The Ultimate 101

GUIDE TO RECRUITMENT

Tufts
UNIVERSITY

By: Crystal Butler OT/s

The Diversity Recruitment Toolkit is designed
to provide Program faculty and staff with the information
and resources

needed to support and build a diverse Entry Level Occupational
Therapy Doctorate (OTD), Post Professional Masters and Post
Professional OTD student body.

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OVERVIEW

The following comprehensive recruitment toolkit for faculty, staff, and graduate students includes techniques and ideas regarding relevant research literature, as well as survey data from our project. This toolkit was created to serve as a foundation for the recruitment of Black students into Tufts' Occupational Therapy Doctoral (OTD) Program Entry Level Occupational Therapy Doctorate (OTD), Post Professional Masters and Post Professional OTD student body.

These activities are intended to be in collaboration with academic leaders, department chairs, deans, and faculty leaders to improve recruitment and retention efforts for the associated Tufts Occupational Therapy programs.

These initiatives will create an atmosphere of inclusive excellence in education, research, and public service that welcomes a varied range of people with different viewpoints, backgrounds, and experiences.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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Finally, I would be negligent if I did not acknowledge my family, particularly my parents and siblings for believing in me.

INTRODUCTION

Occupational therapists (OTs) are healthcare professionals who help people of all ages participate in the activities they need and want to do, despite any physical, cognitive, or emotional challenges they may face (AOTA, 2024).

For centuries, the field of Occupational therapy has been perceived as a white female identified profession. Diversity in the occupational therapy (OT) field was acknowledged by the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) in their Centennial Vision (AOTA, 2006) and was reaffirmed in Vision 2025 (AOTA, 2017).

The lack of diversity in the occupational therapy profession is indeed a recognized issue (Dressel, 2014). Occupational therapy, like many healthcare professions, has struggled with representation in various aspects of diversity to name a few: race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, geographical representation, political beliefs, ableism, etc.

Occupational therapy (OT) professionals are extremely concerned about the impact of systemic racism on occupational justice in both society and OT educational programs (Cho-Baker, 2022).

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

"Fostering a diverse and inclusive workforce is critical to increasing access to care and improving aspects of health care quality" (Saffer, 2023). OT and OTA programs are a starting point for increasing professional diversity and promoting a well-rounded healthcare workforce (Kitchen et al., 2022).

This lack of diversity is seen in students across the nation for students who identify as Black. For instance, the AOTA 2021 annual report identified Black students representation within the following degree levels: assistant programs (11%), Master's programs (6%), doctoral programs (5%) (AOTA, 2021). A more representative workforce that provides a racially and ethnically diverse pool of clinicians is necessary to best serve America's diverse population (Brown et al., 2021). Please look at AOTA charts below.

Throughout this document the term underrepresented minority group (URM) will be used. This term refers to "individuals from racial and ethnic groups that have been shown by the National Science Foundation to be underrepresented in health-related sciences on a national basis. This includes: Blacks or African Americans, Hispanics or Latinos, American Indians or Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders (NIH, 2019).

The AOTA 2020-2021 ANNUAL REPORT FROM PROGRAMS ACROSS THE NATION

Faculty Race

No Response	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African American	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	White	Other
470 8%)	10 (<1%)	306 (6%)	334(6%)	20 (<1%)	4,153 (76%)	146 (3%)

FACULTY RACE REPRESENTATION DEMONSTRATING PREDOMINANTLY WHITE (AOTA, 2021).

Race amongst current faculty and students in OT programs display Black or African Americans as the least represented race.

Race–2010 versus 2021

	American Indian or Alaska Native		Asian		Black or African American		Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander		White		Missing/ Other	
	2010	2021	2010	2021	2010	2021	2010	2021	2010	2021	2010	2020
Doctorate	0%	<1%	4%	8%	4%	5%	0%	<1%	88%	76%	4%	10%
Master	0%	<1%	5%	8%	6%	6%	1%	<1%	86%	74%	1%	11%
OTA	1%	<1%	2%	5%	13%	11%	1%	1%	82%	68%	2%	14%

RACE AMONGST DEGREE LEVEL DEMONSTRATING MINIMAL INCREASE WITHIN A 10 YEAR SPAN (AOTA, 2021).

When looking at these above statistics, the represention of Black faculty and students continues to demonstrate the need for strategies within programs to increase diversity within the OT profession.

Scan Here for Full AOTA 2020-2021 Annual Report

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<u>SEVERAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTE TO THIS LACK OF DIVERSITY:</u>

1. **Historical Context:** Occupational therapy, like many healthcare fields, has its roots in institutions and systems that were often **exclusionary or discriminatory**. Historical barriers to education and employment opportunities for marginalized groups have had lasting effects on the diversity of the profession (Ramirez et al., 2023).

2. **Barriers to Entry:** Structural barriers such as **limited access to educational resources,** financial constraints, and lack of mentorship opportunities can make it challenging for individuals from underrepresented backgrounds to pursue careers in occupational therapy. For example, establishment of a mentorship program between current URM students and URM professionals can be a support for students.

3. **Cultural Humility:** The lack of diversity within the profession can also impact **cultural competency** and the ability to effectively serve diverse patient populations. Patients may feel more comfortable and understood when they receive care from healthcare professionals who share similar backgrounds and experiences (Ramirez et al., 2023). For example, the **<u>University of Oregon developed an assessment tool</u>** to measure the level of cultural competency and awareness on campus in addition to **<u>a self-assessment checklist</u>**, with the goal to promote diversity and equal opportunity.

4. **Awareness and Recruitment Efforts :** Efforts to increase diversity within the occupational therapy profession often face challenges in **recruitment and retention**. There may be limited awareness of the profession among certain communities, or misconceptions about the types of individuals who can pursue careers in occupational therapy (Ramirez et al., 2023). For example, attending **<u>HBCU career fairs</u>** to inform students about the Tufts OT Programs offered.

ADDRESSING THE LACK OF DIVERSITY IN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY REQUIRES A MULTIFACETED APPROACH:

- Recruitment and Outreach: Proactive recruitment efforts targeting underrepresented groups, as well as outreach programs aimed at increasing awareness of the profession among diverse communities.

