After six years of helping CSU’s renowned Department of Occupational Therapy grow and thrive, Wendy Wood believes the time has come for someone else to take the reins as department head. And, fittingly, she will be taking the reins herself – of a horse, as part of a new research study that partners occupational therapy with CSU’s internationally respected Equine Sciences Program.

“This is a terrifically exciting opportunity for me,” Wood said. “I love being on the ground floor of projects, and the resources at Colorado State to launch this program are exemplary. It’s a synergy that’s meant to happen, and I’m excited to spearhead this program.”

The five-year research program is funded by a donation from the Carl and Caroline Swanson Foundation. The $468,000 gift will allow master’s and Ph.D. students to lead the research along with Wood.

Work will focus on equine-assisted activity and therapy (EAAT) – an area of study that appears to have tremendous promise, Wood said. Therapists long have known about the special connection between horses and riders, but there is limited documented research on the effectiveness of equine-assisted therapy.

“I think the potential for this program is great,” she said. “There is beginning research as well as enormous anecdotal evidence that suggest a patient-horse relationship can be enormously beneficial. Right now the applications are very broad, but there is evidence that shows this relationship can be powerful and life-transformation.”

While part of the project will be documenting existing research, Wood and her graduate students will do their own research at CSU’s renowned Equine Center. A good deal of the work is expected to be completed at the proposed Temple Grandin Research Center at the Equine Center.

Wood hopes the project will legitimize EAAT on a sound, scientific basis, which ultimately will benefit humans and horses.

Still, stepping down as department head of OT is bittersweet. Under her direction, the OT department has added a master’s and Ph.D. program, renovated the OT Building, grown enrollment by 25 percent, added two new faculty, and undergone a major curriculum revision. Through all of that, the program’s national reputation continues to rise, with U.S. News & World Report ranking CSU No. 6 in the country and Graduateprograms.com ranking CSU No. 1 in overall student satisfaction.

“I truly believe I accomplished what I was asked to do in this position, and I’m very proud of that. This feels like a great time to hand over the department’s leadership to someone else.”

Wood will transition into her new position this summer.

Wendy Wood with her horse, Irish.
From the department head

What a heartening time this is for the Department of Occupational Therapy!

From over 150 professional entry-level graduate programs in occupational therapy in the United States, GraduationPrograms.com recently ranked the quality of education in our program top in the nation! Especially gratifying, this top ranking was based on surveys of current students and recent graduates. U.S. News & World Report also continues to rank our professional program sixth nationwide.

The first cohort of students in our new interdisciplinary Ph.D. program in Occupation and Rehabilitation Science entered last fall. Under the mentorship of faculty, our current and future doctoral students will engage in research that seeks to optimize human performance and participation in everyday occupation and contexts, which is the mission of our department. Core research areas include cognitive, motor, sensory, and neurophysiological dimensions of performance; everyday occupation, disability, rehabilitation, and health; and education from an occupation and rehabilitation science perspective.

Our Ph.D. milestone plus top national rankings are a tribute to our outstanding faculty. We had two terrific additions last fall: Matt Malcolm and Arlene Schmid. You can read about Arlene’s yoga research in this issue. I hope you’ll also enjoy our tribute to Elona (Ellie) Gilfoyle, former OT department head, dean, and provost at Colorado State. Learn, too, about our 50-year alumni reunion plus catch some great news on Mary Khetani, Pat Sample, and Cathy Schelly.

Because of an outstanding donor gift and an exciting opportunity to make a difference in the area of equine-assisted activity, I am stepping down as department head of OT to go back to faculty research. You can read more on the front page of the newsletter. We are also grateful to alumnus Dennis Repp for his continued support of the New Start program for student-veterans.

A heartening time it is, indeed! Do stay in touch, and, if an opportunity presents, know that you’re always welcome to visit us here in Fort Collins.

Wendy Wood
Professor and Head
(970) 491-1882 • wendy.wood@colostate.edu

Balancing act

Research shows that 77 percent of stroke survivors sustain a fall after stroke and many are repeat fallers. Falls and the subsequent development of fear of falling often lead to people limiting their activity and participation in life. This statistic became the driving force behind the research of new Department of Occupational Therapy Associate Professor Arlene Schmid, Ph.D., OTR.

While working as a clinical occupational therapist in Hawaii, Schmid was introduced to the benefits of yoga, inspiring her to study how yoga could be used as therapy for people who have had a stroke.

“After testing our yoga program on people with chronic stroke, we found that their balance did improve,” Schmid explains. “However, what was interesting was that it seems that they actually started reporting more falls, likely due to their increased confidence and desire to walk. We also found wonderful improvements in pain, quality of life, fear of falling, activity, and participating in life.”

In her upcoming study, Merging Yoga and OT, Schmid seeks to blend yoga with group OT focused on fall risk factor management in order to improve both balance and management of fall risks. The small preliminary study, funded with a grant from the American Occupational Therapy Foundation, will start this summer at Schmid’s lab on the CSU Foothills Campus. The study will consist of 20 participants who will practice a specially designed yoga regimen and participate in a group OT intervention class twice per week for an eight-week period.

