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SPRING 2026

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Seminar dates, locations, and tuition are subject to change; please call before making any non-refundable reservations.

In This Issue

SPRING 2026



- 5 ALUMNI SERVICES**
The USAHS Alumni Network debuts in June. The new engagement platform will serve as the primary hub for alumni-related activities. Get a sneak peek at what's coming.
- 6 AT YOUR SERVICE**
Students and employees take part in community impact and service activities across the University as a *force for good*.
- 8 ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT**
A group of Miami alumni strengthen PT education through clinical training at Memorial Healthcare.
- 10 ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT**
From classroom to clinic, Allison Caton, MOT, OTR/L (MOT '17), Byron Campbell, PT, DPT, ATC, LAT, CSCS, ADN-cert (DPT '21) and Alexis Artis, MS-SLP (MS-SLP '23) are committed to giving back by offering guidance, sharing expertise and creating clinical opportunities for students preparing to enter the field.
- 12 ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT**
USAHS Alumni Association Advisory Board members Paige Funderburk, MOT, OTD (MOT '05, OTD '06), Steve Weyandt, PT, DPT, SCS, MTC (MPT '00, DPT '04), Shaun Reghabi, PT, DPT, ATC/L, MS (DPT '23) and Bob Kentner, DNP, RN, CPHQ (DNP '21) share why they stay involved and how they "give back" as mentors.
- 14 UNIVERSITY UPDATES**
USAHS advances toward reaffirmation of accreditation; SLP program expands national reach; Dr. Savage elected to national accreditation board; Dr. Schwier appointed to California Board of Occupational Therapy.
- 16 CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION**
Elevate your career and explore the continuing education pathways available to USAHS alumni.
- 18 CLASS NOTES**
Discover what your fellow USAHS alumni have been up to professionally and personally.

On the cover: USAHS Alumni Association Advisory Board member **Paige Funderburk, MOT, OTD (MOT '05, OTD '06)**. Read about her and fellow alumni mentors in the Alumni Spotlight article on page 12.

Dear USAHS Alumni,



As we step into a new season of growth this spring, I'm grateful for the opportunity to introduce myself as the President of the USAHS Alumni Association. It is with honor and excitement that I take on this new role. I am a proud two-time graduate of USAHS – earning my Master of Occupational Therapy in 2017 and my Post-Professional Doctor of Occupational Therapy in 2023. My years at USAHS were filled with rigorous learning, eye-opening experiences, and friendships that continue to shape both my personal and professional journey.

During the past five years as Vice President of Advocacy, I've had the privilege of working alongside passionate alumni and university partners to advance our shared commitment to excellence in Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Speech-Language Pathology, Nursing, and Education. Together, we've built bridges between alumni and students, strengthened our professional voice, and cultivated a growing network rooted in service, leadership, and lifelong learning.

Some of our proudest accomplishments include the annual *Advocacy Recap* – a publication created by alumni that highlights key legislative updates and provides actionable resources for professional engagement. Our Geographic Mentor Program continues to foster meaningful connections, as experienced clinicians guide students entering their respective fields. Across our campuses, alumni and students have also joined forces in community outreach initiatives that make a tangible difference in the lives of others.

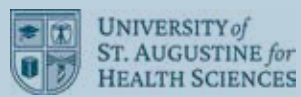
We've shared countless moments of camaraderie at our alumni reunions in St. Augustine, Florida and San Marcos, California. The recent gathering in Austin continued that momentum, and I'm thankful to all who were able to attend. We'll also be hosting alumni events at major national and regional conferences, further extending our reach and sense of community.

It was at USAHS that I fell in love with the field of Occupational Therapy – a passion that led me back to serve as a core faculty member. I will never forget the pride and purpose I felt walking across the graduation stage, ready to serve others through the healing power of our professions.

Here's to continuing that spirit – together.

Warmly,

Rebekah Jarrar, OTD, MA MOT, OTR/L (MOT '17, OTD '23)
President, USAHS Alumni Association



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USAHS is proud to be a Certified B Corp Institution, joining a global movement of people working as a force for good. USAHS has been a Certified B Corp since 2015.

Uniting the USAHS Community: Introducing the New Alumni Network

The new USAHS Alumni Network platform, powered by Aluminati, is scheduled for launch in June 2026. This new digital ecosystem will consolidate key alumni services under a single login, creating a centralized online home for the USAHS community. The network will feature an alumni business directory, event registration, mentoring tools, career services, and communication resources, offering a streamlined way to access information and stay connected.

The platform will be available to alumni, students, employees, and clinical partners and will serve as the primary hub for alumni-related activities. It represents a significant investment in modernizing the alumni experience and strengthening long-term engagement across the University.

“The new Alumni Network is intended to strengthen the alumni community while also supporting the broader mission of USAHS,” said Alumni Engagement Director Polly Crabtree. “A more connected and



engaged alumni base helps the University expand its professional network, increase visibility in clinical settings, and create more opportunities for students entering the field.”

The launch of the new network reflects the University’s commitment to building a sustainable, future-focused engagement model. By consolidating services and communication into one platform, USAHS is creating a more efficient and cost-effective system for outreach and community building.

“The new Alumni Network is intended to strengthen the alumni community while also supporting the broader mission of USAHS.”

PREPARING FOR THE JUNE 2026 LAUNCH

- 1. Submit updated contact information** so the University can ensure accurate communication.
- 2. Use of a USAHS email address** is recommended for logging into the USAHS Alumni Network. Those needing to reset a USAHS email password may contact USAHS IT Support at support@usa.edu to request assistance.

