



NCOTA 2025 Spring Conference Conference Faculty

B

Dr. Susan Blair brings 36 years of diverse clinical occupational therapy experience, spanning NICU, palliative care, rehabilitation, home health, and skilled nursing. A dedicated educator and mentor, she has served as a clinical staff developer and fieldwork coordinator, overseeing and mentoring over 20 occupational therapy staff. Dr. Blair is currently an Assistant Clinical Professor in the Entry Level OT Doctoral Program at Baylor University. Dr. Blair holds dual AOTA Board Certifications in Physical Rehabilitation and Gerontology. She has authored textbook chapters and journal articles, including *Influencing Perception of Frailty Risk in Urban and Rural Older Adults (Physical & Occupational Therapy in Geriatrics, 2023)* and *Investigating the Efficacy of an Online Multigenerational Awareness Course for Occupational Therapy Students: A Pilot Study (Open Journal of Occupational Therapy, 2025)*. She has also presented extensively on evidence-based practice and developed the AOTA-approved workshop *Geriatric Rehabilitation for Today's Older Adults*. She earned her Bachelor's from the Medical University of South Carolina and her OTD from Chatham University, focusing on frailty perceptions in older adults. Dr. Blair actively contributes to the Gerontology Exam for AOTA's Advanced Certification and Specialty and was appointed to the AOTA Commission on Practice in 2024.

Dr. Marc Bartholdi OTD, OTR/L, CHT is a fellowship-trained certified hand therapist with over 25 years of clinical and educational experience. He is an active member of the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA), American Hand Therapy Association (ASHT), North Carolina Occupational Therapy Association (NCOTA), The American Hand Therapy Foundation (AHTF), and is a board member of the South Carolina Hand Therapy Association (SCHTA). Marc joined Pfeiffer University in 2021 as an Assistant Professor in their master's in occupational therapy program.

C

Bryden Carlson-Giving, OTD, OTR/L is a neurodivergent and disabled occupational therapy practitioner (OTP) with experience in pediatric outpatient, inpatient, and school-based settings. Bryden earned his post-professional doctorate from Boston University, where his research focused on creating a toolkit to support OTPs in challenging ableism within the OT profession. This work led to the development of the first neurodiversity-affirming

occupational therapy model, the EMPOWER model. Bryden is also the creator of Neurodivergent Nexus, an online resource hub that supports practitioners in challenging ableism throughout the OT process. He received the 2024 Emerging Leader Award from Boston University, and is the editor of "Neurodiversity-Affirming Occupational Therapy: Empowering Approaches to Foster Neurodivergent Participation," out March 2026.

Thomas Curry MSOT, OTR/L, COMT-UE received a MSOT in Occupational Therapy in 2022 from Pfeiffer University. He then completed a hand therapy fellowship and Certification in Orthopedic Manual Therapy- Upper Extremity from Ivy Rehabilitation in 2024. Tom works for Ivy Rehabilitation in Fort Mill, SC specializing in hand and upper extremity rehabilitation.

F

Dr. Tomeico Faison is an assistant professor in the Duke OTD program and serves as the Director of Diversity and Innovation in Professional Pathways. She is also the CEO of two therapy companies, Therapeutic Solutions of NC and Low Vision Rehab Solutions. She often serves as a consultant for behavioral health and community-based mental health organizations with specialized knowledge in billing and reimbursement options.

G

Brian Gonzalez Granados is a first-generation Latino college student from Durham, NC, balancing his roles as a full-time employee, student, and advocate for equity in education and occupational therapy. His experiences navigating higher education while working full-time have shaped his passion for supporting underrepresented students. Beyond his academic and professional commitments, Brian is a dedicated son, brother, and active member of his faith community. His diverse perspectives and lived experiences drive his commitment to fostering inclusivity and meaningful engagement in occupational therapy education and practice.

H

Kathryn Hansen, PhD, OTR/L is an associate professor of Occupational Therapy at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. Her research focuses on advancing the discipline towards neurodiversity-affirming care and creating inclusive environments for individuals with diverse sensory needs and preferences. Dr. Hansen is also a licensed pediatric occupational therapist who specializes in supporting autistic children and their families from a neurodiversity-affirming lens. When she is not working, she enjoys being with her family out in nature, swimming, sewing, and weaving on her loom.

J

Gwyn Joyce is a pediatric occupational therapist who specializes in feeding therapy in Carrboro, NC. Gwyn has 9 years of experience in pediatrics, having worked in outpatient, and early intervention. She has a passion for working with children of all ages to help them to expand their diets in a fun and safe way. She enjoys crafting, cooking, exercising and spending time with her family.

L

Jeffery Lucas, Ph.D., OTR/L, CDP, CKTP, CAPS is an Assistant Professor of the Department to Occupational Therapy Master of Science program at Winston-Salem State University. Dr. Lucas obtained his Bachelor of Science Degree in Recreational Therapy at East Carolina University, Bachelor of Arts Degree in Psychology at North Carolina Wesleyan University, Master of Science Degree in Occupational Therapy at Winston-Salem State University and Doctor of Philosophy in Organizational Leadership at The School of Professional Psychology. His occupational therapy career includes clinical experience in skilled nursing/administration, home health, outpatient, acute care and academic teaching and administration. Teaching comprises administration, home modifications, Aging in Place. Research focus encompasses burnout in rehabilitation directors in skilled nursing facilities, preventing burnout among staff and employees working with clients with Intellectual Developmental Disabilities, and the impact of free clinics on student learning. Dr. Lucas partners with community organizations through ongoing volunteer and service-learning projects, outpatient occupational therapy clinics, fieldwork opportunities, and community-engaged research to address needs and increase capacity of all partners. Dr. Lucas has held office positions at the state association.