The group intervention sessions will allow participants to develop and practice fall management strategies. One intervention lesson asks group members to photograph places where they have sustained a fall. The group will then analyze the photo together and develop management skills to help the participant avoid future falls in similar environments.

“Group intervention is a great way for people with a stroke to meet with others who understand their struggles and care about their progress,” says Schmid. “They are able to build their confidence together.”

Occupational therapy graduate students Leslie Willis and Chloe Philips will help facilitate the program, with Willis teaching the yoga lessons. As a trained yoga teacher, Willis will also be mentored by a local yoga therapist. Willis will deliver the yoga sessions that have been developed and tailored to this specific group (chronic stroke at risk for falls).

Schmid hopes that her preliminary study will yield results that can help her improve the program for a larger study in the future. The study will begin recruitment this spring.

Left to right: Chloe Philips, Arlene Schmid, and Leslie Willis practice yoga on the Colorado State University Oval.

We also found wonderful improvements in pain, quality of life, fear of falling, activity, and participating in life.

Arlene Schmid

Yoga rehabilitation for stroke survivors

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Left to right: Chloe Philips, Arlene Schmid, and Leslie Willis practice yoga on the Colorado State University Oval.
$1 million gift from alumnus will expand New Start Program for student-veterans

A lone point, Lee Urton thought he might have to give up on his goal of going to college. The former U.S. Marine, who deployed to Iraq in 2003, was injured and unsure of how to navigate the red tape that stood between him and a college education. Then he found out about the New Start for Student-Veterans Program at CSU.

“I had almost given up on my dream of going to college until I met Cathy Schelly in the New Start program,” Urton said. “New Start has helped me deal with the bureaucracy of veterans’ benefits and has connected me with the resources that I need for academic success. Most importantly, New Start has given me the confidence that I am not in this battle alone.”

Urton, who doesn’t like to discuss the injuries he sustained, has experienced success as a sophomore studying health and exercise science with New Start’s support.

Schelly, an assistant professor in OT and director of the Center for Community Partnerships, established the New Start program at CSU following the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center. She knew returning veterans would be seeking college degrees after suffering brain injuries, post-traumatic stress, and various physical injuries.

“We’ve always tried to keep a pulse on what’s going on in the world. I knew we were going to war after 9/11 and that many young men and women were going to get hurt,” Schelly said. “We wanted to prepare CSU to work with these soldiers and help them be successful, in spite of serious injury.”

The program entered a new era in 2012 when alumnus Dennis Repp donated $1.55 million to create the New Start for Distinguished Veterans Fund. Repp, a veteran himself, donated an additional $1 million recently to help the program better track the progress of program participants, from college entry to graduation and beyond.

“New Start has helped me deal with the bureaucracy of veterans’ benefits and has connected me with the resources that I need for academic success.”

Lee Urton

Mary Khetani knows that when you are working to improve the lives of young children with, or at risk for, disabilities, the focus must not only be on the skills they learn to perform everyday tasks, but also on their chances to participate in activities and positively contribute to their homes, schools, and communities.

Historically, occupational therapists who work with young children and families have had more tools to measure a child’s capacity to perform everyday tasks, without knowing much about the child’s needs to participate in activities and the full range of factors that might be contributing to problems in participation. Khetani has spent the last six years working closely with mentors and colleagues, including parents of young children with and without disabilities, to develop a new survey called the Young Children’s Participation and Environment Measure, or YC-PEM.

The YC-PEM is the first attempt to combine comprehensive and detailed assessment of a young child’s participation and environment in a single measure so that the full range of modifiable factors can be considered by an occupational therapist who is planning to intervene with young clients and their families.

Khetani, who has been selected as a Comprehensive Opportunities for Rehabilitation Research Training Scholar, will be supported over the next five years to work with three mentors to develop and apply skills in biostatistics, knowledge translation, mobile health, and clinical trials research to validate and explore the utility of the YC-PEM survey for pediatric research and practice applications.

Schelly recognized with AOTA Fellow award

Cathy Schelly is being recognized as a Fellow of the American Occupational Therapy Association at the 2014 annual meeting. Schelly is known for her contributions to enhancing community support for persons with disabilities. She has overseen many programs, including Recreation Works, the ACCESS project, Opportunities for Postsecondary Success, and New Start for Student-Veterans. As director of the Center for Community Partnerships for 23 years, Schelly has been awarded significant grant funding for these novel programs. Since 1987, she has been a visionary organizational leader within the Department of Occupational Therapy.

Mary Khetani

New grant to study identification of TBI in school children

T raditionally, students who were struggling in school as a result of a Traumatic Brain Injury have had to present medical documentation in order to be eligible for special education services. This has resulted in thousands of students throughout the United States who don’t get identified, or are misidentified, for eligibility for special education services.

Pat L. Sample and David Greene, faculty in the Department of Occupational Therapy, received a three-year grant from the Colorado Traumatic Brain Injury Trust Fund to do a qualitative case study chronicling the experience of Colorado school districts as they implement a new procedure for identifying students with TBI.