Email updates will be sent to alumni as the launch date approaches. When registration opens, users will be able to authenticate their profiles using a USAHS email, Google, Facebook, LinkedIn, or a personal email address.

“We are so excited to see this long-awaited platform come to fruition,” says Rebekah Jarrar (MOT '17, OTD '23), President of the USAHS Alumni Association. “The USAHS Alumni Network will allow us to streamline functions for alumni and add more engagement and connection opportunities with the university, students, and one another.”

When the platform goes live, an email invitation will be sent with instructions for authentication and registration. Users will be able to indicate interest in mentoring current USAHS students, search job boards, see where your fellow alumni live and work, browse University social media accounts, and check out and register for alumni events. Questions or suggestions may be directed to alumni@usa.edu.



At Your Service

If you have an idea for a service event or have participated in community outreach efforts that *Accolades* can highlight, please email details and photos to alumni@usa.edu.

Community outreach is an important part of the University's mission, and service learning is a key component of our programs as a **Certified B Corp Institution**. The following is just a snapshot of some of the community service activities that have occurred across our campuses.

CALIFORNIA

■ The University is proud to be a community partner in the City of San Marcos' newly launched **Blue Zones Ignite™** initiative, an evidence-based effort designed to improve well-being and make healthy choices easier for residents. USAHS is joining a coalition of healthcare, education, housing, and community organizations supporting a citywide assessment that will help shape policies, environments, and programs to foster longer, healthier lives.



■ The University sponsored the **8th Annual U.S. Open Adaptive Surfing Championships**, last September at Oceanside Pier in California. The international event brought together adaptive surfing athletes from around the world, with students, employees and alumni volunteering to assist athletes both on land and in the water. This year will mark the sixth consecutive year USAHS is sponsoring the event, reinforcing the University's mission and commitment to service and community impact.

TEXAS



■ Austin campus Residential and Flex DPT students volunteered alongside other local university DPT students to support the Special Olympics Healthy Athletes FUNfitness Screenings at the Area 13 Swim Classic in Austin. Special Olympics Clinic Director and USAHS Associate Professor and Director, Physical Therapy Clinical Education Coordination, **Derrick Campbell, PT, DPT, DSc** supported DPT student training to screen athletes in flexibility, strength, balance, and aerobic fitness. DPT students collected data and made recommendations based on athlete performance. FUNfitness is part of a larger program called Healthy Athletes with the mission to support individuals with intellectual disabilities who have less access to quality healthcare than individuals without intellectual disabilities.

FLORIDA



■ The University was the Presenting Sponsor of the **Walk to Defeat ALS**, joining the community to raise awareness and support for those affected by ALS. "The St. Augustine campus has a deep and meaningful connection to people living with ALS," says OT Program Director and Associate Professor **Helen Carey, PhD, MScAdvOT, Dip COT, OTR/L**. "Through our pro bono clinics, research studies, and educational collaborations with the ALS Association, we've been honored to support individuals and families affected by this disease. Together, we continue working toward a future grounded in care, compassion, and meaningful advocacy."



■ Led by Assistant Professor **Cheryl Sheffield, OTD, OTR/L, ATP, CHAMP, CDP, FPS**, occupational therapy students partnered with local robotics teams and faculty to transform ordinary, store-bought toys into accessible gifts for children with mobility, sensory, and developmental differences. Thirty-four switch-adapted toys were created and delivered directly to children in the St. Augustine community, each tailored to a child's specific abilities and family input. For many of these families, inclusive play options are limited, expensive, or simply unavailable.

UNIVERSITY WIDE

■ Working with five different community nonprofit organizations, University employee volunteers from all five USAHS campuses completed 235 hours of volunteer service during Volunteer Service Week.



■ The **GoBabyGo** program at the Miami campus was highlighted on Miami's WPLG Local 10 News. Led by Assistant Professor **Rosie DeFeo, PT, DPT, EdD, PCS, ATP**, graduate PT and OT students adapt ride-on toy cars and other toys so children with mobility challenges can fully enjoy play. The program relies on donations, and two local high school students stepped up to raise funds so more families can benefit.





USAHS Alumni working for Memorial Healthcare System pose for a group shot. Front row from left to right: Karina Ingegneri, Sharon Gregory, Tiffany Noya. Back row left to right: Gerard Talbot-Paul, Daneu Abreu, Daniel Tobon, Eduard Leiva

BUILDING BETTER CLINICIANS:

Miami Alumni Strengthen PT Education Through Clinical Training

USAHS alumni **Eduard Leiva, DPT (DPT '19)**, and **Karina Ingegneri, PT, DPT, ATC/L (DPT '19)**, both part of the first graduating cohort of the Miami campus DPT program, are strong advocates for clinical education. They talked to *Accolades* about the value of clinical education and how they collaborate to provide opportunities for PT students on their clinical rotations and beyond.

The PT clinic at Memorial Healthcare System's East Hollywood location is one of the largest in the South Florida area. Part of a general outpatient clinic that sees the full range of patients discharged from the hospital's in-patient rehab, as well as patients from surgical and other

providers in the area, the PT clinic is headed up by USAHS graduate Eduard Leiva, DPT.

