Differences in Values and Goals of Occupational Therapy Students

Margaret A. Danka

Key Words: curriculum • professional education • professional productivity

This study compared professional values and goals of three levels of occupational therapy students: (a) seniors in baccalaureate programs (n = 337), (b) students in professional master's programs (n = 95), and (c) students in postprofessional master's programs (n = 62). Demographic characteristics including gender, age, and college background were also examined. Significant differences were identified between the baccalaureate group and the postprofessional master's group for three professional goals: (a) making a theoretical contribution to the profession, (b) performing research in the profession, and (c) educating occupational therapy students. Significant differences were also noted for four professional values. Intellectual stimulation was more often chosen by postprofessional master's students, exciting life and comfortable life were more often chosen by baccalaureate students, and helpfulness was more often chosen by the baccalaureate and postprofessional master's students. It was concluded that determining the professional values and goals of occupational therapy students may generate implications for career counseling, recruitment, curriculum planning, and decreasing the attrition rate.

The purpose of this study was to compare the professional values and goals of three levels of occupational therapy students: (a) seniors in baccalaureate programs, (b) students in professional master's programs (master's programs for students who have a baccalaureate degree in another field), and (c) students in postprofessional master's programs (master's programs for students who have a baccalaureate degree in occupational therapy). The two research questions examined were

1. Is there a relationship between students' values and the level of their professional education?
2. Is there a relationship between students' professional goals and the level of their professional education?

Literature Review

This literature review describes factors related to professional values and goals of occupational therapy students and occupational therapists' professional productivity, professional publications, and research endeavors. Professional productivity of occupational therapists who had graduated with baccalaureate degrees and with professional master's degrees was examined by Gilkeson and Hanten (1984). Rogers and Mann (1980a, 1980b), Clark, Sharratt, Hill, and Campbell (1985), and Storm (1990). Gilkeson and Hanten (1984) found that as early as 2 years beyond graduation, occupational therapists with a master's degree had engaged in research with a higher frequency, and at 5 years beyond graduation, they had spent significantly more time teaching in an academic institution than had baccalaureate respondents. Six years beyond graduation, the master's graduates presented a higher number of programs or workshops at various pro-

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The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics has projected that occupational therapy will grow by 55% through the year 2000 (Silvestri & Lukasiewicz, 1991). According to recent data from the Research Information and Education Division of the American Occupational Therapy Association, there is approximately a 25% shortage of occupational therapists (Silvergleit, 1989). In 1991, 2,592 entry-level students graduated from accredited occupational therapy educational programs (American Occupational Therapy Association, 1992), yet most recent estimates were that 6,000 jobs were unfilled in 1989 (Silvergleit, 1989).

Because of this continued shortage of occupational therapy professionals, the focus of this article was on the occupational therapy student. Few data have been published regarding occupational therapy students' professional values and goals. Knowing the professional values and goals of students can benefit the profession in the areas of career counseling, recruitment, curriculum planning, and decreasing the attrition rate.

The purpose of this study was to compare the professional values and goals of three levels of occupational therapy students: (a) seniors in baccalaureate programs, (b) students in professional master's programs (master's programs for students who have a baccalaureate degree in another field), and (c) students in postprofessional master's programs (master's programs for students who have a baccalaureate degree in occupational therapy). The two research questions examined were

1. Is there a relationship between students' values and the level of their professional education?
2. Is there a relationship between students' professional goals and the level of their professional education?
fessional conferences than did the baccalaureate graduates.

Rogers and Mann (1980a, 1980b) defined professional productivity in terms of practice, education, research, and professional activities. They found that as educational level increased, so did scores on these productivity variables. Professional master's degree respondents reportedly made greater contributions in the areas of practice, education, research, professional activities, and publication than did the baccalaureate respondents.

A study by Clark et al. (1985) compared occupational therapists who had graduated from the baccalaureate and the professional level master's programs at the University of Southern California. Respondents were compared in the categories of (a) involvement in professional organizations, (b) educational goals, and (c) research and publication productivity. Those who had graduated from the professional level master's program had significantly more publications, had presented at more professional conferences, and spent many more years conducting research than those who graduated from the baccalaureate program.

