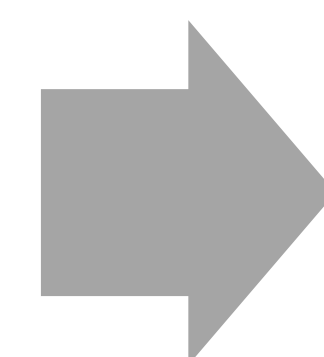


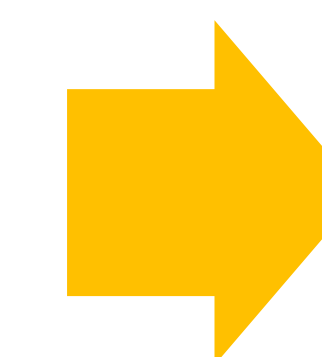
OT students are experiencing a variety of emotions entering transitional period



The SOTA buddy system is created as a social/emotional/academic resource



While some students perceive benefits, there are barriers to connection identified as well



It is recommended to foster community among cohorts through more events, incentivizing participation, and redefining OT departmental support

Introduction

- Research shows social support can reduce stress in grad students^{1, 2, 3}
- The SOTA (Student Occupational Therapy Association) Buddy system was formed to provide that social support during transition into grad school.
- Anecdotally, there were OT students who had nonexistent relationships with their SOTA Buddy

My project is a Needs Assessment to determine students' current perception of the SOTA Buddy system and how it could be improved

Participants

- Target audience: 1st and 2nd year Tufts OT cohorts
- The interviews were first-come first-serve for whoever expressed interest and submitted required consent forms
- 6/8 interviewees were 2nd year students

Methods

Part 1: Surveys

Created and revised survey

Collected survey data for 2 weeks

Part 2: Interviews

Contacted interested participants for consent forms

Conducted/audio recorded 8 interviews in total

Part 3: Mixed Methods Analysis

Surveys

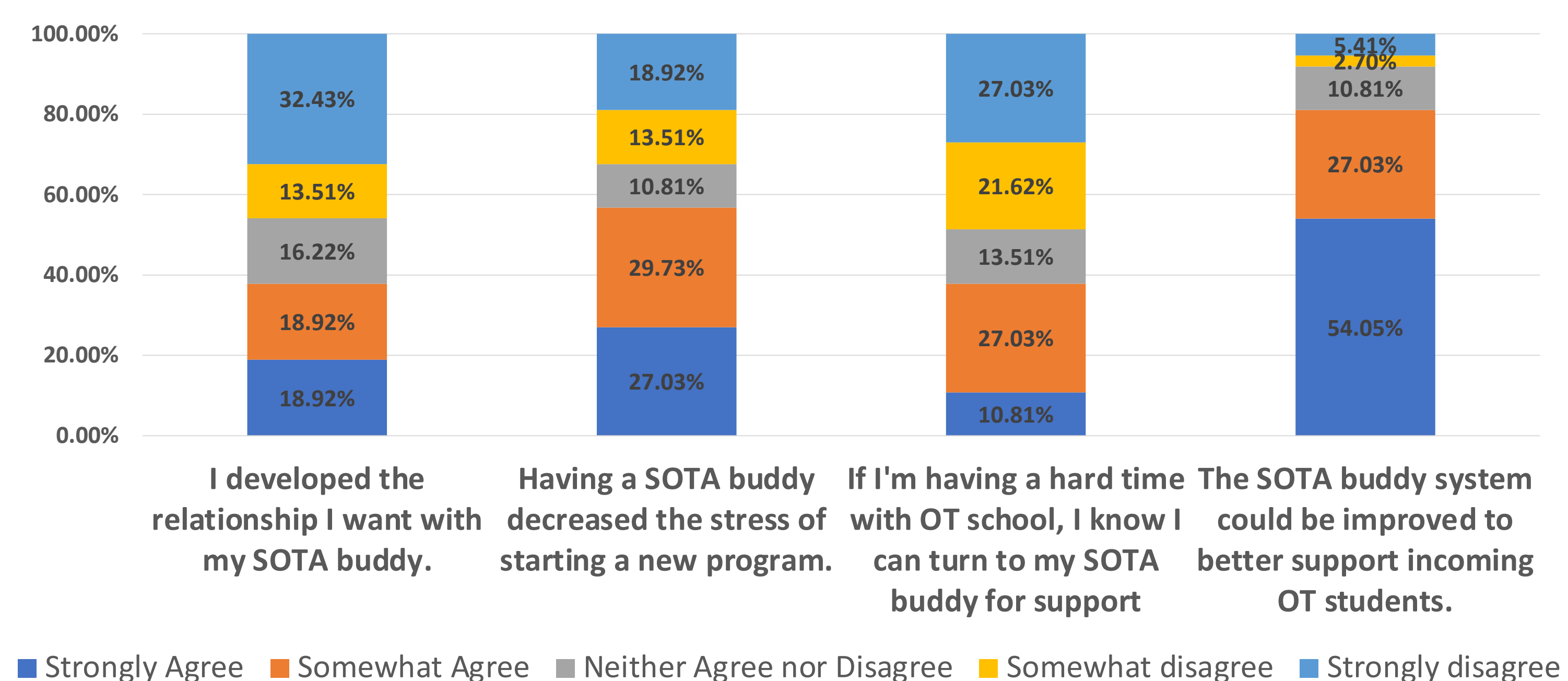
- Exported qualitative questions from survey
- Created codes and organized responses into codes
- Visualized quantitative data

