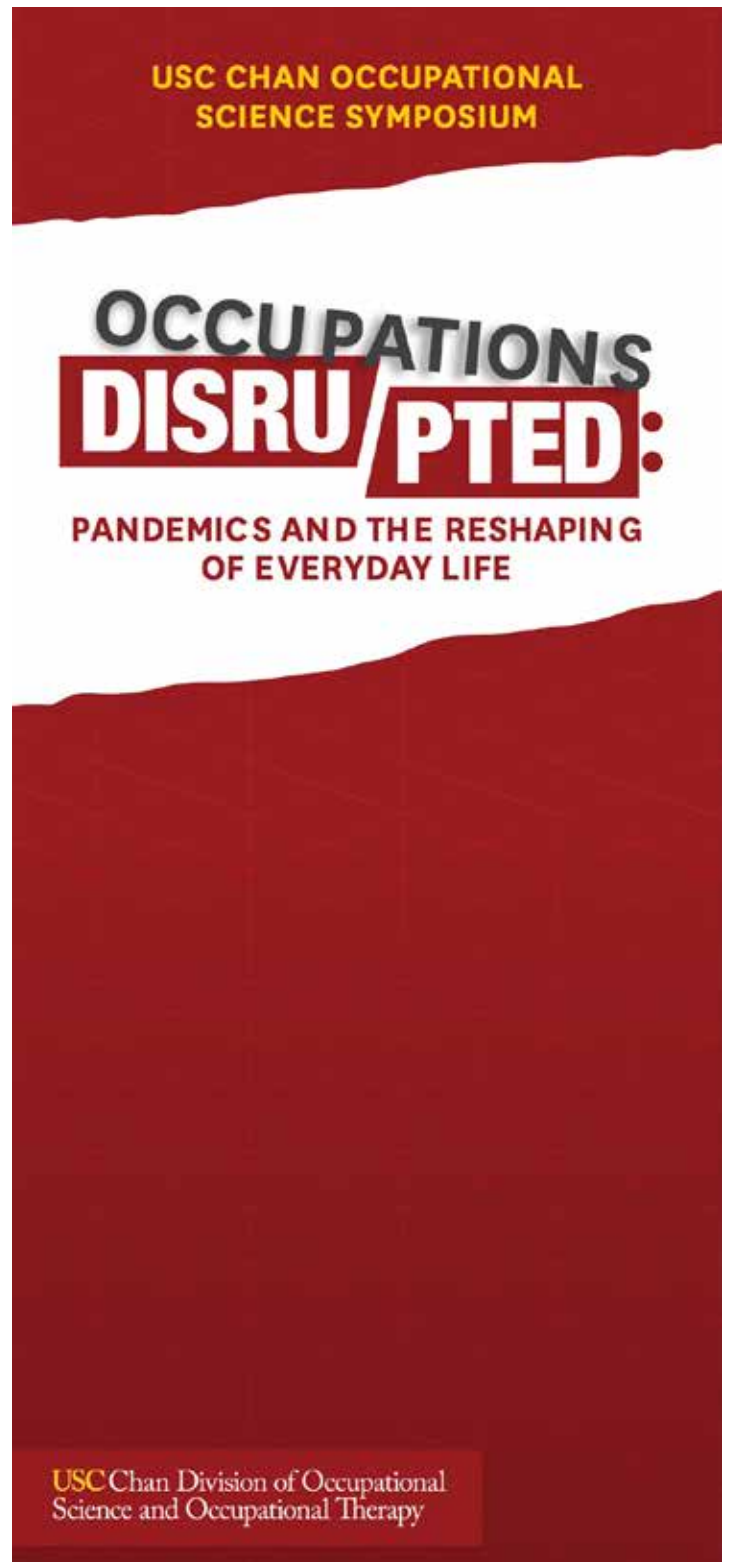
As always, the symposium will be highlighted with the honorary Wilma West Lecture Award. Roshan Galvaan, professor at the University of Cape Town, will deliver the 2021 Wilma West Lecture, titled “A luta Continua: Passages of Decolonial Love.” Galvaan’s scholarship explores the complexities of human occupation in relation to marginalization and exclusion. Her current research focuses on occupational choice in contexts of social inequality, occupation-based community development and supported education and personal recovery in higher education.

“Dr. Galvaan has done so much to help people in the discipline think about constructs in different ways,” Aldrich said. “In particular, her work has taken a decolonial approach in relation to occupation and occupational science that is increasingly being seen as a way forward for the discipline to reconceive the ways it makes contributions toward social transformation.”

The symposium was established at USC in 1988 as a mechanism for mobilizing and celebrating what was then the newborn academic discipline started at USC. During the decades since, the symposium has played an integral role in nurturing and growing the discipline on campus, throughout the nation and across the world. The event has previously featured renowned speakers, including household names Stephen Hawking and Jane Goodall.

While the symposium theme focuses on the pandemics’ disruptive effects, the lineup of speakers similarly looks to shake up some of the traditional ways in which Westernized occupational science has approached occupation.