Dr. Leiva and USAHS Associate Director of Clinical Education, Assistant Professor, PT Programs at the Miami campus Karina Ingegneri, who works

“Sometimes finding a clinical placement is hard, so knowing that we can send students to a place where they can learn what they need to learn and be safe is great.”

per diem at the Memorial PT clinic, are more than just old college friends. They are hands-on supporters of the USAHS DPT program, welcoming students on clinical rotations as well as hiring USAHS graduates onto the Memorial PT team.

“Sometimes finding a clinical placement is hard, so knowing that we can send students to a place where they can learn what they need to learn and be safe is great,” says Dr. Ingegneri, whose primary role in her position as Associate Director of Clinical Education in the DPT program is ensuring students complete their three clinical placements required to graduate.

Dr. Leiva's clinic accepts about six

USAHS students each year, two per trimester. Because the clinic is part of a hospital-based outpatient system, students gain exposure to a wide range of diagnoses and patient populations. “We see all of the PT diagnoses they learn about in school, so we are able to give them an extremely well-rounded experience,” he says. “Because of the skill it takes to see all the different kinds of patients from all the different specialties, it can be a challenging internship. But by the end of it, they are ready to tackle any entry-level PT role in the field.”

The clinic employs 25 full-time physical therapists, many of whom hold specialty certifications. This allows students with particular interests to work closely with clinicians who practice in those areas. The clinic's location also provides interdisciplinary opportunities, with occupational therapists and speech-language pathologists on site. In addition, the building houses the Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospital pediatric PT clinic, giving students exposure to pediatric care.

“They can match for therapies in a certain PT specialty, and since we have it all, we can move them around so they can experience everything we offer,” Dr. Leiva says. “They also get experience working with techs, PTAs and therapists at all levels.”

Dr. Ingegneri notes that the clinic's one-on-one patient model is another advantage. “Because it is hospital-based, all patients are seen individually, which gives students more time to spend with the patient as well as more time to work on their notes,” she says.

Students also benefit from access to the Epic System, which allows them to view electronic health records across the regional healthcare network. “Students can see past history, medications and interact with physicians and surgeons if needed,” Dr. Ingegneri says. “That is something they would not experience at a standalone PT clinic.”

“While we are shaping the next generation of physical therapists, we are getting them to be better than we are, which helps the entire profession continue to improve.”

Beyond hands-on patient care, students participate in a variety of continuing education activities, including lunch-and-learns, in-services, a sports journal club that hosts monthly webinars, and orthopedic surgeon, resident and PT presentations that offer continuing education credits. At the end of their internship, students complete an exit or mock interview with Dr. Leiva to prepare for future job searches.

The benefits of hosting students extend far beyond the additional support they provide, Dr. Leiva says. “It keeps my therapists sharp. We are teaching the students, and they are also teaching us. It keeps us alert and up to date,” he says. “While we are shaping the next generation of physical therapists, we are getting them to be better than we

are, which helps the entire profession continue to improve.”

That commitment to developing new clinicians has also strengthened the clinic's workforce. In his six years at Memorial, including three as manager, Dr. Leiva has hired eight full-time PTs who graduated from USAHS. “We have had a really good experience hiring USAHS graduates,” he says. “They hit the ground running and work well together. They are always ready, and they make me proud to have them as part of our team.”

For both alumni, supporting clinical education is a way to give back to the program that shaped their careers. It is also a way to ensure that future PTs enter the field with confidence, competence and a strong foundation in patient-centered care.

Sharon Gregory, DPT, COMT, CLT (DPT '19)

Physical Therapist II, Memorial Regional Hospital South

Certifications: Orthopedic manual therapy; Lymphedema therapy

“I was fortunate to have such positive experiences during my clinical rotations while attending USAHS that it fostered my own interest in becoming a clinical instructor. My clinical instructors taught me so much about building rapport with patients, having difficult conversations and continuing to grow as a PT.”

“I believe that one of the best ways to impact the future of the profession is to support the growth of students and new clinicians. The PT and rehab world is small, so when it comes to first jobs and new graduates, word of mouth is a powerful tool. I have had two students go on to work for Memorial, one of whom is a USAHS graduate, and I regularly take USAHS students in an effort to give back to my alma mater.”

FROM CLASSROOM TO CLINIC:

Alumni Pay it Forward Through Clinical Education and Training

At the University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences (USAHS), the alumni network remains a driving force behind student success. Graduates across disciplines credit their own professional growth to the mentors, clinicians and educators who supported them during their academic journeys. Today, many of those alumni are committed to giving back by offering guidance, sharing expertise and creating clinical opportunities for students preparing to enter the field.

Occupational therapist **Allison Caton, MOT, OTR/L** (MOT '17); Baltimore Orioles physical therapist **Byron Campbell, PT, DPT, ATC, LAT, CSCS, ADN-cert** (DPT '21); and Houston-based speech-language pathologist **Alexis Artis, MS-SLP** (MS-SLP '23), are among the alumni who remain closely connected to USAHS. Each contributes in unique ways, from mentoring and guest lecturing to providing clinical education placements for students.

Artis, who frequently participates in student panels and discussions, says she values the chance to support future speech-language pathologists as they prepare for their careers. She works with both pediatric and adult populations and owns Esther Speaks Speech Therapy, a contracting company and private practice specializing in language, fluency, pragmatics and articulation disorders.

"I love being a resource for SLP students and offering perspective about the next chapter of their lives," Artis says. "I am grateful for the support I received early in my career and the encouragement to become a leader.



Alexis Artis, MS-SLP

Sharing those skills with students and prospective students, whether through advice or shadowing opportunities, is important to me."

