

Elizabethtown College

The 22nd Occupational Therapy Graduate Research Symposium 2026



**“Building the Legacy: 50 Years of OT Scholarship
and Innovation at Elizabethtown College”**

**April 20, 2026
Sponsored by
Pi Theta Epsilon
Upsilon Chapter**

**The Occupational Therapy Faculty and Graduate Students
welcome you to
*The Occupational Therapy Graduate
Research Symposium 2026***

**Elizabethtown College
April 20, 2026**

(Closed Captioning provided for all sessions.)

5:00-5:50 **Opening Remarks and Welcome**

Introduction by Nancy Carlson, Ph.D., OTR/L
of welcome video created by Doris Gordon, MS, OTR,
Founder of Elizabethtown College's OT Department

Debbie Waltermire, DrPH, OTR/L,
Director of BS/MS Program

Kerri Hample, OTD, OTR/L, NBC-HWC
Director of EOTD/PPOTD Programs

Introduction of Keynote Speaker

Kerri Hample, OTD, OTR/L, NBC-HWC
Director of EOTD/PPOTD Programs

Keynote Speaker

Rebecca Austill-Clausen, MS, OTR/L, FAOTA



Rebecca Austill-Clausen is an Occupational Therapist, entrepreneur, Reiki Master, and award-winning author with 50 years of experience. Her book, *Change Maker: How My Brother's Death Woke Up My Life*, has received five national awards. A Fellow of the American Occupational Therapy Association, Rebecca has held multiple leadership roles, including President of the Delaware OT Association, Vice President of all AOTA State Presidents, and Secretary of the PA OT Licensure Board. She expanded her one-person business to 350 OT, PT, and Speech Language Practitioners. She represented OT practice at the first AOTA and APTA Task Force Meeting and was the Joint Commission Home Health representative for AOTA, APTA, ASHA and 3 Therapeutic Recreation Associations. Becky taught Reiki at 9 AOTA Annual Conferences and is the Healing Coordinator for the International Association for Near-Death Studies. She recently retired and lives at Kendal-Crosslands Continuing Care Retirement Community where she is Chairperson of the Crosslands Integrative Health Committee and was appointed to the Kendal-Crosslands Health Services Board Committee. Becky is a dynamic and engaging speaker who loves being an OT!

This year's symposium will be offered in a hybrid format. Welcoming Remarks, Keynote Speaker and Doctoral Capstone Presentations will offer the option to attend either in-person in the Masters Center on campus or virtually via Zoom. Graduate Scholarship posters, featuring first-year OTD graduate students, will be held in the Masters Center Atrium for in-person attendees and will run concurrently with the Doctoral Capstone Presentations.

Please note that classrooms for Capstone Presentations do have limited capacity. If the presentation you would like to see is at room capacity, you have the option to watch virtually in Gibble Auditorium in the Masters Center on your personal device.

Recording, downloading and/or photographing of the OT Graduate Research Symposium events is strictly prohibited.

SPECIAL NOTE: Up to 2.75 Contact Hours will be awarded to attending clinicians who registered for this Graduate Symposium on the evening of April 20, 2026 only. Registration will be available at 4pm on the evening of the Symposium at