“There’s so much important work being done in occupational science all over the world — in just too many places to name — with perspectives that can help us here in the United States,” Aldrich said. “We have an opportunity to hear from the full richness of voices that constitute occupational science around the world.”





MAKING THE CASE

What health care professions should be considered truly essential? That was a question floated throughout the early phases of the COVID-19 pandemic, and it was answered by occupational therapy practitioners with a resounding “we are.”

To continue proving occupational therapy’s distinct value in the comprehensive care for coronavirus patients throughout their journeys from critical illness to long-term survivorship, clinical faculty members **Jamie Wilcox** MA ’13, OTD ’14; **Kelsey Peterson** MA ’17, OTD ’18; **Carnie Lewis** ’17, MA ’18, OTD ’19; and **John Margetis** ’11, MA ’12, OTD ’13 co-authored a case study published in a recent issue of the *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*.

The case study follows “Jeffrey,” a 74-year-old White, cisgender man who works as a middle school science teacher in Los Angeles. Jeffrey has a complicated medical history that includes cardiovascular diagnoses, and after five days of worsening symptoms, he presented at the emergency room on New Year’s Eve 2020.

At every point in Jeffrey’s COVID-19 disease course at Keck Hospital of USC, occupational therapy played a key role in

optimizing his functional independence and occupational engagement, given the constraints of his physiological impairments. Successful critical care rehabilitation required a collaborative, interprofessional approach. To align the functional and medical goals of care, the practitioners thoughtfully considered Jeffrey’s medical status, the risks and benefits associated with occupational therapy and the disease course at every stage, from monitoring to the intensive care unit to the step-down unit. After 61 days in the hospital — 43 of which he spent in the ICU — Jeffrey was discharged home to continue recovering with outpatient telerehabilitation services.

With this case study, Wilcox, Peterson, Lewis and Margetis show the essential value of occupational therapy in providing client-centered interventions that can effect positive, long-term survivorship after severe cases of COVID-19. Interprofessional collaboration is necessary to managing the medical aspects of occupational performance in critical care settings. Occupational therapists’ broad perspectives on physical, psychosocial and emotional health during COVID-19 hospitalizations are truly essential and distinct contributions to the care team.

“Occupational Therapy During COVID-19–Related Critical Illness: A Case Report” is available to AOTA members at tinyurl.com/ajot-covid-case-report.

Amber Angell PhD '16 was the lead author of "Sex differences in co-occurring conditions among autistic children and youth in Florida: A retrospective cohort study (2012–2019)," published in the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*.

Lisa Aziz-Zadeh and **Sharon Cermak** were co-authors of "Unique deficit in embodied simulation in autism: An fMRI study comparing autism and developmental coordination disorder," published in *Human Brain Mapping*. Postdoctoral scholar **Emily Kilroy** PhD '18 was the lead author, and occupational science students **Christiana Butera** PhD '22 and **Aditya Jayashankar** PhD '23 were also co-authors.

Grace Baranek co-authored "Associations among sensory hyperresponsiveness, restricted and repetitive behaviors, and anxiety in autism: An integrated systematic review," published in *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*. Occupational science student **Emily Campi** MA '20, PhD '24 was a co-author.

Occupational science student **Miranda Donnelly** PhD '24 was a co-author of "Student veterans' experiences of a campus veterans center revealed through Photovoice," published in *The Journal of Continuing Higher Education*.

Karrie Kingsley MA '01, OTD '07 was the author of "Best practices in supporting social, emotional, and self-regulation skills," a chapter in the textbook *Best Practices for Occupational Therapy in Early Childhood*, published by AOTA Press.

Mary Lawlor co-authored "Understanding connectivity: The parallax and disruptive-productive effects of mixed methods social network analysis in occupational science," published in the *Journal of Occupational Science*. Alumna **Melissa Park** MA '95, PhD '05 was the article's lead author.

Sook-Lei Liew MA '08, PhD '12 co-authored "Development of a low-cost, modular muscle-computer interface for at-home telerehabilitation for chronic stroke," published in *Sensors*. Occupational science student **Miranda Donnelly** PhD '24 was a co-author.

John Margetis '11, MA '12, OTD '13 and **Jamie Wilcox** MA '13, OTD '14 were co-authors of "Occupational therapy: Essential to critical care rehabilitation," published in the *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*.

Julie McLaughlin Gray MA '95, PhD '06, **Linda Liang** OTD '18 and **Ruth Zemke** were co-authors of "Occupational harmony: Embracing the complexity of occupational balance," published in the *Journal of Occupational Science*. Alumna **Yijun Liu** MA '19, OTD '20 was the article's lead author.

Roberta Pineda was the lead author of "Randomized clinical trial investigating the effect of consistent, developmentally-appropriate, and evidence-based multisensory exposures in the NICU," published in the *Journal of Perinatology*. USC Chan staff member **Polly Kellner** was a co-author. Pineda and Kellner were also co-authors of "Factors related to enrollment in early therapy services following neonatal intensive care unit discharge," published in *Acta Paediatrica*. Pineda was the lead author of "Applying the RE-AIM framework to evaluate the implementation of the Supporting and Enhancing NICU Sensory Experiences (SENSE) program," published in *BMC Pediatrics*.