Interviews

- Edited Zoom transcripts for clarity
- Coded overall concepts and line-by-line
- Organized codes into themes

Results

Surveys Results: 43 responses total, 37 usable for data analysis



Interview Results:

Prominent Emotions During Transition

- Excitement
 - "I felt excited that I, you know, had someone reaching out to me from the program. I was very excited about my decision to come to Tufts" - #7
- Stress
 - "It was very easy for us first years to spiral into 'Well, we could know/have to know XYZ'" - #1
 - "It's challenging in the beginning to make friends ... because people are so focused on like starting classes" - #4

Perceived Purpose of SOTA Buddy

- To ease transition to grad school
- Act as an academic and social/emotional resource
- Answer questions about the program
- Provide advice/perspective

Barriers to SOTA Buddy Relationship

- Busy work/class schedules
- Lack of in-person meetings
- Limited mental/emotional capacity
- Negative feelings
- Lack of outreach from mentor or mentee

Result of Non-existent Relationship with SOTA Buddy

- Sought out informal mentors
- Became more interested in networking among cohorts
 - "There was not enough meaningful intermingling to break those initial clique formations" - #3
 - "I know like half the ... second year cohort, but not the other half. I would love to have an opportunity to like talk with them a little bit more" - #7

Recs for Stakeholders & Limitations

Short Term Recommendations:

Plan more frequent events similar to SOTA social events (e.g. ice cream social structure)

Mandate 1 in-person meeting in beginning

Offer SOTA buddy program as opt-in/opt-out

Incentivize participation from both mentor/mentee

Clarify roles/responsibilities

Long Term Recommendations:

Create resource bank for mentors

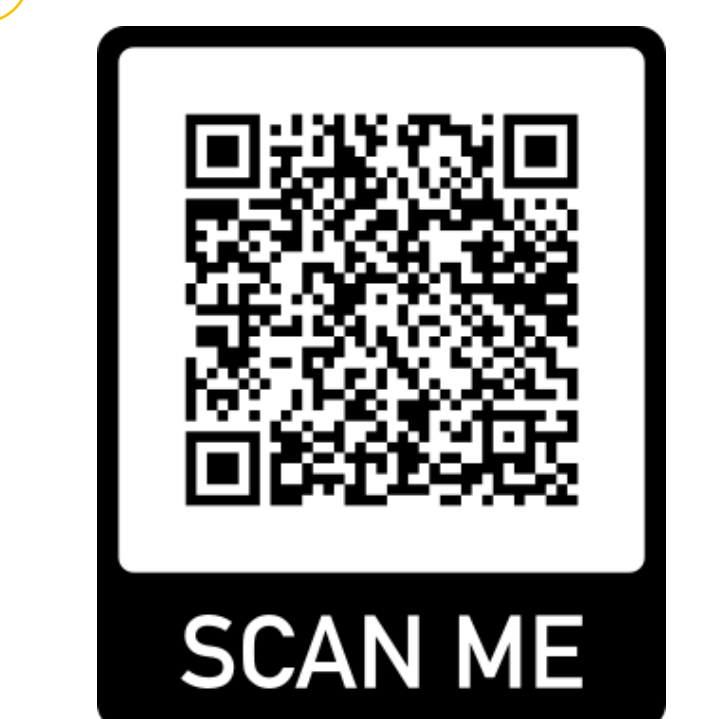
Develop mentorship workshop to provide skillset

Develop OT departmental structure to decrease mental load on SOTA mentor

Limitations

Did not triangulate qualitative data from survey with interviews

For complete list of recommendations:



DEC Student Outcomes

- Presentation for SOTA E-board and SOTA faculty mentor
- Qualitative analysis skills
- Networking with 1st and 2nd year cohorts
- Meeting w/ new SOTA chairs to provide short term recommendations

