Economy’s Impact
Fieldwork Educators
Program Accreditation
Reducing expenses while maintaining the quality of the educational experience for Master of Occupational Therapy (MOT) program students is the challenge faced by the program in these rough economic times, according to Dr. Aaron Eakman, director of the Idaho State University MOT program. State revenue downturns have affected education as a whole, both K-12 and higher education, and the university has asked all departments and programs to be ready to cut the state budget for the 2009-2010 academic year by up to 12 percent. "We’ve had to tighten our belts," Dr. Eakman said.

While the salary lines for all full-time faculty members in next year’s budget have been maintained, nearly every other account has seen large decreases. One example of these cuts is travel for the academic fieldwork coordinator, who will now rely more heavily on telephone and e-mail contact with fieldwork students, and reserve trips to the fieldwork sites for situations when problems or other exceptional circumstances arise. Additionally, a review of professional journal subscriptions has been conducted to reduce library expenses while assuring that access to information via online sources can be maintained.

While state funds will be decreased, Dr. Alex Urfer, chair of the Department of Physical and Occupational Therapy, takes some comfort in the fact that the department is lucky enough to have some accounts that contain money that is not under state control. This includes money paid by students in professional fees for the physical therapy and occupational therapy programs and various funds contributed to the department, which continue under the department’s control. Some of the cuts in the state funds can be absorbed into these local accounts; however, Dr. Urfer notes that there is some apprehension in shifting basic educational expenses (such as personnel costs) from what were considered to be stable state accounts to more volatile local accounts.

Dr. Urfer notes that, in addition to budget cuts, efforts to enhance department revenues are being undertaken. These include expanding patients seen in the department’s clinics and seeking to hire a graduate assistant who can aid with clinic expansion and assist faculty in grant-seeking activities. And in an optimistic vein, Dr. Eakman notes that admissions to the MOT program are trending upward, perhaps due to occupational therapy’s status as a recession-proof profession. “Even in these hard economic times,” he said, “health professions, particularly occupational therapy, continue to have excellent employment outlooks.” Increased admissions would bring increased professional fees to the program, helping to mitigate the state cuts.

Despite the difficult times, Dr. Eakman remains confident in the program’s future noting that, because Idaho State has the health care mission for the state, the program can count on the support of both the university and its Kasanka College of Health Professions.

Echoing this optimism, Dr. Urfer sees the value of being forced to review curricula and consider whether certain courses could be consolidated. “This is doable,” he said, “and in the long run, it will help us to be a better, more efficient department.”

Rough Economy Forces Responses by Master of Occupational Therapy Program
Fieldwork Educators Essential Component of MOT Education

Fieldwork educators are the people who bring everything together to make MOT students’ clinical affiliations “the capstone of their overall education,” according to Dr. Bryan Gee, academic fieldwork coordinator for the ISU Master of Occupational Therapy program. “They are the glue that makes for a meaningful graduate,” said Dr. Gee.

The therapists who supervise students during their clinical affiliations are “essential to the success of the program,” agreed Dr. Aaron Eakman, director of the MOT program, who noted that supervisors at all levels (part-time practicum experiences as well as short-term level I and longer-term level II placements) are all appreciated immensely by the program. This success, noted Dr. Gee, includes the program’s 100 percent NBCOT examination pass rate and the praise for the competency and maturity of MOT graduates received from the recent ACOTE accreditation team.

While he sees the classroom portion of the program as an important factor in the successes, he stated that the fieldwork educators are the ones who build crucial critical reasoning skills in the students and who transform them into entry-level practitioners.

Fieldwork Educators Are Eligible for Affiliate Faculty Status

Benefits:
- Enjoy library circulation privileges equivalent to those received by other university faculty.
- Access to Reed Gymnasium and associated recreational facilities (ID card required).”
- Total fitness appraisals and supervised wellness programming (fees may apply).
- Access to most physical education activity classes (aerobics, karate, dance, etc.) at normal faculty fee rate.
- Listing in appropriate publications of the University.
- Receipt of a certificate of acknowledgment.

For more information or to apply, contact Bryan Gee at geebryan@isu.edu or (208) 282-3629.