Shawn Roll was the lead author of "A standardized protocol for the comprehensive assessment of dental hygiene work," published in *Work*. The article was co-authored by alumnus **Mark Hardison** PhD '19. Roll was a co-author of "Intelligent agents to improve thermal satisfaction by controlling personal comfort systems under different levels of automation," published in *IEEE Internet of Things Journal*. Roll was also a co-author of "Impacts of working from home during COVID-19 pandemic on physical and mental well-being of office workstation users," published in the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*. Roll was the co-author of "Modeling extracurricular activity participation with physical and mental health in college students over time," published in the *Journal of American College Health*. Occupational science doctoral students **Buwen Yao** '23 and **Sandy Takata** MA '15, OTD '16, PhD '22 were co-authors. Roll and Julie McLaughlin Gray were co-authors of "Worker perspectives on incorporating artificial intelligence into office workspaces: Implications for the future of office work," published in *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. Occupational science student **Yoko Fukumura** MA '19, PhD '24 was the article's lead author.

Stacey Schepens Niemiec Postdoc '13, **Cheryl Vigen**, **Mike Carlson** and staff member **Jeanine Blanchard** MA '99, PhD '10 were co-authors of "Long-term follow-up of a lifestyle intervention for late-midlife, rural-dwelling Latinos in primary care," published in the *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*. Alumna **Jenny Martínez** '09, MA '10, OTD '11 was also a co-author.

Leah Stein Duker MA '06, PhD '13, Postdoc '15 was the lead author of "Use of audiobooks as an environmental distractor to decrease state anxiety in children waiting in the pediatric emergency department: A pilot and feasibility study," published in *Frontiers in Pediatrics*.

Jamie Wilcox MA '13, OTD '14 was the lead author of "Occupational therapy for the long haul of post-COVID syndrome: A case report," published in the *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*.

A DEEPER MEANING

For occupational therapist and feeding specialist Sonia Trejo, healthy meals are more than just what's on the plate.

**BY SONIA TREJO MA '08, OTD '19,
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF CLINICAL
OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY AND FEEDING
CLINIC COORDINATOR AT THE USC
UNIVERSITY CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES**

I'm no stranger to stressful mealtimes.

Growing up, my family didn't seem worried because I appeared to be eating — I had no other choice! I had learned that my protests to intolerable tastes, smells and textures were to no avail. So, as a picky eater, I problem-solved my way through mealtimes by cautiously and methodically poking at the food on my plate until I could finally make it secretly disappear in order to be “finished” (until the next meal).

Now, as a mother myself, I have a new understanding about mealtimes from the other side of the table. Mealtimes are nourishing; through connection and food, we ensure that our relationships and our bodies grow strong and healthy. But what happens when mealtimes aren't? As the Feeding Clinic Coordinator at the USC UCEDD, I hear and support many families who are struggling, stressed and eager for help.

Pediatric feeding disorder (PFD) can involve medical, sensory, motor, nutritional and/or psychosocial factors. The Feeding Clinic serves particularly complex clients, given the high incidence of co-morbidities, including developmental disabilities, trauma, anxiety, medical or genetic conditions or other mental health disorders. This interdisciplinary assessment clinic allows me to work alongside experts from a variety of disciplines, while also pulling from my own personal, professional and cultural experiences to offer support in mealtime occupations. As a Latina, being able to help underserved populations is equally important to me.

The USC UCEDD at CHLA serves the mental health needs of Los Angelenos who meet medical necessity. They come primarily



from an underserved and disadvantaged population. Disparities are evident, with most families waiting far too long for the help they desperately need. Each day represents at least three more stressful food interactions that fuel the worry cycle, and can be detrimental to family functioning, health and relationships.

There are notable examples of the significant feeding needs within this community: A teenager only eats purees after recently choking, and fears what will happen if they try solid foods again, while their family worries what will happen if they don't. A mother is exhausted by the daily mealtime battles, feeling depleted by the waste of time, energy, food and finances. A person experiences pain with eating, and thus avoids mealtimes, which results in health implications. A child enjoys eating limited

textures, while the family unknowingly offers foods outside of the child's skillset, creating anxiety and frustration for all. A family feels judged for offering the only (unhealthy) foods their child accepts, rather than the culturally valued, homemade and nutritious foods they would prefer.

Feeding can be a long journey, and options for most families with PFD are limited, especially if they are uninsured or underinsured. I struggle when a family is not (or is no longer) eligible for our services at the UCEDD. Despite finding fulfillment in my work, I cannot be fully satisfied when families are left “starving” for care — there is more to be done! My position, passions and perspectives give me a unique opportunity to direct my problem-solving skills to contribute in a meaningful way and advance this work.

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