



Fellowship in Higher Education Leadership

2025 PROJECT SUMMARIES

ABOUT FHEL

ABOUT

The APTA Academy of Education Fellowship in Higher Education Leadership (FHEL) is a blended learning program intended for current and aspiring directors and leaders in physical therapy education programs. The Academy took over the FHEL (formally ELI) in 2023, making the 2024 graduating class the first cohort under the APTA Academy of Education.

The 52-week program is delivered across a 13-month time frame. This allows fellows to connect theory with practice and enables the direct application of knowledge learned through the Fellowship to their everyday work in physical therapy education.

The FHEL program provides mentoring by high-quality, experienced physical therapy education academic administrators, taught by qualified content expert faculty, and peer networking and support to create a community of educational leaders.

The award-winning fellowship was first accredited by the American Board of Physical Therapy Residency and Fellowship Education (ABPTRFE) in 2012 and reaccredited in 2017 through 2027. With over 160 alums, the FHEL welcomed its 13th cohort for 2024-2025.

MISSION

The mission of FHEL is to develop a community of visionary, innovative, and influential directors in physical therapist and physical therapist assistant educational programs to advance the health of society.

PROGRAM GOALS

- Provide consistent curriculum delivery over time by recruiting and retaining quality faculty/mentors.
- Prepare graduates who provide advanced management and leadership skills in real-world leadership contexts.
- Offer a high-quality, contemporary curriculum and operations.
- Produce successful graduates.
- Establish a professional community whose members support each other's development after graduation.

2024-2025 THEL Cohort

GRADUATES

Jennifer Bagwell, PT, PhD, DPT
Marisa Birkmeier, PT, DPT, DHSc, Board Certified in Pediatric Physical Therapy
Jacque Bradford, PT, DPT, EdD, CHSE
Carmen Capó Lugo, PT, PhD
Stephanie Eton PT, DPT, Board Certified Geriatric Specialist
Megan Freeland, PT, DPT, PCS
Brittani Freund, PT, DPT, PhD, SCS, ATC/L
Brittney Mazzone Gunterstockman, PT, DPT, EdD
Marcia Himes, PT, DPT, DHSc
Angela Holland, PT, DPT, EdD
Ashanti Jones, PT, DPT, EdD
Sarah Luna, PT, DPT, PhD
Ashley McCall, PT, MPT, PhD
Denise Peters, PT, DPT, PhD
Sherry Osborn Pinkstaff, PT, PhD, DPT
Laurie Ray, PT, PhD
Laura C. Schmitt, PT, PhD, FAPTA
Richard Severin, PT, DPT, PhD, CCS
Janet Tankersley, PT, DPT, PhD, PCS
Shelene Thomas, PT, DPT, EdD, FNAP
Jodi Thomas, PT, DPT, DHSc
Stacia Hall Thompson, PT, DPT, PhD
Catherine Turner, PT, DPT, PhD
Meredith Wampler-Kuhn, PT, DPTSc
Kinsey Whitaker, ACCE, PT, DPT, GCS
Nicole Windsor PT, DPT, PhD,
FAAOMPT, CERP
Liana Wooten, PT, DPT, PhD

FACULTY

Sharon McDade, EdD
Evan Robinson, R.Ph., PhD, FNAP
Gail Jensen, PT, PhD, FAPTA
Emelyn dela Pena, EdD
Steve Milam, JD
James (Jim) Kemper, PhD, SPHR
Damon Braggs, MBA
Barb Sanders, PT, PhD, FAPTA
Kristin Greenwood, PT, DPT, EdD, MS, FNAP

MENTORS

Amy Garrigues, PT, DPT
Michael Majsak, PT, EdD
Stanley H. Wilson, PT, EdD, CEAS, FASAHP
R. Scott Ward, PT, PhD, FAPTA
Leslie Portney, PT, PhD, DPT, FAPTA
Karen Huhn, PT, MS, PhD
Holly Lynch, PT, DPT, MA
Diane Heislein, PT, DPT

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Teressa Brown, PT, DPT, PhD



JENNIFER BAGWELL

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, LONG BEACH

PERSONAL GOALS

1. To develop systems focused on improved transparency and communication within our Department
2. To improve my understanding of our departmental budget and address budgetary issues with a focus on improved student experience
3. To better understand motivations and policies at the college/Dean's level and to facilitate clear communication regarding our department desires, goals, and challenges

LESSONS LEARNED

1. One of my biggest lessons was the intentionality with which I should use the four frames. Some frames come more naturally to me (systems and human resources), but focusing intentionally on viewing my role or a situation from these different frames has broadened my perspective.
2. The importance of both management and leadership in my role as a Department Chair and how I can grow with respect to both
3. The value of being intentional regarding relationship building (with students in our program, with faculty and staff in my Department, College, and University, and with administration). I feel that many of my successes and challenges over the past year have related to people. More consistent, open, and direct communication has helped tremendously and is an area of continued focus

JENNIFER BAGWELL

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

My leadership project was to develop a plan to revise the Doctor of Physical Therapy curriculum at California State University, Long Beach, reducing it from nine semesters to eight. This initiative was motivated by several factors:

- Curricular: Program's contact hours exceed the national average reported by CAPTE. Feedback from student and alumni surveys and faculty input suggests that content could be consolidated, integrated, or is beyond entry-level expectations.
- Programmatic: The current May start date poses challenges for university operations, student support, and advising during the initial summer term. It also complicates recruitment efforts, particularly for students graduating in late May or June.
- Financial: An additional semester increases the financial burden on students.

A 3-year implementation timeline was drafted. During the 2024–2025 academic year, the curriculum committee mapped credit hours across key content areas, benchmarking against the top 10 and other selected DPT programs nationwide. This systems-level analysis helped identify areas for consolidation and integration. With faculty input, the committee developed an initial draft proposal to reduce course units. I began assessing the potential impact of these curricular changes on faculty teaching loads to gain consensus and decrease potential faculty concerns, consistent with the human resources and political frames. Additionally, I conducted a preliminary analysis of the financial implications, including projected faculty costs and the reduction in student tuition due to one fewer semester.

Significant work remains before implementation. Over the next 2 years we plan to:

- Map a timeline for our Application for Approval of Substantive Change (AASC) from CAPTE including division of tasks among faculty
- Engage faculty, alumni, advisory committee, and student groups for feedback
- Draft new course syllabi and map the proposed curriculum with CAPTE standards and competencies
- Coordinate with our College, Director of Operations, Dean of Graduate Studies, University curriculum coordinator and specialist, Registrar, Director of Academic Programs, and other associated stakeholders regarding proposed curricular modifications
- Develop assessment matrices to evaluate the effectiveness of curricular modifications



MARISA BIRKMEIER

GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Foster an inclusive environment across the physical therapy program that has a shared vision and commitment to excellence.
2. Develop skills and abilities to navigate challenging conversations and interactions that result in productive outcomes.
3. Identify my leadership strengths and areas for continued improvement to navigate current and future leadership roles.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Leadership opportunities come in all sizes and from all directions.
2. I always valued my professional networks and colleagues but I now realize how important it is to have a strong community to support both personal and professional success.
3. Leading does not mean it is the person in front of the line. Leaders are where they are needed, which continuously changes depending on the circumstance. Effective leaders support others to be their best selves to achieve the shared vision of the group.

MARISA BIRKMEIER

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

Title: Elevate the Physical Therapy Program in the GW School of Medicine and Health Sciences

The GW Physical Therapy (GW PT) Program resides in the GW School of Medicine and Health Sciences (SMHS). SMHS is structured as a medical education enterprise with a medical division and health sciences division and various departments and programs within the divisions. Over the last 25 years, the GW PT Program achieved excellent student and graduate outcomes, national recognition, and contributed to SMHS in multiple committees and leadership roles; however, the GW PT Program struggles to consistently be a strong voice in the School despite these faculty and staff efforts.

My project served to identify avenues and connections across SMHS to strengthen the presence and influence of the GW PT Program. I developed a multi-tiered approach to build influence at the department, division, and school-wide levels. At the department level, I strengthened existing relationships among the three programs (PT, OT, DHSc) to demonstrate to SMHS the capabilities of the Health, Human Function, and Rehabilitation Sciences department. At the health sciences division, I promoted the GW PT Program through strategic committee service that benefit PT faculty and the health sciences division. School-wide, I increased my visibility among leadership, nurtured existing interprofessional activities, and developed new ventures with faculty, staff, and students across SMHS.

