

2018

# The Outlook of Occupational Therapy

Alexa Spinks  
*Ouachita Baptist University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/honors\\_theses](https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/honors_theses)



Part of the [Kinesiotherapy Commons](#), and the [Occupational Therapy Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Spinks, Alexa, "The Outlook of Occupational Therapy" (2018). *Honors Theses*. 661.  
[https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/honors\\_theses/661](https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/honors_theses/661)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Carl Goodson Honors Program at Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. For more information, please contact [mortensona@obu.edu](mailto:mortensona@obu.edu).

# **SENIOR THESIS APPROVAL**

This Honors thesis entitled

**“The Outlook of Occupational Therapy”**

written by

**Alexa Spinks**

and submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for completion of  
the Carl Goodson Honors Program  
meets the criteria for acceptance  
and has been approved by the undersigned readers.

Dr. Amber Chelette, thesis director

Dr. Jennifer Fayard, second reader

Dr. Rachel Pool, third reader

Dr. Barbara Pemberton, Honors Program director

Date

The Outlook of Occupational Therapy

Alexa Spinks

Ouachita Baptist University

### **Abstract**

There is a strong demand for occupational therapists as well as a great job outlook, but there seems to be a lack of knowledge about occupational therapy among college students. The purpose of this thesis was to find out if more education about this growing field would lead to an increase in interest or consideration of the field of occupational therapy. College students ( $n=93$ ) in Concepts of Wellness classes at Ouachita Baptist University were surveyed about their knowledge and perspective of occupational therapy before and after a brief presentation over information about occupational therapy was provided. There was a significant difference in the pre-survey and post-survey responses ( $p<0.05$ ) regarding students being able to define occupational therapy. There was also significant difference in responses ( $p<0.05$ ) regarding consideration of occupational therapy as a career. The outcome supported the hypothesis that more information about occupational therapy would increase the likelihood that someone would consider occupational therapy as a career.

### Introduction

Occupational therapy (OT) has become a very promising career path, although many do not know it yet. OT is defined as "a form of therapy for those recuperating from physical or mental illness that encourages rehabilitation through the performance of activities required in daily life" ("National Occupational Therapy Month," 2016). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (n.d.), the job outlook, or the projected percent change in employment, for 2014-2024 in occupational therapy is 27%, which is 20% higher than the average growth rate for all occupations. The demand for occupational therapists is strong as well. According to the American Occupational Therapy Association ("Workforce Trends in Occupational Therapy, n.d.), the demands for OT services for children remains strong and the demand for services for an aging population is increasing. The Administration on Aging ("A Profile for Older Americans: 2015", 2015) says that in 2014, persons 65 years or older represented 14.5% of the U.S. population and by 2040 that will increase to 21.7%. Occupational therapists can help older adults have the independence they seek to maintain for as long as possible.

There are two studies that have been done that show evidence of a lack of knowledge of occupational therapy among different populations. In 2001, a study was conducted through Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska to assess school-age children's perceptions of occupational therapy. There were 103 children that participated in a neuroscience exposition where three of the booths were set up specifically to explain occupational therapy to students. Of the 103 children, 86 completed both the pre and post questionnaires, which revealed that most students did not know about occupational therapy until after the exposition (Royeen, Zardetto-Smith, Duncan, and Mu, 2001). "Most of the participating children (65 out of 86, 75.6%)

reported [on the post questionnaire] that they have certain knowledge about occupational therapists, whereas only 18.6% of children responded on the pre-test" (Royeen et al, 2001).

Another study was published in the American Journal of Occupational Therapy in 2016. The purpose was to investigate the knowledge other medical professionals have of occupational therapy. "The results demonstrate that health care professionals may not fully understand the specific interventions that occupational therapists can provide" (Bonsall, Mosby, Walz, and Wintermute, 2016).