Active on social media as @MadameAlexis on TikTok and @thetravelingartis on Instagram, Artis encourages students to seek hands-on experience in varied settings and to embrace their individuality as clinicians. Her biggest advice is to ask questions.

"You are there to learn and grow as professionals," she says. "You will not know everything, and even after 20 years in the field, you may encounter a case you have never seen before. Never hesitate to ask for help and use the resources available to you, including your network of SLPs."

In Baltimore, Dr. Campbell serves as the senior organizational physical therapist for the Baltimore Orioles. Each semester, he provides clinical education for two USAHS PT students



Byron Campbell, PT, DPT, ATC, LAT, CSCS, ADN-cert

looking to gain experience working in a professional sports setting.

"Clinical education is the most important part of the educational process because it can shape future clinician growth and real-world outcomes," he says. "Students encounter real patients and real problems that a textbook alone cannot solve. They also learn that building a professional relationship with patients can be the deciding factor in achieving successful outcomes."

Several students who have shadowed Dr. Campbell have gone on to work in professional baseball and other sports settings. He often taps into his network to help connect high-performing students with opportunities.

"Nothing worth having comes easy," he says. "Work hard, do right by your patients and do what you love."

In Jacksonville, Dr. Caton has worked at Ascension St. Vincent's Medical Center since earning her MOT

"Clinical education is critical for the transition from student to clinician."

in 2017. Specializing in intensive and progressive care, she oversees employee engagement and supervises students on their clinical rotations. She also remains involved with the University through continuing education courses, alumni weekends and guest lectures on specialty equipment used in acute care.

"My students often come into the acute care setting with limited exposure," she says. "They are immersed in a fast-paced environment with a multidisciplinary team managing medically complex patients across a wide range of diagnoses. They can observe surgeries, heart catheterizations and shadow other disciplines, including respiratory therapy, speech therapy and dietary."

Dr. Caton says her own clinical

education experiences were essential to developing confidence and competence as an occupational therapist. She is committed to offering the same foundation to today's students.

"Clinical education is critical for the transition from student to clinician," she says. "Application and critical thinking, which are needed for safe, effective and evidence-based practice, are honed through hands-on experience and consistent feedback. Fieldwork helped me develop confidence and step into my professional role."

Her advice to students is to be patient with themselves. "It is a learning process that comes with great challenges and even greater successes," she says.



Allison Caton, MOT, OTR/L

BECOME A CLINICAL PLACEMENT PARTNER

The clinical and fieldwork phase is a defining moment in a student's training, offering the chance to apply classroom learning in real-world settings under the guidance of experienced clinicians. Clinical site partners play a pivotal role in shaping these experiences, mentoring emerging rehabilitation professionals and helping influence the future of patient care.

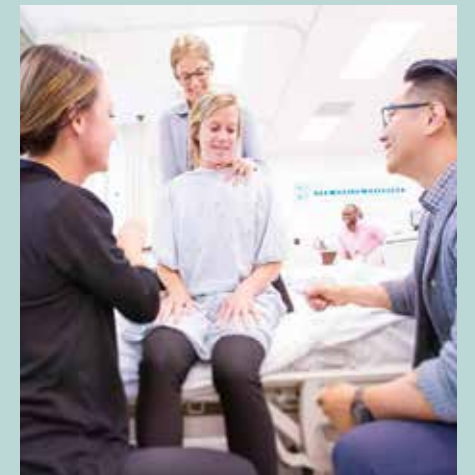
To recognize this commitment, USAHS offers an Educational Support Plan (ESP) that provides professional development opportunities for clinicians who host a student. Benefits vary by academic program and may include:

- One complimentary USAHS webinar
- One complimentary live or online USAHS continuing education seminar
- Cost of one credit hour toward a USAHS online course of choice
- \$100 toward a continuing education course
- \$100 toward registration for local or national conferences
- \$100 toward reference materials or textbooks ordered through professional organizations

Each year, one clinician is also honored with the Clinical Education Partner of the Year Award, which includes:

- \$300 toward professional association dues or a national conference registration fee
- Recognition on the USAHS website and in *Accolades*, the university's biannual publication

Clinicians and workplaces interested in becoming a clinical placement partner, please contact clinedsa@usa.edu.



GUIDING THE NEXT GENERATION:

Alumni Mentors Shape the Future of Healthcare

USAHS Alumni Association Advisory Board members share why they stay involved and how they “give back” as educators and mentors.

Engagement with the USAHS alumni community offers many rewards, but few are as meaningful as guiding students as they pursue their healthcare careers. Mentorship creates a vital link between experienced professionals and emerging clinicians. Students gain practical skills, real-world insight, career direction, and opportunities they might not otherwise access.

“It is critical to our profession that relationships between educational organizations and practicing professionals be maintained,” says alum **Paige Funderburk, MOT, OTD** (MOT ’05, OTD ’06). “This collaboration keeps educational programs aligned with real-world needs and industry trends.”

Dr. Funderburk, a California-based OT with 20 years of clinical and administrative experience, serves on the USAHS Alumni Association Advisory Board and Advocacy Committee. She regularly participates in alumni events, continuing education courses, and mentoring programs, providing both geographic and general OT mentorship.

Like her fellow board members, she finds deep satisfaction in helping students overcome obstacles and launch successful careers. “One of the students I mentored struggled early after graduation, but now she is excelling

in her preferred setting,” she says. “*Accolades* magazine even featured her story.”

