

# DEPARTMENT *of* OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

## NEWSLETTER



VOLUME 9 | SPRING 2026

### Hello from the UNE OT Program,

It is a pleasure to welcome you to our Spring 2026 Occupational Therapy Alumni Newsletter. This edition reflects the energy, growth, and connection that continue to define our OT community here on the Portland Campus for the Health Sciences, across varied practice settings across the country, and throughout generations of graduates of our program.



In addition, this spring marks an exciting period of growth and evolution for the OT program. We are actively designing a revised MSOT curriculum designed to strengthen integration across coursework and fieldwork. At the same time, we are preparing to launch an entry-level Doctor of Occupational Therapy (OTD) program in addition to our MSOT program in fall 2027. This new program builds on the strengths of our MSOT foundation while expanding opportunities for scholarship, leadership, and systems-level thinking. We look forward to sharing more as this work continues, and I am grateful for the alumni who are contributing to and supporting this next chapter of our program.

Within these pages, you'll find a snapshot of what has been happening in the department over the past several months, including faculty and student accomplishments, program and community partnerships, recent publications, and special events. We are excited to highlight opportunities to reconnect in person, including our alumni networking social at the 2026 AOTA Annual Conference & Expo, as well as share news from our fieldwork office, LEND, CAIEP, and Pi Theta Epsilon.

You will also meet a new member of our OT faculty, celebrate alumni achievements and spotlights, and see how our students continue to engage in meaningful, hands-on learning experiences that reflect the values of occupational therapy and interprofessional collaboration.

### In this Issue...

Director's Message.....	1
April Invitations.....	2
New Faculty Member.....	4
Fieldwork News.....	4
Departmental News.....	5
Maine LEND News.....	6
CAIEP News.....	7
Alumni Spotlights.....	8
Advisory Board.....	9
Community Engagement.....	10
Experiential Learning Experiences.....	11
Save the Date.....	12



UNIVERSITY OF  
NEW ENGLAND

INNOVATION FOR A HEALTHIER PLANET

These stories are a testament to the strength of our alumni network, and the impact UNE graduates are making locally, nationally, and beyond.

We are grateful for your continued connection to the program, whether through mentorship, fieldwork partnerships, collaboration, or simply staying in touch. We hope this newsletter helps you feel connected to UNE and inspires you to share your own updates, achievements, and stories with us.

Thank you for being such an important part of the UNE Occupational Therapy community. We hope you enjoy this update and look forward to staying connected.

All my best,

Caroline Beals, PhD, OTR/L, CHSE

## April Invitations



### Pediatric Adaptive Projects Expo & Nancy MacRae Meaningful Occupations Fundraiser

We invite you to join us on April 14 from 4:30 to 6 pm in Innovation Hall on the Portland Campus to explore and celebrate the creativity and innovation of our first-year occupational therapy students. This year's showcase will feature 23 interactive pediatric adaptive projects designed by our students to support children and families and promote meaningful occupational engagement.

Past projects have included sensory boards, climbing structures, and modified pediatric tools and games. Following the event, these projects are donated to local organizations and individuals, extending their impact into the community. You may also choose to participate in the Nancy MacRae Meaningful Occupations Fundraiser while you attend, which raises funds for occupational therapy research.

This event is free and open to community members, students, faculty, and professional staff. Individuals of all ages and abilities are welcome. Light refreshments will be provided.



## See you at the 2026 AOTA Conference & Expo in Anaheim, CA!

Connect with fellow UNE Occupational Therapy alumni and current students at a networking reception in conjunction with the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) Annual Conference & Expo. Don't miss this opportunity to share your experiences, celebrate achievements, and inspire future professionals!



### Occupational Therapy Networking Social

Brewheim | 1931 E Wright Cir Anaheim, CA 92806

**Friday, April 24, 2026**

7:00 pm- 9:00pm PT | Patio



Please register for this event to assist in our catering order.