Accomplishments thus far include:

- A GW PT faculty member, through a competitive selection process, was selected and presented at one of the four SMHS Bicentennial Faculty Lecture Series. I advised the faculty member to apply, mentored her in the application process, and rallied GW PT faculty and students to attend the lecture.
- 92% (12/13) of core faculty serve on a SMHS or University level committee with 5 faculty newly elected or appointed this past academic cycle.
- I convened a SMHS Interprofessional Day of Service planning team that includes leadership from the physician assistant (PA) studies program, doctor of occupational therapy (OTD) program, undergraduate medical education program, and DPT program. OT and DPT programs currently plan to participate in the GW Day of Service activity in August with plans for medicine and PA to participate in 2026.



JACQUE BRADFORD

UNIVERSITY OF MEMPHIS

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Enhance my capacity to lead the strategic planning and implementation of a new Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) program.
2. Develop and refine skills in articulating a clear, shared vision and fostering a values-driven culture that promotes academic excellence, inclusivity, and collaboration among faculty, staff, and students.
3. Evolve my leadership style by deepening my practice of servant leadership, with a focused emphasis on effective delegation, team development, and shared governance.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. As a fellow, I gained a deeper appreciation for the importance of building strong relationships through direct, personal communication, beyond email, through the fellowship process of meeting with institutional leaders. This close communication and relationship building is also important for supporting staff who may not be institutional leaders, but assist in day-to-day operations of university tasks. Much can be achieved by picking up the telephone or making a personal visit.
2. The FHEL program provided a unique and safe space in which I could explore, test, and expand my leadership identity. I learned that stepping into discomfort, whether by taking risks, voicing new ideas, or assuming unfamiliar leadership roles, was essential to discovering and refining my leadership purpose. This space encouraged authentic reflection and encouraged me to lead with greater clarity and confidence.
3. I have reframed the way I view challenges in academic leadership. Rather than seeing barriers as threats to success, I now see them as complex puzzles that can often be solved through strategic thinking, collaboration, and persistence. The fellowship reinforced the value of team-based problem-solving and taught me to lean into collective expertise to navigate organizational hurdles more effectively.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

My leadership project, Beyond Knowledge: Building Affective Skills Competency in Student Physical Therapists, aims to incorporate affective domain skills competencies into the Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) curriculum, aligning with a broader competency-based education (CBE) model. While the academic calendar for the DPT program is fixed due to cohort-based progression, the curriculum can be intentionally designed to foster essential affective skills such as empathy, professionalism, ethical decision-making, communication, and cultural responsiveness. This project will involve identifying affective competencies through a targeted needs assessment, educating faculty on CBE principles through a workshop by Fall 2025, and embedding these competencies into program policies and the student promotion process.

The initiative will be implemented within the broader context of curriculum development, instructional design, and clinical readiness standards, and will require strategic leadership to navigate both internal and external challenges. These include faculty unfamiliarity with assessing affective skills, undefined competency benchmarks, and alignment with institutional systems. However, the project is bolstered by valuable resources and opportunities, such as collaboration with other university healthcare education programs, consultation with CBE leaders, and published references, i.e., WHO Rehabilitation Competency Framework. Drawing on a servant and situational leadership style, I plan to lead this effort through project planning, team engagement, iterative assessment, and transparent communication. I anticipate that the outcomes will be shared through professional forums such as ELC and with interprofessional colleagues across campus, with the ultimate goal of cultivating a values-driven, competency-focused foundation for our future DPT graduates.



CARMEN E. CAPÓ-LUGO

UNIVERSIDAD ANA G. MÉNDEZ

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Foster innovation and excellence across the continuum of learning by designing educational experiences that are culturally responsive, evidence-informed, and aligned with evolving professional and societal needs.
2. Build and lead high-performing, collaborative teams grounded in shared decision-making, psychological safety, and a clear commitment to inclusive excellence in physical therapy education.
3. Advocate for impactful, system-level change—such as advancing direct access and health equity—through strategic networking, cross-sector collaboration, and a focus on measurable outcomes that benefit both communities and the profession.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. I learned that cultivating culturally responsive leadership isn't a checklist—it's a constant negotiation between deeply held values, systemic limitations, and the realities of institutional culture.
2. I learned that I tend to lead primarily using the symbolic frame, but vision alone doesn't build infrastructure—people, trust and shared ownership do.
3. Navigating the system to support faculty and meet the needs of the program was more difficult than I expected. I learned that leadership is not only about passion—it also needs strategy and patience. Finding that balance has been one of the hardest lessons for me. I'm very thankful for the fellowship, because it gave me tools I will use for a long time.

CARMEN E. CAPÓ-LUGO

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

Engagement with university's leadership ensured alignment with broader institutional goals. Looking ahead, we will implement the Sustainability Health Index to systematically assess community needs, with pilot testing set for August and data collection beginning in October. These efforts will inform long-term strategies and resource planning aimed at embedding population-level outcome measurement within our DPT curriculum, scholarly agendas and community partnerships. Central to this effort is the integration of health system science into the DPT curriculum, empowering our students to act as agents of change who help transform the healthcare system from within. Success will be measured by faculty engagement in KT activities, quality of community data gathered, and the feasibility of implementation strategies developed by March.

This leadership project focuses on establishing a robust knowledge translation (KT) track within our Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) program to advance faculty scholarship, enhance students' understanding of evidence-based practice, and ultimately elevate physical therapy services in Puerto Rico. Motivated in part by the critical shortage of physical therapists on the island, the project also aims to position our program as a key contributor to improving population health outcomes. Initial outreach—through local clinic engagement and a KT symposium—revealed strong interest but limited clinical readiness for the depth of KT we had envisioned. This prompted a strategic shift toward foundational work, beginning with a thorough assessment of community needs and population-specific contexts. We conducted departmental and faculty practice–focused SWOT analyses, identified faculty populations of interest, consulted a KT expert, and initiated early-stage collaborations with local clinics. Engagement with university leadership ensured alignment with broader institutional goals. Looking ahead, we will implement the Sustainability Health Index to systematically assess community needs, with pilot testing set for August and data collection beginning in October. These efforts will inform long-term strategies and resource planning aimed at embedding population-level outcome measurement within our DPT curriculum, faculty scholarship, and community partnerships. Central to this effort is the integration of health system science into the curriculum, empowering our students to act as agents of change who help transform the healthcare system from within. Success will be measured by faculty engagement in KT activities, the quality of community data gathered, and the feasibility of implementation strategies developed by March 2026. This project has required adaptive leadership, deep listening, and a commitment to equity, and it will serve as the foundation for transforming how we prepare future physical therapists—by aligning education and scholarship with real-world health system needs and creating sustained impact in the communities we serve.



STEPHANIE ETON

UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE - CHATTANOOGA

PERSONAL GOALS

1. By the end of this fellowship, I will understand the skills needed for assembling and leading a high-performing team to enhance committee structure and strategic planning in my department and residency.
2. By the end of this fellowship, I will develop clear and confident communication skills to enhance conflict resolution and team dynamics.
3. By the end of this fellowship, I will develop an understanding of fiscal and political dynamics within my institution to aid in my growth as a well-rounded leader.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Building Collective Impact-Leadership thrives through community collaboration, not isolation. By assembling diverse teams and leveraging institutional resources—from student affairs to fiscal support—we create powerful advocacy networks for students, faculty, and staff.
2. Shared Challenges and Shared Solutions-Leadership challenges rarely exist in isolation. Creating trusted networks across programs provides vital support, counsel, and collaborative opportunities that transform individual obstacles into collective growth.
3. Broadening Perspective Beyond Disciplines- Effective leadership requires looking beyond disciplinary boundaries. Engaging with resources like Inside Higher Ed and CUPA-HR, while fully utilizing on-campus expertise from human resources and student affairs, creates a foundation for programmatic excellence.

STEPHANIE ETON

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

Elevate: Faculty Development in Teaching, Scholarship, and Service for College of Health, Education Professional Studies

The Elevate program addresses the critical allied health faculty shortage through a comprehensive 4-semester residency that transforms clinicians into effective educators while developing essential leadership capabilities. This systems-based approach creates sustainable solutions for faculty recruitment, retention, and development while directly supporting University of Tennessee Chattanooga (UTC) and College of Health, Education and Professional Studies (CHEPS) missions.

