

## Lessons Learned: Results of a Survey Study Exploring the Experiences of Black / African-American Students in Occupational Therapy Education

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DOI: [10.5014/ajot.2023.77S2-RP2](https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2023.77S2-RP2)

Date presented: April 21, 2023

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**PURPOSE:** To share survey results that explored the academic experiences of Black students in entry-level OT and OTA programs. The survey aimed to identify supports and barriers in the educational process. The results will inform recommendations for implementing practical and relevant strategies to foster diversity, equity, and inclusion in OT and OTA programs.

**DESIGN:** A survey research design was used.

**METHOD:** Individuals who self-identified as Black/African-American and were enrolled in an entry-level OT or OTA program in the US between January 1, 2017- December 31, 2020 were recruited to participate in the study. Recruitment information was shared with 200 accredited OT and OTA programs and professional OT organizations that have student membership. Eligible participants completed a survey that containing forty-one items focused on the students' experiences in the classroom, in their OT/OTA program, with their peers and instructors, and fieldwork.

**RESULTS:** 124 responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Location, cost, and school reputation were the top factors influencing OT/OTA program choice. Respondents also indicated it was of high importance to feel supported by the faculty, utilize diverse learning materials, have fieldwork experiences in a supportive learning environment, and to feel comfortable asking questions to clinical instructors. A lack of awareness of, and access to the OT profession, as well as discrimination were listed as barriers in the educational experience.

**CONCLUSION:** The results of this study offer OT and OTA programs information to identify opportunities to recruit and retain Black/African-American students and recommendations to foster safe and inclusive learning environments.

**IMPACT:** This study provides insight into factors that affect the student learning experience and informs OT and OTA programs on potential strengths and improvements needed to create supportive learning experiences for the next generation of OT practitioners.

### References

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