

## OTA Bridge to Bachelor-Degree Market Report- St Charles CC

Report summarizing OTA Missouri Marketplace Engagement data research and project analysis, articulated to provide context and relevance to the Market Study



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## Introduction

### Summary Explanation

St. Charles Community College (the “College”) has a long-standing history of investing in their community by providing quality education that matches community need. This includes an Associate of Applied Science Degree within the OTA Program that allows for general education and fieldwork specific to the degree, which translates to an 80+ hour program. In the fall of 2018, the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE®) released new standards of practice for the Occupational Therapy field. This new standard puts into practice a new entry-level enrollment for OTA national accreditation as a baccalaureate-level degree program.

Upon release, St. Charles Community College began reviewing their OTA Program (the “Program”) to confirm the viability, both technically and in operations, of expanding its current program offering to include a Bachelor of Arts Degree for Occupational Therapy Assistants to meet the changing dynamics of national professional standards. Technically, the College is a community college and by state statute and its own mission it serves to offer Associate Level Degrees and technical training. Operationally, the Program Chair has been watching the trend within the industry and has designed their program to meet and exceed those national industry qualifying standards.

After contacting the Missouri Department of Higher Education’s Coordinating Board for Higher Education (CBHE) to determine the feasibility of an application to expand the Academic Program, the College chose to pursue a summary review of internal practices and a snapshot study of the Missouri OTA Marketplace from both an educator’s and industry specialist’s perspective.

### OTA Program Exploration Objective

Occupational Therapy, by definition, is a client-centered health profession and the practice of helping people across the lifespan through therapeutic use of daily activities (occupations). This client practice ranges the spectrum in primary, preventative and tertiary care. There are two professional certifications in the field: 1) Occupational Therapist, which requires a masters or doctorate level degree plus certification/ licensure and 2) Occupational Therapist Assistant, which current requires an Associate-level degree plus licensure.

The College is pursuing an application with the Missouri Department of Higher Education to add a Baccalaureate Degree of OTA curriculum within the St. Charles Community College OTA Program. The Program’s objective aligns with national and state educational standards while meeting workplace demand and assisting students to attain the highest professional placement to the best of their abilities.

### OTA Program Requirements

- Proposed program aligns with AOTA – Vision 2025
- Proposed program aligns with MDHE Blueprint for Higher Education (2025 focus)
- Cost of Educational Attainment is Lower
  - Cost per credit hour is lower for proposed program than 4-year institution offering

### OTA Program Goals

- Increase Number of Students to meet Workforce Demand

- Align Student Qualifications / Degrees with Market Demands
  - Expectation of competency standards
- Increase direct Placement of Bachelor-level prepared Students to meet Industry

### **Marketplace Study Objective**

The College commissioned River Henge Partners LLC to perform a Missouri Marketplace Study to provide data relative to the Occupational Therapy Assistant (“OTA”) workforce qualifications for graduate placement within the state of Missouri. The “OTA Missouri Marketplace Engagement Data Study” (“Data Study”) was designed to capture data on positions marketed upon exit of educational institution and employer’s qualifications to confirm additional skills-sets or professional-level requirements.

### **Third-Party Review and Reporting**

Separately, River Henge Partners LLC, a business consulting firm specializing in industry-sector data analytics, was commissioned to provide Summary Reporting of the external Study findings. River Henge Partners is a private sector catalyst rooted in data research, analytics and hands-on experience to guide master-planned economic development.

With a combined 30 years of experience in economic development - including urban and rural planning and another 20 years in data research and analysis, River Henge Partners offers customized data for communities and industries in any economic and industry sector.

### **Scope of Work**

The Scope of Work for the “OTA Bridge to Bachelor-Degree Market Report- St Charles CC” (the “Report”) includes:

Articulated Report summarizing OTA Missouri Marketplace Engagement data research and project analysis, articulated to provide context and relevance to the Market Study

## **Report Background**

### **Report Purpose**

The purpose of the “OTA Bridge to Bachelor-Degree Market Report” is to draw together information gathered from the Study’s dataset and Interpretation of Summary Findings, conducted by a separate third-party company, and provide a contextual framework as a baseline consideration for the Program’s potential expansion.