The lack of knowledge about occupational therapy among college students is important because they are considering and pursuing different careers. Occupational therapy is a career to consider due to the increasing job outlook. There are a few possible reasons that college students may not be familiar with occupational therapy. It could be that they have not personally needed occupational therapy before. Occupational therapy is also a relatively new career compared to other medical professions such as doctors and nurses. The profession celebrated its centennial in 2017. Another possible reason is that both high school and college courses fail to expose students to the field of OT. College fairs, career fairs, college magazines, science textbooks, and other career resources could all include more information to promote occupational therapy. One other factor to consider is that there does not seem to be such a lack of knowledge about the related field of physical therapy (PT). A possible reason why physical therapy is more known than occupational therapy is that PT treats large movement dysfunctions and injuries. Although OT can also treat such injuries, it is more focused on improving life skills, functional abilities, and independence in completing daily tasks. Therefore, more people may have personal experience with PT.

The appearance of a lack of knowledge among the population was the motivation for the study. The researcher's motivation was also personal. The researcher decided to pursue a career in occupational therapy after being introduced to it and observing occupational therapists. It was hypothesized that providing information about the outlook, demand, salary, and job requirements for occupational therapy would increase the likelihood that someone would consider occupational therapy as a prominent career.

### **Methods**

The study had 93 participants average age 19, with 50 females completing the survey. No compensation was given for participation. The participants were recruited from Wellness classes at Ouachita Baptist University as a sample of convenience. The Wellness classes provided a quick and efficient way to reach a large enough group of people. Most of the students in the Wellness classes were freshmen at the university. Surveying freshmen was beneficial to the context of the hypothesis and survey questions because they are early in their educational and professional pursuits. Giving them knowledge about occupational therapy could truly lead them to pursue a career in it.

Participating students responded to the pre-survey on Survey Monkey. The link to the survey was distributed on Moodle by their professor. The first page of the survey was the informed consent. By continuing with the survey, the participants agreed to the informed consent. Each student was given a random code to enter into the survey rather than their name. The code allowed investigators to link the students' pre-survey and post-survey answers. The pre-survey included questions about participant background and knowledge of occupational therapy (see Table 1).

After the pre-survey was completed, a presentation to inform participants about the career of occupational therapy was delivered. With consent, PowerPoint presentation found on the American Occupational Therapy Association website was used to deliver the information (see Appendix). The presentation included the definition, educational requirements, workplace options, job outlook, and salary for occupational therapy.

After the presentation, students responded to the post-survey. The post-survey link was also distributed via Moodle and participants used the same code they were previously given. The post-survey repeated questions from the pre-survey to allow investigators to compare participants' knowledge and perspective before and after the presentation (see Table 2).

Participant responses were exported from the Survey Monkey website and organized by their code name. Incomplete responses were excluded from the analysis. A paired t-test was used to determine whether there was a significant difference between the pre-survey and post-survey responses.

### **Results**

Of the 93 that participated, 8 responses were excluded from the analysis. There were two responses with incomplete pre and post surveys. One response included an incomplete pre-survey and no post-survey. There was one response with only a post-survey and no pre-survey. Four responses only included the pre-survey and did not have post-survey answers.

For the completed surveys, 75% said they had heard of occupational therapy before. There were 83% who said they know someone who has received occupational therapy. There were 21% who said they personally know an occupational therapist. Also, 23% said one or both of their parents work in the medical field. Of the 85 completed surveys, 27 participants are in a

major related to the medical field (medicine, doctor, nurse, therapy, etc.), 13 are education majors, 9 are business majors, 5 are business majors, 25 are in "other" majors not categorized, and 6 are undecided on a major.

Questions five through nine helped set up the demographics of the participants and were only asked in the pre-survey. For question five, "Have you ever heard of occupational therapy," the average was 0.75 and the standard deviation was 0.43. For question six, "Have you or anyone you know ever received occupational therapy (select all that apply)," participants were given four choices. The choices were "No, neither I or anyone I know has received OT," "Yes, a friend has," "Yes, a relative has," and "Yes, I have." The average was 0.83 and the standard deviation was 1.09. For question seven, "Do you personally know any occupational therapists," the average was 0.21. The standard deviation was 0.41. For question eight, "What is your intended career path," the average was 3.33. The standard deviation was 1.62. For question nine, "Have either or both of your parents worked or do they currently work in a medical-related field," participants could say no, one, or both. The average was 0.45 and the standard deviation was 0.45.

