Department of Occupational Therapy Entry-Level Capstone Projects

Department of Occupational Therapy

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Implementation of the Capstone Focus Area Selection Tool during an Education-Based Capstone Experience

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Implementation of the Capstone Focus Area Selection Tool during an Education-Based Capstone Experience

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Introduction

- The aims of this capstone project were to gain experience in education from a professor's perspective and to learn all facets of a graduate program from the preparation, facilitation, and self-reflection in relation to three courses in an entry-level OTD program:
  - OTD8273: Occupational Therapy Interventions III, Physical Disabilities
  - OTD8101: Introduction to Didactic, Clinical & Research Experiences
  - OTD8142: Occupational and Contextual Analysis
- Another aim of this project was to implement the Capstone Focus Area Selection Tool (C-FAST) into the first-year course known as OTD8101 to help guide first-year students in their doctoral capstone selection process.

Capstone Focus Areas

Education	Research Skills	Clinical Practice Skills	Theory Development
Leadership	Administration	Program and Policy Development	Advocacy

Figure 1
The Eight Focus Areas of the Doctoral Capstone

Site Description

- The site where I completed my capstone experience was Nova Southeastern University (NSU), Tampa Bay Regional Campus.
- My experience took place with a focus area in education within the Department of Occupational Therapy.
- My mentor for this experience was Dr. Thomas Decker, OTD, EdD, OTR/L.

Summary of Needs Assessment

Education

- The field of OT is expected to continue to increase steadily in the coming years. OT programs lead students to the path of becoming a clinician, however, academia is not emphasized as a possible path.
- OT students do not receive formal education about faculty roles or how to transition to the role of academia as part of their curriculum.
- Education-based capstones would allow students to gather experience in the world of academia and learn if academia is a feasible path for them.
- This capstone experience could aid in the reduction of the ever-growing faculty shortage in OT programs across the country.

C-FAST

- Although there is no current literature to depict the need for this tool, as OTD programs continue to increase it will be indispensable to implement the C-FAST to assist NSU OTD students in the selection of focus area(s) based on their attributes and values.
- The C-FAST was created in Fall 2021 and was aimed to be implemented into the NSU OTD program's curriculum in the first semester of the program.

Literature Review Summary

Education

- There is minimal literature on education-based capstones and how they can lead to the path of academia.
- However, it is noted that the transition to academia is challenging for skilled clinicians who do not have previous teaching experience (Lockhart-Keene & Potvin, 2018; Murray et al., 2014b; Smallfield & Wood, 2019).
- The available literature on this transition is limited as most are from first-hand accounts or small population sizes.