- Educational Support: Providing support and resources to individuals from underrepresented backgrounds to overcome barriers to education and training in occupational therapy.

- Cultural Humility Training: Incorporating cultural competency training into occupational therapy education programs to better prepare future practitioners to work effectively with diverse patient populations.

- Mentorship and Support Networks: Establishing mentorship programs and support networks to help students and early-career professionals from underrepresented backgrounds navigate the challenges of entering and advancing within the profession (Bleich et al., 2015).

By addressing these challenges and implementing strategies to promote diversity and inclusion, the occupational therapy profession can better reflect the communities it serves and provide more equitable and effective care to all patients.
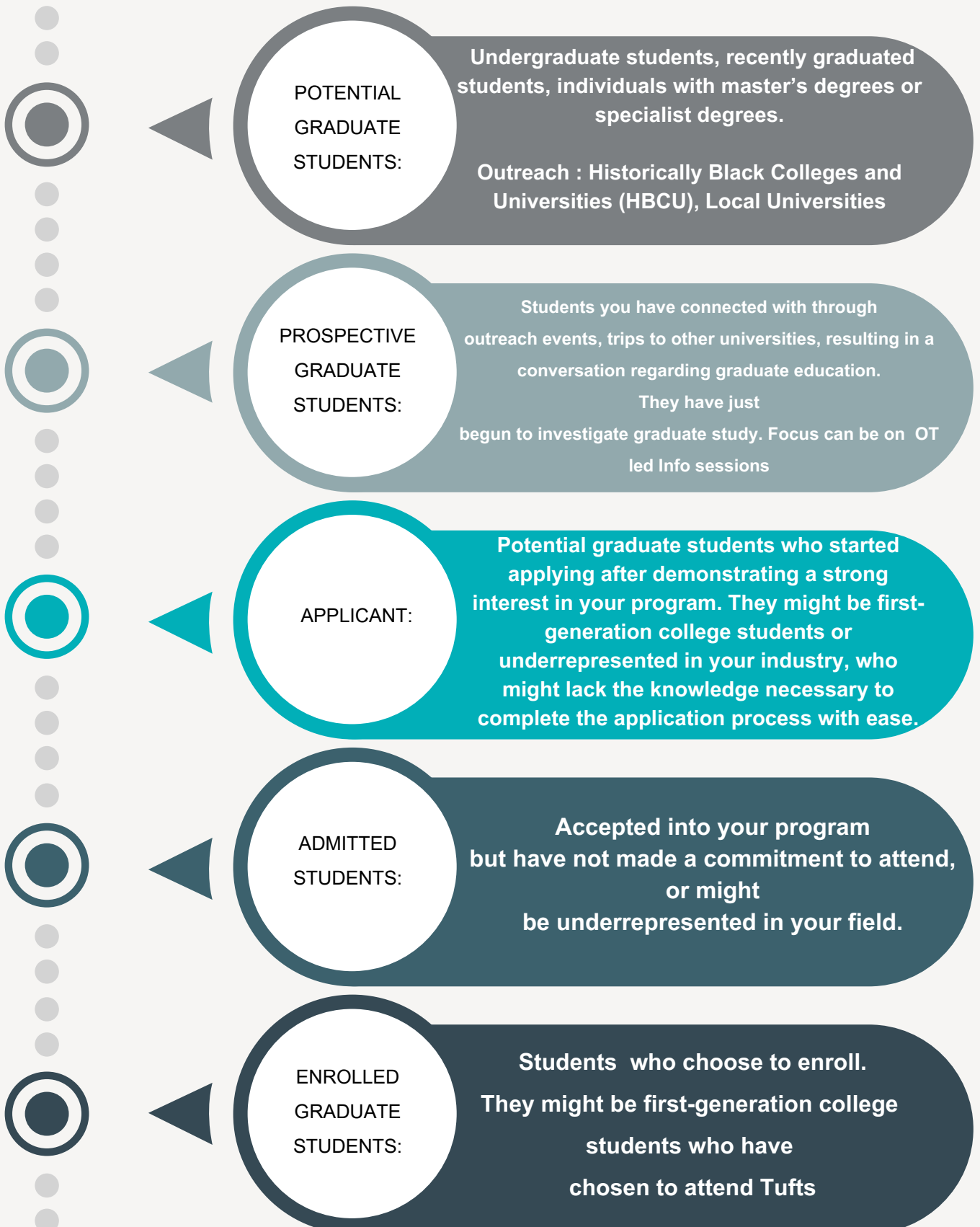
Before Recruiting

Enrollment Management Plan

a) **Evaluate the existing makeup** of staff, teacher, and student body within the program. Examine present procedures in the context of inclusion, equity, and diversity, establish goals and plans of action to give diversity, equity, and inclusion top priority.

b) **Evaluate the chances that** staff, instructors, and students have to pursue professional development opportunities related to social justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. Establish a culture that promotes and motivates staff, instructors, and students to participaate in those activities.
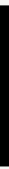
5 Phases of Recruitment

POTENTIAL GRADUATE STUDENTS: Undergraduate students, recently graduated students, individuals with master's degrees or specialist degrees.

Outreach : Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), Local Universities

PROSPECTIVE GRADUATE STUDENTS: Students you have connected with through outreach events, trips to other universities, resulting in a conversation regarding graduate education. They have just begun to investigate graduate study. Focus can be on OT led Info sessions

APPLICANT: Potential graduate students who started applying after demonstrating a strong interest in your program. They might be first-generation college students or underrepresented in your industry, who might lack the knowledge necessary to complete the application process with ease.

ADMITTED STUDENTS: Accepted into your program but have not made a commitment to attend, or might be underrepresented in your field.

ENROLLED GRADUATE STUDENTS: Students who choose to enroll. They might be first-generation college students who have chosen to attend Tufts

(University of Missouri Recruitment Toolkit, 2024)

Themes

The most common themes for the experiences of Black students enrolled in higher education based on the literature are listed below:

Admissions Process

(Ramirez et al., 2023; Toretsky, 2018

Lack of Financial Resources

(Ford et al., 2021).

