



CTRS® Educator Spotlight



Kris Johnson, MS, CTRS Aurora University

National Council for Therapeutic Recreation Certification® (NCTRC®) is proud to spotlight Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialists. Go to [NCTRC.org](https://www.nctrc.org) to learn more about NCTRC and the CTRS credential.

Kris has been a CTRS for 37 years and currently teaches as an Associate Professor of Therapeutic Recreation and is the Chair of Therapeutic Recreation and Neurodiversity Studies at Aurora University. Read Kris' CTRS story below.

I have been employed at Aurora University in Aurora, Illinois, for the past 23 years. It has a large population of first-generation college students and is also recognized as a Hispanic-Serving Institution. One of my greatest joys has been meeting students where they are academically and developmentally and mentoring them through their journey as they grow and develop into outstanding young professionals.

I have had the privilege of creating an engaging therapeutic recreation curriculum aligned with NCTRC's Job Task Analysis. At Aurora University, each therapeutic recreation class had a significant experiential learning component that helps students connect theory to practice while enhancing their resumes. They have numerous opportunities to assess, plan, implement, and evaluate programs and special events for senior citizens with dementia, individuals with developmental disabilities, and children at therapeutic day schools in the area, using a variety of therapeutic modalities. These have included adaptive sports, music, art, dance, and animal-assisted therapy.

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Kris Johnson (*continued*)

Embedded in this experiential curriculum design are opportunities for students to develop “habits of the heart” as students learn how to become “weavers” - those who knit communities together through inclusive programming. Students find purpose in compassion, and their classrooms become think tanks, bursting with social energy, creativity, and collaboration.

In addition to curriculum design, I love actively mentoring students throughout their journey toward certification. I provide guidance on meeting NCTRC's eligibility criteria, including academic coursework and internship requirements, and offer support in navigating the certification process. Whether it involves reviewing exam preparation materials, having NCTRC Credentialing Specialists lead webinars during classes, or sharing test-taking strategies, I aim to empower students to approach the CTRS exam with rigor and confidence.

Lastly, to help students gain the knowledge, skill, and ability to be successful recreational therapists, I recently implemented a series of popular micro-credentials - a short, focused learning experience that validates specific skills or knowledge, used to demonstrate competency in a particular area. These are either embedded in existing classes or offered as separate one-credit classes. These include Therapeutic Recreation and Veteran Culture, Mental Health First Aid, the Autism Exercise Specialist Certificate, and a Behavior Management 101 Certificate.

Overall, being an Associate Professor of Therapeutic Recreation at Aurora University has been my true vocation, where my joys and talents meet some of our society's greatest needs. Seeing the ripple effect that happens when I help students become change-agents, as a CTRS, and better the lives of individuals with disabilities, is more of what the world needs right now. I am honored to be a part of their journey.