

# Development of a Toolkit for Tufts University Occupational Therapy Program to Increase Recruitment for a Multicultural Classroom

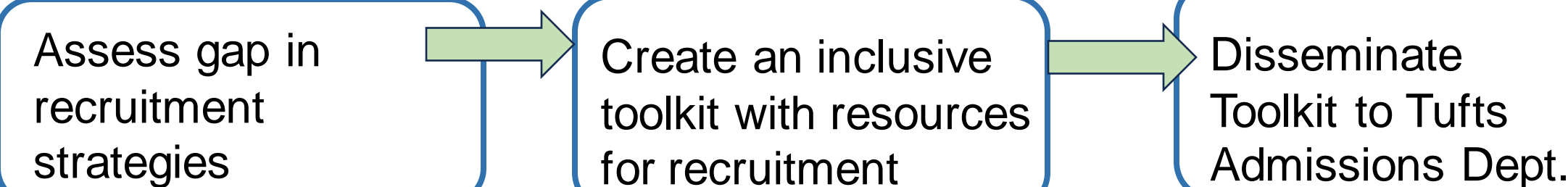
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## Introduction

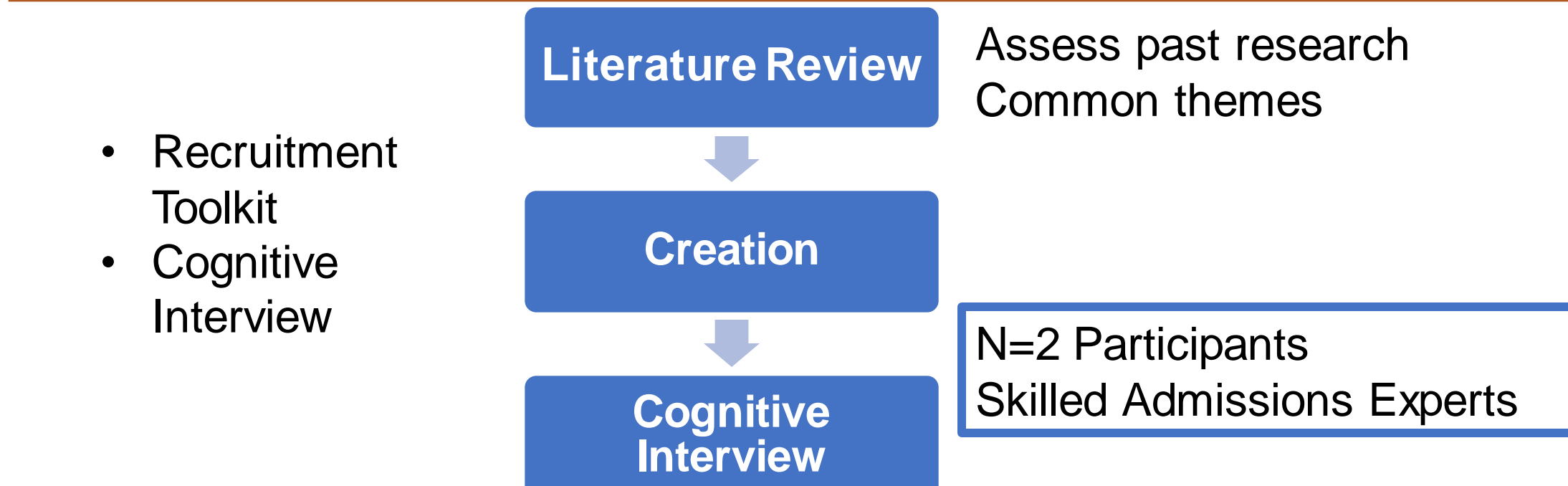
- Occupational therapy, like many healthcare professions, struggles with representation from various racial & ethnic backgrounds, as well as other forms of diversity such as gender identity, first generation & socioeconomic status
- In 2021, **approximately 125,000 Occupational Therapists in U. S.**
  - Of this population, 82.4% identified as White, 89.4% as women & 10.6% as men
  - Other races represented were **Asian (6.93%) & Black (5.4%)**. (*Occupational Therapists | Data USA, n.d.*)
- AOTA 2021 Annual Report statistics for Black students in OT programs: Assistant (11%), Master's (6%), Doctoral (5%) (AOTA, 2021).
- A more racially & ethnically representative workforce of occupational therapy practitioners (OTPs) is necessary to best serve America's diverse population (Brown et al., 2021).
- Graduate programs serve as the bridge** to make these changes in diversity and inclusion for our profession. Introducing underrepresented minorities (URM) to the OT profession can begin to close the racial gap to represent the diverse populations we serve.