Lack of Awareness/ Exposure

(Ford et al., 2021) ; (Kitchens et al., 2022); (Ramirez et al., 2023)

Mentorship

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

Location of Program

(Kitchens et al., 2022)

Feelings of Isolation and Lonliness

(Ramirez et al., 2023)

Faculty & Student Diversity

(Kitchens et al., 2022)

FEELINGS OF ISOLATION AND LONLINESS

(RAMIREZ ET AL., 2023)

Admissions Process

Holistic admissions is a strategy that many educational institutions, including those offering occupational therapy programs, are adopting to increase diversity among their student bodies, including URM populations. Holistic admissions consider a range of factors beyond academic performance, such as personal experiences, extracurricular activities, community involvement, and overcoming adversity (Toretsky, 2018; Roberts, 2022).

This approach aims to identify applicants with diverse backgrounds and perspectives who demonstrate the potential to succeed in the program and contribute positively to the profession.

'The admissions/interview process alone is so expensive that most minority groups don't stand a chance.
This is further perpetuating the institutional barriers that prevent minority groups from obtaining power' (Colaianni et al., 2022).

Current research suggest Black students have a 50% attrition rate when pursuing a degree in higher education, specifically within STEM majors (Ford et al., 2021).
Reasons include:
- Lack of Knowledge,
- Lack of Financial Resources
- Feeling excluded (Ford et al., 2021).

Admissions Continued...

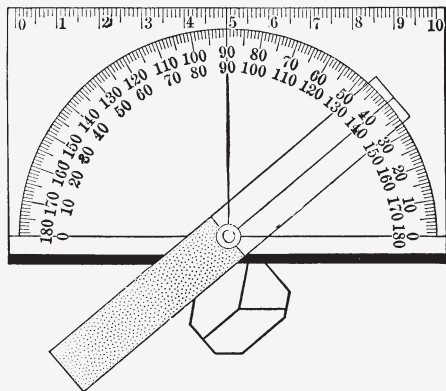***How holistic admissions can be implemented to increase recruitment of URM:***

1. **Diverse Applicant Pool:** Actively recruit students from diverse backgrounds by reaching out to schools, community organizations, and professional networks that serve URM populations. Promote the occupational therapy profession in communities where it may be less well-known or understood. For example, visiting local schools within or close to the New England Community with higher diversity indexes (1 being higher diversity), such as: University of Massachusetts (0.74) - Boston ; Harvard University (0.73), Massachusetts Institute of Technology (0.73) (Usanews, n.d.)

2. **Outreach and Support Programs:** Establish outreach programs and support networks to provide guidance and resources to URM students interested in pursuing careers in occupational therapy. This could include mentorship programs, pre-occupational therapy clubs, and informational sessions tailored to the needs and interests of URM communities. For example, create a powerpoint reviewing resources and available to Black students at Tufts (Africana Center, The National Black Caucus (NBOTC), Coalition of Occupational Therapy Advocates for Diversity (COTAD) answering questions related to diversity and inclusion within the program.

3. **Application Process:** Review admissions criteria and application materials to ensure they are accessible and inclusive. Consider alternative measures of potential and achievement, such as essays, personal statements, and letters of recommendation, which can provide insight into applicants' unique experiences and perspectives (Bleich et al., 2015; Jaegers et al., 2020; Roberts, 2022).

4. **Interviews and Selection:** Conduct interviews as part of the admissions process to assess applicants' interpersonal skills, cultural competence, and alignment with the values of the occupational therapy profession. Give weight to applicants' experiences and achievements that demonstrate a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (Robert, 2022).

5. **Financial Support:** Address financial barriers to education by offering scholarships, grants, and other forms of financial aid specifically for URM students. Additionally, provide information about financial aid options and resources for navigating the financial aspects of attending occupational therapy school. For example, directing students to scholarship programs like the American Occupational Therapy Foundation. Also create a scholarship solely for Black students.

6. **Retention and Support Services**: Once admitted, provide ongoing support and resources to ensure the success and retention of URM students. This may include academic advising, tutoring, counseling services, and opportunities for professional development and networking (Gates, 2018).

7. **Evaluation and Continuous Improvement :** Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of holistic admissions practices in recruiting and supporting URM students. Collect data on diversity metrics, retention rates, and student outcomes to identify areas for improvement and refine strategies over time.

By implementing holistic admissions practices that prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion, occupational therapy programs can create a more representative and culturally competent workforce that better reflects the communities they serve.

Lack of Exposure

There is a lack of knowledge about the OT profession due to limited exposure to minority communities (Ford et al., 2021). Many students may be unfamiliar with occupational therapy as a career option or may have misconceptions about what occupational therapists do. Addressing this lack of exposure requires targeted efforts to raise awareness of the profession and provide opportunities for undergraduate students to learn about OT and explore it as a potential career path.

Occupational therapy minority students were exposed to the profession, at a later age compared to non- OT minority students, with OT minority students exposed to OT between the ages of 19 and 25 years old and the non-OT minority students exposed to OT between the ages of 12 and 18 years old. (COLAIANNI, 2022).

Program Pathways for Increased Enrollment: Prospective Students receive course credit for summer classes and gain early insight to the program/ curriculum. These programs have been noted to increase divesity (Dressel et al. 2014)

For Example: Boston School of Med & Spelman, Early Acceptance Program

'I think you guys could start the exposure process sooner. I don't know how soon you guys begin to talk to students about health careers, but I think starting that conversation – and I don't just mean this purely for [XXX] – but I think, 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).

LACK OF EXPOSURE CONTINUED...

Strategies to consider:

1. Educational Outreach Programs: Collaborate with undergraduate institutions, high schools, and community organizations to develop educational outreach programs that introduce students to the field of occupational therapy. These programs could include presentations, workshops, and hands-on activities that highlight the role of occupational therapists in promoting health, well-being, and independence across the lifespan.

2. Shadowing and Observation Opportunities: Facilitate opportunities for undergraduate students to shadow occupational therapists in community, school based settings, early intervention, or medical setting, allowing them to observe firsthand the day-to-day responsibilities and interactions involved in the profession. This can help students gain a better understanding of the diverse settings in which occupational therapists work and the populations they serve. Connecting with Tufts Alum who currently work in these settings would be a valuable resource.

