# IV. A. OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS

## CONTINUING ACCREDITATION

Once awarded, accreditation continues until a reevaluation results in its reaffirmation or until it is withdrawn at the request of the institution or by the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE®) for cause. (See ACOTE Policy IV.A.3. Accreditation Actions.) Established occupational therapy educational programs are reevaluated on a 5-, 7-, or 10-year cycle. The program director is notified 1 year in advance of the on-site year and is provided with the necessary information and links to complete the Report of Self-Study. The specific dates for the visit are established in collaboration with the program director after the selection of the visiting team.

At the time of ACOTE action on the Report of On-Site Evaluation, ACOTE awards an accreditation period based on the following criteria:

- 5-year review cycles are given to programs that are reaccredited, but raise significant concerns as determined by ACOTE.
- 7-year review cycles are the standard number of years for reaccreditation.
- 10-year review cycles are granted to those programs that have no areas of noncompliance and have demonstrated exceptional educational quality.

Programs cited with no more than two areas of noncompliance that are given a 7-year accreditation term may be granted an extension to a 10-year term by ACOTE. This decision will be based on ACOTE's review of the Plan of Correction or Progress Report submitted by the program and a determination that the program has fully resolved the cited areas of noncompliance. ACOTE will also consider any pre-existing areas of noncompliance or program changes that have occurred subsequent to the on-site evaluation that affect or are likely to affect the program's full compliance with the Standards. This extension option is only available within 1 year of ACOTE's accreditation action on the program's Report of On-Site Evaluation.

## THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS

At the heart of the continuing accreditation process is the self-study. The U.S. Department of Education (USDE) mandates inclusion of self-study as a requirement for accreditation. Self-study in this context refers to a formal process during which an educational program critically examines its structure and substance, judges the program's overall effectiveness relative to its mission and success with respect to student achievement, identifies specific strengths and weaknesses, and indicates a plan for necessary modifications and improvements. The process should flow naturally out of the ongoing program evaluation. It should include a consideration of external factors influencing educational directions as well as an assessment of the extent to which the program is in compliance with established accreditation standards.

ACOTE does not specify details regarding how the self-study process is to be conducted. However, it does have the following expectations:

- The self-study process precedes the preparation of the report. Although the requirements of the final report should be considered in the plan for the study, the initial focus should be on the evaluative process, not on the document.

- The self-study process should be comprehensive, examining in sufficient detail all aspects of the program so that eventual assessment of compliance with the *Accreditation Standards for a Doctoral-Degree-Level Educational Program for the Occupational Therapist*, *Accreditation Standards for a Master's-Degree-Level Educational Program for the Occupational Therapist*, or *Accreditation Standards for an Associate-Degree-Level Educational Program for the Occupational Therapy Assistant* can be accomplished. Regardless of the delivery model of the educational program (i.e., consortium, distance education, etc.), compliance with the Standards must be documented.

- The self-study process begins with a well-thought-out plan that includes

  - objectives,
  - identification of resources,
  - individuals to be involved and delegation of responsibilities,
  - timeline, and
  - reporting mechanisms.

  The plan should address how existing information from ongoing evaluation will be included.

- The self-study process is <u>evaluative</u> rather than <u>descriptive</u>. It should include comments, suggestions, and recommendations on program change, particularly the resolution of current problems or weaknesses that are cited in the Report of Self-Study, and should offer predictions or plans for future change.

- The self-study process involves the entire faculty of the program. Although it is recognized that a small committee or a single individual is generally assigned responsibility for overseeing the process and the preparation of the report, it is expected that the process include input from <u>all</u> faculty and from administration, students, graduates, and fieldwork educators.

Further guidelines are provided in the *Guide to the Report of Self-Study*, available from the AOTA Accreditation Department.

It is the self-study process from which many of the benefits of accreditation for the program derive. The report should be perceived not as the end or goal, but as the means of communicating the results of the self-study to ACOTE.