### Thursday April 23, 4:00 - 5:00 PM

Don't miss this engaging short course at the AOTA Conference, presented by UNE Occupational Therapy Professor Carol Lambdin-Pattavina, OTD, MSOT, OTR/L, CTP, FAOTA, titled "Examining and Fostering Development of Professional Identity in Occupational Therapy Students & Practitioners." This session explores the critical role of a strong professional identity in promoting longevity and sustainability within the occupational therapy profession. Dr. Lambdin-Pattavina will highlight strategies to cultivate professional identity among students and practitioners, including an examination of the impact of student participation in the AOTA Conference. Dr. Lambdin-Pattavina's work focuses on supporting individuals in the community to design meaningful lives through occupation. Her efforts are grounded in advancing more equitable and just systems of care. Dr. Lambdin-Pattavina's research interests include community-based, occupation-centered interventions for individuals in marginalized communities, the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL), and interprofessional education (IPE). She is actively engaged in professional service and recently served as Chair of the AOTA Mental Health Special Interest Section (MHSIS).

### Thursday April 23, 4:00 - 6:00 PM AOTA Conference Poster Session #2

Afterward, please stop by the UNE poster presentation of current student, Julia White, MSOT '26 and Dr. Kris Winston entitled "Service as Occupation: The Yellow Tulip Project." This poster explores service as an occupation through an autoethnographic reflection on Hope Gardens by sharing findings from personal experience and research as to how service fits as an occupation in individuals' lives.



### Friday April 24, 10:30 - 11:00 AM

Don't miss "Occupational Needs of College Students After Concussion" presented by UNE Occupational Therapy Program Director and Associate Clinical Professor Caroline Beals, Ph.D, OTR/L, CHSE. This clinical application of research presentation will describe a mixed-methods study examining how concussions affect college students' occupational engagement. Findings highlight the need for holistic, occupation-based recovery approaches and underscore the vital role of occupational therapy in supporting return-to-learn and successful participation in college life.

## New Faculty Member



### Introducing Hillary Littlefield, OTD, MSOT, OTR/L

I'm thrilled to be joining the department as an Assistant Clinical Professor and your new Doctoral Capstone Coordinator—and even more excited to be back on campus as a proud UNE alum (Class of 2014...Go Nor'Easters!). Before returning to UNE, I built my clinical foundation in acute care, working with multi-trauma, orthopedic, neurological, and acute burn populations, and later stepped into system-level leadership roles supporting acute care, inpatient rehab, critical access hospitals, and outpatient therapy services. I'm a lifelong learner, and I'm passionate about mentorship, experiential learning, and helping emerging OTs discover what lights them up. My professional interests include physical disability and rehabilitation, workforce wellness, and creating sustainable models of care that keep both patients and providers thriving. I'm grateful to

be here, eager to get to know all of you, and excited for what we'll build together!

