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Students

About half of the recent MPO classes have been made up of engineering students, many of whom worked in their discipline before finding “they just didn’t have enough people interaction to satisfy them,” explains Kapp. Biology, applied physiology, and kinesiology graduates are also highly represented in the program. Kapp says that for their incoming class of 15, which began in May, they received 80 applications, an increase over last year, which she attributes to applicants’ ability to apply to multiple O&P master’s programs through NCOPE’s Orthotics and Prosthetics Centralized Application Service (OPCAS). Most notably, Kapp says that “the quality of the applicants is absolutely going up,” leading the MPO faculty to schedule interviews with about half of the applicants.

As part of the program’s experimental research requirement, students support faculty research projects. Beginning in the third semester, students prepare a proposal for their research projects. The fourth semester is spent collecting data for the project, and in the fifth and final semester the students complete the data analysis and present their findings.

“What’s nice about having these topics faculty-driven rather than student-driven is [that] to get enough data it takes...multiple years,” says Kapp, whose student-participated research is studying gait, balance, and posture in users of prosthetic feet. “So we carry these projects onto year two and sometimes year three to collect enough data so that it actually becomes publishable.” Each student presents the results of his or her work to an audience of about 60 people from the UT Southwestern campus, local healthcare facilities, and the community. The MPO program has made it possible for clinicians who attend the presentations to earn American Board for Certification in Orthotics, Prosthetics and Pedorthics (ABC) continuing education credits.

Aside from working on their research, students spend four weeks of their fourth semester working full-time at clinical sites. The MPO program has affiliation agreements with facilities around the country and internationally, including Brooke Army Medical Center, Fort Sam Houston, Texas. In their final semester, students have clinical practice once a week at physician-led local clinics that are not strictly O&P practices, and include physical therapy; orthopedic surgery; the county hospital for diabetes-related foot problems; Texas Scottish Rite Hospital for Children, Dallas; or the amputee clinic at the Dallas VA Medical Center, to gain insight into the larger picture of the O&P clinician’s role in patient care. “One of our strengths is offering a very sound, clinically based education, and that’s because we all, as faculty, see patients every day,” Kapp says of the program. “And so we bring that right back into the classroom.”

Editor’s note: Articles in this series do not constitute an endorsement or recommendation of any program. Programs will be covered in an order determined by the editor, and all NCOPE-accredited O&P master’s degree programs will be given the opportunity to be featured.

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