Before becoming educators and Alumni Association Advisory board members, USAHS alumni **Steve Weyandt, PT, DPT, SCS, MTC** (MPT ’00, DPT ’04); **Shaun Reghabi, PT, DPT, ATC/L, MS** (DPT ’23); **Bob Kentner, DNP, RN, CPHQ** (DNP ’21); and Dr. Funderburk were shaped by mentors of their own. Their current service reflects a commitment to giving back to the university that shaped their professional lives.

“Any place where you gain a quality education, you want to help it grow,” says Dr. Kentner, a 20-year U.S. Navy veteran who transitioned into nursing after retiring from the military. He earned his DNP from USAHS in 2021.

Now the quality and infection prevention manager and emergency preparedness manager at Sidney Regional Medical Center in Sidney, Nebraska, he remains actively involved as an educator, mentor and guide to USAHS nursing students, participating in a long-running support group for nursing students and teaching the Organizational Leadership and Policy in Healthcare course.

“I am a firm believer in putting the effort back into the system,” he says. “As a mentor, I can share guidance and help



“Collaboration between educators and clinicians keeps our profession aligned with real-world needs.”

— Paige Funderburk, MOT, OTD

students avoid the mistakes I made. It is incredibly rewarding.”

Dr. Weyandt also serves students as both an educator and mentor within the PT programs. As a regional vice president and partner at BenchMark Physical Therapy in Peachtree City, Georgia, he often supports students during clinical internships, especially those adjusting to new environments.

“The University gave me so much and set me up for success,” says Dr. Weyandt, who earned his DPT in 2004. “If I can motivate the next generation and show them their career dreams are possible, I want to do that.”

His own student experience shaped his dedication. He founded USAHS student government and a big brother and sister mentoring program. “My mentor encouraged me to stay the course. She helped me push through some of the most rigorous parts of the curriculum.”

Since earning his DPT in 2023, Dr. Reghabi, a sports clinical specialist and physical therapist at Texas Children’s Hospital, has stayed intentionally engaged through mentoring conversations, panels, and leadership advising.



“As a mentor, I can help students avoid the mistakes I made. It’s incredibly rewarding.”

— Bob Kentner, DNP

“My involvement is about paying it forward to emerging professionals who are stepping into one of the most complex versions of healthcare we have ever seen,” he says. “They deserve frameworks, not just feedback.”

His mentors challenged him to think differently and pursue bigger goals, shaping his own approach. “It is about building momentum for those who come next,” he says. “Continued involvement allows me to help students gain clarity, confidence, and a sense of community.”

He describes his style as helping students find “true north,” the internal compass that guides decisions during uncertain moments. His mentoring includes not only clinical pathways but also identity alignment, interdisciplinary navigation, leadership presence, and confident decision-making without a script.

“What students need most is not just advice,” he says. “They need structure, psychological safety, and real examples of how others transformed potential into momentum.”

All four board members agree that providing real-life answers to students’ questions is invaluable as they move



“If I can motivate the next generation and show them their dreams are possible, I want to do that.” — Steve Weyandt, DPT

from classroom to clinic. Many of these relationships continue well into graduates’ professional careers. Dr. Kentner, for example, still works closely with his own mentor, USAHS Academic Coordinator of Nursing Clinical Education and Assistant Professor Dr. Amy Herrington, as they co-facilitate a nursing support group.

“It is incredibly rewarding to watch former mentees evolve into mentors themselves,” says Dr. Reghabi. “That is the multiplier effect. That is how you build momentum that outlives you.”

Positive mentoring relationships often lead to employment opportunities as well. Dr. Funderburk and Dr. Weyandt have both hired former mentees, and Dr. Kentner’s work as a preceptor has resulted in many students securing permanent roles through their clinical placements.

USAHS is deeply grateful for the dedication of its Alumni Association Advisory Board members, committee members, and alumni community. Their time, expertise, and mentorship have an immeasurable impact on the healthcare professionals who follow in their footsteps.



“Students need structure, psychological safety, and real examples of how others created momentum.”

— Shaun Reghabi, DPT

Ways Alumni Can Get Involved

- Serve as a clinical preceptor
- Join the mentorship network
- Guest lecture or participate in student panels
- Attend regional alumni events
- Support student leadership initiatives

What Students Say They Need Most

- Clear clinical expectations
- Career strategy and post-graduation pathways
- Emotional and academic support during transitions
- Honest insight about specialty areas
- Networking connections

USAHS ADVANCES TOWARD REAFFIRMATION OF ACCREDITATION WITH WSCUC

USAHS is preparing for reaffirmation of accreditation with our institutional accreditor, WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC). WSCUC reaffirmation is a vital, university-wide initiative that underscores the university's ongoing commitment to excellence in healthcare education.

Last fall, Vice President, Accreditation and Assessment and Quality Assurance Officer, **Dr. Kimberlee Moore**, led a series of meetings to introduce the WSCUC reaffirmation process to key constituent groups within the University community. A key milestone in

this process took place on Oct. 22, when Dr. Moore and Chancellor and CEO **Vivian Sanchez** welcomed WSCUC Vice President **Dr. Linda Petersen** to the San Marcos campus to lead an onsite training session with representatives from University leadership, faculty, and staff, which provided valuable insights into the reaffirmation process.

The reaffirmation process focuses on continuous improvement and ensures that the University delivers quality, student-centered learning experiences. Over the next year, USAHS will conduct an institutional re-



Dr. Kimberlee Moore

view and self-evaluation in preparation for the WSCUC site visit on October 13–15, 2027.