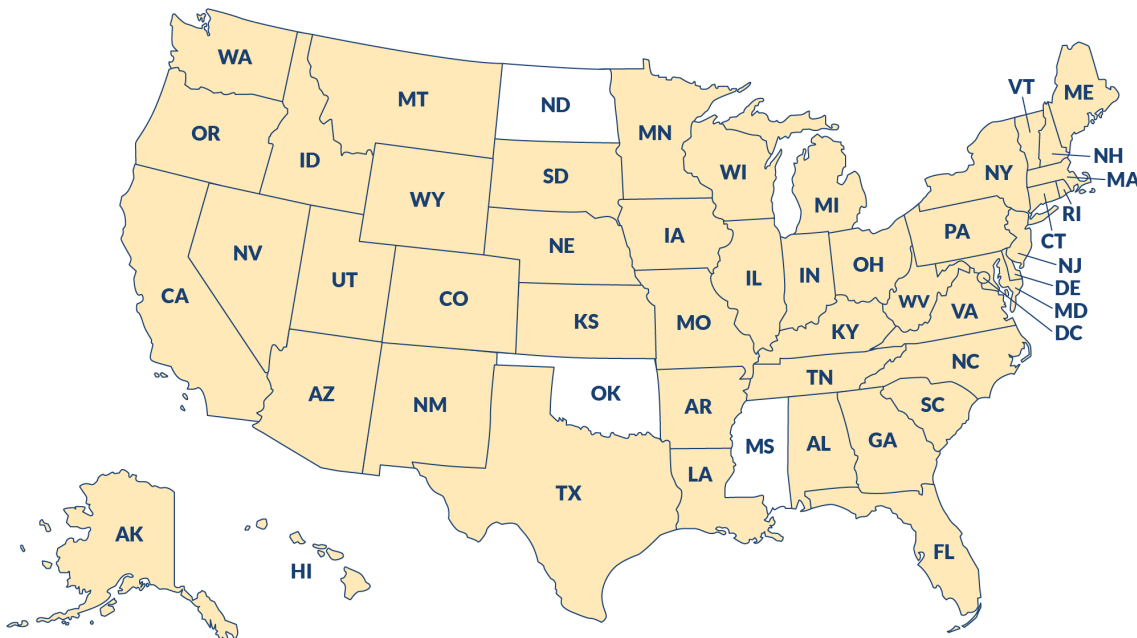
Hillary Littlefield, OTD, MSOT, OTR/L

## News from the Fieldwork Office

Our students in the Class of 2026 are in the process of completing their placements before May graduation. This cohort has placements in eight different states and one international placement in Belize providing services to underserved children.

We continue to work on securing fieldwork placements for the Class of 2027 and for the Class of 2028 who will be joining us in May. We deeply value the connections our students can make with UNE alumni through Level I and Level II fieldwork experiences and are thankful to those who have offered placements. If you are interested in providing fieldwork placements, please contact Academic Fieldwork Coordinator Jessica Walton at [jwalton5@une.edu](mailto:jwalton5@une.edu).

Help us fill in the map by letting us know where you are currently practicing, and if you have interest in mentoring a student, guest lecturing, or adjuncting for our program. Even if you just have an address update, [keep us in the loop by completing this form!](#)



States where UNE OT Alumni Practice

## Do you employ UNE OT alumni?

We would love to hear from you! As part of our accreditation tracking, we are seeking input from those who employ graduates of the UNE OT program. Your participation in a very brief survey (less than 10 minutes to complete) will provide our program with data and insight as to how our graduates are entering the workforce and their preparedness. We sincerely value your feedback and time! If you or someone you know employs graduates from the UNE OT Program, [please consider responding to and sharing this link to the Employer Survey.](#)



## Are you interested in Mental Health First Aid Training to better support UNE fieldwork students?

UNE OT faculty, professional staff, and fieldwork educators recently took part in a certification training in Mental Health First Aid to learn techniques and local resources for supporting the mental health of students and coworkers. This evidence-based, non-clinical mental health awareness and crisis intervention training for general adult audiences was developed by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing, supported by the Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), and taught by Certified MHFA Instructors from Sweetser, a behavioral health non-profit organization in Maine. If you reside in Maine and would be interested in participating in a future training, please email Melissa Walsh at [mwalsh18@une.edu](mailto:mwalsh18@une.edu).

## Departmental News

### Departmental Award

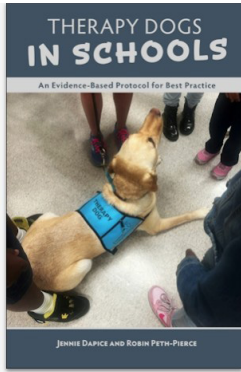
The UNE Occupational Therapy Program was honored to be named STRIVE's 2025 Business/Organization of the Year. This award recognizes the program's sustained partnership and service to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in southern Maine. STRIVE, a South Portland based nonprofit organization, provides services and programming for tweens, teens, and young adults with intellectual disabilities. The Business/Organization of the Year award recognizes exceptional service, volunteerism, and community partnership that advances STRIVE's mission.



"Community partnerships like UNE OT and STRIVE are foundational to experiential education," said Caroline Beals, Ph.D., OTR/L, CHSE, program director of occupational therapy at UNE. "They provide our students an opportunity for immersion in authentic practice to strengthen interprofessional skills, and, most importantly, advance participation and quality of life for our community partners. STRIVE partners help future OT practitioners develop as more inclusive and person-centered providers in their approaches. Our students grow as reflective, compassionate practitioners as a result."