Storm (1990) investigated productivity differences among occupational therapists with various levels of education. She examined research contributions, publications, awards and honors, and presentations. Her study did not substantiate significant differences in professional productivity among baccalaureate, professional master's, and postprofessional master's groups.

Madigan (1985), Holmstrom (1975), Katz (1982), and Rozier, Gilkeson, and Hamilton (1992) examined various goals and values of occupational therapy students. Madigan (1985) compared freshman and sophomore occupational therapy assistant students to junior and senior professional occupational therapy students. Career goals such as writing books or journal articles and teaching were selected by many more professional level occupational therapy students than by occupational therapy assistant students. The occupational therapy assistant students more often indicated creating artistic works as a main goal in their career choice. Several work values, such as independence, variety, and intellectual stimulation were more frequently chosen by the professional level occupational therapy students, whereas supervisory relationships, surroundings, and security were more often valued by the occupational therapy assistant students.

In Holmstrom's (1975) profile of aspirants to a career in occupational therapy, one variable studied was self-rating of life goals. Some life goals on which subjects rated themselves highly were: (a) helping others in difficulty, (b) becoming an authority on a special area in one's field, and (c) obtaining recognition from colleagues for professional contributions. Rozier et al. (1992) identified some of the reasons that students of differing educational levels chose occupational therapy as a career. They surveyed 218 students and found that the statement "helping people is personally enjoyable" was agreed with often as a reason to enter the profession of occupational therapy.

Katz (1982) examined the terminal and instrumental values of 56 occupational therapy juniors and 48 occupational therapy first year master's students at New York University using the Rokeach Value Survey (Rokeach, 1968). She found that the juniors more often chose values related to a comfortable, happy life, whereas the first year master's students highly valued intellectual endeavors.

The professional productivity of occupational therapists with differing educational backgrounds has been examined by several researchers with varied results. Some report increased professional productivity with higher levels of education, and others do not substantiate these findings. There are limited data available regarding professional values and goals of occupational therapy students.

Method

This study used a cross-sectional descriptive design (Mann, 1985) to compare the stated professional values and goals among students in each of the three levels of occupational therapy academic programs.

Subjects

A sample of 20 of the 67 baccalaureate programs, eight of the 15 professional master's programs and 10 of the 31 postprofessional master's programs were randomly selected from academic programs in the United States for inclusion in this study. At least one third of each of the three programs was selected to obtain a representative sampling. Curriculum directors of the sample were mailed a copy of the questionnaire and asked to provide the researcher the number of students in their programs (seniors in the selected baccalaureate programs and the total number of students in the selected professional and postprofessional master's programs were requested; students on fieldwork were eliminated) so that a sufficient number of questionnaires could be mailed.

Instrumentation

A questionnaire incorporating questions from Madigan's (1985) and Morris's (1982) studies was developed. Three slightly different forms of the questionnaire were developed for each of the three levels of academic programs. The questionnaire consisted of a maximum of 25 fixed-alternative questions and one question with a 5-point response scale. Vital to the questionnaire were two questions regarding professional values and goals of students (see Appendix). Questionnaires were pretested on nine occupational therapy students (three in each of the three program levels) at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, before distribution to the sample.
Procedure

Enough questionnaires for distribution to each student \((n = 1,163)\) in the 46 selected academic programs were sent to the curriculum directors. The curriculum directors were asked to distribute the questionnaires to students and to place the return envelope in an accessible location for the students to return after completion. After a 2-week period, the curriculum directors were asked to seal the envelope containing the completed questionnaires and mail it to the researcher. A follow-up letter was sent after 3 weeks to those who did not respond to the initial request.

Data Analysis

Means and standard deviations were determined for each variable within the fixed alternative questions, for each variable included in the 5-point response question, and for each variable among the three program levels. The means for 15 specific variables among the three levels of students were compared to establish differences, with chi-square and analysis of variance.

