

# Columbia University MOTivator

we see the need, we meet it, we exceed it!

Fall 2019

## Congratulations to the First OTD Graduates



Dr. Lenin Grajo, Director, Post-Professional OTD Program with Dr. Leslie Kane and Dr. Danielle Mahoney

Dr. Leslie Kane and Dr. Danielle Mahoney received their Doctor of Occupational Therapy degrees in May, as the first graduates of the Post-Professional OTD program.

Dr. Mahoney's capstone project was "Development of the Occupational Therapy Anticipatory Awareness Test for Adults with Brain Injury". Her mentors were Dr. Glen Gillen and Dr. Janet Falk-Kessler.

Dr. Kane's capstone project was "An OT Practice Guideline on Readiness for Change for Adults with Spinal Cord Injury". Her mentors were Dr. Katherine Dimitropoulou and Dr. Sharon Gutman.

## Columbia Launches Accelerated MS/PP-OTD Program

As proponents of choice for students entering the OT profession, we are excited to announce that we are launching a one year accelerated Post-Professional OTD program for our MS students. Students who wish to advance their clinical education directly after completing their MS degree will take one year to complete an OTD online in the evenings, while also completing fieldwork, becoming licensed, and beginning work.

The MS/PPOTD is intended to help students broaden their clinical skills and obtain advanced knowledge in the areas of clinical leadership and the application of research evidence.

# Letter From The Director

Dear CUOT Family,

It is hard to believe that it is already autumn! We just on boarded 54 MS students from across the country as well as 7 new Post-Professional OTD students. This is our first OTD cohort that we will train online. Therefore, we have students participating across the country.

We are pleased to welcome Dr. Rochelle Mendonca to our faculty. She will be teaching in both the MS program as well as our OTD program. She brings an expertise in assistive technology that will greatly round out our faculty. Our faculty remains both busy and successful with multiple publications, new grants, and honors.

As usual, CUOT will be well represented at AOTA. Please save March 27th as the date for our Alumni Reception. We look forward to reconnecting in Boston!

We are also pleased to announce the second annual Janet Falk-Kessler Distinguished Lecture and Day of Scholarship to be held May 14, 2020. Our speaker this year will be the dynamic Danielle Butin, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of the Afya Foundation. Danielle is a gifted occupational therapist whose work has tremendous global impact. Not to mention she is an outstanding speaker. The day will feature networking opportunities, alumni relationship building, oral, and poster presentations in addition the Daniele's lecture.

Till then,



Glen Gillen, EdD, OTR, FAOTA  
Professor and Director, Programs in Occupational Therapy



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COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY  
IRVING MEDICAL CENTER

PROGRAMS IN  
OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

Save the Date!



The 2020  
Dr. Janet  
Falk-Kessler  
Distinguished  
Lectureship

May 14, 2020  
12:00 – 5:30 pm  
630 West 168<sup>th</sup> St.  
New York, NY

Columbia University Irving Medical Center  
Alumni Auditorium



Important  
Dates:

Call for Papers

opens  
December 2,  
2019 and due  
January 17, 2020

We invite  
submissions for  
45-minute oral  
presentations and  
poster sessions

Early Bird  
Registration

March 23 –  
April 29, 2020

Visit

[www.columbiaot.org](http://www.columbiaot.org)

# 2019 Commencement Awards



The Joan Bozuwa Memorial Award for Scholarship, Leadership, Creativity, and Integrity  
**Ashley Sgandurra**

The Steven Katz Award for Clinical Excellence  
**Pamela Casimiro-Kirkbride**

Emily Raphael-Greenfield Achievement Award for Excellence in Mental Health  
**Jamison Hahn**

Patricia A. Miller Achievement Award for Excellence in Gerontology  
**Kathryn Langan**

The G. Gordon Williamson Achievement Award for Excellence in Pediatrics  
**CapriAnna Pappalardo**