Questions two through four were used in both the pre-survey and post-survey to analyze the effect of the informational material. Excel was used to perform t-tests on the following questions. For question two, "How confident are you in your ability to define occupational therapy," there was a significant difference in the pre-survey and post-survey responses ( $t(84) = -12.80, p < 0.05$ ). The average pre-survey was 1.05 and the average post-survey was 2.18. The standard deviation was 0.74 for both the pre-survey and post-survey. The data is displayed in Figure 1. For question three, "Have you ever considered a career in occupational therapy," there was a significant difference in the pre-survey and post-survey responses ( $t(84) = -2.76, p < 0.05$ ).

The average pre-survey was 0.79 and the average post-survey was 1.11. The standard deviation for the pre-survey was 1.25 and for the post-survey it was 1.37. The data is displayed in Figure 2.

Question four was a strongly agree-strongly disagree rating scale question and included four parts, 4a-4d. Each part was a statement. Participants were asked to indicate their "level of agreement" of each statement on a scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Question 4a stated "There are many jobs available in occupational therapy." The average pre-survey was 2.45 and the average post-survey was 3.18. The pre-survey standard deviation was 0.70. The post-survey standard deviation was 0.94. There was a significant difference in the pre and post responses ( $t(84) = -7.33, p < 0.05$ ). The data is displayed in Figure 3. Question 4b stated "There is a good salary as an occupational therapist." The average for the pre-survey was 2.72 and the average for the post-survey was 3.2. The standard deviation for the pre-survey was 0.72 and for the post-survey it was 0.84. There was a significant difference in the pre-survey and post-survey responses ( $t(84) = -5.21, p < 0.05$ ). The data is displayed in Figure 4. Question 4c stated "Admission into an occupational therapy program is difficult." The average pre-survey was 2.56 and average post-survey was 2.48. The pre-survey standard deviation was 0.73. The post-survey standard deviation was 0.93. There was not a significant difference in the pre and post survey responses ( $t(83) = 1.30, p > 0.05$ ). The data is displayed in Figure 5. Question 4d stated "Occupational therapy is a well-respected profession." The average pre-survey was 2.89 and the average post-survey was 3.26. The standard deviation for the pre-survey was 0.74 and the standard deviation for the post-survey was 0.79. There was a significant difference in the pre and post survey responses ( $t(84) = -5.16, p < 0.05$ ). The data is displayed in Figure 6.

### Discussion

There seems to be a lack of knowledge about occupational therapy. The motivation for this study was to discover if this was true among college students. It was hypothesized that a presentation of information regarding important facts about occupational therapy would increase the likelihood that someone would consider occupational therapy as a career.

For question two, after the presentation, participants were better able to define occupational therapy. The results for question two supported the hypothesis because the presentation helped participants to become more confident in their ability to define occupational therapy. For question three of the post-survey, participants were more likely to consider occupational therapy as a career. These results supported the hypothesis exactly and met the goal of increasing the likelihood of someone considering a career in occupational therapy. For question 4a, after the presentation, participants were more likely to agree that there are many jobs available in occupational therapy. These results supported the hypothesis because the job outlook is growing for occupational therapy and is a reason to consider it as a career. For question 4b, after the presentation, participants were more likely to agree that the salary is good for occupational therapists. The results for question 4b supported the hypothesis because a good salary is also a possible reason to consider occupational therapy as a career. For question 4c of the post-survey, the results were not significant and do not support the hypothesis. For question 4d of the post-survey, participants were more likely to agree that occupational therapy is a well-respected profession. The results for question 4d supported the hypothesis because participants are more likely to consider occupational therapy as a career if they consider it a well-respected profession.

The results of this study are similar to the results of the 2001 study at Creighton University and the 2016 study done by Bonsall, Mosby, Walz, and Wintermute. The study in 2001 revealed that most of the school-age students that participated did not know about occupational therapy until after the exposition. The results of the 2016 study demonstrated that health care professionals may not fully understand occupational therapy. The results of this study revealed that college-aged students were not knowledgeable about occupational therapy until after the presentation.

The job outlook for occupational therapy is very high and should be taken into consideration when deciding on careers to pursue. College-age students deciding on a career path are not well-informed about occupational therapy. It appears that presenting more information about occupational therapy increases the likelihood of someone considering it as a career. However, further studies could be conducted to find the source of why students are unaware of occupational therapy and the potential opportunities it can provide. The results could help future researchers to further increase the likelihood that someone will consider occupational therapy as a career.