### **Field Research**

#### Report Project Basis

The baseline data necessary for Reporting includes the confirmation of educational programs, job positions and placement and contextual information from education and industry that work directly with OTA workplace productivity (dataset from Study). Also included in review for reporting are the separate Analysis of the Study, the College’s Microburst session outline, and the foundation of national

accreditation requirements published by ACOTE®. The Report is a summation of the results of the St. Charles Community College Planning Session, Study, and Study Analysis.

### Exceptions

The Report is not designed to be a comprehensive business plan for the move to formalizing a bachelor program at the St. Charles Community College. While parts of the Report may be utilized in their application, should the College seek to pursue program expansion, this document is not intended as a comprehensive prospectus for the Program.

The Report is based on a snapshot of information, taken at the time of Study and Survey. The report does not reflect an opinion by the contracted third-party and should not be construed as an endorsement by any particular company, program, or person.

### **Dataset Conditions and Considerations**

Study parameters were limited to identifying and verifying positions currently marketed upon graduation from qualified Occupational Therapy educational programs and industries offering employment to confirm additional skill sets or professional level requirements. Qualifiers included: initial requirement matched OTA-level entry and operations which were located within the defined geographic scope.

Considerations in the Marketplace Study included a) educational institutions offering OT, OTA and Pre-OT programming operating in the state of Missouri, b) student placement (positions and industries) information post-exit, and c) job descriptions offered by company's advertising OTA positions, located within the geographic scope. Analysis of the Marketplace Study was conducted by a separate company.

### **Dataset- Methodology (Data Collection)**

Study Methodology for Education included:

- Collect Community College, College and University Data (Missouri)
- Confirm Program Definition
- Collect Data from question set – direct phone call

Study Methodology for Industry included:

- Keyword Research – Search Engine, Industry Database
- Catalog results – Job Title, Company, Location, Salary
- Collect 20-30 samples of detailed job postings
- Verify percentage of sampling to confirm qualifications- direct phone call

The two primary questions for Education Engagement were:

1. Outside of the OT and OTA job titles themselves, what other Positions are marketed to graduates?
2. Beyond healthcare, what other industries are hiring?

Three primary questions for Employer Engagement hiring OTA Graduates were:

1. Outside of the standard OTA requirements, what are you looking for in new hires?
2. How do you see the OTA Position and the requirements evolving in your industry?
3. What do you see as the evolution of the OTA Position in your business?

### Qualifiers for Analysis

The defined parameter for analysis is limited to current conditions as identified in the dataset provided. The Analysis is specific to employer engagement relative to the available workforce placement in the pre-defined marketplace. In review and consideration are:

- Position Response – Education
- Education Survey – Positions, Industry-type
- Position Sampling – Industries/Companies
- Employer Survey- Roles, Responsibilities (current), Future

Key qualifier for analysis:

- Clearly identified educational systems operating in the state of Missouri – and in good standing with ACOTE.
- Job placement within the state of Missouri
- Analysis of data to segregate additional educational or professional requirements, if any
- If available, analysis of contextual comment – subjective to the qualified person being interviewed

### Report Documentation

River Henge Partners reviewed the following documents for reference and inclusion:

- OTA Missouri Marketplace Engagement Study – Dataset Summary
- OTA Marketplace Engagement Analysis Summary Outline
- St Charles Community College provided information:
  - AOTA Current Trends in Accreditation and Higher Education April 2018 presentation
  - September 2018 ACOTE Standards
  - MDHE – A Blueprint for Higher Education (in Missouri)
  - St Charles Community College OTA Program Microburst Planning Outline
- 2018 MO Economic Report – Missouri Department of Economic Development

### Considerations

#### Geographic Boundaries

Reporting criteria is limited to the state of Missouri for education and industry defined marketplaces. Since both the OTA Educational Program requirements and the Professional OTA certification are national, consideration accounts for prevailing industry standards.

#### Job Title Specificity

OTA's are referred to as COTA's in the workforce. This points to the passage of the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy (NBOCOT) Board Certified Exam which OT's and OTA's pass to practice within their profession and license as per Missouri state requirements.

### Marketplace Engagement

The data gathered reached into the State of Missouri's educational environment, active labor market, and collected job descriptions and positions which posed an industry standard. The raw data itself captures only part of the story. The Study process engaged both educators who have direct responsibility in transitioning students to the workforce and industry experts (department heads, therapy managers, talent acquisition) who work daily with OTAs in their respective work environs. This direct marketplace engagement provides a snapshot of what is happening within the industry today from a workplace and education/ workforce training perspective.

