Dear Alumni, Prospective Students, and Families,

Beginning with the admissions cycle that opens in July 2020 for the incoming class of 2021, the University of Missouri Occupational Therapy program is converting its entry-level degree from the Master’s of Occupational Therapy (MOT) degree to the Occupational Therapy Doctorate (OTD). We are committed to providing the highest quality education to our students and we are acutely aware of the cost and commitment that is required by our students and families. As we balance the critical factors of OT education, accreditation and professional practice, we believe this conversion in the best interest of our students, our profession, and the state of Missouri.

The U.S. has the most complicated healthcare and educational systems in the world and, as you know from your own work, changes occur rapidly. With changes and advancements in these systems comes corresponding changes in our professional knowledge base and subsequently in the training requirements for our practitioners. Over the last two decades we have seen the mass proliferation of accreditation standards for entry-level practice at both the master’s and doctoral level in occupational therapy to reflect the growing knowledge required to practice proficiently. In the fall of 2018, the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE) adopted a new set of accreditation standards that require additional standards to be incorporated into our educational program. This in turn adds time and credit hours to our master’s curriculum to address the new standards. We believe that we have reached capacity for what can ethically be considered a master’s level curricula.

Nationally, the average master’s OT program is 86 credit hours. The threshold for a master’s degree at the University of Missouri is 36 and the threshold for a doctoral degree is 74. When compared to other master’s level rehabilitation programs in the same Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) category from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), OT master’s programs require 40% more credit hours than any other master’s level program in our CIP category. The changes in our accreditation standards have, in essence, already converted our master’s program into a doctoral level curricula. We have reached a point where we believe it is unjust to ask our students to take on the burden of any more additional time and cost for a master’s degree. The OTD program will be more credit hours than our current master’s program, but now the extra content will go toward attainment of a higher terminal degree in OT.

We understand and appreciate that this will make the overall cost of the degree higher and will add some additional time to complete the training. We are exploring opportunities to help mitigate both of these factors and we will share those with you as we approach the start of the OTD program. However, even in the absence of these opportunities we are still confident that we are providing an affordable, high-quality training option for students seeking OT education. The total cost of our OTD degree for Missouri residents will be close to 30% less than the cost of a master’s degree and close to 60% less than the cost of a doctoral degree when compared to the average cost of most of our competitors in the region.
It’s important to note many programs are or will soon be making this transition. Nationally, as of April 2019, the majority of OT programs in the United States are either accredited or candidate OTD programs (55%). If we consider all programs currently in the process of transition that number is more than 84%. In the immediate future the majority of graduates coming out of entry-level programs in the U.S. will hold an OTD. In a recent survey the majority of our alumni responded that they already have or will definitely seek an OTD in the near future. Applicants who have been accepted to our program but choose to attend another university indicate the top reason they go elsewhere is that they want to pursue an OTD. This is consistent with the national applicant data we receive through our centralized application system. Finally, there have been clear indications over the last few years from the leadership of our accrediting body that there is strong support for a single point of entry at the doctoral level. It seems clear to us at University of Missouri that this transition is not only necessary but in our graduates’ professional best long-term interests.

As always, we would be happy to discuss this with any of you if you would like. Please feel free to reach out to muot@health.missouri.edu to schedule a time to meet with us and/or talk on the phone. We look forward to beginning this new era in OT education with all of you. Thank you for supporting MUOT.

Best wishes,

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