C-FAST

- There was no current literature depicting the need for a tool to help students choose between the eight focus areas.
- In the Fall 2021 semester, Dr. Thomas Decker led a group of six OTD students through a research study to construct an 80-item tool to assist future entry-level OTD students in selecting preferred capstone focus area(s) that best align with personal attributes and future interests (See Figure 2) (Decker, 2021).
- Over 89% of the students who completed the feedback survey agreed that the C-FAST was helpful in providing guidance for the capstone selection process (Decker, 2021).
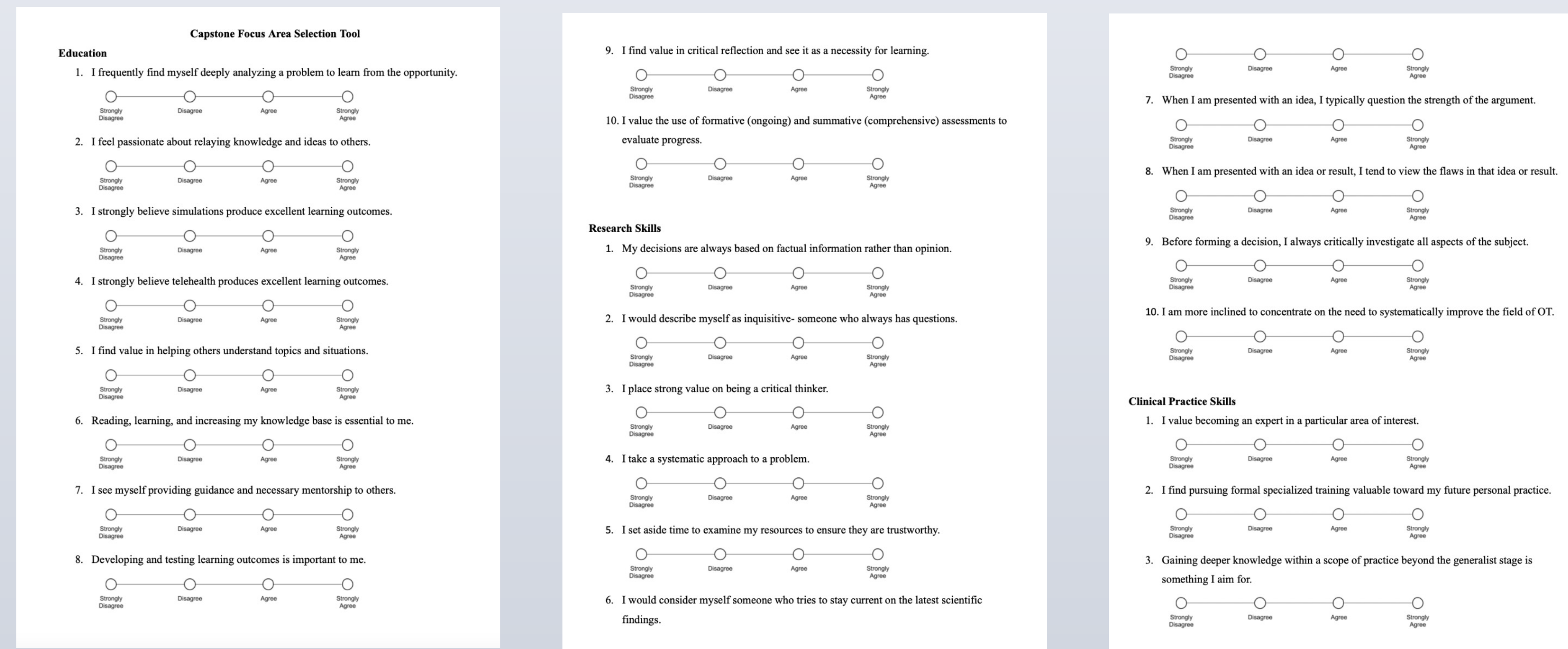
Figure 2
Pages 1, 2, and 3 of the C-FAST

Capstone Project Description

Education

- A 16-week education experience to learn all facets of a graduate program from the preparation, facilitation, and self-reflection in relation to three courses in an entry-level OTD program and the roles of a faculty member.
- The experience of understanding how to navigate the learning management system (Canvas) from an instructor's perspective.
- Effective feedback was provided to students to enhance their learning after each assignment following approval by Dr. Decker.
- A presentation was given at each institute (I, II, and III) in the summer term.
  - Topics: Introduction to the Course, SMART Goals, and Level 2/Professionalism and the C-FAST.
- There were weekly program meetings with all faculty members and additional faculty meetings to address policies.