3. Internships and Experiential Learning: Offer internships, volunteer opportunities, or experiential learning programs that allow undergraduate students to gain practical experience in occupational therapy settings. These experiences can provide valuable insights into the profession and help students develop relevant skills and competencies. For example, during fieldwork training week, we can invite undergraduate students to act as volunteers during FW simulation and competency exams, providing hands on experience to life as a doctoral student.

4. Career Fairs and Information Sessions: Participate in career fairs and organize information sessions specifically targeted at undergraduate students to provide information about careers in occupational therapy. Highlight the various paths available within the profession, including clinical practice, direct care or managerial/leadership roles
research, education, entrepreneurship,
and advocacy. (See Spreadsheet at end of toolkit)

5. Collaboration with Undergraduate Programs: Collaborate with undergraduate programs in related fields such as psychology, sociology, and health sciences to integrate information about occupational therapy into existing coursework. Guest lectures, panel discussions, and interdisciplinary projects can help expose students to the principles and practices of occupational therapy.

6. Online Resources and Social Media: Utilize online platforms and social media channels to share information about occupational therapy careers, educational pathways, and professional opportunities. Create engaging content such as videos, blog posts, and success stories to reach a wider audience of undergraduate students. For instance, **AOTA list their top 10 ways to promote diversity in OT**, from this Tufts OT programs can implement these strategies through social media. Also, reposting/ collaborating with COTAD content across profiles.

7. Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives: Incorporate diversity and inclusion initiatives into outreach efforts to ensure that students from underrepresented backgrounds are included and supported. Highlight the importance of diversity in the occupational therapy workforce and showcase the contributions of diverse practitioners to the profession.

By implementing these strategies to increase exposure to the occupational therapy field among undergraduate students, we can help address the lack of awareness and misconceptions that may be barriers to diversifying the profession. Providing students with opportunities to learn about occupational therapy and explore it as a potential career can help cultivate a more diverse and inclusive workforce that reflects the needs and experiences of the communities we serve.
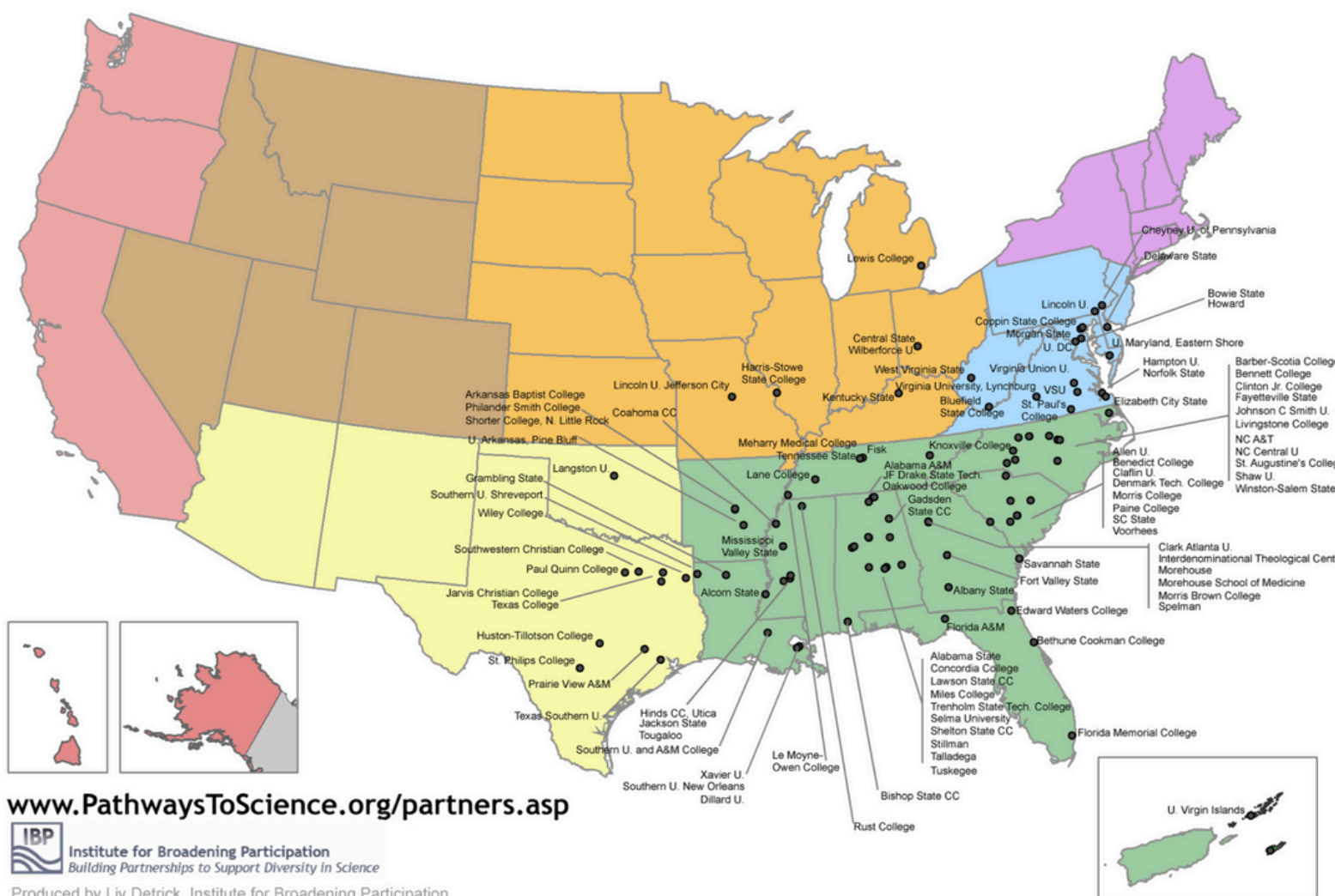
LOCATION

Recruitment from Historically Black Colleges & Universities

Recruiting URM students from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) into occupational therapy programs can be an effective strategy for increasing diversity within the profession. HBCUs have a long-standing tradition of providing educational opportunities to African American students and can serve as valuable recruitment pipelines for occupational therapy programs. Currently, there are 25 HBCU programs with 9 doctoral, 16 masters, 11 bachelors, and 4 associate occupational therapy programs (HBCU-colleges, 2024).