<https://www.etown.edu/depts/occupational-therapy/index.aspx>

Time		PDU
5:00-5:50 Gibble Auditorium	Welcome and Opening Remarks; Keynote Address Join us via ZOOM LINK:	.75
Time	DOCTORAL CAPSTONE PRESENTATIONS	PDU
6:00-6:30 Esbenshade 360	<p><i>Building Bridges: Advancing OT Collaboration within MTSS School-Based Programming</i></p> <p>Graduate Student: Hayley Violet Biesiadecki, OTDS Mentor: Erin van Gelder, MS, OTR/L</p> <p>Purpose: This capstone project developed and implemented a classroom-based Tier 1 occupational therapy program and digital resource platform to support elementary teachers in addressing student regulation, fine motor, and participation challenges within a Multi-Tiered System of Support framework.</p> <p>Join us via ZOOM LINK:</p>	.50
6:00-6:30 Esbenshade 380	<p><i>Role of Occupational Therapy in Acute Care Oncology: A Guideline for Varying Levels of Functioning</i></p> <p>Graduate Student: Maureen E. Nagle, OTDS Capstone Mentor: Sarah E. Williamson MOT, OTR/L</p> <p>Purpose: Cancer and its treatments often cause significant physical and psychosocial limitations that reduce participation in daily activities. This capstone project examines occupational therapy's role in acute care oncology and supports development of evidence-based intervention guidelines aligned with patients' functional status.</p> <p>Join us via ZOOM LINK:</p>	.50
6:00-6:30 Esbenshade 382	<p><i>Occupational Therapy in Community Mental Health Promotion: Addressing Adolescent Stress</i></p> <p>Graduate Student: Nicole E. Ringwald, OTDS Capstone Mentor: Ronna Kassel, Executive Director, YMCA</p> <p>Purpose: This capstone examined how non-profit organizations are sustained and the application of occupational therapy principles in community settings. It also explored the integration of stress management strategies into a pre-existing youth program to address current adolescent health and wellness needs in an accessible and sustainable manner.</p> <p>Join us via ZOOM LINK:</p>	.50
6:00-6:30 Esbenshade 370	<p><i>Developing Clinical Guidelines for Occupational Therapy Management of Peripheral Neuropathy in Children with Leukemia and Lymphoma</i></p> <p>Graduate Student: Gillian M. Blades, OTDS Capstone Mentor: Kristen P. DeVirgilio, PT, DPT</p> <p>Purpose: This capstone, conducted in the oncology clinic at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, explores occupational therapy interventions for chemotherapy-induced peripheral neuropathy through national benchmarking, retrospective chart review, and clinical observation to identify best practices and guide quality improvement initiatives.</p> <p>Join us via ZOOM LINK:</p>	.50

Time		PDU
<p>6:40-7:10 Esbenshade 360</p>	<p><i>Bridging the Gap: Integrating OT-Based Self-Regulation Supports in Private School Classrooms</i></p> <p>Graduate Student: Madison K. Drumheller, OTDS Mentor: Mrs. Cynthia Williamson, Interim Principal of St. Catharine of Siena School and Kerri Hample, OTD, OTR/L, FMCHC</p> <p>Purpose: This capstone project highlights the gap in access to occupational therapy in private schools and the need for self-regulation supports. It synthesizes evidence on interoception-based strategies and informs the development of a toolkit to promote students' self-regulation and classroom engagement.</p> <p>Join us via ZOOM LINK:</p>	<p>.50</p>
<p>6:40-7:10 Esbenshade 380</p>	<p><i>Addressing Sexual Health in Pelvic Floor Therapy: A Resource Toolkit for Occupational Therapists</i></p> <p>Graduate Student: Ella Longenecker, OTDS Capstone Mentor: Melissa Gillis OTR/L</p> <p>Purpose: Pelvic floor and sexual health are emerging occupational therapy practice areas. This poster presents a capstone project addressing sexual health concerns among individuals with pelvic floor dysfunction, including development of a toolkit to support occupational therapists in clinical practice.</p> <p>Join us via ZOOM LINK:</p>	<p>.50</p>
<p>6:40-7:10 Esbenshade 382</p>	<p><i>Bridging Forensic Hospitalization and Community Reentry: An Occupational Therapy Resource Guide for Patients and Providers</i></p> <p>Graduate Student: Cara E. Jandzio, OTDS Capstone Mentor: Colleen Phillips, OTD, OTR/L</p> <p>Purpose: This capstone project examined barriers to community reintegration for individuals transitioning from forensic mental health hospitalization. Through needs assessments, stakeholder collaboration, and community resource analysis, the project culminated in the development of practical reentry resource guides for both patients and clinicians.</p> <p>Join us via ZOOM LINK:</p>	<p>.50</p>
<p>6:40-7:10 Esbenshade 370</p>	<p><i>Interoception and Sleep Management in Children with ASD</i></p> <p>Graduate Student: Leah M. Thomas, OTDS Capstone Mentor: Katie Kolecki, OTR/L</p> <p>Purpose: This Capstone project is centered on the intersection between sleep, interoception, and children with ASD. This project aimed to provide practice guidelines for OTs to carry out interoception intervention for children with ASD to target sleep outcomes.</p> <p>Join us via ZOOM LINK:</p>	<p>.50</p>

