

Get to Know the  
Occupational Therapy  
Program Faculty  
2024

*Anne Kiraly-  
Alvarez, OTD,  
OTR/L, SCSS*



- **Practice area:** School-based practice
- **Why OT?:** It was the perfect blend of my interests in healthcare/medicine and special education
- **Favorite thing about MWU:** Working with our wonderful faculty and staff who are committed to student success!
- **Professional Involvement:** ILOTA Director of Membership; COTAD-ED
- **Fun fact:** I was born in Saudi Arabia

*Monika  
Robinson,  
DrOT, OTR/L*



- **Practice area:** Home Health
- **Why OT?:** It embraces my values and perspective
- **Favorite thing about MWU:** Collaborating with students on COTAD, and mentoring students!
- **Professional Involvement:** L'Arche Board, Co-Chair of ILOTA Home & Community Health SIS
- **Fun fact:** I plan to run the Chicago Marathon every 15 years—this year will be round 2

*Susan Charnley,  
DrOT,  
OTR/L, CHT*



- **Practice areas:** UE Rehab and Acute Care
- **Favorite OT quote:** “Man, through the use of his hands, as they are energized by mind and will, can influence the state of his own health.” - Mary Reilly
- **Favorite thing about MWU:** Opportunities in the simulation lab
- **Professional Involvement:** Secretary of IL OT PAC, American Society of Hand Therapists Outreach Division
- **Fun fact:** I love to make and eat pickles

*Dana Lingle,  
OTD, OTR/L,  
CHT*



- **Practice area:** UE Rehabilitation, Ergonomics, Education/Fieldwork
- **Why OT?:** OT merges creativity, science, and psychology to help clients achieve their goals
- **Favorite thing about MWU:** Teaching and working with students who inspire me to keep learning
- **Professional Involvement:** ILOTA, ASHT, IL Academic Fieldwork Consortium
- **Fun fact:** I call myself an anatomy geek; I love to garden and create meals from what I grow

*Divya Sood,  
OTD, OTR/L*



- **Practice area:** Pediatrics; Community Health
- **Why OT?:** OT is a powerful profession that facilitates participation in occupations
- **Favorite thing about MWU:** Opportunities for interprofessional collaboration with other programs and colleges within MWU
- **Campus Involvement:** Chair of the OT Academic Review Committee, Member of University Research Committee
- **Fun fact:** I enjoy cooking, gardening, and spending time with my family

# *Giftly Abraham, OTD, OTR/L*



- **Practice area:** Pediatrics
- **Why OT?:** I love being a small part of making a positive impact on individuals in my community
- **Favorite thing about MWU:** Emphasis on teaching; I enjoy interacting with students & building professional relationships
- **Campus Involvement:** Scholarship Committee, Diversity Committee, Wellness Committee, Curriculum Committee
- **Fun fact:** I love to travel with my husband; my goal is to see 50 states before I am 50

*Emily K.  
Simpson,  
PhD, OTR/L*



- **Practice area:** Community-based
- **Why OT?:** Its promotion of inclusion aligns with my values related to justice
- **Favorite thing about MWU:** Focus on teaching lets me prioritize teaching and mentorship, which allows me to develop meaningful relationships with students
- **Campus Involvement:** Chair of Admissions; Director of Student Research; Faculty Liaison to Student Ambassadors
- **Fun fact:** I have four younger sisters



# *Lisa Knecht- Sabres, DHS, OTR/L*



- **Practice Area:** Inpatient Rehab & a variety of settings for Older Adults
- **Why OT?:** I value independence; I am able to pursue both of my occupational passions- being a therapist and a professor!
- **Favorite thing about MWU:** The focus at MWU is on excellence in education!
- **Professional Involvement:** Reviewer for numerous professional journals and OT textbook publishing companies
- **Fun fact:** I completed a century (100 mile) bike ride on my 50th Birthday

*Lisa Mahaffey*  
*PhD, OTR/L,*  
*FAOTA*



- **Practice area:** Mental Health
- **Why OT?:** I love the opportunity we have as a profession to help create a society that is inclusive of all people
- **Favorite thing about MWU:** Working with my fellow faculty, and the diversity of experience we bring to the program
- **Campus Involvement:** Faculty advisor for SOTA; Project Director on the Tiered Occupational Therapy School Mental Health grant.
- **Fun fact:** I love to to Packer games (I'm an owner), and teach Mental Health First Aid

*Susanne  
Higgins OTD,  
OTR/L, CHT*



- **Practice area:** UE Orthopedics
- **Why OT?:** OTs integrate creativity and expertise in health sciences with knowledge of engagement in occupations
- **Favorite thing about MWU:** Helping students become ready for clinical practice with strong ethical and clinical reasoning
- **Professional Involvement:** ASHT; Teaching CE courses with ILOTA
- **Fun fact:** I love cooking & hanging out with my family

*Mark Kovic,  
OTD, OTR/L,  
FAOTA*



- **Practice area:** Neurorehabilitation & international capacity-bridging
- **Why OT?:** It fits my personality - I consider the context of what we do & our profession embraces this aspect of our daily lives
- **Favorite thing about MWU:** The open-door policy – it is great to be able to welcome students into my office
- **Professional Involvement:** I am a Fulbright Specialist & part of national accreditation for our profession
- **Fun fact:** I talk to my plants!

*Lydia Royeen,  
PhD, OTR/L*



- **Practice area:** Primary Care
- **Why OT?:** The interventions and education we provide can have a profound positive effect on the people we interact with
- **Favorite thing about MWU:** As new faculty it has been wonderful to see the collaborative nature faculty has to provide the best experiences for the students!
- **Professional Involvement:** Communication Liaison for Home and Community Health SIS, journal reviewer for numerous professional journals
- **Fun fact:** I grew up in a log cabin in VA

Phyllis V.  
Hughes,  
DrOT, OTR/L



- **Practice Area:** Geriatric/Skilled Nursing
- **Why OT?:** I love that we make a difference in the everyday lives of our clients
- **Favorite thing about MWU:** The faculty collaborates and works well together
- **Professional Involvement:** Adjunct Faculty; Fieldwork Coordinator on ILOTA Board; ILOTA Community Outreach Program- The Program has been working to introduce OT in underserved communities
- **Fun Fact:** I was born in Belize

*Marissa  
Dastice  
MOT, OTR/L*



- **Practice area:** Adult neuro rehab
- **Why OT?:** I value helping clients in meaningful and practical ways
- **Favorite thing about MWU:** I enjoy the collaboration amongst faculty member and hands on practical labs
- **Campus/Professional Involvement:** Adjunct Faculty
- **Fun fact:** I have a major in Spanish and studied abroad in Costa Rica

# *Abigail Thomas OTD, OTR/L*



- **Practice area:** Pediatrics
- **Why OT?:** I love collaborating with families to maximize potential in children
- **Favorite thing about MWU:** Emphasis on active participation in labs and lectures; I enjoy the opportunity to provide hands on learning in small groups
- **Campus/Professional Involvement:** Adjunct Faculty in OT Process Children and OT Practice Children
- **Fun fact:** I enjoy traveling, 3D printing, and going to concerts!