In 2024, CAPTE reported 191 vacant physical therapy faculty positions with 182 additional projected vacancies. With 292 accredited DPT programs and 25 in development, this shortage affects educational quality across healthcare disciplines. Clinicians transitioning to academia often lack formal training in teaching, scholarship, and service, creating a significant gap in faculty preparation.

The aim of this project is to offer a structured pathway for clinicians transitioning to academia through a comprehensive 4-semester residency featuring:

- PhD course credits applicable toward a terminal degree
- Professional certification upon completion
- Structured experience across teaching, research, service, and leadership development
- One-to-one mentoring with experienced faculty
- ABPTRFE accreditation for physical therapists (with future accreditation planned for nursing and occupational therapy)

A systems thinking approach was applied to develop this project. Elevate addresses faculty development as an interconnected system where improvements in one area create positive effects throughout:

- Faculty development serves as the central driver that impacts teaching effectiveness, research productivity, and service engagement
- Enhanced faculty capabilities directly improve student outcomes, institutional reputation, and recruitment success (faculty and students)
- Feedback Loops: Outcomes inform continuous program refinement (strategic planning)
- External Influences: Program design aligns with institutional policies, accreditation requirements, and professional standards
- Improved job satisfaction and career progression into leadership roles

This program was created to align with UTC's institutional mission. Elevate directly supports UTC and CHEPS missions by:

- Transforming lives through improved educational experiences delivered by better-prepared faculty
- Inspiring scholarship and innovation by developing faculty research skills and collaborative opportunities
- Ensuring strategic resource stewardship by addressing faculty shortages through efficient internal development
- Embracing diversity by creating accessible academic pathways for clinicians with diverse backgrounds
- Enhancing disciplinary knowledge through clinical-academic integration
- Promoting community ethics through structured mentorship systems

The expected outcomes of the project are

1. Organizational: Sustainable faculty pipeline into leadership, improved retention, institutional reputation
2. Educational: Enhanced teaching effectiveness, student satisfaction, innovative pedagogy
3. Research: Increased scholarship output, funding opportunities, interdisciplinary collaborative opportunities
4. Service: Strengthened community engagement, leadership development, interdisciplinary collaboration

In summary, Elevate cultivates essential skills in academia by using a systems thinking and strategic planning approach. By viewing faculty development through a systems lens, this approach transforms the faculty shortage crisis into an opportunity for sustainable growth, enhanced educational quality, and long-term institutional capacity building across health professions programs.



MEGAN L. FREELAND

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY PHYSICAL
THERAPY AND HUMAN MOVEMENT SCIENCES

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Through reflection, improve my ability to serve as a team member adding value without a leadership position.
2. By actively participating in the content presented, create a wholistic view of the world of academia outside of clinical education and understand the motivation and contribution of all invested parties.
3. Through advocacy and networking, elevate the image of clinical education within both the department and medical school.
4. Driven by systems thinking and quality improvement, transform our program's image to one of experts, collaborators and leaders in clinical education

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Mentorship, not speeding tickets!
2. Leaders are not afraid of the microphone, though don't like to use it very often.
3. Micromanaging removes the opportunity for creativity, not delegating removes the opportunity for others to shine.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

The intentional and progressive development of the ability to apply knowledge and skills to make informed decisions and improve patient outcomes is a clear and specific focus of entry level DPT programs. The program at Northwestern University Physical Therapy and Human Movement Sciences (PTHMS) is no exception. Both formative and summative assessments provide regular, measurable feedback in these areas and students identify "increased knowledge and experience from decision-making and acting in work with similar cases and different patients, would lead to learning and increased security in clinical reasoning" prior to their first full-time clinical experience. While it is well documented that students struggle in the affective domain more often than the cognitive or psychomotor domains at all levels of clinical experience, this area of performance is difficult to objectively measure. Further, it has been established that clinical instructors and site coordinators of clinical education are less likely to address affective concerns due to a (perceived or actual) lack of skill and comfort in doing so. Within our program, we have seen a near 3-fold increase in per-cohort affective behavior concerns from students during clinical experiences in as many years. Additionally, during the curricular mapping process, we identified that faculty feel that they spend only 21% of their instructional time teaching behaviors in contrast to 45% and 34% of time on knowledge and skills, respectively. While many programs have systems in place for reporting and noting trends in affective behavior – both concerns and accolades - at the program level, we wanted to move beyond this with an assets-based approach. We wondered, what opportunities exist for the intentional and progressive development of the ability to apply behaviors to make informed decisions and improve patient outcomes? Leaders within PTHMS with a passion for the topic and a variety of viewpoints were invited to come together. As a group, 10 individuals began to shape ideas, share hopes, fears or aspirations, and identify goals with key performance indicators to explore this question.



BRITTANI FREUND

UNIVERSITY OF ST. AUGUSTINE
FOR HEALTH SCIENCES

PERSONAL GOALS

1. To develop and refine advanced leadership and management skills that are directly applicable to my current and aspiring role as a program director in a Doctor of Physical Therapy program.
2. To establish meaningful connections with experienced mentors and peer fellows, fostering a supportive professional community that continues beyond the duration of the program.
3. To design and execute a leadership project that addresses a critical need for my institution, demonstrating innovation and impact in physical therapy education.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Being a leader is "about mentorship not speeding tickets" - wise words of Dr. Mike Majsak.
2. Knowing what resources and other leaders are amongst your intuition (ie, wellness, student affairs, registrar, dean, etc.); collaboration is essential for sustained effective leadership.
3. A leader is adaptable to the evolving challenges in healthcare education, including technological advances, DEI initiatives, and accreditation standards.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

As part of my participation in the APTA Academy of Education Fellowship in Higher Education Leadership, I propose the development and implementation of a comprehensive, structured onboarding program for new faculty within our physical therapy education program (University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences – Dallas campus).

This initiative is designed to support new faculty in navigating the complex academic environment by providing a 15-week, mentor-guided onboarding experience. The program will introduce new faculty to essential institutional platforms, policies, and procedures, while also fostering early integration into the academic community through weekly engagements with key team members.

Each new faculty member will be paired with a dedicated mentor who will guide them through a sequenced curriculum that includes:

- Orientation to institutional systems and educational technologies
- Introduction to program culture, values, and expectations
- Scheduled meetings with interprofessional team members and leadership
- Ongoing support and feedback to promote confidence and competence in their new role

This project directly aligns with the Fellowship's mission to cultivate visionary, innovative, and influential leaders in physical therapy education. By enhancing the onboarding experience, this initiative aims to:

- Advance faculty retention and satisfaction
- Promote excellence in teaching and academic leadership
- Foster a culture of mentorship and continuous professional development



BRITTNEY MAZZONE GUNTERSTOCKMAN

LINCOLN MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Strengthen interpersonal relationships with my team so that each member feels valued and supported.
2. Improve my ability to see different perspectives (or frames) during decision-making and conflicts to foster an inclusive environment.
3. Explore creative ways to resolve issues or dilemmas without a policy or procedure to demonstrate flexibility and innovation.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Understanding the "why" drives decision-making and processes, while explaining the "why" fosters employee engagement.
2. Leadership is a behavior, not a position. You can lead from any position.
3. Resource overload is real. It is important to be intentional and selective when sharing resources with colleagues and students.

BRITTNEY MAZZONE GUNTERSTOCKMAN

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

For my leadership project, I focused on developing the Human Resource Frame from Bolman and Deal's leadership model, which emphasizes the importance of people and relationships within an organization. My primary goal was to foster stronger interpersonal connections among faculty and staff by promoting open dialogue and building trust. To achieve this, I designed and implemented a climate survey aimed at assessing and improving the climate and culture of the Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) program. My target was full participation from all 15 faculty and staff members.

The climate survey explored five domains: overall culture, sense of belonging, employee satisfaction, collaboration, and resources, and consisted of both quantitative and qualitative components. The quantitative portion was delivered via a Qualtrics survey, which included five statements per domain rated on a five-point Likert scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). Additionally, participants were asked to rank the five domains from most to least important, and from most to least problematic. The qualitative portion involved one-on-one semi-structured interviews with each participant. During the interview, the order of domains discussed was from the employees' rankings, from the most to least problematic. For each domain, the conversation focused on positive aspects, current challenges, and suggestions for change or improvement.