For more information or questions about the WSCUC reaffirmation process, please contact Dr. Moore at kmoores@usa.edu.

SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGY PROGRAM EXPANDS NATIONAL REACH

In just eight years, the USAHS Master of Science in Speech-Language Pathology (MS-SLP) program has grown from a single campus in one state to four campuses across three states, an achievement that exemplifies the university's priority of increasing access.

Since enrolling its first 20 students in Fall 2018, the program has grown by an impressive 3,695%, becoming the second-largest SLP program in the country.

- **Campuses:** Austin (2018), Dallas (2019), San Marcos (2024), St. Augustine (2025)
- **Reach:** Accepts students from 47 states
- **Impact:** 759 alumni, addressing the national shortage of SLPs
- **Innovation:** Pro bono teletherapy clinic serving CA, FL, TX, including specialized care for Parkinson's, brain injury, and pediatric speech/language needs



Innovation and Impact

The hybrid program provides high-quality online education with intentional hands-on skills training during on-campus residencies, as well as other clinical training experiences. One hallmark of the program is its robust pro bono teletherapy clinic, where every student learns to provide online therapy to individuals across the lifespan residing in California, Florida, and Texas. "It's a skill that's really important," says Associate Dean of the

MS-SLP program, **Meghan Savage, PhD, CCC-SLP**. "Our profession lends itself well to teletherapy. It's a differentiator for us to teach the technology skills that help students engage clients in an online format."

One Program, Four Campuses, One Mission

Though spread across four campuses, the SLP program operates as one unified, accredited program, with faculty collaborating across locations. "Our faculty are dedicated to student learning, committed to teaching the current best evidence, and focused on training the next generation of SLPs," explained Dr. Savage.

From rural communities to metropolitan centers, USAHS SLP graduates are directly impacting patient care where it's needed most. As Dr. Savage reflects: "I'm incredibly proud of what we've built from the ground up. Our hybrid model allows us to train students in their own communities, helping address critical shortages while staying true to our mission of excellence in education."

DR. SAVAGE ELECTED TO NATIONAL ACCREDITATION BOARD

Associate Dean of the MS-SLP program, **Meghan Savage, PhD, CCC-SLP, FNAP**, has been elected to serve a four-year term as an Academic Speech-Language Pathology board member for the **Council on Academic Accreditation in Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology (CAA)**. Her term began Jan. 1, 2026.

The CAA, the accrediting body of the **American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)**, is recognized by both the U.S. Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

The council establishes and enforces accreditation standards for graduate programs in audiology and speech-language pathology, ensuring academic

excellence, accountability, and the preparation of future professionals. Dr. Savage's election reflects her longstanding contributions to the field and highlights the University's leadership in advancing health sciences education nationwide.

"I am honored to serve in this capacity and to contribute to the quality of graduate education in our profession," said Savage. "The CAA plays a critical role in supporting academic programs that prepare the next generation of clinicians, and I look forward to engaging in this meaningful work."

Interim Chief Academic Officer, **Dr. Maria Puzziferro**, said Savage's appointment underscores the national recognition of USAHS faculty expertise.

"Dr. Savage's election to the CAA is a



prestigious achievement and a reflection of her exceptional leadership and commitment to academic excellence," Puzziferro said. "Her service on this council will extend the University's influence on the future of graduate education in speech-language pathology across the country."

DR. SCHWIER APPOINTED TO CALIFORNIA BOARD OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

Associate Dean for Occupational Therapy Programs and Program Director on the San Marcos, CA campus, **Erin Schwier, EdD, OTD, OTR/L**, has been appointed by Governor Gavin Newsom to the **California Board of Occupational Therapy (CBOT)**.

The CBOT regulates the practice of occupational therapy in California, ensuring that practitioners meet the highest standards of safety, ethics, and professional competency. This prestigious appointment elevates Dr. Schwier's professional profile while underscoring the vital role USAHS faculty play in shaping the future of the occupational therapy profession.

"I am deeply honored to be appointed to the California Board of Occupational Therapy," said Dr. Schwier. "This role



allows me to help guide the profession at a statewide level and contribute to advancing occupational therapy practice for the benefit of patients,

families, and communities."

Interim Chief Academic Officer, **Dr. Maria Puzziferro**, celebrated the appointment as a milestone for both Dr. Schwier and the University:

"Dr. Schwier's leadership reflects the excellence and commitment of USAHS faculty. When we speak of our university's prominence, it is embodied in achievements like this, where our faculty influence professional associations, shape the future of practice, and elevate the visibility of our institution. USAHS continues to stand out for our premium education, our preeminence in the health sciences community, and our unwavering commitment to preparing practice-ready professionals."

The appointment reinforces the mission of USAHS to advance health sciences education while preparing practice-ready clinicians dedicated to serving with compassion, excellence, and impact.

ADVANCING PRACTICE:

How USAHS Supports Alumni Through Continuing Professional Education

For graduates of the University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences, learning does not end at commencement. Across the country, alumni continue to advance their skills, pursue new credentials and stay current in their fields through the University's robust Continuing Professional Education (CPE) offerings. With discounted seminars, complimentary webcasts and a growing catalog of specialized certifications, USAHS is committed to supporting lifelong learning for every graduate.

The University's CPE program has long been recognized for its high-quality, evidence-based coursework designed for rehabilitation professionals, nurses, educators and other healthcare practitioners. Today, USAHS alumni have more opportunities than ever to deepen their expertise and earn continuing education units (CEUs) that may apply toward licensure requirements in their professions.

