

The OWLS Program experience: An innovative alternate fieldwork model to encourage non-traditional skill development in undergraduate occupational therapy in Australia.

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Introduction: The Occupation, Wellness, Life Satisfaction (OWLS) program developed by Deakin University in Australia is an alternate model that provides occupational therapy students fieldwork in non-traditional settings. The OWLS experience enables strategic learning within non-clinical settings, including students working with non-occupational therapists and with differing work culture and practices.

Objectives: The OWLS program emphasizes student learning through practical problem-based experience that is responsive to student and community needs. The aim is to provide student-driven services to communities not receiving regular occupational therapy, while honing students' independent learning and developing skills and competencies are not generally covered in clinical placements

Report Description: In critiquing the OWLS program as an alternate fieldwork program, this presentation will focus on the strengths and weaknesses to illustrate its innovation as an alternative model for practical education.

Discussion: The OWLS model enables a creative approach in providing challenging fieldwork for level three and four undergraduates. In responding to community identified gaps, the OWLS program provides a supportive environment for student to learn and to prosper. Participating students are placed, in pairs, into two fieldwork settings during a full-time eight week practicum; one a school setting and the other within a community organization. This experience encourages the students to acknowledge the professional, cultural and organizational differences, to be flexible in their thinking and independent in action to meet individual and group needs within the host setting. This provides these senior students opportunities to establish their professional identity and demonstrate their professional uniqueness. Discussion will elaborate on the essentials of the program including coordination, the tutorial support and the remote supervision model, which includes student-peer mentoring.

Contribution to the practice base of occupational therapy: Alternative fieldwork models, such as the OWLS program, provide students with real practice opportunities to develop a diverse range of relevant skills and competencies within a variety of work, community and culturally diverse environments. The experience of working in unique environments as a student may alter their future career opportunities and interests as graduates. The OWLS program has application across the spectrum and professions within urban, rural and remote settings.