



**American Society
of Hand Therapists®**

**How to Start a Student Hand Therapy Club:
A User's Guide**

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I want to thank the Huntington University Hand and Orthopedic Interest Club members and my mentors for inspiring my passion for hand therapy which led to the creation of this text.

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GETTING STARTED

If you have found this document, you may already be on your way to a rewarding career in occupational therapy or physical therapy or may have an interest in the specialized field of hand therapy. Perhaps the next step in the process is to develop a plan that will assist in the transition from student to clinician to hand therapist. This guide, which provides a framework for developing a Student Hand Therapy Club, has been designed to help with that transition. Peer support, mentoring relationships, and professional networking are important steps in becoming a hand therapist. By establishing a Student Hand Therapy Club at your university, you will be able to build relationships, skills, and knowledge that will lead you to a successful career!

What are the benefits?

- A peer group with similar career interest
- Exploring hand therapy topics in depth
- Developing skills in appraising research
- Practicing hands-on skills
- Developing leadership skills
- Building relationships with leading experts in the field of hand therapy
- Demonstrate to potential employers a dedication to hand therapy practice

WHERE TO BEGIN

The first step in the process of developing a Student Hand Therapy Club is to solidify your own interest in pursuing a career in hand therapy. When beginning your graduate studies

in occupational therapy and physical therapy, you can become inundated with theories, practice settings, and career options. Prior to investing precious time and energy, make certain that this is a specialty area in which you could see yourself practicing. If you have professors that have a specialty certification in hand therapy, speak with them about this area of practice. Log onto <https://www.asht.org/find-a-therapist>, find a therapist within your community, and reach out to them. See if you can shadow them or interview them, as to why they have chosen this area of practice. Social media is also a great way to connect with hand therapists and see what their daily practice looks like. Consider becoming a student member of the American Society of Hand Therapists (ASHT). Student membership will grant you access to the Journal of Hand Therapy, discounted admission to the ASHT Annual Meeting, and many other educational resources (<https://www.asht.org/about/membership>).

WHERE TO GO NEXT

Identify a peer group

Now that you've found your passion for hand therapy, the fun can really begin. One of the most rewarding parts of being member of a club is developing relationships with your peers. The chances are that you have classmates that share a similar interest in a career in hand therapy. Ask around your cohort and the other cohorts in your program to see if anyone would be interested in starting a club. Discussing the benefits of starting a club with your classmates may help bolster interest. Some students may want to participate simply to learn more about this specialized area of practice. Use social media to your advantage and post on your program's private social media pages to identify interested students. You should establish a

core group of individuals who will help develop a cohesive message. Once you have identified those individuals you will initiate a plan to approach the university with your proposal to start a Student Hand Therapy Club.

Identify a Faculty Advisor

Before approaching one of your professors about starting a hand therapy interest club, decide which faculty member may be most appropriate. It may be helpful to identify a faculty member with prior experience in hand therapy, but this should not be the only consideration when approaching a potential advisor. Some universities supplement their program's faculty with adjunct professors who may have experience in the practice of hand therapy. These professors may serve as an excellent resource to the club however may not be available as an advisor due to their part time hours. While it would be ideal to have a certified hand therapist (CHT) serve as the club's faculty advisor, mostly importantly, make sure the person you approach is willing to provide support and guidance as the club comes to fruition and continues to flourish.

Approach the University

It is important to get the support of the university that you attend. Universities have many resources that can be useful to a newly formed club. Aside from providing a meeting space, your university may have equipment that they will let clubs use during meeting (electronics, dynamometers, goniometers, splint pans, etc.). Your academic program can also provide support in the development of relationships with area clinicians who may be interested in contributing by guest speaking.

Most universities require prior approval for club development. In order to gain approval to form a club and use your university as a meeting place, you may need to give a presentation to your program director and faculty. This will include the mission, benefits, and costs of the club. It is important to enter this meeting well prepared. To demonstrate the seriousness of your intentions to start a student hand therapy club, you will need to prepare a list of potential members, basic budget, sample club programming, and the club bylaws. A sample copy of the club bylaws can be found in Appendix A. The bylaws included in this document will allow you to edit them to reflect the mission and needs of your university and club.

Recruit members

Now that you have the university's support, it is time to expand the club from a small group of co-founders to a larger group of interested students. To recruit additional students you may want to distribute fliers, post meeting times on social media, and give a presentation to your classmates and the students in other graduate cohorts. All of these can be good strategies for recruiting members, however, being able to clearly express the benefits of the club and your passion for hand therapy will be the most effective message. While maximizing your membership may improve your club's success, it is important to emphasize the academic component of the club. Potential members must understand that Student Hand Therapy Club is not intended to be an expressly social club and will require professionalism and responsibilities.

PLAN YOUR FIRST MEETING

Find a space

If your club is fortunate enough to have open access to your university's facilities, take some time to think about the features of the space. Determine which meeting space will facilitate interaction at the meetings. You will want to have enough space to accommodate your members and the planned activities for each meeting. Plinth tables are nice for practicing range of motion, manual muscle testing, and exercises. If you plan on having food at your meetings, you should make sure that you have access to trash cans and cleaning supplies. Good audio-visual equipment, such as a projector, makes it easier for the group to engage in learning activities together. Consider reserving meeting spaces in advance and attempt to tailor the meeting space to the planned activity.

Depending on your club's resources, you may not have access to the university facilities. In a situation such as this, you may have to be creative in order to facilitate the development of the club. Meetings can take place gathered around a kitchen table, or at a coffee shop. Space can often be reserved at local public libraries free of charge. Instead of asking for guest speakers to give a formal presentation, your club could invite them to share a meal and conversation at a local restaurant. Ultimately, what will fuel the success of your club is not the physical resources or meeting location but rather the passion and dedication of those involved.

Set the agenda

Prior to your first formal meeting, you will need prepare an agenda. Some of these activities could include:

- Ratify the club bylaws
 - A vote can be taken anonymously or by a show of hands
 - A simple majority vote (>50%) of members attending the first meeting is required. However, a supermajority (e.g. >60%) could instead be required if the club deems that it is in their best interest.
 - Take time to review the bylaws and discuss concerns. The bylaws are not an immutable document and amendments can be made prior to and following ratification.

- Accept nominations for leadership positions
 - A simple way to accept nominations is to create a document listing the open positions with lines underneath so that people interested in those positions can sign up. An example of this document can be found in Appendix C.
 - Having a list of nominees during the first meeting will streamline the process and allow voting to take place at the next meeting or through a free SurveyMonkey poll. (<https://bit.ly/2Sj64Yl>)

- Create a private social media page
 - Various platforms will allow you to connect with the members of your club with a variety of privacy settings. It is important to set up a page on social media to easily connect with group members. Tools on these platforms will allow you to share documents and conduct polls. Polls are a great way to gauge the attitudes

and opinions of club members regarding a host of topics. Polls also will allow the group to make decisions on more informal topics like meeting content and t-shirt designs.

- Once elected, control and moderation of the private social media page should fall under the duties of the Communications Chair.

The first meeting will likely be quite short. The primary purpose of this meeting will be to pass the bylaws and accept nominations for leadership positions. At the end of the meeting the club should vote on the agenda of the next meeting. Taking suggestions and voting on a content area will be good for all members of the group to express their interest in any given upper quarter related topics. At this meeting, a vote should be taken for a volunteer locate a journal article which the group will review and discuss at the next meeting.

REGULAR MEETINGS

Regular meetings are when the club will come together to discuss scholarly publications, practice hands-on skills, and network. Your club can decide how formally structured they would like their meetings to be. A general meeting format is attached in to give you a general idea of how to structure a meeting (See Appendix B).

Locate and select scholarly publications

Scholarly publications provide clinicians with the tools and evidence to ensure the interventions and approaches they provide are safe and effective. As a practicing hand therapist, it will be vital to understand how and where to locate research and peer-reviewed guidelines to safely treat unfamiliar conditions. If you are unsure of where to start, your

university's library should be able to help you find journal articles. The Journal of Hand Therapy is an excellent resource for finding peer-reviewed research articles that would be relevant to discuss at meetings (<https://www.jhandtherapy.org/>). To avoid violating any copyright laws, discourage sharing materials and make sure to select journal articles that all club member can access freely.

Critical appraisal of research

Research can and does take many forms. From systematic reviews to case reports, the quality of design and level of evidence can vary between studies. It is important to critically appraise research. A critical appraisal tool is not only good to use for appraising the quality of a study but also the content included in the study. Complicated topics that are often presented in hand therapy research can be intimidating and the terminology can be confusing to students. Using a critical appraisal tool will also help the reader to slow down and examine what is being said by the author(s) in the terminology used and concepts applied in the study. The Centre for Evidence-Based Medicine at Oxford University has published multiple resources to assist in appraising research (<https://bit.ly/2weTgI0>). Duke University has also developed a critical appraisal tool that is design specifically for therapy studies (<https://bit.ly/2E1mPPg>).

Hands on activities

Hands on activities will be one of the biggest draws to club meetings. It gives students the chance to practice techniques. Hand therapy is a skilled profession, and skill requires repetition to develop. Simple activities that can be performed at club meetings include palpation, manual therapy techniques, range of motion assessment, manual muscle testing,

and orthotic fabrication. It will be helpful to have your faculty advisor or guest lecturers give a brief demonstration prior to completing any unfamiliar techniques.

An example of a popular hands on club activity is the fabrication and fitting of orthoses, as one of the biggest challenges of fabricating custom orthoses is knowing how the thermoplastic splinting material will react. To help club members become more familiar with the properties of various thermoplastic products, consider purchasing sheets of different splinting materials with club funds or requesting donations of scraps from local clinics. These materials can be evenly dispersed among group members so that they can attempt cutting out various shapes from the different thermoplastic sheets. This activity is beneficial for club members as they become more familiar with splinting materials and begin to develop the scissor skills necessary for competent orthosis fabrication. Inviting a skilled therapist as a guest to this meeting will also provide the club members with the opportunity of additional advice and networking.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Special events are excellent ways of getting members of the hand therapy and hand surgery communities involved in your hand therapy club. You may be surprised to find that many members of the community are willing to come speak to your club. You may even be invited to visit a hand therapy clinic or a physician's office. At times it could be beneficial for club members to divide into smaller groups and make multiple clinic visits to facilitate the best learning environment. It is important to make accommodations so that the special event allows

for maximum attendance. You may have to schedule special events in the evening, at locations that are suitable for group gathering, or travel to suit the needs of presenters.

Guest speakers

Having guest speakers at your meetings or special events is a great way to supplement the content and activities your club is reviewing. This may be especially useful to the club and its members if your club's faculty advisor is not experienced in hand therapy. Guest speakers will help your club drive its agenda by providing valuable clinical insight and suggestions for content areas on which you should focus your efforts. Hand surgeons are great allies to the hand therapy profession because their patient outcomes can rely heavily on the skills of a therapist. Sometimes your club may want to look outside of the hand therapy profession to other clinicians that possess skills that are complimentary to hand therapy practice. Small business owners, lymphedema specialists, and ergonomics specialists all have skills and knowledge that would be valuable to students interested in becoming hand therapists.

If you have a difficult time recruiting speakers, consult the professors at your program as they will likely have a professional network of therapists who would be interesting guest lecturers. ASHT's website has a directory of its members that can easily be searched to locate hand therapists in your surrounding area (<https://www.asht.org/find-a-therapist>). A quick internet search will help you locate local hand surgeons and other practitioners that may be interested in meeting with your club (<https://www.assh.org/handcare/Find-a-Hand-Surgeon>). When reaching out to potential guest speakers include an explanation of the club, why you are inviting them to speak at a meeting, and any potential topics of interest.

Club parties

Scholarly pursuit through formal education can be stressful and time consuming. It is important to make time to relax and spend time with your classmates. Planning club parties at the end of each semester is a great way to blow off some steam and have some fun. Potluck dinners and pizza parties are always a hit with hungry graduate students. You can incorporate articles reviews and hands on activities but sometimes it is good to take a break and plan an informal gathering. This might be a good time to play games, quiz one another on anatomy, or attempt to use the orthoses you've made while eating your entire meal.

Clinic visits and field trips

As a student, it can be difficult to gain perspective on the daily operations of a hand therapy clinic. Consider reaching out to a local hand therapy clinic to arrange a visit. Many facilities have specific policies regarding student shadowing and will not accommodate multiple students all at once. Private clinics tend to have more flexibility regarding group visits but may have difficulty accommodating a large group of students due to time and space constraints.

Knowledge of anatomy is at the top of nearly every hand therapist's list of foundational skills a prospective student should have prior to a hand therapy rotation. Each school is different in their delivery of anatomy and kinesiology content. Some schools offer a cadaver dissection while others offer model-based instruction. If your program does not offer lab with cadaveric specimen, consider reaching out to the anatomists at your nearest medical school or graduate anatomy department. There is no better way to experience human anatomy than using a cadaver.

FUNDRAISING AND VOLUNTEERING

Fundraising can be a sensitive and challenging endeavor but is important to the overall success of your club. Simple fundraising ideas to consider are selling t-shirts or a bake sale. Search the internet for more creative fundraising ideas to help bolster your club income. Funds can be used to pay for food at club meetings and parties or to help with the expenses of students travelling to the American Society of Hand Therapists Annual Meeting (<https://www.asht.org/education/asht-annual-meeting>).