Of the 15 employees, 14 participated in the climate survey, yielding a 93% response rate. Quantitative findings indicated that most participants felt satisfied with the overall climate of the program, experienced a sense of belonging, and believed that collaboration was well-supported. At the program level, while teaching resources were generally perceived as adequate, lower satisfaction was noted regarding resources for scholarship and service. At the broader college and institutional levels, participants reported lower satisfaction with the overall climate and perceived deficits in available resources.

Further qualitative analysis will be conducted using a combination of artificial intelligence tools and traditional coding methods to ensure a robust interpretation of the data. Results will be disseminated through an oral presentation to program and college leadership, as well as shared with the faculty and staff within the DPT program. The final phase of the project will involve the development of actionable improvement plans, directly informed by participant feedback and guided by practical, feasible strategies.

Through this project and my participation in the fellowship, I have experienced significant growth as a leader. I hope that each employee felt valued and supported throughout the process. Follow-up climate surveys are planned to assess the impact of this initiative and guide ongoing enhancements to the program's culture.



MARCIA K. HIMES

MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Strengthen Advocacy Skills: I aimed to develop the ability to effectively advocate for the unique needs of the Physical Therapy program within evolving institutional frameworks.
2. Enhance Collaborative Leadership: I sought to foster stronger cross-disciplinary relationships and collaborative approaches with university leadership during organizational transitions.
3. Advance Strategic Problem-Solving Abilities: I focused on refining my ability to analyze complex administrative problems and lead solutions that balance accreditation standards with institutional objectives.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Effective Communication is Foundational: Transparent, persistent, and multi-directional communication was critical to aligning university leadership with accreditation requirements.
2. Change Requires All Four Leadership Frames: Addressing organizational change through Bolman and Deal's four frames—Structural, Human Resource, Political, and Symbolic—was essential in successfully navigating both compliance and leadership challenges.
3. Systems Thinking is a Leadership Necessity: Understanding the interplay between institutional policy, accreditation standards, and educational outcomes underscored the need for leaders to think beyond their immediate context.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

My leadership project focused on navigating a university-wide academic restructuring and its impact on the Department of Physical Therapy. The restructuring shifted our status from a standalone department—where I served as department head with direct oversight of curriculum, budget, and faculty evaluation—to a program housed within a newly formed School. This transition placed the program under a School Director, effectively removing my direct reporting line to the Dean and reallocating responsibilities such as faculty evaluations and budget oversight to the School Director.

While the restructure aligned with broader institutional goals, it created a conflict with CAPTE accreditation standards, particularly those related to leadership accountability and autonomy. Our program was placed in conditional compliance. Over the course of eight months, I led a complex change management initiative that engaged stakeholders at the college and university levels. I advocated for necessary modifications to preserve CAPTE compliance while aligning with the university's new structure. The result of this sustained effort was full resolution of the compliance issue, with our program removed from conditional status and no further progress reports required.



ANGEL HOLLAND

UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS
FOR MEDICAL SCIENCES

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Develop time management strategies to improve my ability to delegate
2. Develop coaching skills to build a team that feels empowered and inspired to grow in their personal careers
3. Increase understanding of business/budget knowledge of managing an academic department to improve negotiation skills for department needs

LESSONS LEARNED

1. I have learned how to transition from a manager to a leader through the strategies and knowledge I've attained through FEHL
2. I have learned valuable insights and resources to utilize in my daily role as Department Chair to guide me with complex administrative situations
3. I have learned the key players in higher education whom I need to partner with to improve my current role and the success of our department

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

For my leadership project, I first set out to write a proposal to develop a Teaching Residency Program based on long term goals identified by our faculty during our annual department planning retreat in July 2024. While starting this project and working with administration at my university, it became clear I needed to revise my approach to be successful in the current political climate along with growing budget concerns. The challenges I encountered in adapting my original project idea allowed me to utilize much of the knowledge gained in the FEHL and apply leadership strategies to be more effective in my role. I adjusted my project to develop a strategic plan for growth in our department. The strategic plan aligns with university and college goals and considers the long-term goals set by our core faculty group in July 2024. I will present a logic model of the strategic plan to our faculty in July 2025 to obtain feedback. I will then take the faculty feedback and use it to set task priorities and develop a timeline to present to my Dean for approval to begin the action steps to implementation.



ASHANTI M. JONES

UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA -
MONROE

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Strengthen my capacity as a transformational leader in physical therapy education by applying evidence-based leadership frameworks to implement strategic initiatives that enhance student success, curricular innovation, and program growth within my academic institution. Expand my knowledge and application of inclusive excellence by designing and evaluating institutional policies and practices that promote justice, equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging (JEDI-B) in physical therapy education, recruitment, and clinical training environments.
2. Expand my knowledge and application of inclusive excellence by designing and evaluating institutional policies and practices that promote justice, equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging (JEDI-B) in physical therapy education, recruitment, and clinical training environments.
3. Cultivate a national network of higher education leaders and leverage collaborative partnerships to contribute meaningfully to the scholarship, mentorship, and policy development efforts of the APTA Academy of Education and its affiliated leadership communities.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Leadership Requires Intentional Self-Awareness and Strategic Communication: Through structured reflections and peer mentorship, I learned that effective leadership in higher education requires continuous self-awareness, active listening, and the ability to adapt communication styles to different stakeholders. Leading with clarity, empathy, and purpose creates a culture of trust and drives collective progress. I can (and should!) develop other frames and strategies in order to more fully consider problems/issues in my department. This will still be an authentic approach.
2. Advancing Educational Equity Demands Courage and Institutional Alignment: I gained a deeper understanding that promoting justice, equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging (JEDI-B) is not a peripheral task—it must be embedded in the institution's strategic mission and daily operations. Transformational change requires courageous conversations, data-informed decision-making, and alignment across faculty, administration, legislation, and student support structures.
3. Fiscal Responsibility is Integral to Sustainable Academic Leadership: One of the most impactful lessons I learned is that understanding higher education budgeting processes is essential for any academic leader. Fiscal responsibility extends beyond managing line items—it involves aligning financial decisions with institutional priorities, advocating for resources that support mission-driven outcomes, and making tough choices that preserve academic quality and student access in a resource-constrained environment.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

Pre-Health Initiative and Needs Assessment:

I developed the Pre-Health Initiative Program as part of my APTA Academy of Education Higher Education Leadership Fellowship. This comprehensive academic readiness program involves content experts across the University of Louisiana System, designed to support undergraduate students pursuing careers in healthcare. Grounded in a formal needs assessment, the project identified key barriers to professional school entry and retention, including gaps in academic preparation, limited access to mentorship, and a lack of early exposure to rigorous coursework expectations. In response, the initiative provides structured support in core sciences, personal and professional development, research literacy, and community engagement.

This project was inspired by my own leadership journey as a physical therapy educator and administrator. Through years of mentoring students and engaging in DEI-focused efforts, I recognized the urgent need to create sustainable pathways for diverse learners to succeed in healthcare education. The fellowship experience gave me the tools, language, and network to transform this vision into a strategic, data-driven initiative that aligns with both institutional goals and broader equity outcomes in health professions education.



SARAH LUNA

UNIVERSITY OF THE INCARNATE WORD

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Build on my past experiences as a faculty member and a leader in a health care organization by learning the business and culture of higher education leadership.
2. Grow in the areas of faculty recruitment and retention, academic culture and organizational structure, performance metrics, and financial management.
3. Prepare myself for a future role as a DPT Program Director.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. I am a faculty member, not a program director, but there are ways that I can be a leader in my program and in the profession.
2. Viewing a situation through a political leadership lens can help me identify key stakeholders that should be involved or consulted before the work of solving a problem begins.
3. There are opportunities to clarify the true cost of physical therapy education and balance the needs of the university with students' financial burden.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

The leadership project was an opportunity to force myself to engage with intimidating finance content on a deeper level. I also wanted the project to be something that is useful to my program leaders. I created a workspace where I can visualize and experiment with factors contributing to the actual cost of educating one DPT student in my program. Calculating the true cost of DPT education is a logical first step in addressing the poor return on DPT education investment and student debt-to-income ratio. Direct instructional costs were readily available to me, and I was able to calculate a "first draft" of the cost per student with those values. Ongoing work will be needed to obtain overhead costs from university departments outside of the DPT program. For example, accurate information about cost per student requires leaders in departments such as library services, information technology, facilities management, student affairs, etc. to calculate their expenses by school or by program. Some experts may argue that detailed overhead analysis is not useful; however, I am not convinced of that at this time. While I understand universities must remain financially healthy, I struggle with the idea of using future physical therapists to subsidize other departments or programs. I plan to continue exploring opportunities to reduce the cost of DPT education.