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are primarily located in the southeastern United States, with a significant concentration in states that had a substantial African American population during the era of segregation. While there are few OT programs located in southern states, Tufts can recruit Black students by attending these universities in person.

Historically Black Colleges & Universities

Alabama A&M University
Alabama State University
Albany State University
Alcorn State University
Allen University
Arkansas Baptist College
Barber-Scotia College
Benedict College
Bennett College
Bethune Cookman College
Bishop State Community College
Bluefield State College
Bowie State University
Central State University
Cheyney University of Pennsylvania
Claflin University
Clark Atlanta University
Clinton Junior College
Coahoma Community College
Concordia College
Coppin State College
Delaware State University
Denmark Technical College
Dillard University
Edward Waters College
Elizabeth City State University
Fayetteville State University
Fisk University
Florida A&M University
Florida Memorial College
Fort Valley State University
Gadsden State Community College
Grambling State University
Hampton University
Harris-Stowe State College
Hinds Community College
Howard University

Huston-Tillotson College
Interdenominational Theological Center
JF Drake State Technical College
Jackson State University
Jarvis Christian College
Johnson C Smith University
Kentucky State University
Knoxville College
Lane College
Langston University
Lawson State Community College
Le Moyne-Owen College
Lewis College
Lincoln University (Missouri)
Lincoln University (Pennsylvania)
Livingstone College
Meharry Medical College
Miles College
Mississippi Valley State University
Morehouse College
Morehouse School of Medicine
Morgan State University
Morris Brown College
Morris College
Norfolk State University
North Carolina A&T State University
North Carolina Central University
Oakwood University
Paine College
Paul Quinn College
Philander Smith College
Prairie View A&M University
Rust College
Saint Augustine's College
Saint Paul's College
Savannah State University
Selma University

Shaw University
Shelton State Community College
Shorter College
South Carolina State University
Southern University and A&M College
Southern University, New Orleans
Southern University, Shreveport
Southwestern Christian College
Spelman College
St. Philips College
Stillman College
Talladega College
Tennessee State University
Texas College
Texas Southern University
Tougaloo College
Trenholm State Technical College
Tuskegee University
University of Arkansas, Pine Bluff
University of Maryland, Eastern Shore
University of DC
University of the Virgin Islands
Virginia State University
Virginia Union University
Virginia University of Lynchburg
Voorhees College
West Virginia State College
Wilberforce University
Wiley College
Winston-Salem State University
Xavier University

Establishing transitional programs between Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and occupational therapy (OT) programs can provide a structured pathway for URM students from HBCUs to pursue careers in OT by offering mentorship, support, and resources to facilitate their transition into graduate-level OT programs.
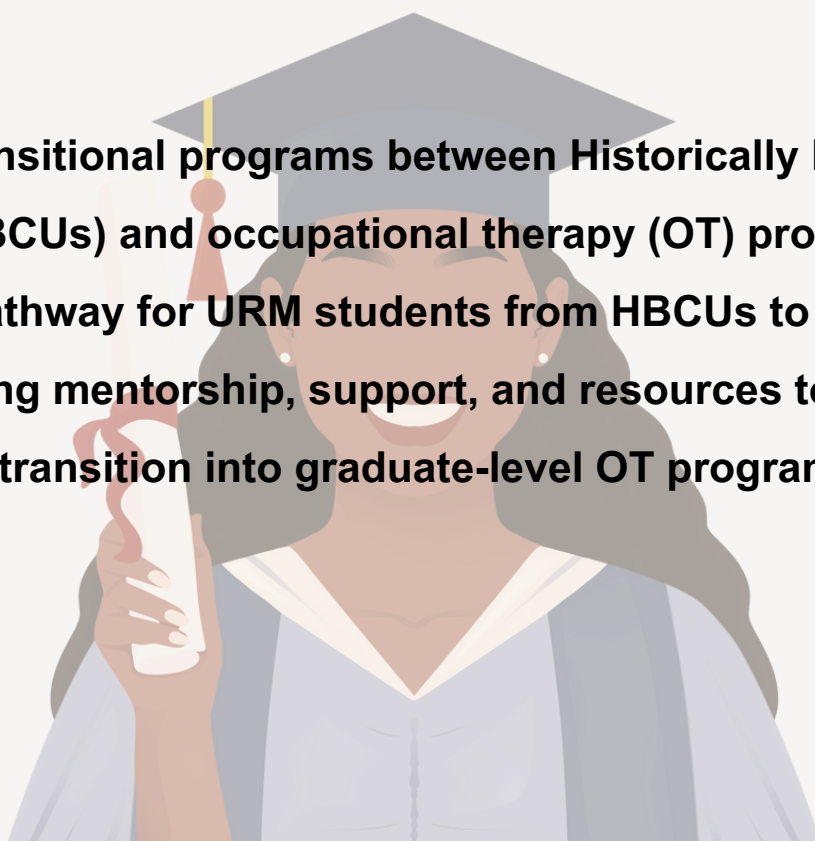
How transitional programs between HBCUs and OT programs can be structured:

1. Early Exposure and Recruitment: Begin by establishing partnerships between HBCUs and OT programs to facilitate early exposure and recruitment of URM students or their alumni. This may include organizing information sessions, career fairs, and workshops at HBCUs to introduce students to the field of OT and provide information about educational pathways and career opportunities.

2. Pre-OT Advising and Support: Offer pre-OT advising and support services to URM students at HBCUs who are interested in pursuing careers in OT. This may include academic advising, assistance with prerequisite coursework planning, and guidance on preparing competitive applications for OT graduate programs.

3. Transitional Programs and Summer Institutes: Develop program pathways and summer institutes specifically targeted at URM students from HBCUs who are interested in OT or advancing their OT degree. These programs can provide hands-on experiences, mentorship opportunities, and exposure to the field or advanced degree programs through workshops, seminars, and clinical observations. (Lizzaragara, 2011)

4. Dual-Degree Programs and Articulation Agreements: Establish dual-degree programs or articulation agreements between HBCUs and OT programs to streamline the transition of URM students from undergraduate to graduate-level OT education. These programs may allow students to earn a bachelor's degree from their HBCU and seamlessly transfer into an OT program for graduate study.

