Holistic Admissions: Improving Diversity in the Occupational Therapy Workforce

Amy Darragh, Carmen DiGiovine  
The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH, USA

Introduction/Rationale: Human beings must have access to systems that support their health and wellbeing. Unfortunately, Implicit Bias impacts healthcare providers’ ability to deliver egalitarian care. Mitigation of implicit bias is critical for a socially and medically just healthcare system. This begins with educational programs: institutions must provide diverse and inclusive environments to improve students’ understanding of diverse populations. In the USA, however, OT programs at all levels are decidedly not diverse. A culturally competent and diverse workforce is critical for effective practice (https://www.aota.org). The Ohio State University OT Division implemented a Holistic Admissions process to attract students with “diversity of experience, background and thought”


Approach: The OT division created an Admissions Vision, describing the value placed on diversity, with input from multiple stakeholder groups. The holistic admissions process considers three equally weighted aspects of a student's application: academic merit, attributes, and experiences, assessed through review of paper applications and an in-person interview.

Results: Following the implementation of holistic admissions, representation from racial/ethnic groups other than white more than doubled (5% to 14%) and incoming student academic credentials remained consistent. Gender distribution did not change.

Conclusion: Future efforts must include more effective recruitment to ensure a diverse pool of applicants. The classes remain dominated by students who identify themselves as white and female, however, we remain optimistic that we will continue to see increasing diversity.