The Marguerite Abbott Memorial Award for Physical Disabilities  
**Lisa Touhey**

Robert Evander Achievement Award for Excellence in Science  
**Brooke Gerstman**

The Barbara E. Neuhaus Award for Excellence in Research  
**Jacqueline Jezioro**

2019 Supervisor of the Year: Diane Schriebman, OTR, Community Access  
2019 Distinguished Alumni: Varleisha D. Gibbs, PhD, OTD, OTR/L  
2019 Friend of OT: Jane Fialko and Porsha Hall, SAGE

# SpOTlight on Students

## Columbia OT Students Named Rudin Scholars



Dr. Glen Gillen, Lisa Touhey, Ashley Sgandurra, Paolina Mazzella, Darwin Davis, and Dr. Lee Goldman at the awards ceremony

Four students in the Programs in Occupational Therapy were named Rudin Scholars in 2019: Lisa Touhey, Ashley Sgandurra, Paolina Mazzella, and Darwin Davis.

The Rudin Scholars program is supported by Jack Rudin, the May and Samuel Rudin Family Foundation, and the Louis and Rachel Rudin Foundation. The program has provided scholarship support to more than 600 students on the medical campus.

Congratulations to our Rudin Scholars!

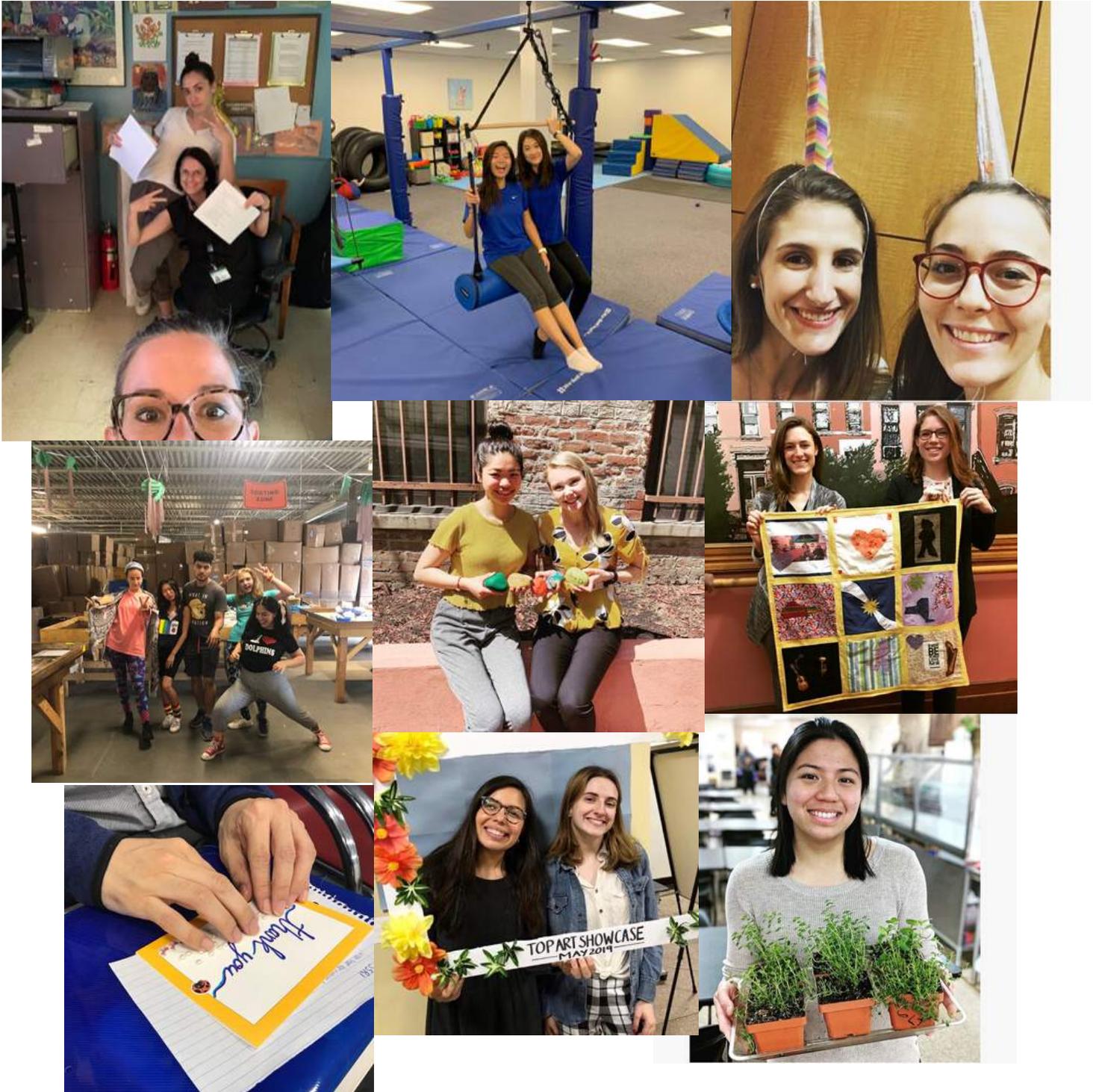
When our students aren't working hard in the classroom, they're also working hard on the basketball court as part of the OT intramural basketball team.