C-FAST

- The C-FAST was completed by the cohort of 2025 in the eighth week of OTD8101.
- The students received their scores within one week of the assignment due date.
- A presentation was given to explain why the C-FAST was created, what the scores meant, and provide an opportunity to answer any questions.
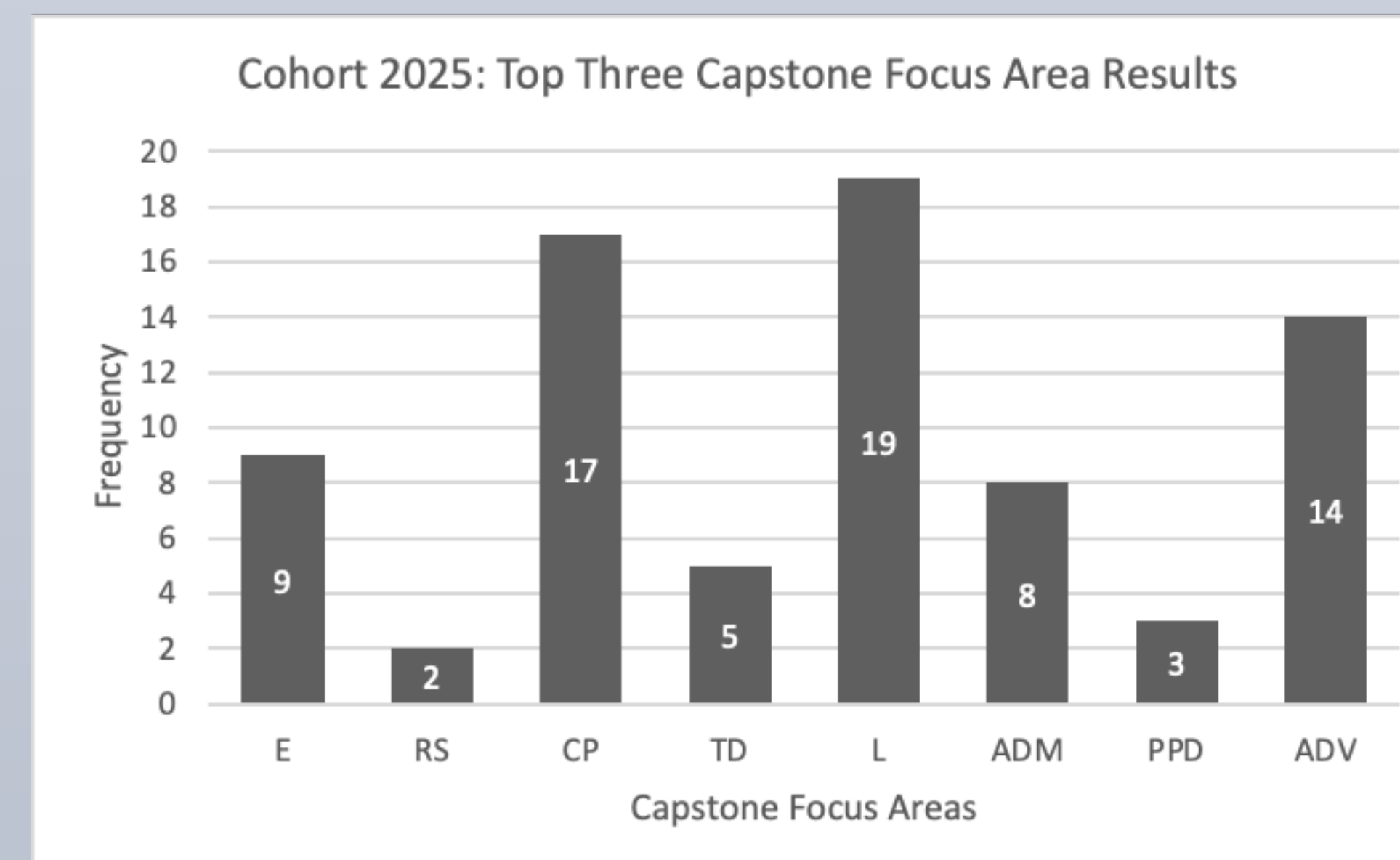
Figure 3
Cohorts 2025: Top Three Capstone Focus Areas

Results indicated Leadership (24.68%), Clinical Practice Skills (22.08%), and Advocacy (18.18%) had the highest frequencies in the cohort. Conversely, the lowest frequencies were found among Research Skills (2.60%), Program and Policy Development (3.90%), and Theory Development (6.49%) (see Figure 3).

Learning Objective Achieved

- Gain experience in the navigation of a learning management system from an instructor's perspective.
- Understand how to provide effective feedback to students to enhance their learning.
- Determine and list the requirements while engaging in activities that would support a future career in education.
- Administer the C-FAST to the cohort of 2025 to aid in the selection of their future capstone focus area.

(Tradeline, 2018)

Implications for OTD Programs

- Increased awareness of the benefits of an education-based capstone experience.
- Learning how to give effective feedback to increase the likelihood of others' success.
- Understanding the process to become a lab assistant and the appropriate progression to later become a faculty member at NSU.
- A well-rounded clinical work experience can increase the odds of education employment.
- Continued implementation of the C-FAST in subsequent years in order to later determine the reliability and validity of the tool.

REFERENCES & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS