

## Paving My Way

Thinking back to my senior year of high school, the idea of choosing a career that I would have forever felt very daunting. I knew I was interested in the medical field and that I did not want to sit at a desk all day. Besides that, my only other sense of direction was my love for dance and desire to be able to maintain an active lifestyle in the working world. As captain of my high school dance team and a competitive dancer for fourteen years, dance was something I did not know how to part ways with. When people consider careers, oftentimes the only options that come to mind are professions that everyone is familiar with, such as being a doctor, lawyer, or teacher. I lacked the clear desire for a specific career that those around me had, and with parents who had no knowledge of how to navigate niches within the medical field, I felt lost. I began my college career studying exercise science to become a physical therapist, based almost entirely on advice from my dance teacher who said that I would be great at it and really enjoy it.

During my first semester in college, I had doctor's orders to receive physical therapy treatment for a long standing back injury from dancing. After I completed my therapy regimen, I asked my physical therapist if I could observe him at his clinic to see if physical therapy was truly the right career path for me. While there, I learned a lot about the profession and knew I was very interested in the musculoskeletal system, becoming a healer, and developing connections with patients. Though I felt interested in physical therapy, I knew that that spark of confidence each person has about their career path was missing for me after observing physical therapy. That doubtful feeling led me to a conversation with a professor at a charity event where he asked me if I had heard of occupational therapy, which I had not. He said he felt like occupational therapy might be the right fit for me due to its creative and person-first nature. Occupational therapists help clients maximize function and participation in activities of daily living and other occupations that are meaningful to them.

Dolly Parton once said, "If you don't like the road you're walking, start paving another one." So, as soon as I arrived home, I searched for "occupational therapy clinics nearby" and set myself up to observe an occupational therapist that following week. On my first day of observation, I felt that spark I had been missing. From that day forward, I added a minor, psychology, which would help me obtain the prerequisites I would need for occupational therapy school. I obtained hundreds of observation hours in a variety of settings, such as pediatrics, geriatrics, neurological diagnoses, acute care, limb loss, cancer rehabilitation, and orthopedics. I also worked in a pediatric therapy clinic for several months. These experiences along with various leadership positions and support I received within my Tri Sigma chapter helped pave the road that has led me to where I am today -- Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center in New Orleans, finishing up the first year of coursework towards my Master of Occupational Therapy degree. I also recently took a teaching position at my old dance studio, where I teach three classes. Today, I could not be more grateful to myself for choosing to look beyond the fear of uncertainty and work to pave the road to the fulfilling destination that is at the end this journey.