6. Mentorship and Professional Development: Provide mentorship opportunities through AOTA, NBOTC, COTAD programs. Mentors can provide guidance, support, and encouragement to help students navigate the OT admissions process, succeed in graduate school, and prepare for careers in the field (Brown et al., 2021) .

By implementing transitional programs between HBCUs and Tufts OT program, we can help increase diversity within the OT profession and create more equitable opportunities for URM students to pursue or advance their careers in OT. These programs play a crucial role in addressing systemic barriers to access and representation in the field and contribute to a more inclusive and diverse healthcare workforce.

Diversity Within the Program

Feelings of Racial/ Ethnic Discrimination & Anxiety

Prejudice experienced by underrepresented minority (URM) students in occupational therapy programs can manifest in various forms and can have significant impacts on their educational experiences and professional development. It's essential to acknowledge and address these issues to create more inclusive and equitable learning environments within occupational therapy programs.

Colaianni, et al., (2022) highlighted examples in their qualitative study ... as seen in these illustrative quotes:
"I witnessed a peer who did not want to work with a [B]lack student in my program" (Participant 374) and
"Our program professors will choose to grade more difficult for the students they feel aren't prepared and that seems to be the minorit[ies]" (Participant 447).
Participants also noted prejudice and discrimination of OTPs coming from other OTPs. (Colaianni el al.,2022)

From the moment you start school, you realize that you are in it by yourself, really .
[T]here should be more colored students so that we feel like we are a part of something. Do you know what it feels like to be the only Black person in the whole class? I hate when they say, 'Pick a partner, pick a group, or pick someone,' and I look around, and nobody wants to pick me. I'm the last one.
(Participant 14)(Colaianni el al., 2022)

Black occupational therapy students, practitioners, and educators felt a lack of belonging as a result of the profession's lack of inclusivity and diversity. This also makes it harder for individuals to confront issues with institutional racism, and it makes it harder for them to connect with other people. (Aldridge, 2022).

Diversity Continued ...

Common forms of prejudice experienced by URM students and strategies to address them:

1. **Microaggressions:** URM students may encounter microaggressions-subtle, everyday instances of discrimination or bias—based on their race, ethnicity, gender, or other identities. These can include comments, assumptions, or behaviors that undermine their sense of belonging and perpetuate stereotypes. It's crucial for faculty, staff, and peers to recognize and challenge microaggressions when they occur and to foster a culture of respect and inclusion.

2. **Tokenism:** URM students may feel tokenized or isolated in occupational therapy programs, where they may be among the few individuals from their racial or ethnic background. Being the only or one of a few URM students can contribute to feelings of pressure to represent their entire group and may lead to a sense of not truly belonging. It's important for programs to actively recruit and support a diverse student body to avoid tokenism and promote a sense of community and belonging for all students.

3. **Implicit Bias**: Implicit bias, or unconscious attitudes and stereotypes that influence behavior, can affect the experiences of URM students in occupational therapy programs. Faculty and staff may unknowingly hold biases that influence their interactions with URM students, such as lower expectations or differential treatment. Training programs can address implicit bias through awareness-raising workshops, diversity training, and ongoing self-reflection and dialogue.

4. **Limited Mentorship and Support**: URM students may face challenges in finding mentors and support systems within occupational therapy programs who understand URM students' unique experiences and can provide guidance and advocacy. Mentorship programs specifically tailored to the needs of URM students, as well as support networks and affinity groups, can help provide the necessary support and encouragement for success.

5. **Curricular and Cultural Relevance:** The curriculum and learning materials used in occupational therapy programs may not always reflect the experiences and perspectives of URM communities. Programs can work to integrate diverse perspectives, case studies, and cultural competency training into the curriculum to ensure that all students are prepared to work effectively with diverse populations.

6. **Lack of Representation in Leadership and Faculty:** URM students may also perceive a lack of representation among program leadership and faculty, which can contribute to feelings of marginalization and exclusion. Increasing diversity among faculty and leadership positions can help provide role models and advocates for URM students and contribute to a more inclusive learning environment.

To address prejudice experienced by URM students in occupational therapy programs, it's essential for programs to actively promote diversity, equity, and inclusion at all levels. This includes implementing policies and practices that foster a culture of respect and belonging, providing support and resources specifically targeted at URM students, and continuously evaluating and improving efforts to address systemic inequities within the program.

Lack of Funding

The lack of funding for underrepresented minority (URM) students to attend occupational therapy programs is a significant barrier to increasing diversity within the profession. Financial constraints can deter talented URM individuals from pursuing careers in occupational therapy and exacerbate existing disparities in access to higher education (Deck et al., 2022). Addressing this issue requires targeted efforts to provide financial support and resources to URM students who aspire to become occupational therapists.

The financial cost associated with allied health educational programs (Dawes, 2020; Dressel et al., 2014) including OT (Ford et al., 2021), has been cited as a deterrent to racial and ethnic diversity in these programs.

"I think [it] might come down to a question of money? I had an exposure to OT as a high schooler in a large medical town. If I lived in rural or an underserved community, what are the chance of my exposure to this field? Applying and attending graduate school is also expensive. Many of my cohorts are being supported by family as well as a using federal loans. If a family or the student can't support them during this time as well as pay the 100 dollars it take[s] for one application, how can we expect to see...diversity? When the majority of our American upper SES [socioeconomic status] is [W]hite? Additionally all of the items needed for an application (specifically observation hours) would be incredibly difficult if you were working jobs to help pay for undergraduate" [education] (Participant 203). (Colaiani et al.,2022).

"I felt I had to start working to
financially
support my family instead of spending
more years in school. I didn't think I
could
afford a health professions education
(King et al., 2023).

Lack of Funding Continued...

1. Scholarships and Grants: Establish scholarships and grants specifically targeted at URM students pursuing occupational therapy education. These financial awards can help cover tuition, fees, books, living, and other educational expenses, making it more feasible for URM students to attend occupational therapy programs.

2. Financial Aid Counseling: Provide URM students with access to financial aid counseling and resources to navigate the complex process of applying for financial assistance. This may include assistance with completing financial aid forms, exploring scholarship opportunities, and understanding loan options.