Joshua Lucas, a first-generation African American student from Raleigh, NC, is an occupational therapy advocate, social media content creator, and ordained minister. Balancing life as a husband, father, and part-time employee, he is passionate about using digital platforms to educate and inspire others on occupational therapy's impact. His journey has fueled his dedication to accessibility, representation, and understanding in the field. Through ministry, content creation, and leadership, Joshua strives to bridge knowledge gaps, promote inclusivity, and empower individuals to reach their full potential.

M

Lisa Marnell is an autistic occupational therapist and founder of Kids Master Skills LLC. She has over twenty years of experience working in a variety of settings including schools,

outpatient clinics, early intervention, and inpatient/outpatient neuro. Dr. Marnell completed her doctorate at Boston University (BU) where she studied emotional regulation and executive function in autism and is now on the BU faculty. Dr. Marnell works with families and schools to cultivate joy, autonomy, and agency in autistic children, consulting, coaching, and providing direct services to shift the paradigm from ableist to neurodiversity-affirming practice. She owns a private clinic in Thousand Oaks, California, where she provides strengths-based support to autistic clients. Dr. Marnell is an active autism advocate.

R

Dr Rafols is dedicated and seasoned occupational therapist that has practiced in health care for over 41 years. He has practiced in many areas within the occupational therapy landscape. In addition, as a hospital corpsman, first responder and orthopedic technician, as well as an occupational therapist, he has rendered skilled medical intervention within three branches of the military, e.g., the USN, USMC, and USA. Retiring from the military in 2012, Dr. Rafols pivoted to full-time academia and has been the founding program director of three graduate occupational therapy programs, e.g., South University (PPOTD), University of St. Augustine, Miami-Campus (MOT and EI-OTD), and is currently developing the MSOT at the University of North Carolina-Pembroke. While serving as the Chair and Program Director of the MSOT program at the University of North Carolina-Pembroke, Dr. Rafols collaborates with other health professions, within the College of Health Science, at UNCP on telehealth, health disparity, equity and access among marginalized 1st generation college students. In addition, Dr. Rafols mentors junior academicians and graduate students to assist them in navigating the complexities of post-secondary education.

Rachel Robertson, MOT, OTR/L (she/her) is a multiply neurodivergent practitioner who co-founded Diverge Community Services with the vision of empowering other neurodivergent adults to live their best lives, as they define them, without barriers. Rachel provides one-on-one neurodiversity-affirming support for neurodivergent adults in her community, is frequently involved in community building and education, and loves program development. Rachel completed her professional training in occupational therapy at Eastern Michigan University after receiving her bachelor's in neuroscience and psychology from the University of Michigan Honors School. When she's not seeing clients, she is likely spending time with her corgi, Caira, and husband, Eric, hiking, listening to podcasts, or making sawdust in her workshop.

S

Dr. Sanchala Khanolkar Sen has been an occupational therapist for the last 35+ years. She completed her Bachelor's and Master's in OT from India, and a Doctorate in OT from

Chatham University, USA. Dr. Sen worked in India for 14 years as a clinician in almost all OT practice areas. She was a founding member of the School of Occupational Therapy in Nair hospital and taught as a lecturer in TN Medical college, Occupational Therapy department for 4 years. She moved to the USA 31 years ago and has worked in acute care, inpatient rehab, skilled nursing units, and assisted living facilities as a Lead clinician and supervisor. She completed her Board Certification in Physical Rehabilitation from the American Occupational Therapy Association in 2013. She has been teaching for 16 years in the master's program in Occupational Therapy at Winston-Salem State University in North Carolina.

T

Tremayne Thurman is a strategist, consultant, professor, mentor, and coach with over 20 years of experience in occupational therapy and 15+ years in leadership development and corporate growth. As the founder of EC Teams, Thurman Inc., The Thurman Strategy, and 5.31 Graphics, he mentors and leads professionals across healthcare, education, and business sectors. As a DISC-certified trainer and John Maxwell-certified speaker, coach, and behavioral assessor, Thurman specializes in leadership, team dynamics, and communication strategies. His mission is to empower individuals and organizations to achieve intentional growth and success. For more information, connect with Thurman: Instagram:

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Facebook: [facebook.com/thethurmanstrategy](https://www.facebook.com/thethurmanstrategy) Email: support@thurmaninc.com

W

Brianna Williams is currently a student in the Duke OTD program. She has observed the community of youth with mental health and planning to work in behavioral health for capstone.

Linn Wakeford is an Associate Professor and Admissions Coordinator in the MSOT program at UNC-Chapel Hill. She has worked in a variety of practice settings serving children and their families. Linn is the current chair of the NCOTA DEI committee and is involved in equity, inclusion, and justice efforts at UNC and in other organizations.

Z

Cathy Zanowski has been an OT for more than 40 years, practicing in many areas and in management, but always with a mental health lens. She created the Functional Living Institute (FLI) at Rowan Cabarrus Community College as a way to provide innovative level I and II fieldwork opportunities for working with the older Exceptional

Children Population in the 6 Rowan Salisbury High Schools. This fieldwork provides opportunities for the OTA students to go to the high schools and the high school students to come to the college. The use of task boxes is a great way to add function to the Exceptional Childrens' everyday educational experience.