## Report Findings

### Key Definitions and Distinctions

Occupational Therapy: According to the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA), Occupational Therapy is the only profession that helps people across the lifespan to do the things they want and need to do through the therapeutic use of daily activities (occupations). Occupational therapy practitioners enable people of all ages to live life to its fullest by helping them promote health, and prevent - or live better with - injury, illness, or disability.

Common occupational therapy interventions include helping children with disabilities to participate fully in school and social situations, helping people recovering from injury to regain skills, and providing supports for older adults experiencing physical and cognitive changes.

Occupational Therapists must complete a Masters-level Degree (MSOT) (MOT) or Doctorate (OTD), pass a national certification board test, and receive state licensure.

Occupational Therapy Program: Institutions which offer entry-level master's or doctoral programs that are accredited by the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE®).

Occupational Therapy Assistants: AOTA states "Occupational Therapy Assistants play a key role in providing occupational therapy services in every area of practice." A Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant ("COTA") works similarly to a Physician's Assistant, wherein they can work directly with a patient and direct program, under the supervision of an OT. There is a legal and technical separation of roles and responsibilities between the OT and OTA.

Occupational Therapy Assistant ("OTA") Program: OTA programs are educational programs accredited by the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE®). On-site evaluations for program accreditation are conducted at 5 or 7 year intervals for initial accreditation and 5, 7, or 10 year intervals for continuing accreditation.

Certification: The National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy ("NBCOT") administers a qualified exam which results, for those who pass, in a federally-designated professional certification required by most states in order to practice in their respective professional field. The standard definition of a COTA is an OTA who has passed the equivalent of the OTA bar to become nationally certified to practice in their respective field.

Licensure: In addition to professional certification, most states require the COTA to be licensed and registered in the state to practice professionally (i.e. Missouri Division of Professional Registration).

American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) Industry Standards: Across the board in the Occupational Therapy spectrum of education AOTA through ACOTE accreditation maintains “the dynamic nature of contemporary health and human services delivery systems provides opportunities for the (OT professional) to possess the necessary knowledge and skills as a direct care provider, educator, manager, leader, and advocate for the profession and the consumer.” The organization maintains that Innovation within Higher Education is “Alternate delivery models that increase accessibility and decrease costs.” This includes competency-based degrees such as the OTA degree program.

Missouri Board of Higher Education (MBHE) Educational Standards: The coordinated plan for higher education in Missouri states “the private and public benefits of higher education are the building blocks of a vibrant society, a thriving economy and a good quality of life for all Missourians.” Adopted by the Coordinating Board for Higher Education (CBHE), “Preparing Missourians to Succeed: A Blueprint for Higher Education” focuses on five core goals (abridged):

1. Educational Attainment
2. Affordability
3. Quality and Relevancy
4. Research and Innovation
5. Investment, Advocacy and Partnerships

St Charles Community College Mission Standards: The Mission states that SCC serves the community by focusing on academic excellence, student success, workforce advancement, and life-long learning within a global society. The Allied Health Field and OTA program directors both indicate that it is their mission to align with newly defined ACOTE standards and MDHE Blueprint Plan which list competency-based learning as vital for student education, alignment with industry and affordable cost of education.

### **Meeting Educational Challenge**

AOTA maintains that Innovation within Higher Education is “Alternate delivery models that increase accessibility and decrease costs.” This includes competency-based degrees such as the OTA degree program.

There is a shift in Occupational Therapy education that changes the entry-points for students seeking certification. ACOTE has mandated that the entry-level degree requirement for the occupational therapist will move to the doctoral level by July 1, 2027.

The educational gap created between the supervising OT and the OTA explains the rationale for ACOTE to introduce a bachelor’s degree point of entry to OTA professional certification. The move in profession to a bachelor’s requirement underscores the knowledgebase need Missouri’s industry professionals already are experiencing. Two key observations from the Study include:

- Education, field work experience and training required is entirely Industry driven
- Industry is pushing for additional education and experience to provide a base to increase OTA responsibility and to bridge the knowledgebase divide between OT’s and OTA’s.

St. Charles Community College states the OTA Program is uniquely aligned and positioned to provide enhanced professional entry-level requirements for a Baccalaureate Degree of Occupational Therapy

Assistant in addition to offering an updated curriculum for their current Associate of Applied Science Degree (A.A.S).