# SpOTlight on Students

## Mental Health Fieldwork

Columbia has always been a proud proponent of the importance of occupational therapy in mental health. All of our students continue to do Level 1 and Level 2 fieldwork in mental health. Here are some photos of our students on their Level 1 and Level 2 fieldwork experiences this past spring and summer.



# SpOTlight on Faculty

## Dr. Katherine Dimitropoulou Brings Research to the Community

Dr. Katherine Dimitropoulou is an assistant professor of Occupational Therapy at the Department of Rehabilitation & Regenerative Medicine at the Vagelos School of Physicians & Surgeons. She is an energetic and dynamic member of our faculty, who has created a remarkable research agenda with collaborators from Physiatry, Movement Sciences, Neuroscience and Neuropsychology, as well as community organizations.

Her research focuses on the connection between self-regulation, adaptive decision-making, and biomechanics of motor actions within the context of functional tasks.

Dr. Dimitropoulou has received major grant funding to develop her research projects, including a KL2 award from the Irving Institute at Columbia University as part of the NCATS-NIH program and a CTSA/Pilot Award from the Irving Institute.

One of her research projects examines neural and behavioral mechanisms underlying functional motor skill development and learning using meaningful goal-directed motor tasks to study how children with congenital neurological problems like cerebral palsy gauge their abilities relative to the task constraints and whether and how they alter their decisions based on the task demands.

Her other research project, "Eyes on the Prize", studies within a laboratory control environment the effectiveness and efficacy of intervention strategies that can promote children's skill development. She examines the role of control variability in the context of a goal-directed activity and conditions that can maximize or hinder learning and successful interaction with the activity. The goal of these project is to contribute in updating treatment protocols that support children's motor skill and learning during functional activities.

Dr. Dimitropoulou is also bringing her research into the community with the GAME ON camp program, which integrates research findings directly into a program that promotes, mobility, fitness and physical activity in children and adolescents with neurological disorders. She collaborates with community organizations like NYC CP soccer to hold summer camps, which allow children and adolescents to gain confidence in their skills, learn new skills, and socialize in the context of sports. If you are interested in more information about the GAME ON program, please keep an eye on our website.

In addition to her research and community work, Dr. Dimitropoulou mentors doctoral students in the EdD and post-professional OTD programs.



# SpOTlight on Faculty

## Columbia OT Welcomes Rochelle Mendonca



We are excited to welcome Dr. Rochelle Mendonca to the Columbia OT faculty. She joined the faculty this summer and will be teaching Professional Foundations and Health Policy in the Masters program and Cognitive Basis of Function and Decision Making in the OTD program.

Rochelle received her BS in OT in India and starting working as an OT there and in Kuwait. She then attended the University of Wisconsin for a post-professional Masters degree and PhD. She previously taught at the University of the Sciences and Temple University.

Her research focuses on the accessibility of medical devices, environments, products, and services for people with disabilities, as well as the impact of technology (both high and low technology) on function and quality of life of people with disabilities.

