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## Strategies for Enhancing Racially Diverse Student Satisfaction in Graduate-Level Occupational Therapy Programs

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# STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING RACIALLY DIVERSE STUDENT SATISFACTION IN GRADUATE-LEVEL OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY PROGRAMS

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## ABSTRACT

A survey investigated satisfaction levels of racially diverse, graduate-level OT students at NSU and strategies for enhancing student satisfaction to ultimately meet the OT profession's diversity goals. Overall, racially diverse students were satisfied with their OT program experience and identified diverse faculty and scholarship opportunities as desired resources needed for continuation in OT programs.

## METHODS

1. A web-based questionnaire was deployed to survey racially diverse students in Nova Southeastern University's graduate-level occupational therapy programs.
2. The questionnaire was distributed to current students, former students, and alumni, identified as attending Nova Southeastern University's graduate-level occupational therapy programs via emails sent by occupational therapy program administration.
3. The emails included a short description of the purpose of the questionnaire, a participant letter indicating informed consent, a copy of the recruitment flyer with a QR code, and a link to access the one-time, web-based questionnaire.
4. Once the survey had closed, the collected data was downloaded from the REDCap survey system and exported into the latest version of IBM Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) for data analysis.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the demographics of survey participants?
2. What is the satisfaction level of racially diverse students with their OT program experience?
3. What resources that may be offered by OT programs do students perceive as most supportive to their continuation in an OT program?

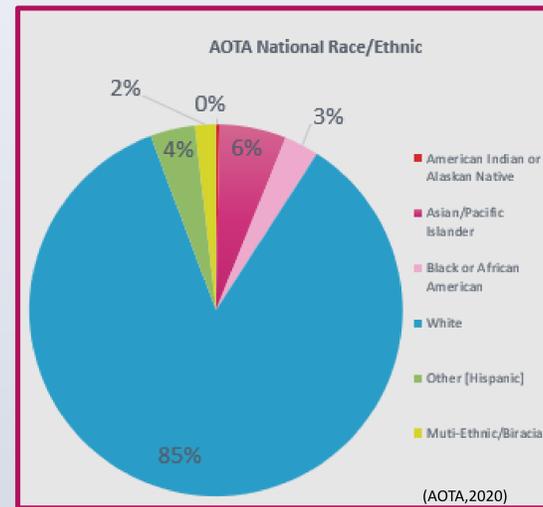
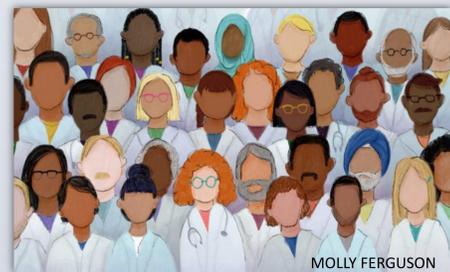
## BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

### Diversity in OT

- AOTA's Vision 2025 is a statement of commitment to represent the OT profession's charge of being "intentionally inclusive and equitable" and to "embrace diversity in all its forms" explicitly (AOTA, 2018).
- There are clear disparities in the percentages of employed occupational therapists of specific racial and ethnic backgrounds when compared to the general population (Brotherton et al., 2021). Research has demonstrated that diverse practitioners improve healthcare outcomes for minority populations and may help alleviate racial and ethnic health disparities (Mattingly, 2018).
- The OT profession is tasked with meeting the needs of the diverse populations it seeks to serve (Byrne, 2015)

### Retaining Racially Diverse Students & Satisfaction

- The goal should be to not only recruit diverse students, but also to retain students by creating an environment where students feel accepted, acknowledged, and thrive along with their peers.
- The OT profession acknowledges a need to transform and diversify. Despite program efforts, research suggests the need to be more inclusive of diverse students and increase support for those students through graduation and into practice (Watson, 2013).



