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Embedding Mindfulness Practice in Entry-Level Occupational Therapy Education Program: Experiences and Outcomes

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Objective

To embed mindfulness practice into an entry-level occupational therapy curriculum and assess outcomes to reduce student stress and promote well-being.

Evidence-base

- **Healthy People 2020:** Promote quality of life, healthy development and healthy behaviors across all life stages
- **Mindfulness training** in higher education (Gura, 2010)
 - enhances cognitive and academic performance
 - supports mental health/psychological well-being
 - provides coping tools to OT students
- **Recent research** (Reid, 2013; Stew, 2011)
 - improved therapeutic interactions in clinical setting, “fully present for clients”
 - Increase ability to cope with challenging situations
 - Increased self-awareness, reduced stress and greater feelings of well-being

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Implementation

Summer reading: Mindfulness: An attentional approach to engaged professionalism (Mueller)

First class (fall):

- Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (pre measure)
- introduced mindfulness (11-minute videotape) and led students through one mindfulness practice
- pairs/small group discussion
- opportunity to share in large group discussion

Weekly in lab (fall and spring semesters):

- 5-6 minute mindfulness practice (video led)
- lab instructors encourage use of mindfulness while practicing skills (listening during Interpersonal module activities, breathing, visualizing before patient transfer)

Backboard resources:

- All videotapes archived for student use
- Published peer-reviewed evidence on mindfulness programs and outcomes (multiple populations)
- Mindfulness apps
- YouTube videos - relationship of social-emotional environment to mental and physical health

Course assignment (spring semester):

- Integrated selected mindfulness practice/activity at start of group-led intervention session

Evaluation:

- Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (post measure in fall)
- after each of 3 modules, student feedback in anonymous online evaluation (qualitative and quantitative)

Integration into other courses:

- Mindfulness moment before tests in other courses – led by course instructors

Outcomes

Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) results

- Inconclusive after first semester
- Students more observant of own degree of awareness?
- Is FFMQ sensitive to recognize short-term change?

Students

“... mindfulness definitely helps to calm me down before fieldwork, exams or anything else that causes me stress and anxiety.”

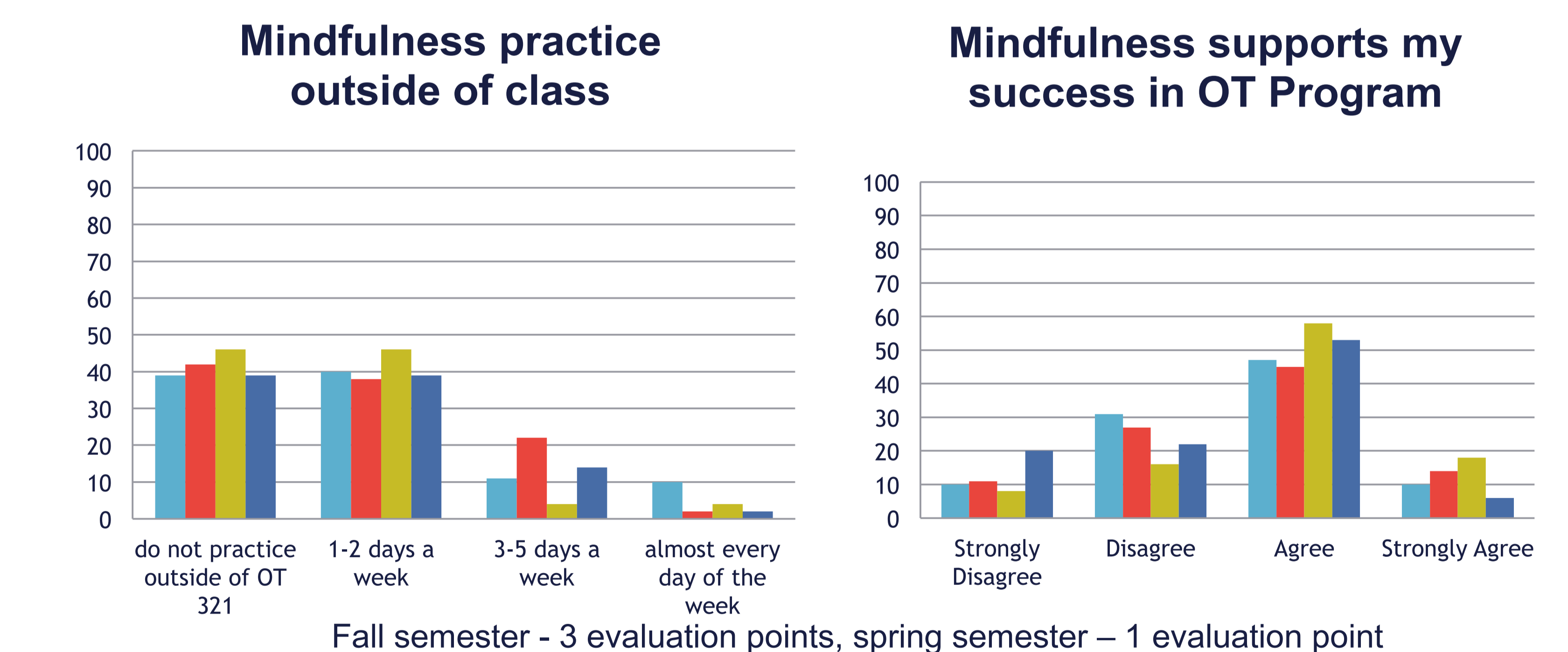
“...it allows me to recognize my feelings and/or worries when I am in class, but then focus on the task at hand. I acknowledge them, let them go, or make a mental note to think about it.”

“...mindfulness helps me to improve my well-being outside of class and be more positive in general.”

“I don’t at this moment really believe mindfulness is something that benefits me. Perhaps I will feel differently in the future.”

Faculty

“... used ... prior to the first A & K exam. Students participated, most really got into it with closed eyes and breathing along with my voice. It was a good addition. I plan to do it again next week.”



Next steps

- End of year data collection/evaluation (Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire, student feedback)
- Plan for second year implementation and first year revision with student input; reconsider FFMQ
- Online training plus in-person session option
- Volunteer participation
- Create separate mindfulness module

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