Volunteering is an excellent way of giving back to you community and promoting the field of hand therapy through word-of-mouth. Interesting ideas for volunteering include clean-up efforts, art projects, and volunteer home building within the community. Projects like these will be a great way to develop teamwork with your classmates. Volunteering also provide a way of engaging in new occupations that may be valued by your future patients. It is always great to gain perspective on the people you serve while simultaneously serving your community.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Ensuring the future success of the Student Hand Therapy Club is dependent on continued interest and dedication of the next generation of students at your university. Establishing mentoring relationships with current officers will ensure a successful transition of club to the future leadership. Passing the torch to the next generation of leaders can be incredibly rewarding as you see your hard work has a lasting impact. As new students from more junior cohorts begin attending meetings, start planting seeds regarding succession planning and leadership opportunities. Identifying leaders in the classroom is a effective way to narrow your search for the future Student Hand Therapy Club leadership team. Approaching university faculty to enquire which students possess academic strengths in hand and

orthopedic content needs to be done professionally and respectfully. Staying connected with the Student Hand Therapy Club through guest lectures as a new graduate or through doctoral capstone projects helps ensure the continuity of benefits for students for years to come.

CONCLUSION

A career in hand therapy requires the commitment to lifelong learning, and participation in a Student Hand Therapy Club is one way to gain exposure to this practice area. The opportunities you create for yourself while participating in a Student Hand Therapy Club can lead to jobs, professional leadership, and other career advancement opportunities. The adage of “you get out what you put in” can be said for the Student Hand Therapy Club, as exploring your interests will provide invaluable learning experiences. Follow the simple steps outlined in this text, find a network of like-minded individuals, and focus your efforts on pursuing your goals. Your hard work will be rewarded as you begin your exciting career in hand therapy.

Student Hand Therapy Club Bylaws

Ratified on [date]

I. What is a Certified Hand Therapist?

A. A hand therapist is a nationally registered occupational therapist or physical therapist who, through advanced continuing education, clinical experience and integration of anatomy, physiology and kinesiology, has become proficient in treatment of pathological upper-quadrant conditions resulting from trauma, disease, or congenital or acquired deformity. (ASHT, 2017)

B. Requirements for Certification:

- Licensure for 3 years as an occupational therapist or physical therapist
- 3 years of practice beyond graduation from an accredited OT or PT program
- Minimum of 4,000 hours of Direct Patient Experience in the upper quarter (hand & upper extremity)
- A passing score on the Hand Therapy Certification Examination

II. Purpose

A. **Mission statement:** To provide a community of students interested in hand therapy and enrich entry-level education through the facilitation of extra-curricular and student-driven learning activities.

B. **Vision statement:** To assist in the preparation of students interested in pursuing a career in hand therapy through scholarly pursuit, hands-on activities, and peer networking.

C. Objectives:

1. Engage in scholarly discussion and enrich understanding of complex hand therapy topics through analysis of peer-reviewed scientific publications
2. Provide hands-on activities that engage students in active learning of skills and topics related to hand therapy
3. Promote interaction and relationships with national stakeholders through professional service and scientific inquiry
4. Develop student knowledge to facilitate success in level II fieldwork and entry-level practice.

III. Officers and Executive Board

A. The Student Hand Therapy Club board shall consist of the Student Hand Therapy Club officers and one (1) faculty advisor

B. Officers will be elected to serve a *12-month* term

1. All elections shall occur during the last meeting during the spring semester
2. A simple majority vote is required to assume elected position
 - i. In the event of a vacancy, the President may appoint a club member in good standing to hold the position on an interim basis
 - ii. Interim officers hold the position until the end of the service term or until there is a party interested in filling the position. The interim officer has two (2) options in the event of a challenge:
 1. The interim may concede the office to the challenger
 2. A special election with a simple majority vote may be held to fill the office for the remainder of the term

C. The Student Hand Therapy Club Executive Board shall be composed of the following positions:

1. President

- The duties of the President of the Student Hand Therapy Club include:
 - Convene all Student Hand Therapy Club meetings
 - Determine overall direction of Student Hand Therapy Club agenda and initiatives
 - Serve as liaison to the University
 - Lead student recruitment efforts
 - Abstain from voting except when casting deciding votes

2. Vice-President

- The duties of the Vice-President of the Student Hand Therapy Club include:
 - Assume the duties of the President in their absence
 - Aid the President in determining the Student Hand Therapy Club agenda and initiatives
 - Assist in organizing and scheduling club meetings and functions to minimize conflicts
 - Attend all Student Hand Therapy Club meetings and functions

