

OTA 2026 HOT TOPIC:

PIVOT POINTS: AMPLIFY, ADAPT, ADVANCE

Pathways to Thrive

OT Designed Campus-Based Outreach Supports
to Reduce the Gap in Access for
Mental Health and Wellness Services
for College Students with Mental Health Needs

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Today's Hot Topic Conference Theme

01

Amplify

The MH access gap and what the evidence says

02

Adapt

Designing and delivering Pathways to Thrive MH preventative services

03

Advance

Early outcomes, lessons, and OT's role



Discuss

Next steps
Addressing MH access through preventive OT within populations

QUICK PULSE CHECK

On campus (like OSU), how long does a student wait for a first counseling appointment?

A

Under 1 week

B

1–2 weeks

C

3+ weeks

D

Not sure

Raise your hand for your answer.



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Need Is Outpacing Counseling Capacity

 **Weeks+**

Waitlists at many campus counseling and wellness centers are weeks

Flannery, 2023

 **45%**

Students report low psychological well-being

ACHA, 2025

 **48.5%**

Surveyed UG students are positive for loneliness

ACHA, 2025

Rising anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, and loneliness are meeting overwhelmed counseling systems. Students need low-barrier supports beyond the counseling center.

The Evidence Points to Three Active Ingredients

Systematic Review (PRISMA): 5 databases → 538 studies → 12 included in SR



Multimodal programming

Flexible, low-barrier entry points into support



Skill-building

Coping, stress management, and resource awareness



Peer connection

Reduces stigma and increases willingness to seek help

Outreach consistently improved:

Wellbeing

Help-seeking

Knowledge

Program reach

Active ingredients → OT

From Evidence to Design



Access & Navigation

Self-referral, drop-in, shared campus spaces; resource awareness and system confidence



Sensory-Based Regulation

Breathing, tactile tools, and environmental supports; calming, OT-informed spaces



Skill Building

Structured, evidence-aligned coping and stress management; practical, repeatable wellness tools



Peer Connection

Peer-supported engagement, belonging, and shared experience to reduce stigma and support retention

Two Domains

Four Core Components



FOCUS AREA 1

Success through Self-Determination

1 Campus Navigation & Resource Access

2 Creating a Goal-Setting Toolkit



FOCUS AREA 2

Wellbeing through Regulation

1 Understanding & Communicating Your Needs

2 Practicing Sensory Strategies for Regulation

*Centering occupation, self-regulation, and student agency:
a manualized, evidence-based, preventative program built for campus-ready implementation*

Four Ways In: Multimodal Delivery



Workshops

Structured, interactive skill-building



Tabling

Drop-in engagement in shared campus spaces



1:1 Support

Individual meetings and navigation help



Online

Anytime access to program resources

Built to be Flexible

4-week

pilot format used at OSU (non-consecutive)

6-week

sample timeline in the manual

Semester

extended implementation option



TURN & TALK ·

Which delivery format do you think would best reach college students? And why?

Think:
time, stigma,
navigation, sensory
load

Consider:
university, community
college, or transition-
age youth

Share:
Share one idea with a
neighbor

Early Signals from the Spring 2026

Pilot Setting: OSU Student Life Disability Services

January–April 2026. Single-semester pilot.

100%

student survey agreed -
strongly agreed they
were satisfied with and
enjoyed the workshops

All items

Site 'provider'
"completely agree"
Acceptable, Feasible, &
Appropriate
(Assessments: AIM, FIM, IAM)

None

Site 'provider'
no implementation
barriers; support adoption



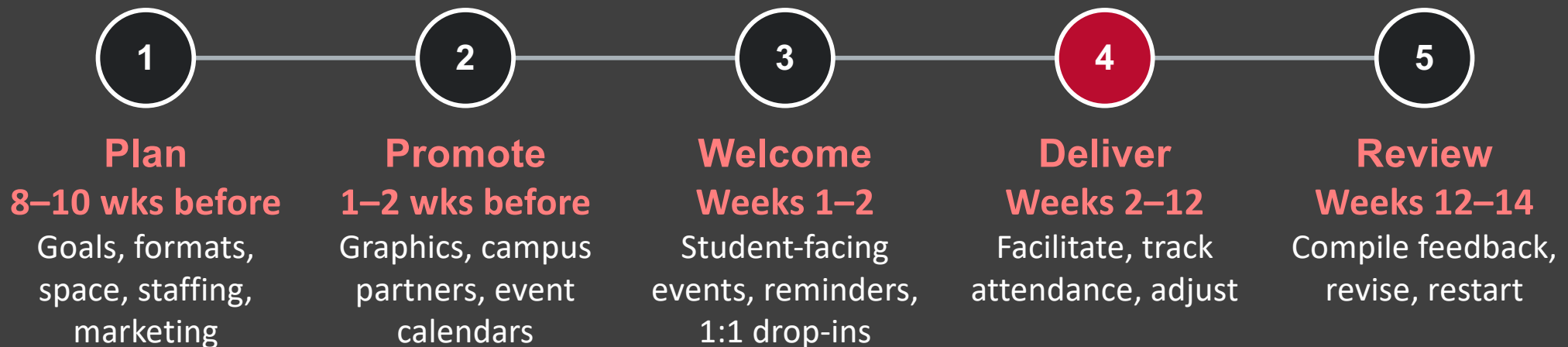
Positive: Students asked for more workshops, repeat offerings, and peer connection.



Adjustment - Academic calendar:

- Attendance dipped during midterms, and no students attended the post–spring break navigation workshop.

Adapt Before You Adopt: A Semester Roadmap



Identified barriers: late program development, pre-booked spaces, limited marketing reach, weather, and academic-calendar disruptions

Solutions: plan early, market early, partner across campus, consider weather conditions, and schedule around midterms and breaks

Advancing OT on College Campuses



Campus needs

- Preventative mental wellness supports
- Sensory-informed environments
- Navigation and resource guidance
- Skill-building for academic and life



What OT brings

- Expertise in participation, environment, and habits
- Sensory regulation and accessibility knowledge
- Holistic, student-centered approaches
- Clinical and non-clinical engagement



Advocacy strategies

- Present to campus leadership about OT & MH
- Highlight cost-effective, scalable programming
- Align with student success initiatives
- Add OT to disability services and program

Consider

AMPLIFY

What evidence would persuade leaders on at your site to invest in OT-led MH outreach?

ADAPT

Which Pathways to Thrive component best fits your setting, and what would you change about it?

- navigation/resources or self-regulation

ADVANCE

Beyond student attendance, how should we measure the impact of preventative and accessible supports?



**Pathways to Thrive
program**

Scan to explore resources

**EVALUATION: Hot
Topic: OT Designed
Campus-Based
Outreach Supports to
Reduce the Gap in
Access for Mental
Health**



***Scan QR code to submit
your evaluation***



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