A Valuable Alumni Benefit

USAHS alumni receive a 20 percent discount on accredited continuing education seminars offered through the University. This benefit applies to a wide range of online and in-person offerings, from foundational refreshers to advanced clinical skills. Alumni can explore the full catalog at cpe.usa.edu and email alumni@usa.edu to request their discount code.

The discount reflects the University's commitment to supporting graduates throughout their careers. Whether



alumni are seeking to expand their clinical toolbox, transition into leadership roles or explore emerging areas of practice, the CPE program offers pathways that align with their goals.

Complimentary Webcasts

In addition to discounted CEU offerings, the USAHS Alumni Association and the CPE team have partnered to provide alumni with complimentary access to 10 live webcasts each year. Each session is valued at \$35 per hour and qualifies for at least one hour of continuing education.

Alumni may register for any of the sessions using the promo code **AlumniWeb2026**. Those who have not previously used the CPE platform

will be prompted to create a profile, which is separate from their USAHS credentials.

Upcoming webcast topics include sleep disorders, leadership development, growth mindset, communication strategies and other timely topics relevant to clinical and professional practice. Email invitations are sent to alumni throughout the year, and graduates are encouraged to keep their contact information up to date to ensure they receive notifications.

The complimentary webcast series has become one of the most popular alumni benefits, offering convenient, accessible learning opportunities that fit into busy professional schedules. Alumni who wish to suggest future topics or volunteer to facilitate a session may contact alumni@usa.edu.

**Specialized Certifications and Microcredentials**

Beyond individual CEU seminars, USAHS offers several advanced certification pathways that allow alumni to build specialized expertise and distinguish themselves in the job market.

- Among the most sought-after offerings is the Dry Needling Certification, developed and taught by USAHS faculty member Eric Krell, PT, DPT. Alumni interested in pursuing this certification may contact the CPE department at 800-241-1027, ext. 1400.
- The University also offers Manual Therapy Certification, a program that reflects USAHS's long-standing leadership in manual therapy education. This certification provides clinicians with advanced hands-on skills rooted in the University's foundational history in orthopedic manual therapy.
- Another distinctive offering is the Craniofacial Certification, a program unique to USAHS. This advanced credential prepares clinicians to evaluate and treat craniofacial dysfunctions using specialized manual therapy techniques.
- For alumni seeking leadership development, USAHS offers Leadership Badges, including certificates and micro-certificates that help professionals strengthen their management, communication and organizational skills. These stackable credentials are ideal for clinicians transitioning into supervisory or administrative roles. Refer to the ad on the inside front cover of this issue for more information about these seminars.

A Growing Catalog for a Growing Profession

The CPE catalog continues to expand each year, reflecting the evolving needs of healthcare professionals. Seminars span a wide range of topics, including:

- Orthopedics and sports rehabilitation
- Physical Agent Modalities
- Cadaveric Anatomy
- Leadership and professional development
- Musculoskeletal Imaging
- Wellness and prevention
- Interprofessional collaboration

Many classes are offered online, allowing alumni to learn at their own pace, while others include hands-on lab components for those seeking in-person skill development.

Strengthening the Alumni Community

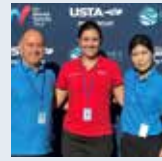
Continuing education is more than a professional requirement. For many USAHS graduates, it is a way to stay connected to the University and to one another. Alumni frequently return to USAHS as seminar participants, instructors, mentors and collaborators, contributing to a vibrant professional community that extends far beyond campus.

The University's investment in continuing education reflects its mission to advance the health sciences through excellence in teaching, research and clinical practice. By offering alumni meaningful opportunities to grow, USAHS strengthens the professions it serves and supports the next generation of clinicians.

As the healthcare landscape continues to evolve, USAHS remains committed to providing graduates with the tools, knowledge and resources they need to thrive. With discounted CEUs, complimentary webcasts, advanced certifications and leadership pathways, alumni have access to a comprehensive suite of opportunities designed to support lifelong learning.

Alumni interested in exploring upcoming offerings, registering for webcasts or suggesting new topics can visit cpe.usa.edu or contact alumni@usa.edu.





Noel Gressner, PT, DPT (DPT '06), **Marissa Goldhoff, PT, DPT** (DPT '22) and **Reiko Takahshi, PT, DPT** (DPT '15) paused

for a photo while they were working at the San Diego Open, an annual professional tennis tournament held at the Barnes Tennis Center in San Diego, California.



Joselyn Rodriguez, DPT (DPT '18) is a licensed physical therapist. She provides birth prep that focuses on delivery via pelvic

floor training. She educates community midwives and doulas on how to screen patients that should see a pelvic therapist before delivery in order to optimize outcomes.



Amber Willis Stewart, PT, DPT (DPT '16) married Jonathan Willis on March 14, 2025, in an intimate backyard ceremony surrounded by close friends and family.



Kelly Twichel, MOT (MOT '17), accepted the award for 2025 SBA Small Business Exporter of the Year for the San Diego and Imperial region. She is the CEO

of Access Trax, which empowers people with mobility disabilities to access outdoor terrain and recreation.



Martin Feliz, PT, DPT, MTC (DPT '20) is entering third year in the NBA as the Assistant Athletic Trainer and Performance Therapist

with the Washington, Wizards in D.C. The Dominican-American dual credentialed Athletic Trainer and Physical Therapist represents one of the few USAHS alumni in professional basketball.