A solution to the lack of knowledge would be to promote occupational therapy more to students. The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) could be a great help by promoting occupational therapy in several ways. They could reach out to younger students on the path to college and graduate school and ensure that they have enough knowledge about occupational therapy to at least consider it. They could make occupational therapy more present by sending representatives to career fairs or classrooms. Another idea is that the AOTA could create programs that allow high school and college students to become hands-on in an

occupational therapy environment. The programs could include workshops, information sessions, observations, and other activities.

### References

- A Career in Occupational Therapy. (2013, August 12). Retrieved April 17, 2017, from <https://www.aota.org/Education-Careers/Considering-OT-Career/Materials/PPTPresentation.aspx>
- A Profile of Older Americans: 2015. (2015). Retrieved March 1, 2018, from <https://www.acl.gov/sites/default/files/Aging%20and%20Disability%20in%20America/2015-Profile.pdf>
- Bonsall, A., Mosby, A., Walz, M., & Wintermute, K. (2016). Health Care Professionals Knowledge of Occupational Therapy. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 70*(4\_Supplement\_1). doi:10.5014/ajot.2016.70s1-po1060
- Bureau of Labor Statistics (n.d.). Occupational Therapists: Summary. Retrieved April 05, 2017, from <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/occupational-therapists.htm>
- National Occupational Therapy Month. (2016). Retrieved February 07, 2018, from <https://www.cbd.edu/occupational-therapy-month/>
- Royeen, C. B., Zardetto-Smith, A. M., Duncan, M. and Mu, K. (2001), What do young school-age children know about occupational therapy? An evaluation study. *Occupational Therapy International, 8*(4), 263–272. doi:10.1002/oti.150
- Workforce Trends in Occupational Therapy. (n.d.). Retrieved April 5, 2017, from <https://www.aota.org/~//media/Corporate/Files/EducationCareers/StuRecruit/Working/Workforce%20Trends%20in%20OT.ashx>

Pre-Survey Questions	
1	Demographics (code, age, gender)
2	How confident are you in your ability to define occupational therapy?
3	Have you ever considered a career in occupational therapy?
4	Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.
4a	There are many jobs available in occupational therapy.
4b	There is a good salary as an occupational therapist.
4c	Admissions into an occupational therapy program is difficult.
4d	Occupational therapy is a well-respected profession.
5	Have you ever heard of occupational therapy?
6	Have you or anyone you know ever received occupational therapy? (Select all that apply)
7	Do you personally know any occupational therapists?
8	What is your intended career path?
9	Have either or both of your parents worked or do they currently work in a medical-related field (medicine, doctor, physical therapy, occupational therapy, nurse, etc.)?

**Table 1**

Post-Survey Questions	
1	Demographics (code)
2	How confident are you in your ability to define occupational therapy?
3	Have you ever considered a career in occupational therapy?
4	Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.
4a	There are many jobs available in occupational therapy.
4b	There is a good salary as an occupational therapist.
4c	Admissions into an occupational therapy program is difficult.
4d	Occupational therapy is a well-respected profession.