3. Tuition Waivers and Fee Reductions: Offer tuition waivers or fee reductions for URM students based on financial need or academic merit. Waiving or reducing tuition costs can significantly alleviate the financial burden for URM students and make occupational therapy education more accessible.

4. Work-Study Programs: Implement work-study programs that provide URM students with opportunities to work part-time while attending occupational therapy programs. These programs can help students earn income to cover educational expenses while gaining valuable professional experience in the field.

5. Loan Forgiveness Programs: Advocate for loan forgiveness programs or repayment assistance programs targeted at URM students who commit to working in underserved communities or in areas with high need. These programs can help alleviate the burden of student loan debt for URM students and incentivize them to pursue careers in occupational therapy.
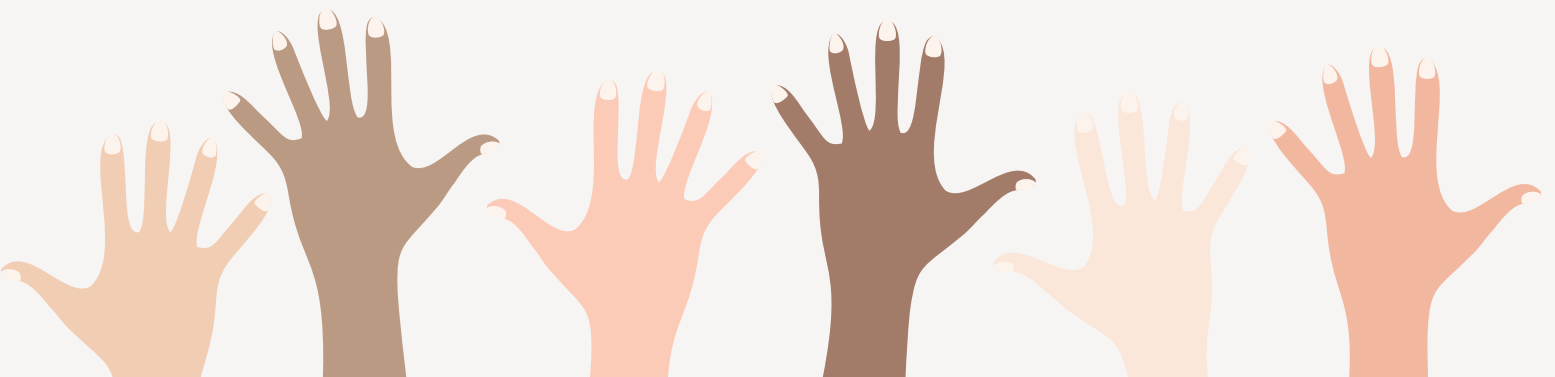
7. **Fundraising and Alumni Support**: Launch fundraising campaigns and engage alumni networks to generate financial support for URM students. Alumni contributions, donations, and endowments can create scholarships and other financial assistance programs specifically designated for URM students in occupational therapy programs.

8. **Advocacy and Policy Change**: Advocate for policies and initiatives at the institutional, state, and national levels that prioritize funding and support for URM students pursuing careers in occupational therapy. This may involve collaborating with policymakers, professional organizations, and advocacy groups to address systemic barriers to access and equity in education. For instance, the Allied Health Workforce Diversity Act of 2021 SEC. 2. supports efforts to increase opportunities for low-income students by providing funding to accredited postsecondary education programs in occupational therapy, respiratory therapy, physical therapy, speech and language pathology, and audiology.

By implementing these strategies, occupational therapy programs can work to overcome the lack of funding for URM students and create more equitable opportunities for aspiring occupational therapists from diverse backgrounds. Investing in the education and professional development of URM students is essential for increasing diversity within the occupational therapy profession and addressing health disparities in underserved communities.

Mentorship

Mentorship plays a crucial role in supporting URM students in occupational therapy (OT) programs. A strong mentorship relationship can provide guidance, support, and encouragement to URM students as they navigate their educational and professional journeys in OT. Student mentorship is essential for the establishment of a strong and meaningful relationship between faculty and students (Dressel et al., 2014 & Gates, 2018).

Mentorship is often cited as a means to promote diversity in health professions (Dressel et al., 2014; Ford et al., 2021). however Dressel found that only a mere 10% of the racial minority students received a mentor.

Mentorship programs can support the occupational therapy field by creating an atmosphere in which students can learn more about a career, and begin to take the steps to enter the profession, while gaining hands on experience from an individual that can guide them throughout their journey. (Schoen et al., 2021).

Key aspects of mentorship for URM students in OT programs:

1. **Identifying Mentorship Needs**: Start by identifying the specific needs and goals of URM students in OT programs. Understand the unique challenges and barriers URM students may face, such as lack of representation, imposter syndrome, or cultural adjustment, and tailor mentorship efforts to address these needs (Schoen et al., 2021; King et al., 2023).

2. **Matching Mentors and Mentees:** Match URM students with mentors who share similar backgrounds, experiences, and career interests. Having mentors who can relate to URM students' experiences and understand their cultural perspectives can foster a sense of connection and trust (Schoen et al., 2021).

3. **Academic and Professional Guidance:** Provide academic and professional guidance to URM students through mentorship relationships. Mentors can offer advice on coursework, research opportunities, fieldwork placements, doctoral study, and career pathways within the field of OT.

5. **Cultural Competency and Advocacy:** Promote cultural competency and advocacy through mentorship relationships. Mentors can help URM students develop cultural competence skills, navigate cultural differences in healthcare settings, and advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion within the profession of OT.

6. **Emotional Support and Encouragement:** Offer emotional support and encouragement to URM students as they navigate the challenges of graduate school and the OT profession. Mentors can provide a listening ear, offer empathy and understanding, and help students build resilience and self-confidence (Kitchens et al., 2023).

By prioritizing mentorship for URM students in OT programs, Tufts can help support their academic and professional success, promote diversity and inclusion within the OT profession, and create a more equitable and supportive learning environment for all students.

Tufts University Campus Climate Survey

> Conducted spring of 2022, Tufts University developed a community survey to identify priorities and opportunities for change, growth, and improvement.