Results

Of the 1,163 questionnaires sent to the 46 programs, 494 were returned (42.4%). The return rate was 44.4\% \((n = 337)\) for the 17 baccalaureate program groups, 36.3\% \((n = 95)\) for the seven professional master’s program groups and 43.9\% \((n = 62)\) for the eight postprofessional master’s program groups.

Characteristics of Respondents

Gender and age. Most of the respondents (94.6\% of the baccalaureate students, 81.1\% of the professional master’s students, and 91.1\% of the postprofessional master’s students) were female. Most of the baccalaureate students (56.8\%) were between the ages of 20 and 22 years; many of the professional master’s students (41.1\%) and the postprofessional master’s students (67.7\%) were 29 years or older.

College background. Surprisingly, 9.2\% of the baccalaureate respondents already had baccalaureate degrees and 9.5\% of the professional master’s students already had master’s degrees. Almost 15\% of the baccalaureate students had associate degrees.

Those wanting to continue their education were asked about the highest degree they would like to obtain. Almost half of the baccalaureate students (49.7\%) said they wanted study that would lead to becoming a specialist in the profession. The highest proportion of the professional master’s students (52.6\%) and the postprofessional master’s students (51.6\%) said they would like to attain a master’s degree. Compared with the baccalaureate students (13.4\%), the professional master’s students (30.5\%) were more than twice as likely, and postprofessional master’s students (37.1\%) were almost three times as likely, to state that they would like to obtain a doctoral degree.

Professional Goals of Respondents

Students were asked to select from a list of 24 professional goals those that they would like to achieve in their careers. Ten of the goals most frequently chosen by the three groups are shown in Table 1. The baccalaureate and professional master’s respondents tended to choose goals that were clinically oriented, whereas the postprofessional master’s students tended to select goals that were academically focused.

Five of the 24 goals listed were found to be significant in other studies of goals of occupational therapy students (Holmstrom, 1975; Madigan, 1985). These five goals are: (a) making a theoretical contribution to the field, (b) doing research in the field, (c) educating occupational therapy students, (d) supervising the work of others, and (e) heading a department. These five goals were subjected to statistical analysis in this study as well. Significant differences were found between the baccalaureate students and the postprofessional master’s students for three of the five professional goals: making a theoretical contribution to the field, doing research in the field, and educating occupational therapy students. Although this finding is not significant, the professional master’s students were more likely than baccalaureate students and less likely than postprofessional master’s students to include as important goals making a theoretical contribution to the field and doing research in the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Professional Goals of Occupational Therapy Students</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>Frequencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Baccalaureate ((n = 336))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being expert in practice</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going into private practice</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educating students</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being consultant</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtaining recognition</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervising others</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being department head</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing research</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publishing papers</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presenting at conference</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The American Journal of Occupational Therapy
field. They were less likely than either of the other two
groups to choose educating occupational therapy stu-
dents as a professional goal.

Professional Values of Respondents
Respondents were asked to rank a list of 30 professional
values on a 5-point scale. Ten of the most frequently
chosen professional values of the three groups are shown
in Table 2. Also, 10 of the 30 professional values had been
statistically examined by other researchers (Katz, 1982;
Madigan, 1985). These 10 professional values were sub-
jected to statistical analysis in this study and significant
differences were found for four of them: intellectual stim-
ulation, exciting life, comfortable life, and helpfulness.
The baccalaureate and the professional master’s students
were significantly more likely than the postprofessional
master’s students to include helpfulness as a professional
value. Baccalaureate students were significantly more
likely to include exciting life and comfortable life than
either of the other two groups. Although intellectual stim-
ulation was frequently selected for all three groups, the
postprofessional master’s students were significantly more
likely to select this goal than either the baccalaureate students
or the professional master’s students.

Discussion
Professional Goals of Respondents
The students in this research and the therapists in Holm-
strom’s (1975) research held in common the professional
goal of becoming an expert in practice. The goal of be-
coming an expert in practice was not divided into general
practice versus specialization in this study. Students need
to be aware of the variety of specializations and to have
their needs addressed regarding the options available in
their professional careers. Becoming an expert in practice
necessitates gathering information in current concepts of
theory, research, and practice. All students need to be
cognizant of this interplay and encouraged to make con-
tributions to the profession. Both the baccalaureate re-
spondents in Madigan’s study and the baccalaureate re-
spondents in this study often chose the professional goals
of being a consultant and having a private practice. Future
trends may reflect an increase of therapists employed in
these areas, therefore these potential trends may be areas
to address in baccalaureate programs.