Time		PDU
<p>7:20-7:50 Esbenshade 360</p>	<p>Creating Supportive Learning Environments: An Instructional Guide to Self-Regulation</p> <p>Graduate Student: Kylie E. Evoy, OTDS Capstone Mentors: Kristine O'Connor, MS, OTR/L and Kasey Daly, MS, OTR/L</p> <p>Purpose: This capstone project evaluated classroom sensory environments in a New Jersey school serving autistic students. Guided by the Person-Environment-Occupation (PEO) model, findings informed the development of teacher guides supporting sensory-based environmental modifications to promote student self-regulation in classroom settings.</p> <p>Join us via ZOOM LINK:</p>	<p>.50</p>
<p>7:20-7:50 Esbenshade 380</p>	<p><i>Occupational Therapy and Gender-Inclusive Healthcare: The Role of Occupational Therapists in Pelvic Floor for Individuals Post Surgical Procedure</i></p> <p>Graduate Student: Grace M. Costenbader, OTDS Capstone Mentor: Vanessa Mavrode, DPT, CAPP-Pelvic</p> <p>Purpose: Little research is available on the role of occupational therapy practitioners in gender-inclusive pelvic floor rehabilitation post-surgical procedure. This project aimed to educate pelvic floor practitioners on treating these procedures and improving the quality of life for this population.</p> <p>Join us via ZOOM LINK:</p>	<p>.50</p>
<p>7:20-7:50 Esbenshade 382</p>	<p><i>Sensory-Based Interventions: A Program Development and Educational Need for Dementia Caregivers</i></p> <p>Graduate Student: Kambrie E. Hepler, OTDS Capstone Mentor: Caitlin Harvey, CDP</p> <p>Purpose: This doctoral capstone explores the use of sensory-based interventions to improve quality of life and reduce behavioral and psychological symptoms in individuals living with dementia, while enhancing caregiver confidence and promoting sustainable implementation within long-term care settings through deliverable educational resources.</p> <p>Join us via ZOOM LINK:</p>	<p>.50</p>
<p>7:20-7:50 Esbenshade 370</p>	<p><i>Neurodiversity-Affirming Practices: A Parent Educational Toolkit for Children Ages 2-5 with Autism</i></p> <p>Graduate Student: Alyssa Eckstein, OTDS Capstone Mentor: Jennifer Jarest OTD, OTR/L</p> <p>Purpose: This study educated parents of children ages 2-5 with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) on neurodiversity-affirming practices. An occupational therapy (OT)-based educational toolkit website was developed to deliver this information. These resources promoted strengths-based, child-led approaches that support meaningful participation in daily life.</p> <p>Join us via ZOOM LINK:</p>	<p>.50</p>

Time		PDU
8:00-8:30 Esbenshade 360	<p><i>Enhancing Emotional Regulation in Elementary Students Through Interoception-Based Intervention</i></p> <p>Graduate Student: Kylie Fair, OTDS Capstone Mentor: Jenna Solis, M.Ed., LAC</p> <p>Purpose: This capstone project examined the integration of interoception-based strategies into elementary school social-emotional learning groups, in collaboration with a school guidance counselor, to support students' awareness of body signals and promote emotional regulation skills.</p> <p>Join us via ZOOM LINK:</p>	.50

1st Year OTD Graduate Students will present
GRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP POSTERS
 In Masters Center Atrium

Time 6:00 P.M. – 7:00 P.M.