*Upper right: UNE faculty members, Jessica Walton, MS, OTR/L and Erin McCall, OTD, MSOT, OTR/L accepted the award on behalf of the UNE Occupational Therapy Program.*

[Read the full article here.](#)



## Faculty Publication

Assistant Professor Jennie Dapice, Ph.D., OTR/L, BCP, C-AAIS, recently co-authored what is believed to be the first book outlining evidence-based protocols for school-based therapy dog programs, offering K-12 educators and administrators a standardized framework. The book published this month by Purdue University Press comes at a time when more dogs are being allowed in schools as a means for providing emotional and educational support for children and youth.

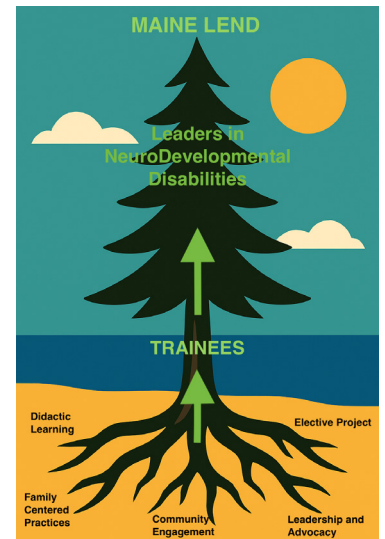


“Students and educators are experiencing significant stress and challenges. Therapy dog programming can be a low cost, high yield intervention that can provide support in the school environment,” Dapice said. “Importantly, therapy dogs may be able to engage and connect with students in ways that traditional educational approaches cannot.” The book outlines the Professional Application of Therapy dogs in Schools, or PATS, protocol – a structured sequence for planning, implementing, and evaluating school therapy dog programs with a focus on community safety, animal welfare, and measurable results. The goals of the standardized approach include improved emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes for students, as well as a more positive culture in schools. The book is available through Purdue University Press and on Amazon.

[Read the full article here.](#)

## News from Maine LEND Program Director, Kris Winston

In the Fall of 2025, I had the pleasure of stepping into the role of Program Director and Principal Investigator for UNE’s Maine Leadership and Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disorders (LEND) Grant. The grant has been active at UNE for 10 years, and we are working toward applying for a third 5-year cycle this spring. We host an interprofessional group of trainees each year including self-advocates and family advocates who are all interested in enhancing their expertise and leadership to meet the complex needs of individuals with autism spectrum disorder and Developmental Disabilities. This year, three students from the UNE MSOT Class of 2026 will complete the training and present their individual projects addressing inclusion of sensory differences at college athletic events, improving understanding of the IEP process for families, and increasing awareness of improved health care access for individuals with neurodevelopmental disabilities. Congratulations to Jared Benoit, Isabella Richardson, and Julia White!



## Are you interested in Leadership Training in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities?

Maine LEND faculty invite prospective applicants to submit a letter of interest for the 2026–2027 Maine LEND training year before September 2026. Maine LEND is a federally funded, interdisciplinary leadership program housed at the University of New England that prepares professionals, family members, and self-advocates to improve systems of care for individuals with neurodevelopmental disabilities through family-centered and inclusive practice.

Those interested in learning more about applying are encouraged to share their interest and background in a brief letter to LEND faculty. [Learn more about Maine LEND](#) or email Jess Malloy, LEND Training Director, at [jpeck1@une.edu](mailto:jpeck1@une.edu).



## News from Center to Advance Interprofessional Education and Practice (CAIEP)

### Interprofessional Honors set UNE OT graduates for success in their future clinical team

Five UNE MSOT students will graduate this spring with Interprofessional Honors, a distinction and nationally recognized credential celebrating intentional, cross-disciplinary collaboration and the communication and teamwork skills essential for excellence in clinical and community practice. Graduating students Abbigail Fournier, Jenny Frick, Alexis Tardy, Gabriela Puentes, and Amelia Teta will each receive a special honor cord and certificate along with the credential demonstrating their collaborative skills, when they attend the forthcoming Occupational Therapy Awards Ceremony on the Portland Campus.