Affiliate Faculty Status

- Receipt of a certificate of acknowledgment.
- Listing in appropriate publications of the University.
- Use of the ISU Computer Center and all microcomputer laboratories for University business at no charge.
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Fieldwork supervisors (left to right)
Greg Hepworth and Todd Williams

Initial Fieldwork Educator’s Conference Held

Reinforcing the connection between academic instruction and fieldwork experiences was a basic goal of the fieldwork educators conference held March 14 at ISU. Fieldwork educators were invited to learn about the Master of Occupational Therapy (MOT) program’s curricular themes and ways that those themes can be carried out during students’ fieldwork experiences.

In addition to information about the curricular themes, faculty from ISU’s MOT program presented brief educational sessions regarding site-specific fieldwork objectives, ways to address psychosocial needs during fieldwork, and supervision strategies for fieldwork students. Time for lunch and networking was also provided and PDU certificates were available for those therapists attending.

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ISU Student Awarded National Scholarship

Heather Corbet, a third-year Master of Occupational Therapy student, was one of three women selected in a national competition to receive the initial annual E.K. Wise scholarship awarded by the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA). The scholarship is awarded with the intention of supporting development of women who can meet society’s diverse occupational needs in underserved areas or communities.

In order to win the award, Heather demonstrated a sustained record of outstanding academic achievement, leadership and community service, and membership in AOTA. The awards are granted annually, in the amount of $5,000, to three female students pursuing a post-baccalaureate, entry-level program in occupational therapy.

Student Occupational Therapy Association 2008–09 School Year

The Student Occupational Therapy Association (SOTA) had a very successful year. For Occupational Therapy Month in April, SOTA was very involved! The club did a raffle as a fundraiser. Each day of the month in April a prize was raffled, ranging from free tans to restaurant gift certificates. Prizes were donated by local businesses and collated by SOTA members.

As a second fundraiser, SOTA members also cleaned Garrison Hall. To prepare the facility for accreditation, which occurred in April, several projects needed to be completed. A list of tasks was prepared by OT faculty; and SOTA members met as a group to accomplish the things needing to be done. Pizza was also delivered to make the evening a sure success!

To promote occupational therapy in the community and provide education to children, two second-year students were able to be involved with backpack awareness. This presentation given to elementary school children explains the importance of wearing backpacks correctly. The SOTA members involved had a great experience and the elementary students were able to learn the importance of properly wearing a backpack.

SOTA is excited about the things accomplished in the 2008–09 year and is looking forward to success in the future.
A warm thank you to the following, for their vision and generosity on behalf of the Occupational Therapy Program.

Shari Tayar
Drs. Arthur and Marcia Lloyd
Dana Howell
Annice Baldwin

For questions regarding your gift to the ISU Occupational Therapy program, please contact Joan Streep Hansen at (208) 282-4292 or hansjoan@isu.edu.

ACOTE Accreditation Team Visits MOT Program

The accreditation of the Master of Occupational Therapy (MOT) program at Idaho State University will be extended according to members of the on-site accreditation team that visited the ISU program April 1-3, 2009. Although the official notice of re-accreditation and the length of the accreditation period granted will not be known until review by the full Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE), the on-site accreditation team praised the program as a “collaborative, integrated program” that is in substantial compliance with accreditation standards.

The on-site visit provides the accreditation team a “glimpse” of the program, according to Dr. Alex Urfer, chair of the Department of Physical and Occupational Therapy, and gives the program an opportunity to present itself in the best light. Additionally, according to Dr. Urfer, the visit provides a learning opportunity by which information from the outside world is made available for improving the program.

The visit of the on-site accreditation team was the culmination of a process that began a year ago when the faculty began an intensive review of the program’s curriculum and administrative procedures, according to Dr. Aaron Eakman, director of the MOT program. This review resulted in a 536-page self-study document that was sent to ACOTE for paper review before the on-site visit. Both Dr. Eakman and Dr. Bryan Gee, as well as Dr. Kelly Thompson attended educational programs to learn how to conduct the self-study and how to demonstrate compliance with ACOTE standards. Work on the self-study became an intense focus for all the faculty members, who met 2-to-4 times monthly to review documents and plan for the study’s completion.

Final action regarding the re-accreditation of the MOT program will be taken by ACOTE based on the review of the self-study and the report of the on-site team.

ACOTE, as the accreditation body of the American Occupational Therapy Association, accredits approximately 275 occupational therapy and occupational therapy assistant educational programs and is recognized and fully compliant with all requirements of both the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).