The master’s-prepared occupational therapists in
Gilkeson and Hanten’s (1984) study, Rogers and Mann’s
(1980a, 1980b) study, the baccalaureate students in Madi-
gan’s (1985) study, and each of the three student groups
in this study had indicated educating occupational ther-
apy students as a major professional goal. In most aca-
demic programs today, faculty must hold at least a mas-
ter’s degree (Rogers & Mann, 1980b). Thus, possession of
a master’s degree provides an increased opportunity to
participate in occupational therapy education. If a goal of
baccalaureate students is to educate students in an aca-
demic environment, this goal should be known while the
students are still in the baccalaureate program so that
they can be properly counseled to obtain the further
necessary degree (on the other hand, respondents may
have been referring to educating students in a clinical
environment, which is difficult to ascertain due to the
limitations of this research).

Rogers and Mann (1980b), Gilkeson and Hanten (1984),
and Clark et al. (1985) reported that occupational
therapists who graduated with master’s degrees had
higher levels of professional productivity than the occu-
pational therapists who graduated with baccalaureate de-
gres. In this study, publishing papers, presenting at con-
ference, and doing research were indicated more
frequently by the professional master’s and postprofes-
sional master’s students than by the baccalaureate stu-
dents. These findings have implications for curriculum
planning. It seems that those baccalaureate students with
goals similar to the goals found in a graduate profile
should be sought out and counseled into master’s pro-
grams so they may more quickly contribute to the growth
of the profession. Students’ professional goals and means
to achieve their goals need to be addressed in occupa-
tional therapy academic programs. Identifying both the
student goals and the goals of the curricula before the
students’ enrollment may be beneficial in addressing
these issues.

Professional Values of Respondents
In Katz’s (1982) research, the master’s students more
highly valued self-respect than did baccalaureate stu-
dents, and baccalaureate students more highly valued
comfortable life than did master’s students. The baccalaure-

...
create students in this study more often chose values that reflected external satisfaction (comfortable and exciting life), whereas the professional master's students more often chose values that reflected internal satisfaction and use of the creative mind (imagination and creativity and self-respect). The postprofessional master's students more often chose values that reflected growth of the self and of the profession (intellectual stimulation and challenge).

Suppose a student who enters an occupational therapy educational program highly values prestige, surroundings, and social recognition but does not believe that self-respect, intellectual stimulation, capability, or honesty (the frequently stated values of the students in this study) are important. This student may fail to complete their academic program or become an unsatisfied but employed therapist, or may contribute to the attrition rate. This student's needs should be identified before he or she enters an occupational therapy program so that the student's educational experience (possibly in a program other than occupational therapy) will be satisfying and rewarding.

**Recommendations and Suggestions for Future Research**

This study should be replicated with a random sample of students in each of the three levels of educational programs to obtain a more representative sample of the student population. Also, a longitudinal study rather than a cross-sectional study would generate information about subjects over time.

Further study in this area may focus on the professional goals and values of baccalaureate graduates who obtain a second baccalaureate degree, because this population was not addressed in this research. It may also be beneficial to compare the professional goals and values of recent graduates and of those who have been working in the profession for 10 years or longer to determine important trends. Professional goals and values of therapists employed in a variety of treatment settings can be determined for insight into what attracts therapists to different settings.

The professional goals, values, and trends of nontraditional students also may be identified, as this is a growing population. Another possible study may focus on investigating and reporting differences in educational programs so that students may make informed educational choices.

**Study Limitations**

This study has several limitations. One limitation was the method of sampling. To contain the costs of the survey, schools were randomly selected for the sample rather than students. The sample of schools may not have been representative of all schools in the United States. Additionally, the response rate was low for survey research and, because the return rate was less than 100%, it is not known how much respondents differ from nonrespondents. Finally, some of the questions may not have been clear, and could have been expanded upon for clarification. For instance, the professional goal of educating occupational therapy students should have been two goals: (a) educating occupational therapy students in an academic program and (b) educating occupational therapy students in a clinical program. Additionally, becoming an expert in practice might have been divided into: (a) becoming an expert in general practice and (b) becoming an expert in a specialized area of practice.