To earn the distinction, students participate in signature UNE interprofessional Knowledge Exchanges, immersive simulations, and a group project presented at CAIEP's Interprofessional Student Showcase. Working alongside peers from pharmacy, medicine, nursing, social work, physical therapy, dental hygiene, and other programs, students engage in rich dialogue on complex health challenges requiring coordinated, cross-disciplinary approaches.

Soon-to-be graduate, Abbigail Fournier, MSOT '26 reflected on her interprofessional simulation involving a standardized patient known as "Michael," collaborating with pharmacy, nursing, and osteopathic medical students. Her experience highlights the value of OT's unique perspective within coordinated care:

*"OT could work collaboratively with pharmacy to support the patient's difficulty refilling prescriptions and taking medications, and with nursing regarding more consistent blood glucose monitoring and COPD management. Additionally, OT could support the patient's sleep routine, mental health, and PTSD, especially through advocating for support groups at the VA."*

Fellow classmate, Alexis Tardy, MSOT '26, noted the impact of participating in an interprofessional harm-reduction event with the Maine Department of Corrections:

*"Hearing the perspectives and questions of other professions helped me better understand how collaborative communication allows healthcare teams to more fully assess and address the complex needs of marginalized populations and where we have unique insights that benefit our clients."*

The Interprofessional Honors distinction reflects UNE's long-standing commitment to preparing Occupational

Therapists who are not only clinically exceptional but also equipped to lead in collaborative, systems-based practice. Congratulations to all!

*Left: MSOT Class of 2026*



## UNE OT Alumni Spotlight

### Bella Crugnale '22, MSOT '24

From hockey rinks to pediatric therapy gyms, Gabriella “Bella” Crugnale’s career has been rooted in teamwork, creativity, and celebrating small wins.

Bella graduated from UNE twice - first in 2022 with a degree in Health, Wellness, and Occupational Studies, and a minor in Coaching before earning her Master of Occupational Therapy in 2024. A member of UNE’s women’s varsity hockey team, Bella credits her student-athlete experience with shaping her leadership, time management, and teamwork skills.

Originally a nursing major, Bella discovered occupational therapy during her undergraduate years and found a profession that aligned perfectly with her interests and values. “OT is all about empowering people to be as independent as they can be at home, in school, or in the community.” After switching her major, Bella became actively involved in the LEND program and adaptive sports initiatives that provide adaptive tricycles and bicycles to children and adults, including Maine Trikers and AMBUCS. She was even able to present at the Maine Occupational Therapy Association Conference.

Now a pediatric occupational therapist at the Boston Ability Center in Natick, Massachusetts, Bella works with children to support their independence in everyday activities. She sees up to 30 children each week, tailoring creative, play-based interventions to each child’s interests. “I love celebrating the little things,” she said. “Those small wins mean everything.”

Bella is grateful for the education and community she found at UNE. Her advice to students preparing to graduate: “Give yourself grace, trust the process, and find a setting you love – it makes all the difference.”



### Undergraduate Accepted Students Day

In March, four alumni attended Undergraduate Accepted Students Day on the Biddeford Campus to share their UNE experience with future Nor’easters. Seeing engaged, successful alumni makes a meaningful impression on prospective students and their families. Volunteering also offers alumni a valuable opportunity to deepen their connection and commitment to UNE.



*Left to right: Joe Valenza '68 (Economics), Holly St. Onge '07, MSOT '08 (3+1 MS Occupational Therapy), Sierra Alley '17 (Nursing), Lindsey Preece '17 (Exercise Science).*

**Do you have news you would like to share with us about your work or passions?**

Email [mwalsh18@une.edu](mailto:mwalsh18@une.edu) to start the conversation.

## Pi Theta Epsilon National Honor Society Induction

This year's Pi Theta Epsilon Induction Ceremony for the MSOT Class of 2027 featured a keynote address by Emily Blackwell, MSOT '24, who encouraged inductees to remain grounded in curiosity. As she noted, "Curiosity keeps us open to lifelong learning, listening, and connecting with others. It allows us to continue adapting and growing in an increasingly complex world long after we leave the classroom."