### **Workplace Feedback**

#### Education Survey- Salient Points

Of forty-three (43) higher education schools offering degrees and programming that reach throughout Missouri's Occupational Therapy Spectrum, there are sixteen (16) colleges, universities and technical schools that are focused on OTA programming. However, within the sixteen (16), there are only nine (9) unique active OTA programs accredited through ACOTE®, of which two (2) are private schools. A Consortium of schools accounts for one (1) unique active program but represents seven (7) advertised programs. Three (3) of the nine (9) unique OTA programs are in the St. Louis Region, including St. Charles Community College.

#### Industry Survey – Salient Points

During the Study, the data research firm found ninety (90) active job listings referencing key words “OTA”, “COTA”, and “Occupational Therapy Assistants”. Forty-one (41) companies posted listings including health systems, home health, skilled nursing, acute and inpatient care, medical spas, rehabilitation centers, psychiatric centers and Professional Management companies. Twenty-one (21) companies were selected to provide job position sampling and marketplace feedback. Twelve (12) confirmed OT use as part of their healthcare protocol. Eight (8) companies responded with contextual feedback. Key industry points to consider:

- Majority of positions are offered by professional management companies – which means that the entry-level person may work at multiple facilities within the region or work for managed care.
- 4 of 8 respondents utilize a management company for services within their facility
- Minimum expectation is that the OTA is a COTA, nationally certified and state licensed
- Missouri's per capita personal income was \$43,661 in the 2017, according to the 2018 Mo Economic Report – MERIC/MoDED
- Salary basis for COTA in Missouri is reported at a range between \$38,771- \$61,405 in the St. Louis marketplace with an average reported across the state at approximately \$55,000.

### **Challenges**

#### Marketplace

There is an industry stated trend showing decreasing utilization of OTA's in an inpatient and acute-care setting (traditionally strong placement) caused by the shift in patient turn-around and in-flux evaluations. Quite simply, patients are staying for shorter periods of time in the hospital setting and the patient load can be, according to those interviewed, 10-15 patient evaluations in-flux a day. Because of that, there may be a squeeze in local markets affecting placement of newly graduated students without significant fieldwork experience.

#### Operational (Local)



The identified need for OTA expansion is driven by workforce demand, competency-based student preparation, and professional placement. The challenges St. Charles Community College must overcome to introduce the new degree level are twofold: 1) accrediting body approval at the state and federal level and 2) unknown competition pursuing 4-year degree designation.

## **Opportunities**

### Marketplace

According to the “2018 Current Trends in accreditation and Higher Education” presentation by AOTA on April 19, 2018, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates that Occupational Therapy Assistants is the 15<sup>th</sup> fastest growing occupation in the US, with predicted Job Growth from 2016-2026 equaling >28%.

The results of the OTA Missouri Marketplace Engagement Study supports a rapid progression of industry adoption. The Study results suggested the two industries within healthcare experiencing the most opportunity for COTA placement are the skilled nursing and home health industries.

Furthermore, interview respondents indicated that there are multiple driving factors such as change in regulations which expanded responsibilities of the OTA, shift in direct patient care by the OT into a purely administrative and oversight role leaving the OTA in an even more essential position as the primary patient care provider, and shift in insurance billing (PTPM) which affects the billed time and company reimbursement processes.

### Industry Outliers

For the Study Researchers did gather subjective examples of non-traditional OTA job positions, which were subject to the opinion of the author. Formal Study search parameters did not specifically meter non-traditional job titles, unless otherwise inclusive of with COTA qualification within the definition or job search, as those bleed outside the spectrum of verifiable COTA-qualified job positions. Industry respondents were all within the health-care field.

Educators indicated they are seeing expanded interest from corporate and non-traditional workplaces seeking an OTA knowledgebase as a key member of their staff. Examples for this are ergonomic specialists, wellness coaching, program design and chronic disease support foundations.

### Operational (Local)

The self-defined goals for OTA Program expansion are student centric. If successful in receiving approval for expansion, the defined opportunities for the student and institution are 1) student educational attainment, 2) workforce need, 3) community engagement, 4) program innovation, and 5) affordability for the student.

