Academic Education/Fieldwork Track

Session K: Making the Most out of the Archaeology for War Veterans: Non-Traditional Level 1 Fieldwork Experience for Occupational Therapy Students
3:15 – 5:00 pm
Level: Intermediate

Learning Objectives:
1. Attendees will be able to identify the benefits of therapeutic archeology for military veterans with physical and emotional injuries.
2. Attendees will be able to identify the benefits of working with military veterans in a non-traditional setting for occupational therapy students.
3. Attendees will be able to identify the pros and cons of a qualitative research pertaining to occupational therapy students’ learning outcomes.

Presentation Abstract:
Military veterans experience many challenges when returning to civilian life after service, including sleep disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and physical disabilities (Eakman et al., 2017; Habibolah et al., 2016; Worthen & Ahern, 2014). Poor sleep quality is associated with increased suicide risk in veterans, as well as depression and substance abuse (Kim et al., 2016; Ulmer et al., 2015; Eakman et al., 2017).

According to Duvall & Kaplan (2014), non-active military personnel who participated in a multiday group-based outdoor recreational experiences reported “greater feelings of social connectedness and more optimistic attitudes about current life circumstances” (p. 692). Although therapeutic archaeology has limited empirical evidence, it is suggested that it can improve quality of life for veterans (Finnegan, 2016).

The American Veterans Archaeological Recovery (AVAR) is a charity that coordinates archaeology-based therapeutic activities for military vets. These therapeutic excavations take place in various international locations, including, but not limited to USA, Britain and Israel.

In May 2019 three Sacred Heart University (SHU) Graduate Occupational Therapy (OT) Program faculty members and nine first year OT students participated in an archaeological dig with military veterans in Saratoga, New York. The experience consisted of four days of all-day-long level 1 fieldwork activities and included on-site archaeological digging with veterans, veteran interviews, ergonomic evaluations, equipment recommendations, education on activity modifications, Kinesio Taping, and interventions to improve quality of sleep; as well as demonstration of cognitive-behavioral strategies to reduce chronic pain, restorative yoga stretches, and breathing exercises.

Our presentation will describe the details of this service learning trip and the students’ learning outcomes as reflected in the qualitative study conducted by a SHU OT faculty member.
Dr. Sharon McCloskey received a bachelor's degree in Occupational Therapy from Trinity College, University of Dublin, Ireland (1985). She received a Master of Business Administration degree from University of New Haven (2007), and a Doctorate in Educational Leadership from the University of Hartford (2019). With more than 30 years of clinical and administrative experience in both healthcare and education settings, Sharon has worked with a variety of patient populations across several practice areas, primarily pediatrics and school-based practice, and mental health (community-based and acute psychiatry). Sharon is currently a full time clinical assistant professor at Sacred Heart University. She continues to provide private OT services to children and young adults, as well as consultative services to the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) and local school districts. Sharon is engaged in many professional volunteer activities for organizations such as CSDE, ConnOTA, and AOTA. She has received many awards during her career, and more recently was the recipient of the 2019 Joanne Andershonis-Reich Research Award. She has presented both locally, nationally, and internationally on a variety of clinical and service delivery topics. Sharon is a strong advocate and leader in the profession of occupational therapy and is passionate about the education of future occupational therapy practitioners.

Dr. Lola Halperin has practiced as a mental health occupational therapist since 1995 and has been teaching in the Graduate Occupational Therapy Program at Sacred Heart University since 2010. Throughout her career, she has worked with clients experiencing mental health issues and other forms of adversity in inpatient and outpatient facilities as well as community-based settings in Israel, Canada, and United States. Currently Dr. Halperin coordinates and teaches the mental health portion of the curriculum at her school and thoroughly enjoys sharing her expertise pertaining to the psychosocial aspects of occupational therapy with her students and other practitioners.

Dr. Jaimee Hegge is an occupational therapist specializing in adult and geriatric rehabilitation. She has worked in the public school system, outpatient clinics, skilled nursing facilities, and home health. She received her Master of Science in occupational therapy from Sacred Heart University in 2012 and her doctoral degree in occupational therapy from St. Catherine University in 2018. Jaimee is a Clinical Assistant Professor at Sacred Heart University and teaches Functional Anatomy and the Adult and Geriatric curriculum.