Kenny Sargent, DPT (DPT '06) was elected Treasurer for the 2026 term on the Arizona Board of Physical Therapy. He currently serves as VP of Clinic Operations for Spooner Physical Therapy, supporting clinics

across Arizona and Texas.



Amanda Hetzler Tupper, MOT, OTD (MOT '13, OTD '19) is pursuing her PhD in education at Ohio State University through the Army's LTHET program. She is pictured here with her

spouse and twin boys.



Daniel Hague, DPT (DPT '20) volunteered with the United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee (USOPC) in Colorado Springs. Working alongside world-class athletes and the USOPC sports medicine team, the

experience reinforced his passion for the field and continued professional growth. His USOPC experience further strengthened his commitment to helping athletes safely return to sport and perform at their best, while reflecting the strong foundation provided by his USAHS education.



Kristina Hartsook, DrOT, OTR/L, BCP (MOT '15) was honored with the FOTA Award of Recognition, which celebrates outstanding contributions to the advancement and promotion

of occupational therapy in Florida.



Jannah Arafa, PT, DPT (DPT '24) and **Melvin Manalansan, PT, DPT** (DPT '24) received awards at the FPTA 2025 Annual Conference for their research abstracts in the Resident/Fellow and Clinical categories, respectively. They are pictured here with USAHS

Associate Director of Clinical Education and Assistant Professor, **Carmina "Minnie" Rafael, PT, DPT**.



Christienne Parten, OTD, Med, OTR (PPOTD '21) published an article titled "A Virtual Pre-Departure Training Program to Prepare Interprofessional

Rehabilitation Teams for International Service-Learning Experiences." The article is a product of Dr. Parten's post professional OTD capstone work after several years of international service-learning experiences in Guatemala.



Lacey Spark, EdD, OTD, MOT, OTR (EdD '25, OTD '19) gave a presentation at the AOTA Education Summit titled "High-fidelity Simulation for Level 1 Fieldwork: Occupational Therapy Faculty Experiences And Perceptions." The session shared a study that explored occupational therapy faculty experiences and perceptions using high-fidelity simulation for Level 1 fieldwork. Findings offered considerations for implementation, efficacy, and future directions for simulation in OT education.



Javier Gonzalez, PT, DPT, PCS (DPT '20) has been selected for inclusion in Marquis Who's Who. As in all Marquis Who's

Who biographical volumes, individuals profiled are selected on the basis of current reference value. Factors such as position, noteworthy accomplishments, visibility, and prominence in a field are all taken into account during the selection process. Scan the QR code to learn more about Dr. Gonzalez.



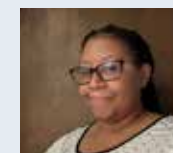
Advisory Board Welcomes Four New Members

The Alumni Association Advisory Board is welcoming four new members with the start of 2026. The Advisory Board makes every attempt to ensure the board is representative of all USAHS alumni (program, campus, and grad years). This year's class of board members continue to bring us closer to achieving this goal.



Natasha Dean, M.S., CCC-SLP (MS-SLP'22) Natasha Dean is a dedicated Speech-Language Pathologist whose clinical experience spans Skilled Nursing Facilities, acute care, and pediatric home health. She is the proud owner of NobleChats Speech Therapy, Inc., in California. Natasha supports individuals across their lifespan with developmental and acquired neurological disorders, providing compassionate, evidence-based care. Her practice reflects a strong commitment to helping clients strengthen their communication and overall quality of life.

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Nia Hidalgo, BSN, MSN, DNP (DNP '20) Nia Hidalgo has been a registered nurse for more than 10 years. Her focus has been on quality management, regulatory, and performance improvement. She enjoys leading project initiatives across multiple departments in the hospital setting. Such projects include ensuring compliance with clinical practice guidelines, regulatory standards and core measure requirements. She is currently working as a Patient Safety Program Manager. She also works as a preceptor for MSN and DNP students.

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Brooke McIntosh Ball, PT, DPT, OCS (DPT '15) Brooke McIntosh Ball earned her Doctor of Physical Therapy degree from the University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences in 2015. She has more than 10 years

of clinical and leadership experience and currently serves as Senior Director of Business Development and Operations at Exxat, a healthcare technology company advancing clinical and experiential education through innovative software solutions. In her role, McIntosh Ball leads strategy and execution for Exxat One, a national platform that connects academic programs and clinical sites to streamline student placement, onboarding, and workforce pipeline development across multiple healthcare disciplines. As a Board-Certified Orthopaedic Clinical Specialist, she brings a strong clinician perspective to her work and is passionate about strengthening academic-clinical partnerships and supporting the next generation of healthcare professionals.



Erica Scott, EdD, MHA (EdD '25) Dr. Erica M. Scott is a Florida native currently residing in the nation's capital, Washington, DC. She earned a Bachelor

of Science degree in Health Science from Florida A&M University in August 2015. After a brief stint teaching 8th Grade Science, Scott decided to further her education at the University of Central Florida where she earned a Master of Health Administration in August 2019. Less than a year later, she felt that she still had a little more left in her tank, so she began the EdD program specializing in Executive Leadership at the University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences. Scott is currently the Employee Benefits Manager for the Hartford.

Alumni may submit updates about their professional or personal lives to share with fellow USAHS alumni. Use the Class Notes form on www.usa.edu/about/alumni/.





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