ASHLEY MCCALL

BRENAU UNIVERSITY

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Foster a deep intellectual foundation that guides strategic leadership in Physical Therapy education.
2. Advance departmental growth through a strategic plan that fosters scholarly engagement, supports data-informed retention, and drives outcomes including academic excellence, professional readiness and dissemination of successes to key stakeholders.
3. Expanding leadership impact and professional engagement through external collaboration and service to influence the broader academic and clinical community.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Learning well is lifelong. It involves relationships, grit and sometimes getting a little uncomfortable to grow.
2. As a leader, the art of listening can be more powerful than any amount of knowledge. It demonstrates respect and often results in being respected.
3. Sometimes you just need to make a decision.

ASHLEY MCCALL

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

The Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE) recognizes scholarship as a vital component of both faculty responsibilities and student learning within the curriculum. As chair of the department's Scholarship Committee and lead instructor for the majority of our curriculum's evidence-based practice content, my project aimed to promote scholarship development within a teaching-focused program through the following initiatives:

1. Support faculty development in scholarship by providing structured, scaffolded opportunities for growth.
2. Enhance student engagement in scholarship by offering differentiated capstone pathways.
3. Establish sustainable mentorship structures between faculty and students with Scholarship Committee oversight.

Since its initiation, the project has met several key objectives. Early efforts focused on restructuring the student Capstone process to include scholarship tracks tailored to varying levels of student interest and experience. One goal of this restructuring - to identify 3-5 projects that could further develop and continue beyond the Capstone timeframe - has been achieved. Simultaneously, faculty were surveyed to assess current scholarly activity, areas of interest, and willingness to serve as a mentor for current and future student scholarship endeavors. Based on the results of this survey, the Scholarship Committee has begun the process of pairing identified projects with interested and available faculty mentors.

Moving forward, the efforts from this project will serve several purposes, supported by strategic leadership among the evidence-based curriculum and Scholarship Committee. The students, beginning their first year, and faculty will be annually surveyed to determine early and ongoing scholarly interest and development. Data from these surveys guide mentorship decisions, inform faculty development opportunities, support project continuity and foster dissemination of findings to our professional community. Ultimately, these objectives aim to cultivate a sustainable culture of scholarship that complements and enriches both student learning and faculty growth within a teaching-focused program. In doing so this work aligns with our institution's mission to prepare our students for extraordinary personal and professional lives through thoughtful, intentional and strategic engagement and affirms our mutual commitment to integrity, intellectual accomplishment and service.



DENISE PETERS

UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Embrace the fellowship fully - I will only learn as much as I put in.
2. Build community.
3. Turn knowledge gained into action and share with others.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Policies aren't all that bad.
2. Good leadership is a lifelong practice.
3. Lean into shared governance.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

My FHES project focused on developing parts of a proposal for a hybrid expansion DPT program at my university to be presented to College leadership later this summer. As the costs of education and living continue to increase in our area and student demographics and needs shift, we need to adapt our teaching methods to better meet both the economic and learning needs of our future DPT students. I focused my efforts towards conducting a needs assessment (based on CAPTE criteria), meeting with members of our leadership team, and meeting with representatives from enTandem DPT/Rehab Essentials to discuss their hybrid learning curriculum and financial model. Ongoing conversations are occurring regarding cost analyses and financial projections, as this will be a vital piece of the proposal. Overall, this project has contributed to 1) data gathering on local and regional needs; 2) defining our target student population (i.e., working adults, PTAs transitioning to PTs, students from rural New England); 3) identifying challenges to program development and subsequent strategies to address these; and 4) enhancing communication with and support from Department and College leadership. Our hybrid expansion proposal is now well on its way!



SHERRY OSBORN PINKSTAFF

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH FLORIDA

PERSONAL GOALS

I had several personal goals for the fellowship covering several different areas such as Mentoring and Faculty Development, Administration and Operations, Academic Innovation. Reflecting on those goals now, a year after I set them during the application process, leaves me both satisfied and dissatisfied in terms of what I was able to accomplish. The goals that I spent the most energy on were the following three:

1. Engage in a community of peers who are exploring not only the nuts and bolts of academic physical therapy, but also the best practices associated with educating physical therapists.
2. Refine and improve my communication skills to foster positive team dynamics.
3. Develop a succession and leadership development plan for our department to ensure programmatic continuity and excellence.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. As I have progressed in my role as a leader and dealt with adversity and conflict I have noted that my self-confidence has been negatively impacted. This Leadership Fellowship has contributed significantly to improving my self confidence by giving me opportunities to improve my knowledge and skills. It has also immersed me in a community of peers that have provided me feedback and positive role models that I have learned so much from.
2. I continue to be struck by heterogeneity of DPT programs and one of the key lessons learned for me is related to the value of having an open mind and curious mind about the myriad ways that one can accomplish their goals.
3. Much has been written about the the intangibles of great leaders - charisma, determination, passion. What I have learned during this year that was jam-packed with absolutely essential and relevant content, is that the foundation of leadership must be a deep and broad understanding of one's profession. I am a better leader because of the time I have spent learning this year.

SHERRY OSBORN PINKSTAFF

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

Leadership Development Plan for the Department of Physical Therapy

Due to stringent accreditation standards and professional expectations, there are many operational responsibilities for a DPT program related to admissions, reporting, assessment, curriculum, etc. At my institution, this is distinctly different than many other Programs within Departments. The consequence is that faculty have much more responsibility for program operations. Due to its large role in the curriculum and the accreditation standards related to it, the role of Director of Clinical Education (DCE) has come to be particularly well defined and, therefore, provides a useful example or model. There are specified duties and standards that has even led the APTA to develop an evaluative tool to allow for assessment of the faculty filling this important role. However, there is no equivalent for the other operational roles such as those related to admissions, curriculum, or assessment.

This leadership development plan aims to establish a structured framework for operational leadership within the Department of Physical Therapy. The plan will define key roles and responsibilities, foster leadership opportunities which will enhance the university and the physical therapy profession, improve communication, and ensure long-term programmatic continuity.

Key Objectives:

- Clearly outline positions beyond those that are already well established (Program Director, Director of Clinical Education) such as Director of Curriculum and Learning, Director of Student Affairs, Director of Faculty Affairs, and Director of Assessment and Data Management.
- Create initiatives such as mentorship programs, leadership training workshops, and specific professional development pathways for faculty.
- Enhance Communication & Team Dynamics: Implement strategies to improve transparency, collaboration, and morale within the department, including structured feedback systems and team-building efforts.
- Ensure Accountability & Programmatic Continuity: Establish measurable goals, and tracking mechanisms to sustain leadership development over time. Integrate these elements into role specific annual self-evaluation, policies and procedures.



LAURA C. SCHMITT

OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Continually develop as a creative and agile leader poised to effectively navigate the dynamic nature and intersections of the healthcare landscape, evidence-based practice, and physical therapy education.
2. Gain skills and confidence in fostering a supportive and intellectually stimulating education and scientific environment that promotes innovative program development, continuous improvement, and opportunities for each individual to belong, engage, and contribute.
3. Form a network of leader peers and colleagues to support my continued growth and collective innovation in physical therapy education.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Stepping out of my comfort zone during fellowship activities was pivotal in building my confidence as an authentic and empowering leader. These experiences enhanced my adaptability, mentoring, and decision-making abilities while reinforcing the key traits essential for effective leadership. I now approach complex leadership challenges with greater agility and a stronger sense of purpose.
2. The Bolman and Deal four-frame leadership model greatly broadened my perspective as a leader. This approach helped me gain deeper insights into the dynamics of effective teamwork and the intricate nature of leadership challenges, while also enhancing my ability to consider and integrate diverse viewpoints.
3. The fellowship gave me valuable insights into how diverse university structures impact physical therapy programs. While these differences are notable, the experience also underscored the commonalities in operations, challenges, and opportunities that shape physical therapy education.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

At my institution, we provide a research specialization designed for students who wish to engage in advanced, research-focused learning experiences that exceed the core requirements of the DPT program. Over recent years, interest in the specialization has significantly increased, with nearly 40% of our incoming cohorts showing interest and successfully completing the specialization criteria.