Outside of the office, Rochelle likes to travel, read, and participate in adventure sports.

## Other Program News

- Columbia came in 2nd place in the 2019 St. Catherine's Challenge, to raise funds for occupational therapy research. We raised over \$7,500.
- **Dr. Dawn Nilsen** was nominated for the Provost's Teaching Award.
- **Dr. Glen Gillen** will give the keynote address at the 2019 NYSOTA conference.
- **Dr. Pat Precin** and **Dr. Sharon Gutman's** work entitled, "Techniques for using Lucid Dreaming in Physical Rehabilitation" was presented by Dr. Precin at the International Association for the Study of Dreams (IASD) international conference in Kerkgrade, Netherlands in June.
- **Dr. Katherine Dimitropoulou** received a Community Based Participatory Research Grant from the Irving Institute.
- **Dr. Lenin Grajo** has been named a Visiting Professor at the University of the Philippines.
- Stephanie Hui, an OTD student, received the Fred Sammons grant for Innovation and Research in Occupation Based Technology to fund equipment and software for a content validity and clinical utility study for an assessment she created called the Interactive Child Activity Narrative of Play (iCan-Play).
- Julia Guzman, an EdD student, received the A. M. Ayer Fellowship from Teacher's College

# SpOTlight on Faculty

## Professor Amanda Sarafian Visits Japan



In March 2019, Professor Amanda Sarafian traveled to Japan with a team of doctors and researchers from the Columbia University Irving Medical Center (CUIMC). The team included Dr. David Roye, Hiroko Matsumoto, Dr. Heakyung Kim, and Dr. Daniel Linhares of the Weinberg Family Cerebral Palsy Center.

The mission of this trip was to educate Japanese colleagues on the latest research and evidenced based interventions for individuals with cerebral palsy. The team met with patients, families, therapists and physicians at two hospitals.

Professor Sarafian presented Rehabilitation for Functional Upper Extremity Improvement in Children and Youth with Cerebral Palsy at the Japanese Academy of Cerebral Palsy and Developmental Medicine (JACPDM) meeting in Osaka.

The team plans to return to Japan next March.

### Alumni News?

Send updates (professional or personal!) to Eileen at [el2777@cumc.columbia.edu](mailto:el2777@cumc.columbia.edu) and we will include them in the next newsletter.

# SpOTlight on Alumni

## Alumni Present on International OT Work



Last spring, the Columbia University OT program hosted a meet-and-greet with three alumni who had pursued OT internationally after acquiring their master's degrees. While all three alumni brought a unique perspective, there were some foundational similarities in their experiences. Since OT was an emerging field in the countries they work in, they found ways utilize their specific expertise and training while partnering with already established and trusted organizations on the ground.

The first speaker to share her experience was Magdalena Oehnhinger who currently practices OT in Uruguay. Magdalena came to the US for school on a student visa and was required to return to Uruguay upon graduation, where OT was just a five-year-old profession.

She shared that she was terrified to return to Uruguay without a job or realistic prospects but was determined to make the most out of her degree. Once in Uruguay, she was fortunate enough to meet another OT who staffed an outpatient clinic. Through this connection, Magdalena landed a position in pediatrics at Teleton, an NGO that specialized in rehabilitation for pediatric patients with a variety of diagnoses including spinal cord injury, muscular dystrophy, and cerebral palsy. Magdalena said that the biggest difference between OT practice in the US and Uruguay was the reimbursement system. In the US, insurance companies require documentation for reimbursement while in Uruguay therapists receive reimbursement regardless of documentation. Magdalena is now a fieldwork supervisor and instructs her students in best practices for documentation and writing reports. Since OT is such a new field in Uruguay, Magdalena had to be creative in finding resources to help her grow in her career. She attends continuing education classes in neighboring Argentina where OT is a more established field. Despite the challenges she has faced, Magdalena insists that students who wish to practice OT internationally should do so. She says that OT is based on empathy and this is the foundation of international work. "We are touched by others' lives and we touch other's lives. We change others and are changed by others. Just be able and willing to learn." (continued on page 11)