3. Treasurer

- The duties of the Treasurer of the Student Hand Therapy Club include:
 - Prepare and present club financial statements
 - Manage the Student Hand Therapy Club's financial accounts
 - Collect all membership fees and manage proceeds from fundraising efforts
 - Investigate sponsorship opportunities to offset direct costs to the Student Hand Therapy Club for functions

- Attend all Student Hand Therapy Club meetings and functions

4. Secretary

- The duties of the Secretary of the Student Hand Therapy Club include:
 - Maintain a log of minutes for all Student Hand Therapy Club meetings
 - Spearhead organization of all Student Hand Therapy Club functions
 - Maintain a roster of all members in good standing
 - Maintain calendar of events
 - Attend all Student Hand Therapy Club meetings and functions

5. Communications Chair

- The duties of the Communications Chair of the Student Hand Therapy Club include:
 - Maintain social media presence
 - Draft and disseminate all strategic communications within the group and to outside entities
 - Create and distribute marketing materials
 - Oversee photography at club events, obtaining photo releases as needed
 - Attend all Student Hand Therapy Club meetings and functions

6. Faculty Advisor

- The duties of the Faculty Advisor of the Student Hand Therapy Club include:
 - Serving as a liaison between the Student Hand Therapy Club and University stakeholders
 - Provide distant supervision to ensure club activities align with the mission and vision of the University

- Enhance club resources through existing professional network
- Provide guidance on club activities, as needed

D. The Student Hand Therapy Club officers shall meet at least bi-monthly to settle clubs affairs and set meeting agendas.

IV. Amendments

A. All amendments to the Student Hand Therapy Club bylaws shall be adopted following a two-thirds majority affirmative vote from the Student Hand Therapy Club officers

B. Proposed amendments shall be presented to Student Hand Therapy Club members in good standing with at least one meeting open for discussion prior to a vote by officers

V. Membership

A. Membership is open to students currently enrolled in the University's Occupational Therapy program. However, club membership is reserved for those students with a strong professional interest in pursuing a career in hand therapy to maintain the integrity of the club's focus on upper extremity rehabilitation.

B. Members are expected to attend meetings prepared to engage in scholarly discussion on topics including, but not limited to, research, basic anatomy and physiology, treatment approaches, evidence-based interventions, hands-on clinical skills, and professional engagement.

- C. Members are always expected to maintain the ethical standards of the occupational therapy and hand therapy professions.
- D. Members must maintain good standing with the University to participate in leadership roles and Student Hand Therapy Club functions.
- E. Members are expected to attend all club meetings and functions
- F. All officers and members are required to pay membership fees in order to attend club meetings and participate in club functions
 - 1. Fees shall be assessed on an annual or semester basis
 - i. If paying for a year membership, the fee (\$25.00) shall be paid during the first month of the new academic year
 - ii. If paying for a semester membership, the fee (\$15.00) shall be paid during the first month of each new semester

VI. Meetings

- A. The Student Hand Therapy Club will hold a meeting each month during the academic session unless otherwise decided by club members and officers.
- B. The club may adopt various meeting formats; however, meetings should promote scholarly discussion of hand therapy topics as defined by the American Occupational Therapy

Association, American Society of Hand Therapists, and the Hand Therapy Certification Commission.

- C. Special meetings may be scheduled as needed to accommodate the schedules of guests or engage in activities with a predetermined schedule.

References

ASHT (n.d. 2017). Retrieved from <https://www.asht.org/about/what-we-do>

Sample meeting agenda

Location: Room 209

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| 4:00-4:10 | greetings, attendance, open floor for suggestions, calls for voting |
| 4:10-4:30 | article discussion |
| 4:30-4:55 | hands-on activities, skill development |
| 4:55-5:00 | closing statements, clean-up |

Student Hand Therapy Club

Officer Nominations Form

President

Vice-President

Treasurer

Secretary

Communications Chair

Additional Resources

American Society of Hand Therapists (<https://www.asht.org/>)

American Occupational Therapy Association (<https://www.aota.org/>)

American Physical Therapy Association (<https://www.apta.org/>)

Hand Therapy Certification Commission (<https://www.htcc.org/>)

American Hand Therapy Foundation (<https://www.ahtf.org/>)

Hand Rehabilitation Foundation (<https://handfoundation.org/>)

American Society for Surgery of the Hand (<http://www.assh.com/>)

Journal of Hand Therapy (<https://www.jhandtherapy.org/>)

Eaton Hand (<http://www.eatonhand.com/>)

Ortho Bullets (<https://www.orthobullets.com/>)