The primary goal of my project was to create infrastructure and essential resources to support this research specialization. Throughout the fellowship year, I gathered preliminary data and feedback from a range of stakeholders, including enrolled students, DPT program faculty, the program director, academic affairs personnel, research offices, and learning support administrators. Using this information and building on previous experience, I developed a structured application process for students aspiring to join the program, as well as a tracking system to monitor their progress within the specialization.

Moving forward, the infrastructure will be transformed into a web-based application accessible to both students and faculty, potentially serving as a model for other specialization or learning experiences within our DPT program and across the school. Additionally, I began creating a standardized set of learning objectives and foundational resources for faculty and students involved in the specialization. These resources will be incorporated into our learning management system. Future efforts will focus on enhancing faculty participation, expanding research capacity, and exploring opportunities to better integrate these resources with institutional assets, foster interdisciplinary collaboration, and support student dissemination of their work.



RICHARD SEVERIN

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Develop foundational skills as an academic leader and educator: Strengthen core competencies in curriculum design, assessment, and academic program development to support excellence in teaching and learning within physical therapy education.
2. Establish a professional network for collaborative problem-solving and mentorship: Build meaningful relationships with fellows, mentors, and leaders in higher education to foster a collaborative support system that can be leveraged to navigate challenges and inform decision-making in academic leadership.
3. Deepen understanding of the broader higher education landscape: Gain insight into the structural, financial, and cultural trends shaping higher education, including accreditation, institutional governance, and evolving student needs, to lead strategically and advocate effectively for program-level innovation.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Common challenges are universal—even among top programs: One of the most surprising lessons I learned was that many programs, even those viewed as highly successful, grapple with similar operational and leadership challenges. I entered the fellowship with an idealized perception of what “strong” programs looked like, but quickly came to appreciate the truth behind the “duck legs” analogy; beneath the calm, confident surface, there is often a great deal of frantic effort to keep things moving. This realization helped normalize the challenges I faced and encouraged me to focus on proactive problem-solving rather than comparison.
2. Uncovering hidden leadership strengths: Through the fellowship's assessments and leadership development activities, I discovered strengths I hadn't fully recognized in myself. While I initially identified strongly with a symbolic leadership style, I came to realize that I also possess strong organizational and administrative capabilities. These skills have become instrumental in the success of my fellowship project and my transition into academic leadership.
3. Flexibility and composure are critical to effective leadership: A key takeaway from my fellowship experience is the importance of flexibility and emotional regulation in academic leadership. Challenges are inevitable, but the ability to remain adaptable and maintain a calm, solution-focused demeanor can often be the determining factor in whether a situation escalates or is successfully resolved. Leadership is not just about strategy; it's about presence and tone.

RICHARD SEVERIN

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

Leadership Project Summary: "The Dragon Cave"; A Centralized Academic Resource Hub

I developed and implemented a centralized online resource, affectionately named The Dragon Cave, to address longstanding communication inefficiencies and policy fragmentation within our Doctor of Physical Therapy program. Named in honor of our university mascot, Sparky the Dragon, this hub was designed to support faculty and administrators by consolidating program-level documentation, policies, and communication tools in one easily accessible location within our existing Blackboard learning management system.

Prior to the launch of The Dragon Cave, critical program documents were dispersed across multiple platforms, leading to confusion, inconsistent policy enforcement, and excessive administrative burden; especially during situations that required urgent or informed decision-making. This challenge was exacerbated by a largely new administrative and faculty team unfamiliar with program, departmental, college, and institutional processes.

The Dragon Cave has become a living repository of our academic operations. It enables faculty to independently access and utilize key policies, resources, and communication from leadership, reducing reliance on email and allowing for more consistent and transparent messaging. In addition, I integrated adaptive tools and smart tracking sheets into the platform to monitor student progress, coordinate course schedules, and streamline workload management.

While The Dragon Cave stands as the primary deliverable of my project, it houses several smaller but equally important innovations that collectively contribute to a more organized, efficient, and empowered academic environment.



JANET B. TANKERSLEY

CHARLESTON SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Provide innovative and visionary leadership for the Charleston Southern University Department of Physical Therapy, fostering a culture of excellence and collaboration while driving advancements in education, research, and clinical practice within the field.
2. I aim to enhance my leadership and mentoring skills to promote departmental stability, stimulate program growth, and support the professional development of faculty members.
3. I seek to actively engage and contribute to a mentoring network of colleagues in physical therapy education, with the goal of enhancing professional collaboration and advancing our field through the sharing of knowledge and resources.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Understanding your primary leadership frame (Bolman and Deal) and how to leverage the other frames situationally by integrating all perspectives during conflict resolution leads to a more comprehensive and effective approach to problem-solving.
2. Embracing the ability to learn, grow, adapt, and prioritize people over personalities can lead to significant personal and professional growth.
3. Build a strong and diverse network of mentors and colleagues who encourage, challenge, and support your leadership journey. This network can provide different perspectives, valuable insights, and constructive feedback as you embrace challenges by creating an environment where failures are seen as opportunities for learning.

JANET B. TANKERSLEY

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

Title: Formal Faculty Mentoring and Academic Navigation Curriculum for Early Career Health Science Faculty

The Physical Therapy (DPT) program at Charleston Southern University (CSU) represents a significant expansion in the institution's commitment to health sciences, being the third graduate health science program and the second doctoral program introduced within this small, private university. Recently, with the establishment of the College of Health Sciences, CSU has positioned itself to enhance its offerings and support for health-related fields.

At the inception of this fellowship, the DPT program was in the candidate phase for accreditation, a status that has since evolved to full accreditation. This transition reflects the program's commitment to meeting rigorous educational standards and its dedication to preparing high-quality physical therapists. However, a notable challenge faced by the program and the college is the presence of many faculty members who are relatively new to academia. They lack the experience and training in pedagogy necessary to effectively transition from being strong clinicians to becoming strong educators. These early career faculty members also often grapple with the shift from clinical practice to academic roles, which entails navigating different expectations, institutional structures, and policies intrinsic to a university setting. Early-career faculty could benefit from a structured, supportive mentoring environment to support their success and mitigate stress and burnout.

The primary objective of this project is to develop a formal curriculum to support early career health science faculty in their transition from clinic to academia. This curriculum, created using the Blackboard Ultra platform, will provide essential guidance in navigating the unique institutional structures and policies of Charleston Southern University. The curriculum will also include modules on teaching methodologies, curriculum development, student assessment, student engagement, annual performance review, and developing a scholarly agenda. This curriculum is designed as an evolving project, with additional modules to be created based on faculty feedback and emerging needs. This initiative aims to empower early career health science faculty by providing comprehensive support and resources, enhancing their teaching effectiveness, and improving their overall academic experience.



JODI THOMAS

TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Gain confidence in managing difficult student and faculty situations.
2. Learn more about the legal aspects of administration.
3. Improve skills in managing budgets.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. The value of being able to share experiences and situations that arise from being in a leadership position. It has been nice to get thoughts or opinions of others or just to have a safe space to be heard.
2. I have increased my confidence in where to find answers to questions or situations that arise. The information and resources provided have been helpful and will continue to be.
3. I have learned/am still learning about how best to delegate tasks and trust others!

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

Texas Woman's University (TWU) is a public university with its main campus in Denton, Texas, and two health science center-focused campuses in Dallas and Houston. The university offers undergraduate and graduate degrees in various fields, including liberal arts, sciences, nursing, health sciences, business, and education. In September of 2023, TWU broke ground on a \$107 million, state-of-the-art health sciences center with the goal to expand training for students seeking health-related careers and increase the number of professionals in high-demand health fields. The health sciences center will also house a multidisciplinary clinic to serve patients in the area and surrounding communities. The availability and accessibility of healthcare services in rural communities pose multiple challenges. Issues such as a shortage of healthcare workers, difficulties with transportation, a lack of resources, and technological limitations could be causes. The new TWU health sciences center hopes to aid in providing healthcare services to rural, underserved areas in North Texas. The purpose of this leadership project is to conduct a needs assessment regarding healthcare services for Denton, Texas, and nearby rural communities. The goal is to identify gaps in local healthcare services and determine how TWU can complement existing resources to improve access, equity, and health outcomes. Through stakeholder interviews, community surveys, and analysis of public health data, the project will generate recommendations to guide clinic programming, partnerships, and outreach strategies. The initial stage of the project will focus on physical therapy services, but future stages will examine the needs for a variety of healthcare services.