**Purpose:** Develop "The Ultimate Guide to Recruitment" Toolkit to serve as a foundation for **recruitment of Black students** into Tufts' Occupational Therapy Entry Level Occupational Therapy Doctorate (OTD), Post Professional Masters & Post Professional OTD student body.

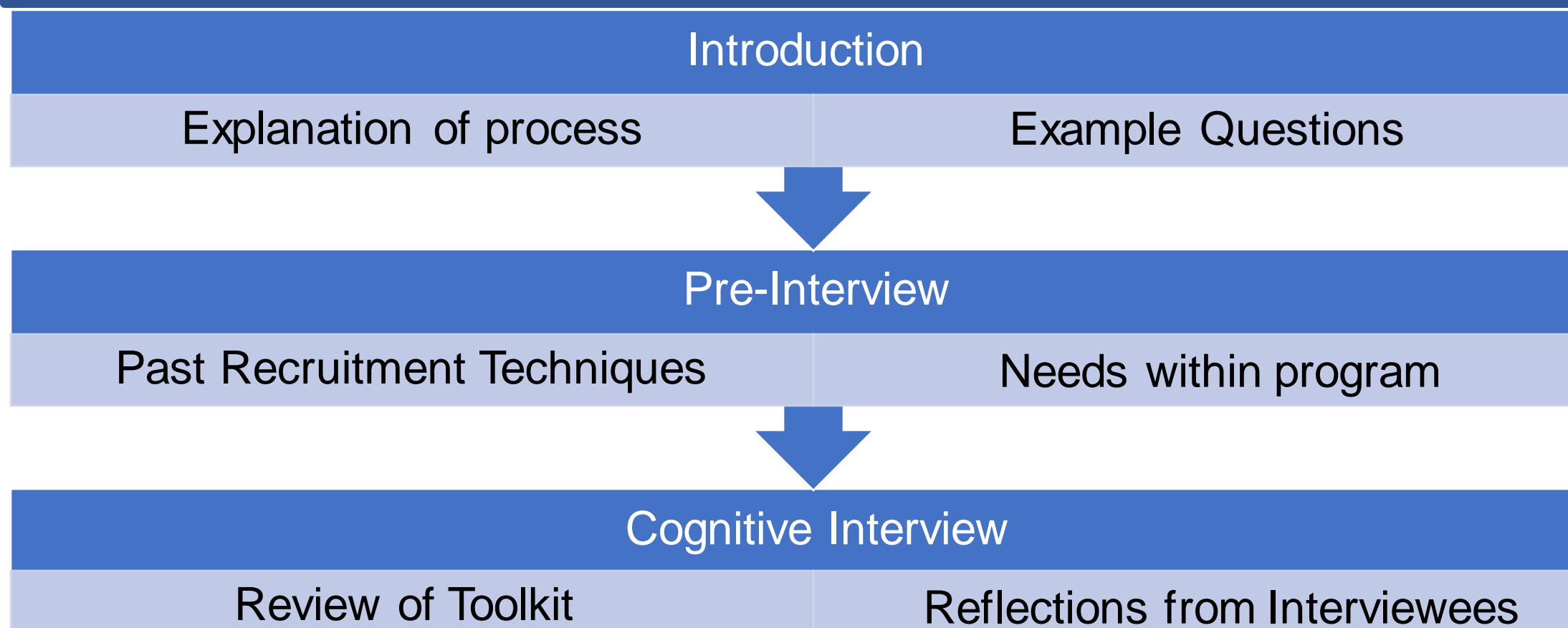
## Project Aims



## Methods



**Cognitive Interview Method**  
➤ Technique used to provide **insight into learners' perceptions** in which individuals are invited to verbalize thoughts and feelings as they examine information. Use of cognitive interview techniques may **improve the development of materials (Shafer & Lohse, 2018)**



