

# MAV SpOTlight


**CLASS OF 2027**

## Meet Our Newest Cohort!

This past January, we were excited to welcome the newest cohort to the Colorado Mesa University Occupational Therapy program. The Class of 2027 brings together students from a wide range of academic backgrounds, including biology, psychology, kinesiology, human development, nursing, and material sciences. Many students entered the program with valuable work and life experience in fitness, education, healthcare, and community service settings. This group brings a wide range of perspectives and experiences to the program. We look forward to seeing the impact the Class of 2027 will have on our OT community!

*I choose OT because...*

seeing their role in the SNF and school settings really resonated me! It's amazing to see what the support of an occupational therapist can do!"

**Abigail Hanlon, OTS '27**

### In this Issue:

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Welcome the  
Class of 2027!

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Meet Our New  
Professor:  
Andrea  
Goodwin

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Sensory Night  
at Eureka

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Interview with  
Wes Norton,  
OTS

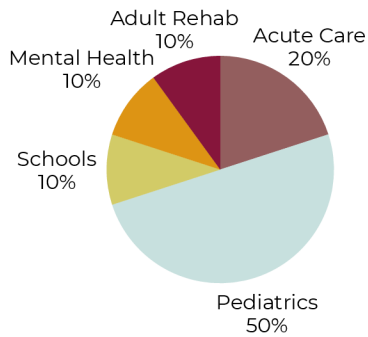
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Our Cohort  
Community

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# Class of 2027 Cohort Interests and Hobbies

## OT INTEREST AREAS



## Meet Current Student, Wes Norton, OTS '26

### What motivated you to pursue a career in OT?

I feel that occupational therapy is the perfect blend of creativity, problem-solving, and working with people. I decided to pursue OT school due to my passion and desire to actively help others in their interests and needs. I knew I wanted to find a job that worked in the trenches right next to patients. OT provides a unique opportunity to build therapeutic relationships with others and set them up for success now and in the future.

### What has surprised you most about OT school?

Something that has surprised me about OT school is how collaborative it is between the students and professors. The professors honestly want you to succeed and are very engaged in your learning process. With the relationship and overall concern that professors have, along with the trust and friendship I have found with my class, the relationships I have built have helped carry me in my OT graduate school experience.

### What's your favorite part of OT school?

One of my favorite parts of OT school has been building relationships with the faculty and classmates. Sharing this bond with others who know or are experiencing the demands of OT school has made the process easier and much more enjoyable.

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## Welcome New Professor, Andrea Goodwin, OTR/L



Andrea was born in Florida, raised in Ohio, and relocated to the Grand Valley in 2016. Her background includes brief work in SNFs as a travel therapist and 10 years of work in a pediatric outpatient clinic. Andrea has a passion for working with neurodivergent children and teens, as well as children with sensory and behavioral challenges. She is really looking forward to giving back to future OTs and continuing to build community relationships. In her free time, Andrea enjoys spending time outdoors and traveling with her husband, family, and friends. Rock climbing and hiking are what drew her to the Western Slope, however she also enjoys camping, biking, rafting, and the ample sunshine available here!

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## Sensory Night at Eureka

Last semester, we were given the opportunity to host a sensory night at a local science museum. We had learned about sensory regulation earlier that semester, and it was exciting to apply that knowledge to an event that would benefit the community. We toured the museum and made recommendations for changes to the sensory environment—turn some exhibits off, dim the lighting, and turn the music off. The science museum can be a lot of stimulation for some kids (and adults!). This event was an opportunity for kids and their families to visit the museum when they otherwise may not have been able.



On the night of the event each corner of the science museum was filled with sounds of curiosity and learning. It was difficult to tell who was more excited, the children or the OT students. We had each created a sensory activity and made “passports” so that kids could get a prize when they went to all of the stations. Children made boats out of recycled materials to sail down the sensory water bin. They raced through an obstacle course, then ran around to the start to do it over again and again. They made lava lamps and did sensory treasure hunts.

My activity was yoga. My partner Allyse and I used our imagination to lead the children through different yoga poses. They did chair pose as they fueled up their rocket ship and warrior two as they flew through outer space. We had small containers of bubbles and encouraged the kids to take a deep breath and let it out to blow the bubbles.

Before the event, I was nervous that the kids wouldn't engage with our activity, but they loved it! Kids absorb the energy around them, so we tried to exhibit a positive, joyful energy. We planned out our activity carefully but ended up rolling with the punches and following the kids' lead. I left the museum that night feeling accomplished and inspired. It was one of my favorite events that we've done in the OT program so far!

*Amanda Ruybal*  
Class of 2026

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## A Student's View: A Look Into Cohort Community

By Ally Payne, OTS, Class of 2026

One of my favorite parts of the program has been the connections I have made with my classmates. As a cohort of 21 students, we have really gotten to know each other over the past year and have become a tight-knit group. I have had the opportunity to work with everyone during group projects which has improved my collaboration and leadership skills. Some of our group work consists of conducting research, creating custom splints, and facilitating activities in the community.

Our cohort has done a great job of bringing energy and excitement into the classroom. While working hard academically, we have also found ways to build a strong sense of community. For example, we had a spirit week for Halloween with different themed

dress-up days, and we celebrated the holidays with a white elephant gift exchange. Most recently, we created Valentine's Day boxes and brought in valentines to share with everyone.

When not in class, we enjoy spending time together by having game nights, craft nights, playing intramural sports, and even going to a trampoline park! It has also been fun to take advantage of the awesome outdoor opportunities around Grand Junction including hiking, skiing, rock climbing, camping, and rafting.

I feel very fortunate to be a part of such a supportive group of people and will always value the lasting friendships I have made here!

*Thank you for reading!*

March Editor: Gardner Popp, OTS, Class of 2026

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