SHELENE THOMAS

AUGUSTANA UNIVERSITY

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Obtain knowledge around higher education leadership, specifically around the budget.
2. Grow in knowledge and awareness of leadership challenges in higher education academics.
3. Meet one other colleague who is also in the process of or is newly a Program Director.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. People think leadership is about authority when really it is about influence.
2. No leaders have everything you need.
3. Protect your time - it's your most valuable resource.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

According to research by Bilyeu et al, new academics feel unsettled and uncertain in the initial phases of transition to academia. Newcomers need collegial and institutional guidance with prioritization of tasks to address the multiplicity of the academic role and avoid frustration and disillusionment. The change of values and beliefs to adapt to the new culture require a concurrent identity shift which can take up to three years and yet, it is known that healthcare providers contribute to the successful education of students in the health professions. Despite this awareness, many have received minimal formal training in education.

As part of her fellowship, Dr. Shelene Thomas developed a comprehensive 10-module orientation designed specifically for graduate-level hybrid faculty at Augustana University. The curriculum addresses the unique pedagogical and logistical needs of hybrid instruction, integrating best practices in online engagement, student support, academic integrity, and asynchronous course design. The modules were piloted by newly onboarded Occupational Therapy faculty, whose feedback informed key revisions. Following this refinement, the updated orientation is set to launch with Augustana's Colorado DPT faculty in May 2025.

Bilyeu C, Reilly M and Niski J. Preparing Clinicians for Roles in Academic Teaching: A Model for Clinical Associated Faculty Development. *J Phys Ther Educ.* 2023;37(3):235-242. -0001



STACIA HALL THOMPSON

METHODIST UNIVERSITY

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Build trust and confidence in my leadership abilities.
2. Advocate for the program by actively seeking internal and external support.
3. Strengthen my ability to deliver constructive feedback to faculty and staff.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Demonstrating confidence in my abilities builds trust and enables authentic leadership. When I demonstrate an understanding of roles, processes, and outcomes, others are more likely to trust my leadership and allow me to lead without unnecessary oversight.
2. Empowering others strengthens advocacy efforts. I learned to leverage individual strengths and delegate strategically, recognizing that effective advocacy doesn't always mean doing everything myself, but enabling others to champion the program as well.
3. I learned that grounding feedback in the program's mission, vision, and values shifts the focus from personal critique to collective growth. This approach allows me to deliver honest, supportive feedback that empowers others to improve and contribute more meaningfully to the program's success.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

My leadership project addresses the critical need for structured mentorship to support healthcare professionals transitioning from clinical practice to academia at Methodist University (MU), specifically within the College of Health Sciences and Human Services (CHSHS), through the development of a Clinical Faculty Mentorship Program (CFMP). Faculty moving into academic roles often lack formal training in teaching, scholarship, and service, leading to challenges in role clarity, professional identity, and job satisfaction. To address these gaps, a needs assessment was conducted to explore how the CFMP could facilitate smoother transitions, enhance faculty effectiveness and well-being, and improve retention within MU CHSHS.

Input was gathered from a diverse group of stakeholders, including administrators, faculty, and clinicians, to assess mentorship needs and perspectives. Thematic analysis of the data revealed three key focus areas: strategic development, strategic needs, and barriers. These insights were used to develop a theory-driven framework that supports the professional growth of new faculty, fosters a sense of belonging, and sets measurable goals in teaching, service, and scholarship. In collaboration with university leadership, the CFMP framework was aligned with the mission of the MU Center for Teaching and Learning. Ultimately, this project aims to establish a sustainable mentorship model that cultivates reflective, skilled educators who actively contribute to academic excellence and institutional priorities at MU.



CATHERINE "CASSY" TURNER

MARY BALDWIN UNIVERSITY

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Improve my ability to navigate situations that align predominantly with the Political Frame so that I can be an effective leader in advocating for my program.
2. Improve my proficiency within the Structural Frame to assist in workflow and organization, particularly as it relates to program assessment and outcomes for student success.
3. Demonstrate increased understanding of the financial structure of the university and college.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. I recognized I was not giving myself enough credit on my existing ability to navigate the Political Frame. It may not be my preferred approach, but through the Fellowship I was able to recognize I do possess this skill set, although there is continued opportunity for growth with each new scenario.
2. Self-care is always key. When unexpected or stressful times occur, it is my Structural Frame that suffers the most. However, I need to give myself grace and respect that I am doing the best that I can.
3. It is OK to say I don't have all the answers right now, and that sometimes things will work their way out. Delegating gives others the opportunities to grow too (thank you Holly!).

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

When I started the Fellowship, there were no formal scholarships of any kind available to our students within our College of Health Sciences, despite there being many methods of financial support for undergraduate students. Framed around the ongoing and important conversations of debt: income ratio for DPT students across the nation, I initially considered methods of seeking out scholarship support. Through mentorship in the Fellowship, the project was reshaped into creating a resource for students on all available financial support options both internal and external to our institution. The project will work to collate in one location, a listing of resources including, but not limited to external scholarships, state tuition support, financial curriculum, supplemental training programs with stipends, loan repayment options etc. While a number of these resources are already listed on a student webpage, students do not necessarily acquaint themselves with the resource. My plan includes providing the information in a format that can be easily edited by administrators and delivered to students (current and prospective) in an interactive way, possibly using social media. While I have been working on the project, an endowed scholarship occurred through our alumni network, and I have contributed to the development of a rubric to be used in the awarding of funds to future recipients.



MEREDITH WAMPLER-KUHN

OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY-
CASCADES

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Develop and put into practice leadership skills gained in this Fellowship in my day-to-day practice as an OSU Faculty member.
2. Expand my professional network to help me excel in future leadership roles.
3. Strive to refine verbal communication skills to deliver messages that are concise and effective.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Leadership styles need to be flexible to optimize outcomes.
2. To have grace with myself as I stretch into new roles.
3. As a leader, you don't need to know all the answers or be an expert in everything. You just need to build a network to increase your 'village' of experts to help you achieve your goals.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

My FHEL leadership project was to solve the problem of how to make community-engaged experiences sustainable for our DPT program. Oregon State University (OSU) is a land grant university that holds the Carnegie Foundation Certification in Community Engagement. As a new DPT program, the developing core faculty identified that it was important to our faculty and students to be engaged in the community. We developed several robust community partnerships, but the experiences were episodic and not sustainable due to a strain on faculty and student resources, namely time. Liability and risk were also constraints to the experiences in the current model.

During this Fellowship, I applied my leadership skills to address the problem by developing and securing approval for two new courses in our DPT program—Community Engaged Physical Therapy I and II—which will launch in the summer of 2025. The first course will provide students with the knowledge of the principles of community engagement, per the Carnegie Foundation definition. The second course will be an experiential learning course where students and a faculty mentor will apply community engaged principles as they participate in a project with a community partner. Partnerships include a local hospital who wants to use DPT students to meet their organizational goal of implementing the Johns Hopkins Mobility is Medicine program, a local adaptive sports organization who needs an injury prevention exercise program for the instructors who support adaptive athletes, and a local organization that delivers the Otago balance program to older adults in the Central Oregon community.

Through the new OSU DPT courses, students will receive course credit and faculty will receive full time equivalent (FTE) credit for mentoring a community engaged learning experience. The partnerships have been strengthened through meaningful conversations resulting in affiliation agreements for each community engaged learning experience. Our community partners will receive support for their project during Fall, Winter and Spring quarters of the year avoiding episodic experiences that prevent them from fully meeting their organizational goals. Students will gain an understanding of the positive impact physical therapists can have on community and societal health through authentic learning experiences that incorporate community-engaged principles. It is our future goal to develop DPT capstone research projects to assess the outcomes of these engaged learning experiences. We also hope that our graduates will utilize these skills further supporting the University and DPT program missions beyond their time as DPT students.