Opportunities Specific to St. Charles Community College and their area served include:

- Workforce Preparation and Placement
- Community Outreach/ Engagement
- Research and Innovation (within the OTA field)
- Affordability

## **Key Points**

### Planning

St. Charles Community College is currently offering an OTA Associate Degree program. Core components for expansion are already in place, should acceptance be granted to expand.

- Classes provide application of skills = COMPETENCY-BASED Curriculum Design
- Professional – Licensed Designation, Standards-driven versus generalized coursework
- St Charles Community College has already invested in the real estate in which to expand curriculum and lab work for additional programming and student enrollment.
- The expertise and leadership are already on-site to design the program.
- Staffing exists within the program department to meet a Bachelor-level degree and Associate-level curriculum.
- There exists the faculty interest to expand to include an OTA Bachelor's Degree program
- There is expressed student interest in both an Associate and Bachelor's Degree for OTA
- The private-sector field-work partners are willing to engage students as part of the learning environment which creates placement opportunities throughout the St. Louis Metro and Missouri
- Need an approved College Mission change and MDHE approval to expand to a baccalaureate-level program

### Analysis

- The Education, field work experience and training required is entirely Industry driven
- Typical entry-level employment is in a clinical setting, which is considered “traditional” in the health-care field
- Industries include hospitals, clinics, mental health, pediatrics, acute-care and skilled nursing
- Some industry outliers exist - school districts (still a traditional placement), private- based placements that are entrepreneurial (i.e. adaptive martial arts; therapeutic horseback riding, tele-health and wellness/job coaches)
- The role of the OTA throughout the health-care industry is changing
- Industry expectation of OTA performance breach typical curriculum-based training and include professional communication, time management, stress management, administrative and reporting responsibilities and a certain amount of physicality to perform tasks on the floor and in the field.

### Study Outcomes

- Both educators and industry specialist have seen a shift in responsibility to the OTA for direct patient care
- According to industry experts commenting during marketplace engagement, the role of an OTA in the health-care field will be more critical as their responsibilities increase and as insurance reimbursement and billing regulations come online.
- Educators maintain that the demand is outstripping placement and as awareness of OTA skill-sets increase, more corporate and private emerging fields will open.
- Industry is pushing for additional education and experience to provide a base to increase OTA responsibility and to bridge the knowledgebase divide between OT's and OTA's.

## Summary Conclusion

Occupational Therapy helps people across the lifespan to do the things they want and need to do through the therapeutic use of daily activities (occupations). Practitioners are tasked to enable people of all ages to live life to its fullest by helping them promote health, and prevent—or live better with—injury, illness, or disability.

Occupational Therapy Assistants are licensed, certified, professional health care providers who plays a vital role in patient well-being by providing direct patient care, instructional training, and human interaction. According to the industries represented in Marketplace Engagement, OTAs represent a critical link in patient recovery and wellness.

The expected amount of education, fieldwork and experience prior to OTA's entering the workforce is expanding to meet the roles and responsibilities within the healthcare field and those respective industries. Per the recommendation of the nationally accrediting body, the spectrum of education provided as an entry-point into the field is shifting to match market demand and the realistic functional role of the professional.

Outside of the healthcare industry, the role of the OTA is changing. As corporate awareness about the Occupational Therapy and the skillset of a qualified COTA grows, emerging fields will follow. This introduces new markets, creates competition for OTA's outside of their current respective certified fields, and places new relevance on the health-care fields demand for increased knowledgebase and fieldwork experience.

According to the 2018 MO Economic Report conducted by the Missouri Department of Economic Development, The Health Care and Social Assistance industry sector is the number one employer in Missouri. Market trends indicate the Healthcare and Social Services industry is growing. Health Care and Business / Management related jobs are the most in demand occupations within the state.

St. Charles Community College is currently offering an OTA Associate Degree program. There exists the faculty interest to expand to include an OTA Bachelor's Degree program. This interest aligns with newly released recommendations for professional educational standards.

The College has positioned for this expansion by the staffing, real estate and lab-space for student training. The expertise is already on-site to design the program. This affords the College a unique position as an early adopter, both in Missouri and the national educational marketplace.

If successful in receiving MBHE approval for expansion, the defined opportunities for the student and institution are 1) student educational attainment, 2) workforce need, 3) community engagement, 4) program innovation, and 5) affordability for the student. The proposed OTA Program expansion positively impacts workplace preparedness and meets forecasted marketplace demand.