Since the support needs of students with TBI are often quite different than for students with other disabilities, misidentification can be as problematic for struggling students as total lack of identification. The Colorado Department of Education has implemented a new policy that gives schools the opportunity and responsibility to assess students for TBI if no medical documentation is available. This form of identification is called “Educational Identification of TBI.”

In the new research project, the study team will be observing and interviewing education professionals as they begin to implement the new ED-ID process, with the goal of learning what successes and barriers school districts will experience.
Fifty years and going strong

OT class of 1963 celebrates golden anniversary

Homecoming is naturally a time for Colorado State University reunions and festivities, and Diane (Payne) Crabtree and Verna "Lee" (Edwards) Scheierman wanted to re-connect with their fellow graduates. Homecoming 2013 marked 50 years since their class of 18 occupational therapy students had graduated from Colorado State.

Rewind nearly eight months before the big event, and the two reached out to the Department of Occupational Therapy with their idea. "My husband and I are from small towns and have really enjoyed our high school class reunions," Scheierman explained. "It seemed like a fun idea to try to touch base with our classmates again."

The two worked with the department on plans, and on the afternoon of Friday, Oct. 11, 2013, their party came to fruition. With eight classmates in attendance, along with spouses, friends, current CSU-OT students, and representatives of the department and college, the celebration began.

"I enjoyed the discussion with my other OT classmates and learning about their personal lives," Crabtree says, who also served as the 50-year speaker at the College's Homecoming and Donor Recognition Breakfast earlier that morning. "Having Diane speak at the breakfast was really great, as was having the chance to be together as a class again," adds Scheierman. Many of the classmates brought memorabilia from their times as students, which was displayed around the room.

Pictures from the event can be seen at www.flickr.com/photos/cshainthumanisci/sets. Also, the OT Class of 1963 was asked to send in their personal stories since graduation. If you are interested in seeing a copy of their compiled stories, please email Katie.Brayden@colostate.edu.

"It was truly wonderful to hear the stories of their time on campus and careers since graduating from CSU," says Wendy Wood, head of the Department of Occupational Therapy. "They are a talented and noteworthy group of alumni, who have each, in their own ways, helped to build and sustain the foundation that makes CSU-OT what it is today. I hope that they will always consider us their CSU home."

Ellie Gilfoyle’s legacy of leadership

Ellie Gilfoyle began her career at Colorado State in 1981 as a faculty member in occupational therapy. She went on to serve as OT department head, during which time she was also president of the American Occupational Therapy Association. Jodie Hanzlik, who followed in Gilfoyle’s footsteps as OT faculty and department head, and now serves as dean of CSU’s Graduate School, said, "Ellie advanced the department by implementing new standards of rigor for faculty and students, and setting the stage for the Ph.D. program that matriculated its first cohort this past fall."

Gilfoyle went on to serve in various roles including associate dean for research and dean of the College of Applied Human Sciences (now College of Health and Human Sciences), and the first female provost and academic vice president at CSU. Before retiring in 2001, Gilfoyle directed the Institute for Women and Leadership.

Gilfoyle was recently featured as part of the college’s Legacies Project, which honors emeriti faculty and retirees by gathering, archiving, and sharing personal and professional histories. In a video interview, she described her motivation in mentoring other women. "I like facilitating another to grow," she said. "That comes from my professor’s philosophy of [looking] for abilities, not disabilities." Further demonstrating her OT background, she applied a systems approach to empower change, bringing greater equity to women at CSU. "We cannot function alone," she said. "Everyone supports each other, and everyone has their own roles."

Hanzlik sums up what many at CSU feel about Gilfoyle: "Ellie has been a personal inspiration to me. Her optimism, her commitment to people and to make things work in the face of adversity, her ability to envision the future and facilitate change, her never-ending energy – all of these characteristics have aligned to make her a natural, charismatic, and engaging leader."

Gilfoyle recently relocated to Tennessee to be nearer to family, but she leaves a legacy of female leaders at CSU whom she mentored in their careers. In addition, she and her husband Gene created two funds that will live on forever at CSU: the Gene and Ellie Gilfoyle Endowment for the Assistive Technology Resource Center and the Elnora Gilfoyle Scholarship Endowment, which supports OT students. The ripple effects of her positive impact on her profession and CSU will be felt for generations to come.
Donor honors ‘growing’ legacy with planned gift

Deanne L. (Peterson) Parrish, a 1964 graduate, knew from the time she was twelve years old that she wanted to be an occupational therapist. She had polio as a child, and a physical therapist helped get her on her feet. When she learned about OT, she immediately knew she wanted to dedicate her life to the profession.

Now she is giving back to her alma mater through a planned gift that will eventually support OT students. Parrish was able to attend CSU with the help of her father and his wheat farm.

“Because my dad sat on a hot, sweaty tractor for those many years, I was able to go to CSU,” she said. With her inheritance from the wheat farm, she decided to invest in a charitable trust that will one day support CSU.

Parrish loves that the trust will keep on growing, just like the wheat on her dad’s farm that made it possible for her to attend CSU. Parrish is retired after a career with the VA.