

January /  
February

JBOT

2021

Justice-Based Occupational Therapy, Vol.3, Issue 1

Student Voice Presenting at the  
AOTA Education Summit

See pages 5-7 for full speech.

COTAD Leader is Voted as Vice  
President Elect to AOTA

COTAD Chair

Dr. Arameh Anvarizadeh OTD, OTR/L

On February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2021, AOTA released the results of their 2021 elections. Dr. Anvarizadeh, a COTAD leader, was elected to be the next Vice President of AOTA. Dr. Anvarizadeh, as well as the other elects, will assume office on July 1, 2021.

Click the link to learn more about the 2021  
AOTA election results : <https://lnkd.in/enK3VvK>



## JBOT Internationally

In the July 2020 issue of Occupational Therapy Now:

Save The Date

## JBOT AROUND THE U.S.

### The Journal of Occupational Science's Introduction to the

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The anti-racism virtual issue of the Journal of Occupational Science (Oct. 2020) includes a position statement, 'A Pledge to Mobilize Against Racism' (Stanley et al., 2020). The issue provides articles that address racism and how we as individuals can make a difference. Topics covered include: slavery, migration, deculturalization, marginalized populations, and occupational justice. The introduction also provides articles that focus on the work that occupational scientists are doing to correct these issues.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14427591.2020.1824567>

## AOTA Education Summit Keynote Speech 2.0 (from page 1)

Mario Millsap

MSOT

Washington University School of Medicine  
Program in Occupational Therapy '20

As a 29-year old Black man, I was ecstatic to finally be accepted into an occupational therapy program after three attempts at the application process. Although OT was a career I never knew existed until my mid-twenties, I was drawn to the profession due to the unique approach to care – one that focused on activities and allowed the client to guide their treatment. Once I arrived on Washington University's campus after working full-time as a rehab aide, I couldn't wait to get started. I expected to be challenged adapting to having homework again and connecting with classmates who were just out of college. I did not expect that I would be in for one of the most challenging times in my life – and one that would transform me into the person I am today.

Early in the semester, I am being taught all about building rapport, cultural humility, and the importance of meeting your clients where they are. All while I was being repeatedly assured that chasing the A Train wasn't necessary here. Simply focus on understanding the material. I thought, "Great! Grades were my least favorite thing about school. I just wanted to learn. That was why I was here."

Cut to a few weeks later, I am pulled into private meetings with educators questioning my aptitude and ability to keep up in the program. I would occasionally be late to class, I didn't know about APA formatting, and I wouldn't bother with small-point assignments. Instead of asking what I needed or even attempted to understand me or my situation, I was encouraged to not focus on my family's well-being – who I was still living with & supporting, all while caring for an ailing sister. They told me to give up my volunteer work with at-risk youth – an activity they repeatedly praised me for when I was admitted – all for the sake of focusing my studies or risk being "academically separated." That jarring experience would jump-start a repeated pattern of assimilation instead of accommodation during my time in the program. It wasn't until I developed relationships with Drs. Quinn Tyminski & Jess Dashner, before I even had an educator reach out to me and ask me what they could do to teach the information in a way that made better sense to me, or ask me if I was OK after looking distracted in class and encouraged me to take a self-care day. It was near the end of the first semester before I saw in action precisely what I was being taught.

After my first year, I honestly felt let down and questioned my reason for being here. The promise of occupational therapy being for everyone was not being met in the same environment I am learning about it. After listening to my classmate's own experiences and many Black OTs about their time as students, it was

## AOTA Education Summit Keynote Speech continued

But I am one of the lucky ones. We originally had five Black students in my cohort of almost 100 (which was a program record) -

## AOTA Education Summit Keynote Speech continued

From my student organizing efforts with the Wash U Black OT Collective and the Wash U Anti-Bigotry Coalition, I feel like it is a godsend to have a new program director that wants to create change as badly as we do. Some faculty members have long expressed frustration at our program's history of inaction when made aware of these inequities but felt powerless to make a difference based on academia's various environmental pressures. They have been actively supporting our efforts to make our OT program better and I am thankful for them. It is early, but I am encouraged by the steps taken so far. My student activism experience is not the norm – but it should be, and it should not have to come or only be taken seriously after a string of senseless murders of Black people.

We cannot complain that our society does not understand occupational therapy if we do not show people and communities what we do. While it is easy to take pride in producing publications for OT-centered literature, and the USA Today Rankings value it on their annual program list, the clients, the community – those who we are meant to serve - do not see them, nor do they care. They do not have access to the journals where many of my colleagues' brilliant evidence-based papers reside that are hidden behind expensive paywalls. They cannot attend conferences to read posters, see presentations, and learn about the cuttingedge technology of our trade. Research has tremendous value, but it cannot begin and end there. Without actionable follow-through they become self-congratulatory efforts while abdicating from the work to impact society for the better. OT's efforts to remain apolitical – while being a profession where enabling access and participation is literally the basis of our entire framework – makes zero sense to me. Political activist Angela Davis once said that "Optimism is a political act". As OTs, when we render our services, we are literally instilling hope to our clients that they will have a better quality of life. By this definition I choose to be political and invite you to be as well.

I speak with passion because I firmly believe in the idea that OT can and should be for everyone. We have a generation of OT students now and in the future who also want to see this profession deliver on this promise. Not just Black students, but also White students, Latinx students, Asian students, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ students. We all have such a unique lens that can be incredibly beneficial to our everchanging and more multicultural society. A society that is growing more aware of the many systemic occupational barriers around them. OT as a profession cannot progress until we make the conscious decision not to be allies, but to be accomplices – those willing to work collaboratively to dismantle these historical infrastructures that undermine real equity for ALL people. Even at the expense of backlash, comfort, or personal gain. And it begins at our institutions.

I channel Ms. Davis once more, quoting, "I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change. I am changing the things I cannot accept." That is why I am here today. I could no longer accept that my student experience was OK. I cannot accept that my experiences are just one of many in a long line of OT students that came before me, and I want to change that. My hope is that after listening, you too - as current leaders of our profession, will be inspired to be change agents and better foster our future. Thank you. -Mario Millsap

## Thank You

We appreciate Mario's generosity and vulnerability in sharing his experience.

To connect with Mario, he's on LinkedIn:

[linkedin.com/in/ mario-millsap](https://www.linkedin.com/in/mario-millsap)

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## Reflections

Share your reflections on justice-based OT!

Students, practitioners, researchers, collaborators, and clients are welcome to send their story to JBOT for a future newsletter!

~250-300 words  
~include a photo

Email:  
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## INTERPROFESSIONAL JBOT

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OTD, OTR/L  
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Transition and Reentry  
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## NSU Study: Black OT Students and Systemic Racism

<https://www.aota.org/Conference -Events/2020-education-summit.asp2> ( ( \$1)-9.8 (sp2-354 (Figure < 2.5 (7 (20)Tw 0

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