

Student Research Spotlight

Sarah Smith, OTR/L

Program: Doctor of Science

Mentor: Beth DeGrace, Ph.D., OTR/L, FAOTA

Department: Rehabilitation Sciences



My name is Sarah Smith and I will complete my doctorate of science in rehabilitation science this semester. Student research in the College of Allied Health emerged as a strong interest of mine shortly after beginning my doctorate 4 years ago. My faculty advisor **Dr. Beth DeGrace, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA** asked me if I would like to support a summer research project examining family health for families raising a child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). As a pediatric occupational therapist working with children with ASD and their families for over 15 years, I jumped at the opportunity in order to apply my research method coursework within a guided faculty mentorship experience. I subsequently involved myself in three CAH student research projects and each experience developed my skills in research, grant writing, manuscript writing, and presenting.

My current research project examines family health. I developed a preliminary model of family health including identification of factors and mediating processes contributing to robust family health. I was awarded a 2014 CAH student creativity research grant to support this project. An interprofessional research team including **Dr. DeGrace; Dr. Carrie Ciro, PhD., OTR/L, FAOTA; Dr. Ami Bax, MD, FAAP; Andrea Hambrick, OTS; Jennifer James, SPT; and Alexandra Evans, BS** supported the project as well. I am disseminating my research at the 2015 Oklahoma Occupational Therapy Association conference, the 2015 Society for the Study of Occupation: USA conference, and the 2016 American Occupational Therapy Association conference. I will submit my research manuscript for publication in January.

My future research interests include testing and refining of the preliminary family health model within various family structures and demographic backgrounds. I also aspire to investigate how and why factors or processes supporting robust family health for families raising a child with autism emerge and persist for some families and not for others. Understanding, defining, and ultimately supporting development of such distinguishing factors and processes through targeted interventions could potentially support overall positive family health outcomes.