## Current Themes In Literature

*\*See QR code for access to themes*

**Admissions Process**  
(Ramirez et al., 2023; Toretsky, 2018)

**Lack of Awareness**  
(Ford et al., 2021); (Kitchens et al., 2022); (Ramirez et al., 2023)

**Faculty & Student Diversity**  
(Kitchens et al., 2022)

**Student Testimonials from the Literature**

The admissions/interview process alone is so expensive that most minority groups don't stand a chance. (Colaianne et al., 2022)

Just generally, the sooner you help people understand what a career in health looks like, probably the more likely they are to actually stick with it or pursue it. (King et al., 2023)

Do you know what it feels like to be the only Black person in the whole class? (Colaianne et al., 2022)

**Location of Program**  
(Kitchens et al., 2022)

Establishing structured pathway for URM students from Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs) to pursue careers in OT by offering mentorship, support, & resources to facilitate transition into graduate-level OT programs

**Lack of Funding**  
(Ford et al., 2021)

Students feel need to financially support their families vs spending time/money on furthering education (King et al., 2023)

**Mentorship**  
(Bleich et al., 2015; Dressel et al., 2014; Ford et al., 2021)

Only 10% of racial minority students received a mentor. (Dressel et al., 2014)

**Feelings of Isolation & Loneliness** (Ramirez et al., 2023)

Black occupational therapy students, practitioners, & educators felt lack of belonging as a result of profession's lack of inclusivity & diversity. (Aldridge, 2022)

## Results

### Participants Responses to the Gap in Program Recruitment

**Expert #1**

Participant reported:

- Over the years Tufts OT program has developed strategies towards increased diversity but finds challenges in actionable solutions
- Conversations about diversity need to be incorporated into classroom even though topics are sensitive in nature
- **Problem:** Recent SCOTUS decision, where use of race-conscious practices in college admissions is banned makes recruitment of URM groups even more challenging

"Unfortunately, I am the White face of recruitment, I don't think that makes recruitment of Black students easier when they see me as the Tufts Representative"

**Expert #2**

Participant reported:

- AOTA needs to **educate** more broadly & thoughtfully about diversity & inclusion
- Lack of diversity in OT should be seen from a higher education level, in addition to a professional systemic level
- Many health professions made vision statements around topics of diversity and inclusion after murder of George Floyd in 2020
- **Problem:** Are there actionable solutions to these statements made by various disciplines in healthcare and are program directors, faculty etc. being held accountable for these efforts?

"Universities must commit to student belonging in light of the Affirmative Action Rulings and attacks on DEI. For example, starting recruitment at the K-12 level since the ruling applies to college admissions"

## Discussion

### Toolkit Strengths

- Accessible via online access
- Tells the story behind the experiences of URM students & higher education
- Generalizable to various disciplines
- Provides realistic strategies for program implementation
- Provides continued learning opportunities and resources for students & faculty
- Uses inclusive language & images throughout toolkit

### Toolkit Recommendations

- Provide Tufts OT Department specific examples for each suggestion listed.
- Brief overview of AOTA's stance on diversity & methods of dissemination of resources
- Provide Retention Strategies within toolkit
- Recruitment/ Exposure to OT pathway building should begin at K-12 level prior to college
- Statement mentioning **Affirmative Action** & impact on recruitment strategies in higher education

## Conclusions

### The Ultimate Guide to Recruitment

- Reviewed & approved to use as foundation for recruitment implementation to increase diversity numbers within Tufts' occupational therapy programs

**3 Actionable Recommendations** to Tufts Occupational Therapy Programs to impact **Enrollment, Graduation, & Attrition Rates:**

1. *Network with OTPs* to serve as mentors within New England & virtually across the nation
2. *Build a sustainable pathway program* with a Historically Black College/ University (HBCU)
3. *Network with alum* who can provide URM groups opportunities for exposure within the field of OT

### Future Implications

- **Access & implement** strategies for recruitment & retention of Black students in Tufts OT Programs
- **Take action** by assigning projects to admissions' graduate assistants
- **Create mentoring program** for current OT/s to connect with alum, OTPs, or practitioners in other disciplines who identify as Black for support throughout graduate school
- **Survey Black OTPs** to gain insight into their experiences
- **Analyze** preference for Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) versus Historically Black College (HBCU) for OT graduate school amongst URM students.
- **Establish** mentorship program with AOTA's National Black Occupational Therapy Caucus to establish network of support for URM students throughout OT school

## Contact/References

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References / Full Toolkit

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