The ceremony also marked the 32nd anniversary of UNE's Alpha Psi Chapter of Pi Theta Epsilon, the national occupational therapy honor society. Professor Emeritus Nancy MacRae, M.S., OTR/L, FAOTA, who founded the chapter in 1994, joined current faculty advisor Carol Lambdin-Pattavina, O.T.D., M.S.O.T., OTR/L, CTP, FAOTA, in recognizing and celebrating the accomplishments of this year's inductees and their future contributions to the profession.



Congratulations to the newest members: Jessica Deschenes, Carson Ford, Savannah Good, Kimberly Lavender, Erin Libby, Hannah LoVerdi, Rebecca Rogers, Aaron Segal, Gina Sheridan, and Sydney Tooze.

[Read the full story here.](#)

## Thank you to the UNE OT Advisory Board

As we continue to revisit the MSOT curriculum and develop the OTD curriculum for 2027, we would like to thank the members of our advisory board for their insights and contributions to this process. This board is made up of UNE OT alumni, current OT students, community OT practitioners, allied practitioners, and community stakeholders from multiple disciplines. This Advisory Board helps guide the UNE OT department in meeting its overall mission and program objectives and seeks to enhance the quality of the education provided to future occupational therapy practitioners.

We would like to thank our outgoing members John Voyer, Bettye McNelley, Whitney Wildes, Susan Wehry, Nick Viti, Erin Masterson, Jojo Picone MSOT '25, and Alex Oldenburg MSOT '26; and our continuing members Lisa Travis, Lisa Clark, Cory Briedt MSOT '19, and Kimberly Lavender MSOT '27.

And finally, we would like to send out a warm welcome to our newest members - Alex Woodhouse, Vicki Hopkins, Joolie Geldner MSOT '22, Holly St Onge MSOT '08, and Caitlyn (Townsend) Keith MSOT '12.

If you are interested in serving as an advisory board member in future years, please contact Melissa Walsh at [mwalsh18@une.edu](mailto:mwalsh18@une.edu).

## Community Engagement

### Maine Youth Thriving Summit

This past fall, an interprofessional team from UNE attended the 2025 Maine Youth Thriving (MyT) Summit at Wolfe's Neck Center in Freeport. This full-day event brought together leaders, changemakers, and youth advocates from across Maine to collaborate on fostering a healthier, more connected future for young people.

UNE representatives included Occupational Therapy Professor Carol Lambdin-Pattavina, OTD, MSOT, OTR/L, CTP, FAOTA; College of Osteopathic Medicine student Libby Shea, B.S.; and CAIEP Program Coordinator Michelle Cote, B.A. Throughout the summit, participants engaged in meaningful dialogue and collaborative activities focused on advancing youth well-being and strengthening community partnerships.

Reflecting on the experience, Professor Lambdin-Pattavina shared, "This summit served as a true example of 'walking the talk,' with intentional efforts to ensure all attendees felt seen and valued. It provided me with much food for thought, and I look forward to embodying the concept of 'mattering' in both my clinical practice and my role as a faculty member."



All three UNE representatives valued the opportunity to connect with a diverse network of individuals and organizations, highlighting the benefits of higher education and the emphasis UNE places on preparing students for collaborative, team-based practice. The day concluded with informal networking opportunities, including a hayride and a visit with the farm's goats, providing a memorable close to a productive and inspiring event.

*Left: Libby Shea, B.S., Michelle Cote, B.A., Professor Carol Lambdin-Pattavina, OTD, MSOT, OTR/L, CTP, FAOTA*

### Portland High School STEM Expo

This spring, UNE OT faculty members, Dr. Erin McCall and Dr. Hillary Littlefield, spent a day engaging with grades 6-12 at the Portland High School STEM Expo. By engaging with adaptive equipment and exploring the profession's unique blend of art and science, students gained a deeper understanding of occupational therapy, allowing them to envision how the field aligns with their own career goals. In addition to exploring the 'art and science' of the field, students learned how OTs support participation in daily activities. This gave them a clearer picture of how the profession helps people across the lifespan to live more independent, engaged lives.

