

Future leader

Maribeth Clifton, OTD '20

Hometown: Cheyenne, WY

Undergraduate degree: BS in physiology from the University of Wyoming

Leadership: OTD Class of 2020 Student Marshall; Agnes Fielding Prahman Scholar; Coalition of Occupational Therapy Advocates for Diversity, WashU Student Chapter (WU-COTAD) Co-President (2019-2020)

What are your meaningful occupations?

My meaningful occupations include listening to music, singing, exercising, learning through reading and social interactions, and spending time with loved ones. These occupations allow me to feel joy, heal and provide a sense of connection and belonging to something greater than myself.

What is your definition of OT?

OT is a profession that has the potential to see individuals, populations, communities and beyond with a holistic and equitable lens. Occupational therapists have the opportunity to assist our clients in identifying and elevating their strengths in order to participate more meaningfully within their daily lives. As occupational therapists, we must also understand and acknowledge the barriers that our clients may face resulting from physical injury, disability, mental health challenges, etc. Additionally, it is important to be mindful of the experiences of many individuals as a direct result of limitations placed by social stratification and systemic issues that are deeply rooted within the history of America and act as barriers to performance of and participation in occupations.

Why did you choose the OTD degree?

I chose the OTD degree because it allowed me additional opportunities for growth, mentorship and education in preparation for my future career goals within academia, scholarly work and community-based practice. While pursuing the OTD degree, I have gained skills in research, program development and teaching. Lastly, through intra- and inter-professional collaboration, I have developed relationships with individuals whom I hope to continue to work with well into my future career.

What are your career goals?

My career goals are to establish a community-based organization serving youth with behavioral health challenges and their families. Ultimately, I hope to pair this work with community-based research through efforts at the university level. I anticipate that this work will inform not only my practice, but also public health initiatives and policy for underserved populations. As a person who is extremely passionate about social justice, I will continue to be a part of conversations and action surrounding diversity, equity and inclusion as they relate to our profession and the individuals we aim to serve.

What WashU experience so far stands out to you?

My experience in Dr. Lauren Milton's laboratory has been instrumental in the development of my scholarly interests and the establishment of relationships with various community partners. In addition, working with Dr. Steve Taff on the development of our practice model related to diversity, equity and inclusion in higher education has been a powerful and motivating learning experience. Finally, I have had the opportunity to work and collaborate with the Race and Opportunity Lab at WashU's Brown School of social work on initiatives relating to health, development and opportunity for Black boys and young men in the St. Louis City and County area.