## Alumni Present on International OT Work (continued)

Victoria Babikian took a different approach to her international work. She utilized the Birthright Armenia program, which aligns young people of Armenian descent with service projects around the country. Though OT is not an established field in Armenia, Victoria was able to identify pediatric day programs and schools serving kids with special needs and advocated for a volunteer position for herself within the schools. Since Armenia is a developing country, Victoria relied on her ingenuity to create handmade therapy tools from available materials such as egg cartons, shaving cream, and dried beans. In some rural locations, Victoria faced unique challenges like a lack of running water and electricity. “You have to be flexible when going to another country,” she said. “You can’t expect it to be like what you’re used to at home.” In her work, Victoria became an advocate for the kids she worked with and presented to teachers and the growing community of local OTs on classroom modifications and documentation best practices. Much of her work with parents focused on combating the stigma around children with special needs and training parents to empower their kids and embrace their abilities. Victoria’s primary advice to students hoping to pursue international OT was to first figure out what they want from the experience and to contact local OT organizations in each country to find the best way to achieve their goal.

For Ellen Osei, the path to international OT emerged through her pageant work. Upon graduation, an autism organization connected her with a small team of pediatricians and pharmacists, and together they traveled from community to community to determine what was currently known about children with autism in Ghana and how best to provide support. Since OT was an unknown field, they worked with local organizations to create an educational program for teachers and parents about how to support children with autism and how to find access to resources. Through their work, they founded Raising H.O.P.E., a charity organization focused on addressing the needs of orphans and children with special needs, which is still thriving today. Like Victoria, Ellen utilized the tools available in her environment to create sustainable and accessible therapy interventions for families. She educated parents on how to use play as a means for therapeutic interaction and empowered the kids to believe in their own self-worth. Ellen frequently traveled back to the US to hold galas utilizing her pageant community to fund raise for her international work. While at home, she pursued flexible positions such as early intervention which allowed her to take time off to travel to Ghana as needed. Ellen’s advice for students pursuing international OT is to “figure out what is the closest thing to therapy that’s going on and start a partnership there.”

Ellen, Victoria, and Magdalena all agreed that while their international experiences with OT were at times frustrating and grueling and required a lot of out-of-the-box thinking and relationship building, they wouldn’t change their experience for anything. “I went in as a new grad and came home thinking, ‘I’m an OT,’” Victoria said.

# Support Columbia OT

## Alumni donations help support the following areas:

- *Scholarships.* Last year, students were given 12 awards from general gifts and 4 awards from alumni endowed gifts.
- *Student support*
- *The new OT multipurpose lab.* Our new lab is open and being used by students.
- *Education enhancement.*
- *Software for classroom instruction*
- *Janet Falk-Kessler Distinguished Lectureship Fund*

## Future donations can support:

- *Scholarships.* 80% of our students rely on Financial Aid.
- *Any area of practice.* Future gifts can be directed to support individuals who are interested in a specific area of practice.
- *International Program Stipends*
- *Prep Courses for the NBCOT exam*
- *Updated admissions technology*

Any support that alumni and friends of Columbia OT can provide will help enhance our student's experience.



## How to Give

<https://www.givenow.columbia.edu>

Search for Occupational Therapy for donation options (Annual Fund, Janet Falk-Kessler Lectureship, etc)

By mail to:

CUMC Office of Development  
516 West 168th Street, 3rd Floor  
New York, NY 10032

If you are interested in annual giving or major gifts, please contact Glen Gillen at [gg50@cumc.columbia.edu](mailto:gg50@cumc.columbia.edu)

# Stay Connected to the Programs



*Website, including information about our doctoral programs, an alumni section and news updates*

[columbiaot.org](http://columbiaot.org)



*Official Facebook page with updates from the Programs*

<https://www.facebook.com/ColumbiaOT>



*Alumni, Faculty, and Student Facebook group to connect with others and share resources*

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/59530213112/>



*Official Instagram page with updates from the Programs*

<http://www.instagram.com/columbiauniversityot>