Opportunities like this reflect UNE's commitment to community engagement and inspiring the next generation of healthcare professionals. We look forward to welcoming some of these students to our Portland campus some time in the future.

*Right: Dr. Erin McCall and Dr. Hillary Littlefield at Portland High School STEM Expo*



## Experiential Learning Experiences

### Dysphagia Diet Lab

As part of a hands-on learning experience in UNE's Teaching Kitchen on the Biddeford Campus, occupational therapy students recently worked with blended foods designed for individuals with dysphagia, a condition characterized by difficulty swallowing. The exercise introduced students to food-based therapeutic strategies that occupational therapists may use to support safety, independence, and quality of life across a wide range of ages and care settings.

Students prepared modified proteins, vegetables, and thickened liquids using techniques commonly employed in clinical and home environments. The kitchen's design allowed all students to participate simultaneously, observe one another's approaches, and learn together in real time.

"I enjoyed working in the kitchen because it gave me a better understanding of how foods are prepared for individuals with specific dietary needs," said Brooklyn Braswell, MSOT '27. "Having this hands-on experience allowed me to better understand their texture, taste, and the overall experience of preparing the foods."

[Read the full article are.](#)



*Left: Ashley Giordano and Hannah Cram, MSOT Class of 2027. Right: Shayna Bains and Gina Sheridan, MSOT Class of 2027*

### OT Interventions with Children and Youth

As part of the OT Interventions with Children and Youth course, first-year occupational therapy students applied their pediatric development knowledge during a dynamic annual interprofessional lab event. Occupational therapy and physical therapy students worked collaboratively to interview a parent or guardian, select and administer an appropriate developmental assessment, and practice scoring and synthesizing results related to a child's overall development.

This hands-on experience enhanced students' confidence and comfort in working with infants and toddlers while also strengthening their collaborative clinical skills. A special thank you to our alumni who generously participated with their little ones, helping to make this event a great success.



*Right: Nathan Tolosky and Savannah Good, MSOT Class of 2027*

## Pediatric Adaptive Vendor Fair

Occupational Therapy faculty Dr. Jennie Dapice and Professor Jamie Harmon in collaboration with Physical Therapy faculty kicked off Occupational Therapy Month this April with UNE's 5th Annual Pediatric Adaptive Vendor Fair. This interprofessional event provides OT and PT students with valuable opportunities to expand their knowledge of pediatric adaptive equipment, explore a range of durable medical equipment (DME), engage with local and national vendors, and further develop their clinical confidence and skills.

We extend our sincere appreciation to the organizations that participated and contributed to the success of this event, including National Seating & Mobility, Saco Bay Physical Therapy, Spurwink ALLTECH, Special Surfers, No Limits Foundation, Bedrock Play, Hanger Clinic, Adaptive Outdoor Education Center, AMBUCS/Maine Trykers, and Maine Adaptive Sports & Recreation.



## Save the Date

### Fall 2026 Homecoming

Mark your calendar for Saturday, October 17 to join us in Biddeford for the WCHP Homecoming tailgating at the Forum before the football game. We love to reconnect with our alumni at this lively, celebratory event and hope to see you there!



## Follow us in Social Media



[@OtUnePortland](https://www.facebook.com/OtUnePortland)



[@uneocctherapy](https://www.instagram.com/uneocctherapy)



[www.instagram.com/une\\_sota/](https://www.instagram.com/une_sota/)



[www.instagram.com/cotad.ch\\_une](https://www.instagram.com/cotad.ch_une)

**#UNEMSOT**

**#UniversityOfNewEngland**

**#WeAreUNE**

**#NorEasters**

## QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS NEWSLETTER?

We would LOVE to hear from YOU!

Please contact Carrie Beals at:

**[cbeals@une.edu](mailto:cbeals@une.edu)**

DEPARTMENT OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

716 Stevens Avenue

Portland, ME 04103

(207) 221-4100

**[www.une.edu/wchp/ot](http://www.une.edu/wchp/ot)**