**Table 2**



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

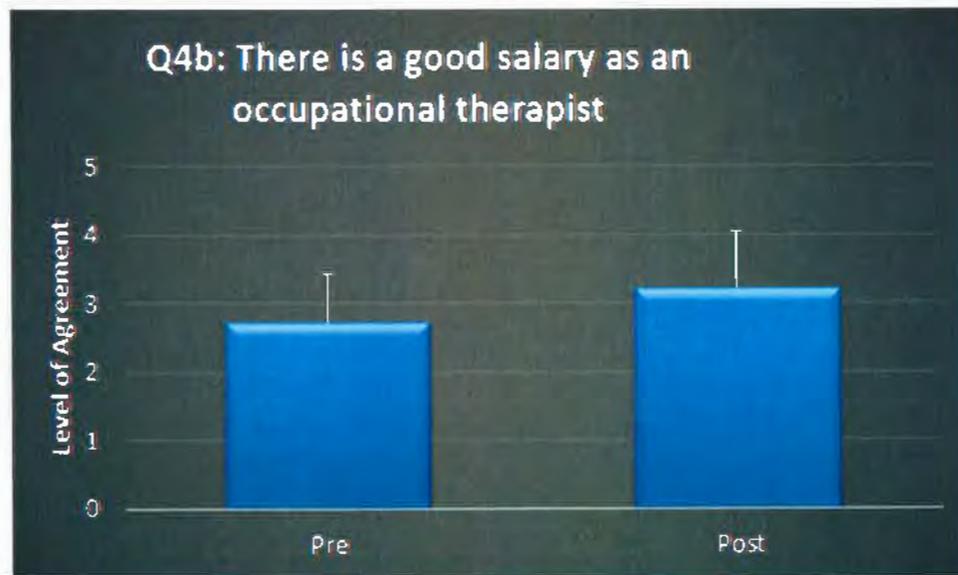


Figure 4

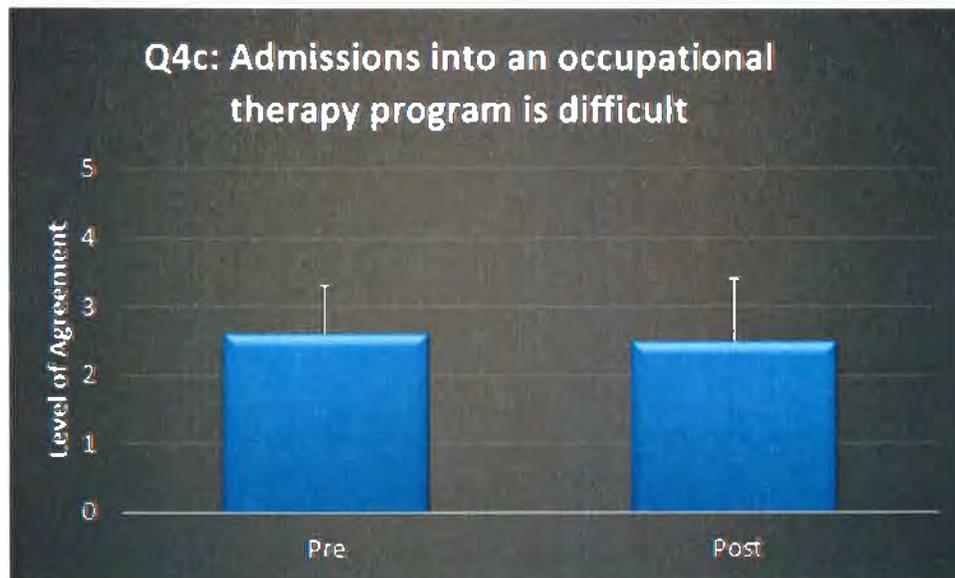


Figure 5



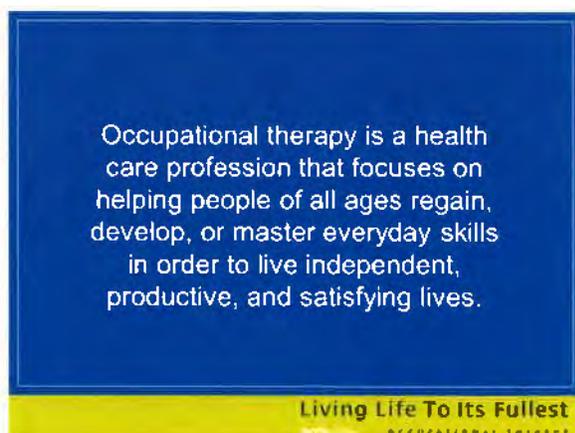
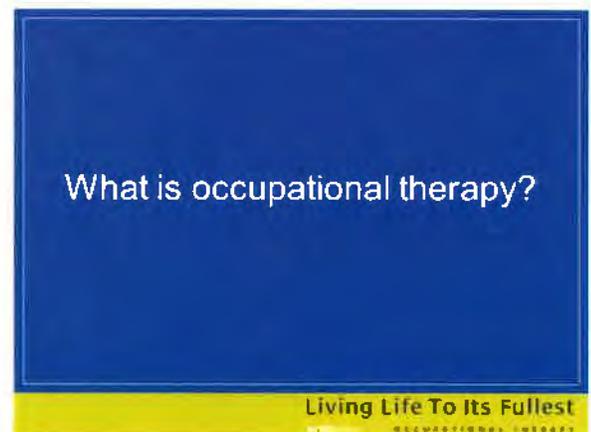
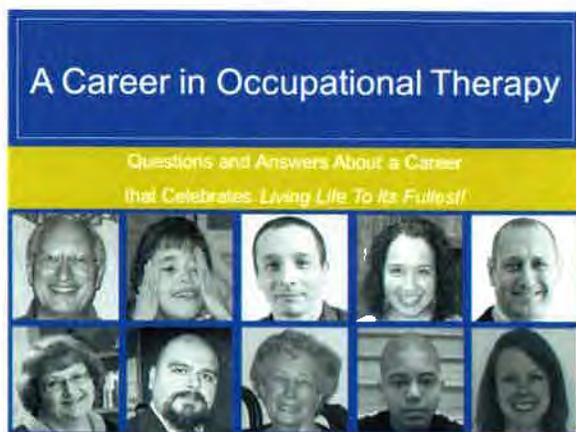
Figure 6