**Summary**

It is shown that similarities exist among occupational therapy students' professional goals and values, yet there are differences in the professional goals and values among different educational levels of occupational therapy students. The profile of the occupational therapy students in this study suggests that the therapist-to-be has an intrinsic interest in the profession, wants to work with and help people, and wants the opportunity to be original. The main goal of respondents was to become an expert in occupational therapy practice, and as a group they all highly valued self-respect, capability, and honesty.

There are also differences among these three groups of students in terms of their professional goals and values, and a pattern emerged that creates a different profile for each of the three groups. In general, the baccalaureate students are quite different from the postprofessional master's students, and the professional master's students tend to have qualities in common with both student groups. The baccalaureate students were more likely than the other two groups of students to say that they chose occupational therapy as a career because it was a well respected profession in which they could fulfill the professional goal of working with people. They were also more likely to state that they valued security, prestige, an exciting and comfortable life, social recognition, and pleasure.

The professional master's students were more likely than the other two groups of students to say they decided on occupational therapy as a career because they could fulfill the professional goals of contributing to society, being independent and original, and working with ideas. They were more likely to say they valued creativity, altruism, imagination, inner harmony, and self-respect.

The postprofessional master's students were more likely than the other two groups of students to say they chose occupational therapy as a career because they had
an intrinsic interest in the profession. They were more likely to say they valued intellectual stimulation, challenge, freedom, and management. They were also more likely to state the professional goals of becoming an expert in practice, educating students, performing research, making a theoretical contribution, writing books, publishing papers, and presenting material at conferences.

Knowing the professional values and goals of students who are preparing to enter an educational program may be beneficial in directing them toward occupational therapy. Recruiting incoming students into the profession of occupational therapy has potential for increasing the work force and decreasing the current shortage of occupational therapists. Knowledge of students’ professional goals and values may help recruiters identify students who will be successful in both the academic environment and in clinical practice. Future curriculum planning, an increase in teaching strategies geared towards student needs, and development of courses according to trends can also be influenced by the knowledge that students in different educational levels have differing professional values and goals. It is important for all of these reasons to know what therapists of the near future value and what their professional goals are. Knowing the professional values and goals of occupational therapy students may provide for growth of the profession and assist in keeping the 2,500 new occupational therapists added to the work force each year productively employed.

Appendix

Student Goals and Values Survey

1. Following is list of goals. Circle any that you consider important for you to accomplish during your career in occupational therapy (May circle more than one response.)
   1. Becoming an expert in a special area of practice
   2. Obtaining recognition from colleagues
   3. Supervising the work of others
   4. Heading an occupational therapy department
   5. Making a theoretical contribution to the field
   6. Creating artistic works
   7. Doing research
   8. Writing books
   9. Publishing professional papers
   10. Becoming an officer in the state professional organization
   11. Becoming active in the national professional organization
   12. Being awarded professional honors
   13. Participating in an organization like the Peace Corps or Vista
   14. Educating occupational therapy students
   15. Presenting material at professional conferences
   16. Being a consultant
   17. Going into private practice
   18. Patenting an assistive device
   19. Constructing an assessment instrument
   20. Beginning a new clinical occupational therapy program
   21. Developing a new treatment technique

2. Below is a list of career values. Please circle one number for each career value.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Career Values</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Not Very Important</th>
<th>Unimportant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Creativity</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Management</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Achievement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Surroundings</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Supervisory</td>
<td>relationships</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Security</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Associates</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Prestige</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Independence</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>10. Variety</td>
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<td>11. Altruism</td>
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<td>12. Imagination</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>15. Intellectual stimulation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>16. Equality</td>
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<td>17. Inner harmony</td>
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<td>19. Exciting life</td>
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<td>26. Broad-mindedness</td>
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References