KINSEY WHITAKER

WABASH VALLEY COLLEGE- ILLINOIS
EASTERN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Enhance strategic leadership capacity by developing more effective leadership style grounded in evidence-based decision making, strategic planning, and management, which is applicable to both academic administration and program development within a PTA/PT educational setting.
2. Expansion of professional network. I had a goal of networking both inside of my institution and outside of my institution. I met several individuals which I had never heard of or met, despite working together at our small institution for several years. The fellowship allowed for networking nationally to allow for shared resources, dialogue around innovation, accreditation and advocacy within physical therapy education.
3. Improve collaboration within my institution to advocate for my program and allow for improved outcomes for the students. At times, a small department can feel siloed, and operating in this way will not promote success.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. There are many moving pieces within academia including all of the levels of chain of command which are processed through a series of checks and balances. Leading change in higher education requires input from multiple stakeholders. Engaging faculty, students, staff, and external partners early enhances buy-in and sustainability. However, when done correctly, you can find success, even if it takes longer than expected.
2. I've learned that advocating for yourself and your program is essential. Effective advocacy requires the strategic use of data and institutional resources to present challenges and propose solutions. Without advocacy, ineffective policies and processes persist, often leading to increased stress, burnout, and limited success for both faculty and students. Confident, data-informed advocacy improves decision-making and fosters institutional support.
3. One of the most personal lessons I've gained is recognizing that I am more capable than I initially believed. At the start of the Fellowship, I questioned whether I belonged in such a high-caliber community. I've come to understand that self-doubt does not reflect my actual abilities. Gaining knowledge of proven leadership processes has increased my confidence and quieted imposter syndrome. This experience has affirmed that I am fully capable of contributing as a leader in higher education.

KINSEY WHITAKER

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

Project Summary: Promoting a Robust Applicant Pool for the WVC PTA Program

My project focused on expanding awareness and increasing enrollment in the Wabash Valley College (WVC) PTA Program by analyzing applicant demographics and identifying underrepresented populations within the Illinois Eastern Community Colleges (IECC) district.

Working with the IECC Data Team, I examined enrollment data across all four campuses and compared Health Professions programs including Nursing, Radiology, Phlebotomy, and Medical Lab Technician. Key factors reviewed included student home county, gender, ethnicity, and traditional vs. non-traditional status. The analysis revealed that while most programs align with institutional averages, there are notable county-based enrollment gaps. Additionally, data tracking is limited to Illinois counties, which creates an "unknown" category that disproportionately affects border programs like PTA at WVC, located just three miles from Indiana.

Findings have been shared with the Chancellor, Dean of Health Professions, Dean of Students, and PTA Program Director. A full presentation to stakeholders, including Institutional Outreach and Marketing, JEDI committees, is currently in the process of being scheduled.

Recommendations fall into two categories: Counties and Businesses. County-focused strategies include establishing scholarships for high school students in each IECC and surrounding county, launching summer health career camps for dual credit, and organizing faculty-student-community networking events. Additionally, I recommend encouraging county hospitals to sponsor Health Professions scholarships to strengthen community investment.

Business focused strategies recommended include implementing a survey to assess regional employers' training and hiring needs, which would guide curriculum development and workforce alignment. I also foresee creating tuition discount partnerships for local businesses and hospitals would further promote enrollment while building long-term collaboration. Adding regional business mixer events one to two times annually would increase program visibility and foster new partnerships within our region.

This data-informed approach supports a more diverse, equitable, and sustainable pipeline of students into the WVC PTA Program and broader IECC Health Professions Pathways



MITCHELL D WINDSOR

WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Develop a comprehensive understanding of the strategic planning process, program budget management, and leadership theories essential to the development and successful operation of a Doctor of Physical Therapy program.
2. Acquire in-depth knowledge of current academic trends, institutional policies, and the key challenges facing higher education to inform strategic decision-making and effective policy development.
3. Establish a strong professional network of peers, mentors, educators, and higher education leaders to foster collaboration, support, and ongoing professional development.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. I'm not sure anyone ever feels completely prepared to lead and facilitate a Doctor of Physical Therapy program. However, this Fellowship has equipped me with a strong foundation and a wealth of resources that I can confidently draw upon when that time comes.
2. I'm continually amazed by what can be accomplished through networking and collaboration. This Fellowship has offered numerous opportunities to connect with colleagues across disciplines, fostering relationships that I know will endure both professionally and personally, even after our cohort goes its separate ways.
3. This Fellowship has underscored the importance of cultivating professional connections within our department, across the college, and throughout the university. I've been aware of this need for some time, particularly because our program operates off-site from the main campus. That physical separation naturally highlights the challenges—and the value—of building and maintaining strong institutional relationships.

MITCHELL D WINDSOR

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One facet of our department's strategic initiative is to implement an end-of-year practical examination, alongside the existing comprehensive written exam, for students completing their first year of didactic education. The goal is to develop a comprehensive, competency-based practical exam that assesses students' critical thinking, clinical decision-making, patient management aptitudes, and hands-on skills. Competency-Based Education (CBE) has been widely adopted in other healthcare education programs, including medicine (MD and DO) and pharmacy, and is gradually making its way into physical therapy education. As part of our strategic initiative, my project focused on establishing a process to gain a deeper understanding of CBE.

With the support of my Chair, I formed a task force to explore both CBE and Simulation-Based Education (SBE). Our specific interest lies in how these educational philosophies are being utilized in Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) programs across the United States. The primary objective of this initiative is to investigate the constructs of CBE and SBE and assess how these educational models can inform the development of a comprehensive, competency-based, end-of-year practical examination.

Project phases included:

- Conducted a scoping review of CBE-related literature, with particular focus on its implementation within physical therapy programs.
- Developed and distributed a Qualtrics survey questionnaire to Program Directors at CAPTE-accredited DPT programs, gathering data on their use of CBE and SBE.
- Analyzing data regarding the DPT programs that currently utilize CBE and SBE, how these frameworks are applied, and how these concepts could inform our comprehensive exam design.
- Compiling questionnaire results and analyzing the collected data to inform the design and implementation of the new practical exam.

Anticipated outcomes of this project include:

- A comprehensive understanding of Competency-Based Education and its applications within Physical Therapy programs.
- An informed interpretation of Simulation-Based Education and how it is integrated into Physical Therapy education.
- A comparative analysis of the similarities and differences between these two educational models.
- The development and implementation of a comprehensive, case-based, end-of-year practical examination for students completing their first year of the DPT program.

By the conclusion of this project, Wichita State University's DPT program aims to incorporate a comprehensive, competency-based practical examination model grounded in the principles of CBE and SBE, which will enrich student assessment and determine clinical readiness.



LIANA WOOTEN

TUFTS UNIVERSITY

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Build a diverse network of mentors and peers across different institutions who could provide perspective throughout my growth and development as a leader.
2. Cultivate my authentic leadership voice through intentional reflection and deliberate practice, strengthening my confidence to speak with assurance and composure in settings ranging from intimate mentoring conversations to higher-stakes institutional discussions.
3. Further understand the intricacies and complexities of both the financial and legal components of higher education.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Authentic Leadership is Dynamic: Authentic leadership isn't a fixed destination but a continual journey of growth and adaptation. As circumstances evolve and you gain new experiences, your leadership style naturally transforms, maintaining its genuineness while reflecting your evolving understanding of yourself and the world around you.
2. External Connections: External connections beyond your institution provide fresh perspectives and innovative solutions that often remain unseen within familiar walls. These relationships form invaluable bridges to new opportunities, preventing organizational stagnation while creating a diverse network of support that strengthens your leadership foundation in ways internal resources may not be able to.
3. Less is More: In the art of leadership, less is more when it comes to speaking versus listening. By restraining your own voice, you create the space for others to share their insights, come to conclusions, and work through conflict.

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As co-director of admissions in a hybrid-accelerated model, recruiting and retaining students in this non-traditional model is of priority. My project included involvement, amongst many other remarkable leaders, in creative efforts to address both of these components of the admissions process. The effort was composed of two parts: 1. the Accelerated Development of Excellence in Physical Therapy (ADEPT) program, a pre-DPT matriculation certificate program that helps incoming DPT students to develop skills and strategies to prepare for the rigors of an accelerated-hybrid program in combination with 2. a partnership between our department and ATI Physical Therapy aimed at making our program more accessible by providing joint scholarships that make DPT education more affordable for students.



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