RESULTS Figure 1. Current breakdown of racial diversity in OT profession

Table 1

### Participant Demographics

Characteristic	Frequency (%)
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	
Hispanic/Latino	6 (25%)
Asian	4 (16.7%)
Black	8 (33.3%)
African or Caribbean	1 (4.2%)
Bi/Multi-racial or Other	5 (20.8%)
<b>Gender</b>	
Female	22 (91.7%)
Male	2 (8.3%)
Other	0 (0%)
<b>Student status</b>	
MOT alumni	2 (8.3%)
OTD alumni	7 (29.2%)
Current MOT student	4 (16.7%)
Current OTD student	11 (45.8%)
Former OTD student/withdrawn	0 (0%)
Former MOT student/withdrawn	0 (0%)
<b>Student completion</b>	
3 or less semesters	6 (25.0%)
6-4 semesters	0 (0%)
7-9 semesters	7 (29.2%)
10 or more semesters	3 (12.5%)
Alumni	8 (33.3%)

Table 1. Most respondents were female (97.1%) and current OTD students (45.8%)

Table 2

### Statements Regarding Student Belonging, Resources, & Satisfaction

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I have/had a sense of belonging in my OT program.	1 (4.2%)	3 (12.5%)	18 (75.0%)	2 (8.3%)
I am satisfied with my experience in my OT program.	0 (0%)	2 (8.3%)	16 (66.7%)	6 (25.0%)
My OT program creates an exclusive environment.	0 (0%)	3 (12.5%)	16 (66.7%)	5 (20.8%)
I felt encouraged to express a varying or dissimilar opinion in my OT program.	0 (0%)	8 (33.3%)	13 (54.2%)	3 (12.5%)
I feel/felt supported as a graduate student by my OT program.	0 (0%)	5 (20.8%)	15 (62.5%)	4 (16.7%)
There are/were adequate resources in place for racially diverse students in my OT program.	2 (8.3%)	12 (50.0%)	7 (29.2%)	3 (12.5%)
My OT program outwardly advocates for concerns and issues I value.	1 (4.2%)	9 (37.5%)	12 (50.0%)	2 (8.3%)

Note. N = 24

Table 2. 91.7% of racially diverse students were satisfied with their OT program experience

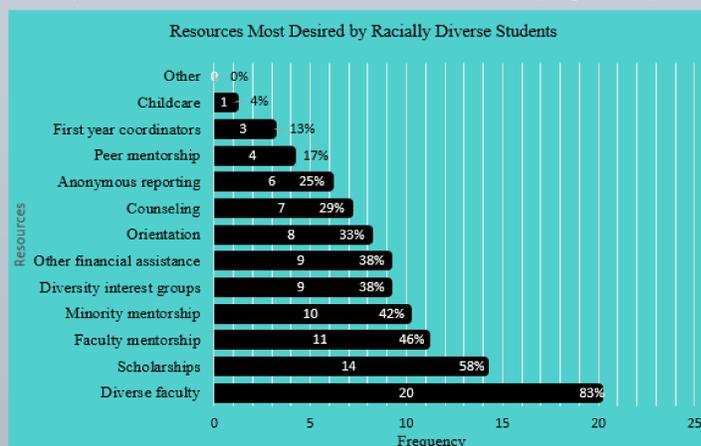


Figure 2. Racially diverse students preferred diverse faculty and scholarships

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Participants will learn about the current state of diversity in the OT profession. This study will illuminate how university-provided resources influence the experiences of racially diverse OT students and the levels of satisfaction levels of racially diverse students within their graduate-level OT programs. This study highlights which resources are currently provided, and which have the potential to increase the satisfaction of racially diverse OT students.

## DISCUSSION & LIMITATIONS

Overall, racially diverse students at NSU indicated high levels of satisfaction

- However, they felt their program lacked adequate resources for racially diverse students.

Racially diverse students identified diverse faculty and scholarship as most important to their continuation in their OT program

- Students were also interested in faculty mentorship and minority mentorship.

Demographically, most respondents were female; representative of the larger OT profession.

- This may limit abstraction of data to opinions of male students
- Respondents represented a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds and semesters completed

By adjusting recruitment strategies and providing adequate resources, OT programs may increase their success in recruiting and retaining racially diverse OT students helping to diversify the profession

## RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study have expectedly uncovered valuable information for OT educational programs to enhance their strategies to retain and satisfy racially diverse students and strive towards the AOTA Vision 2025 to diversify the OT profession. Increasing diversity of healthcare practitioners such as OTs has demonstrated improved outcomes for patients particularly in underserved and minority populations who are disproportionately disadvantaged (Mattingly, 2018). Improved patient outcomes have the potential to justify reimbursement and necessity of provision of occupational therapy services across all levels of care.

## REFERENCES & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

References Available Upon Request

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