> Themes gathered from survey results:
> - Experiences of not belonging and lack of inclusion
> - Bias, harassment, and discrimination
> - Academic, professional, and financial stress

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REPORT

> Results: Students and faculty from URM, reported less positive experiences than other racial groups who reported more positive experiences

> Within the Tufts Occupational Therapy Program, routine assessments of both student experiences can be conducted using gradSERU to improve elements of the program.

gradSERU: Student Survey on perspective of program Experience
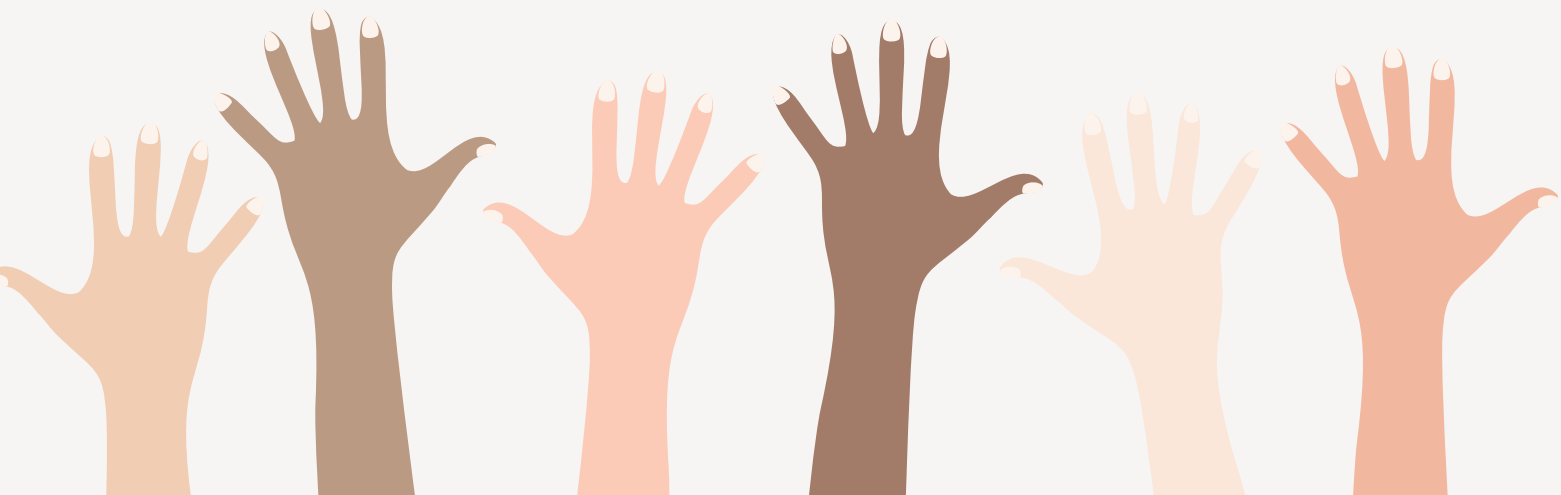
National Name Exchange

The National Name Exchange was **established to help match graduate schools with students from underrepresented groups interested in graduate education.**

(NNE) is an association of fifty-five prestigious universities across the country that gathers and shares each year the names of its gifted but underrepresented sophomore, junior, and senior undergraduate students.

When requesting program information online, NNE students self-identified by filling out the NNE online request form. Ensuring that member universities continue to recognize suitable candidates for graduate programs at participating institutions is the goal of the NNE.

Other initiatives carried out by NNE universities support the national initiatives aimed at increasing the number of traditionally underrepresented individuals enrolled in graduate programs.

The National Name Exchange - For Students

The National Name Exchange was established to help match graduate schools with minority students interested in graduate education.

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OUTCOME MEASURES

1

Enrollment Rates

Enrollment rates in occupational therapy programs refer to the percentage of eligible individuals who are enrolled in accredited occupational therapy education programs. These rates can vary based on factors such as program capacity, applicant pool, admission criteria, and demand for occupational therapy services.

2

Graduation Rates

A graduation rate measures how numerous students who started within the same cohort will graduate with them. This rate shows how numerous students finish their degrees in a opportune way upon enrolling.

3

Attrition Rates

An attrition rate measures the number of students who leave a program before actually completing the program.

Additional Resources

Social Media's Influence in Recruitment:

- Social media plays a vital role in the lives of many people especially the youth of today. Placing recruitment on various platforms like Instagram, Twitter, Facebook may increase visibility

https://www.pathwaystoscience.org/pdf/Using_SocialMedia_REU.pdf

Faculty Training / Educational Resources:

Compiled are various resources faculty can use to help explore areas of improvement needed within the curriculum and supports faculty can provide to URM students.

https://www.pathwaystoscience.org/pdf/BroadeningParticipation_Working_with_Faculty.pdf

https://www.pathwaystoscience.org/pdf/Gradschool_QuestionsChecklist.pdf

https://www.pathwaystoscience.org/pdf/Recruitment_Strategies.pdf

https://www.pathwaystoscience.org/pdf/BroadeningParticipation_Recruitment_and_Retention.pdf

https://www.pathwaystoscience.org/pdf/BP_Resources_for_Faculty.pdf

Student Resources:

Below are Links to supports at Tufts University accessible for URM students. Students should be aware of these resources when considering applying.

Equity and Inclusion Resources
Graduate School Diversity Office (GSDO),
Useful graduate student organizations

PROGRAM PATHWAYS:

https://www.spelman.edu/docs/health-careers-program/boston-med-early-medical-school-selection-program.pdf?sfvrsn=3c686f51_0

FUTURE RESEARCH

This project covers suggestions and examples for the recruitment of URM students. Future research should explore the following:

1.   Perspectives of current OTP minorities and their experiences within the field of OT.

2. Retention strategies to maintain URM student numbers once enrolled in OT Programs

3. Preference for Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) versus Historically Black College (HBCU) for OT graduate school amongst URM students.

Conclusion

Graduate programs serve as the bridge to make these changes in diversity and inclusion for our profession. Tufts University can strategically implement the resources provided within this toolkit to continue strides towards a more inclusive classroom. By exposing URM to the OT profession we are closing the racial gap in order to represent the diverse populations we serve.

References