.25 each

The Lived Experiences of Older Adults Transitioning to an Active Aging Community: Narrative Case Reports

Graduate Students: Elizabeth Rajnik, Emily Tissue, Madisyn Frederick
 Faculty Mentor: Nancy Carlson, Ph.D., OTR/L

Purpose: The purpose of these narrative case reports is to explore underlying factors that support individuals moving from their primary residence to 55-plus active aging communities, including motivators, personal experiences, and psychosocial impacts.

Supporting Higher Education Students with ASD and/or ADHD: Individualized Sensory Strategies for Challenging Classroom Environments

Graduate Students: Shannon Creaney, Sara Novosel, Claire Tylka
 Faculty Mentor: Laura Cunningham, OTD, OTR/L, CCTP

Purpose: College classrooms often lack sensory-friendly environments, reducing academic performance for students with ADHD or ASD. A mixed-methods case series of undergraduates identified common challenges: noise, bright lighting, and limited movement, highlighting the need for universally designed classrooms for all students.

Enhancing Outcomes: A Multidisciplinary Approach to Addressing NICU-Related Parental Trauma

Graduate Students: Emma Alton, Grace Flocco, Elena Kenvin
 Faculty Mentor: Erica Wentzel, OTD, OTR/L

Purpose: This pilot study aims to evaluate whether embedding a series of social work visits in the NICU through the first phase of Early Intervention can reduce parental PTSD symptoms and enhance infant developmental outcomes.

Time 6:00 P.M. – 7:00 P.M. **.25 each**

Impact of Sleep Hygiene Program for Emerging Adult Students in Higher Education

Graduate Students: Jacqueline Huston, Isabella Kurpis, Kendall Ulmer
Faculty Mentor: Terri Reichley Dennehy, D.Ed., OTR/L

Purpose: The purpose of our qualitative, applied inquisition is to examine the experiences of emerging adult, full-time college/university students with sleep/rest, focusing on stress and its impact on overall wellness.

Time 7:00 P.M. – 8:00 P.M. **.25 each**

School Playgrounds: Teachers' Perspectives on Inclusivity

Graduate Students: Olivia Steidle, Laura Maxwell
Faculty Mentor: Marla Davis, OTD, OTR/L

Purpose: The purpose of our research is to explore the perspectives of public school employees who observe recess, using their experiences to better understand the inclusivity of the playground environment. These insights will guide future playground planning and design to create more inclusive recess environments for all students.

Healthy Play Starts Here: How Community Playgroups Support Early Learning in Families Facing Economic Barriers

Graduate Students: Abigail Buffington, Taylor Kopinetz
Faculty Mentor: Diane Martin, OTD, OTR/L

Purpose: This program aims to explore how play-based interventions foster cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development, ultimately supporting early learning experiences and long-term success in children from SED backgrounds.

Development of a Novel Screening Tool: Addressing Quality of Life Disparities in Emerging Adults with Congenital Heart Disease

Graduate Students: Josephine Hunter, Gabriella Cilio, Cheyenne Lewis
Faculty Mentor: Deborah Waltermire, DrPH, OTR/L

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to understand the content and utility of a novel screening tool for emerging adults with CHD that identifies needs related to daily living that impact quality of life.

Occupational Therapy Students' Perspectives on Death Cafes: A Retrospective Analysis

Graduate Students: Gillian Heyden, Samantha Machmer, Elizabeth Petlick
Faculty Mentor: Kerri Hample, OTD, OTR/L, NBC-HWC

Purpose: The purpose of this retrospective study was to analyze the impact of participation in a Death Cafe on undergraduate OT students' perspectives of death and dying, as well as their preparedness for entering practice upon graduation.

Thank you for attending the 2026 Elizabethtown College Occupational Therapy Graduate Research Symposium.

We look forward to seeing you again next year.

*No effort of this magnitude is possible as a solitary pursuit.
To that end, please thank the OT Graduate Research Symposium Committee for their efforts in making this celebration of scholarship and occupational therapy possible.*

*Laura Cunningham, OTD, OTR/L
MaryAnn Sluzis, BSW
Members of Pi Theta Epsilon*

For more information on the Occupational Therapy Program at Elizabethtown College
visit our website at:
www.etown.edu/ot

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