## Appendix

### Occupational Therapy Information PowerPoint Presentation

The PowerPoint was found on the American Occupational Therapy Association website and with consent it was used in the presentation to the participants in the study.

The following slides were presented.



## Personal Qualities or Traits

- Enjoy helping people
- Strong communication skills
- Strong interpersonal skills
- Good problem solver
- Enjoy working with others
- Creative
- Flexible

Living Life To Its Fullest

## What are the educational requirements for a career in occupational therapy?

Living Life To Its Fullest

## Educational Requirements: Occupational Therapist

- Postbaccalaureate Degree
  - Entry-level Master's Degree (MA, MS, or MOT)
  - Entry-level Doctoral Degree (OTD)
- Supervised Fieldwork
- Sample Coursework
  - Introduction to Occupational Therapy Practice
  - Theories of Occupational Therapy
  - Administration and Management in Occupational Therapy
  - Functional Movement and Mobility
  - Cognition and Perception

Living Life To Its Fullest

## Prerequisite Requirements

- Biology
- Human Anatomy & Physiology
- Abnormal Psychology
- Sociology or Anthropology
- Childhood Development
- Statistics
- Medical Terminology
- Related Volunteer Experience
- Related Work Experience

Living Life To Its Fullest

## Where do occupational therapy practitioners work?

Living Life To Its Fullest

## As an OT practitioner, I could work in physical disabilities...

- Hospitals
  - Acute care
  - Inpatient rehab
  - Specialty units (e.g., spinal cord injury)
- Nursing homes
- Home health
- Work rehabilitation

Living Life To Its Fullest

As an OT practitioner, I could work in pediatrics...

- Schools
- Pediatric units in hospitals
  - Oncology, burn units, neonatal intensive care, etc.
- Hospital-based outpatient clinics
- Private clinics
- Private practice

**Living Life To Its Fullest**  
OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

What is the job outlook for occupational therapy?

**Living Life To Its Fullest**  
OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

**Job Outlook:  
Occupational Therapists**

- Employment of occupational therapists is expected to increase 29% between 2012 and 2022, therefore growth is expected to be **much faster than average** for all occupations.
- Reasons for growth & the need for more occupational therapists:
  - Baby-boom generation's movement into middle age
  - Aging of the population age 75 and older
  - Increasing numbers of individuals living with chronic disabilities or limited function
  - Improving technologic and medical advances

Bureau of Labor Statistics  
http://www.bls.gov/oes/2012.htm

**Living Life To Its Fullest**  
OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

**Earnings:  
Occupational Therapists**

- Median annual earnings of occupational therapists was \$75,400 in May 2012.
  - The lowest 10% earned less than \$50,500 and the highest 10% earned more than \$107,070.
- Top industries where occupational therapists work:

Industry	Percent employed	Annual mean wage
Skilled nursing facilities	9%	\$83,430
Home health care	9%	\$62,310
Offices of physical, occupational and speech therapists and audiologists	22%	\$77,430
Hospitals	28%	\$75,140
Elementary and secondary schools	12%	\$66,610

Bureau of Labor Statistics: http://www.bls.gov/oes/2012/occupational-therapists.html#tab-5

**Living Life To Its Fullest**  
OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY