IV. C. CLASSIFICATION OF ACCREDITATION CATEGORIES

PREACCREDITATION CATEGORIES

Applicant Program
To initiate the accreditation process for a new occupational therapy or occupational therapy assistant program, a Letter of Intent and check payable to AOTA for a non-refundable deposit of $500 must be submitted to the Director, Accreditation Department, AOTA, prior to admission of the first class of students. Once an acceptable Letter of Intent and deposit are received, the program is classified as an Applicant Program and will be required to submit a Candidacy Application.

Candidate Program
If ACOTE determines that the Candidacy Application documents that the program meets the requirements for Candidacy Status and indicates the program's potential to achieve compliance with the Standards, the action will be to grant Candidacy Status. As soon as the institutional officials receive written notification from ACOTE that the program has been granted Candidacy Status, students may be admitted into the program according to the approved timeline. The program may then move on to the second step, the preaccreditation review. AOTA will officially list the program as having Candidacy Status. An initial on-site evaluation will be conducted before an accreditation decision is made. (See ACOTE Policy III.A.1. Step One: The Application Review).

ACCREDITATION CATEGORIES

The following accreditation categories are used by the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE®), based on evaluation of the extent to which an educational program complies with the *ACOTE Accreditation Standards for a Doctoral-Degree-Level Educational Program for the Occupational Therapist, a Master's-Degree-Level Educational Program for the Occupational Therapist, or an Associate-Degree-Level Educational Program for the Occupational Therapy Assistant.*

A list of accredited programs is available on AOTA's Web site (www.aota.org) and in the archival issue of the *American Journal of Occupational Therapy.* In addition, all final accreditation actions will be posted on the Accreditation section of AOTA's Web site (www.acoteonline.org) and published in *OT Practice,* the official bimonthly publication of AOTA.

The sponsoring institution of a program may withdraw the Application for Accreditation at any time prior to final action by ACOTE.

ACCREDITATION

Initial accreditation is granted to a program by action of ACOTE prior to the graduation of the first class. Continuing accreditation is granted to a fully operational program by action of ACOTE. A self-study and an on-site evaluation are integral parts of both the evaluation for initial accreditation and continuing accreditation. The accreditation review process confirms that the program is in substantial compliance with the *ACOTE Accreditation Standards for a Doctoral-Degree-Level Educational Program for the Occupational Therapist, a Master's-Degree-Level Educational Program for the Occupational Therapist, or an Associate-Degree-Level Educational Program for the Occupational Therapy Assistant.*

A program in **substantial compliance** with the Standards may be in noncompliance in one or more specific Standards that are believed to be readily correctable. Based on the action of ACOTE, the sponsoring institution is provided with a clear statement of each area of noncompliance. On or before the specified due date, the institution must submit to ACOTE a plan for correcting the indicated area(s) of noncompliance. This plan must include a

schedule for correcting areas of noncompliance within a specified period of time that may not exceed the United States Department of Education (USDE) criteria:

— 12 months if the program is less than 1 year in length;
— 18 months if the program is at least 1 year in length, but less than 2 years in length; or
— 2 years if the program is at least 2 years in length.

ACOTE will assess the adequacy of the plan to return the program to full compliance with the Standards and will require Progress Reports documenting how each area of noncompliance has been or is being resolved. If ACOTE determines that the program has not returned to compliance with the Standards within the specified period of time (depending on program length), it will change the program's status to Accreditation Withdrawn—Involuntary unless the period for achieving compliance is extended for good cause. The notification of accreditation letter will inform the institution of the status awarded to the educational program.

In making a determination to grant an extension of the period for achieving compliance for good cause, ACOTE will review the rationale for the request and assess whether the program has met the following criteria:

1. The program has submitted an appropriate plan for achieving compliance within a reasonable time frame.
2. The program has provided a detailed timeline for completion of the plan.
3. The program has provided evidence that the plan has been implemented according to the established timeline.
4. The program has provided reasonable assurance that the program will achieve compliance as stated in the plan.

ACOTE may also grant an extension of the period for achieving compliance to allow a fact-finding visit or on-site evaluation to be conducted prior to taking action to withdraw accreditation. Extensions of the period of time for achieving compliance are usually limited to a maximum of 2 additional years.

PROBATIONARY ACCREDITATION

A program's status may be changed to Probationary Accreditation for any of the following reasons:

1. The areas of noncompliance are so serious that the capability of the program to provide acceptable educational experiences for the students is threatened. (If the cited areas of noncompliance are not in dispute, ACOTE may recommend Probationary Accreditation without conducting an on-site evaluation. However, most awards of Probationary Accreditation in this category are based on evidence obtained during an on-site evaluation or fact-finding visit.)
2. The program has failed to document significant progress toward compliance with one or more cited areas of noncompliance.
3. The program is in jeopardy of having its accreditation status withdrawn due to the mandated time limit for carrying areas of noncompliance.
4. The program fails to comply with administrative requirements. (See Administrative Requirements Policy.)

Programs cited with area(s) of noncompliance are notified in writing that all area(s) must be corrected within a specified period of time that may not exceed the United States Department of Education (USDE) criteria:

— 12 months if the program is less than 1 year in length;
— 18 months if the program is at least 1 year in length, but less than 2 years in length; or
— 2 years if the program is at least 2 years in length.

Programs are required to report on progress toward correcting cited areas of noncompliance at approximate 4-month intervals throughout the year. Programs are reminded of the time limit for correcting cited areas at regular intervals, depending upon the program's specific time limit for correction. If the area(s) of noncompliance are not corrected approximately 8 months prior to the end of the time limit, the institution is notified that the program is at risk of being placed on Probationary Accreditation if the cited area(s) are not corrected in the next Progress Report. At the same time, the program is notified of the procedure for requesting an extension for good cause.

If the area(s) of noncompliance are not corrected in the next Progress Report (reviewed by ACOTE approximately 4 months prior to the end of the time limit), and the program has NOT been granted an extension for good cause, the program status may be changed to Probationary Accreditation.

Probationary Accreditation is an accreditation category. During a period of Probationary Accreditation, programs are recognized and listed as being accredited. Probationary Accreditation is usually limited to 1 year. However, extensions may be granted by ACOTE for good cause. ***Programs receiving ACOTE's notification of a change of status to Probationary Accreditation must notify currently enrolled students and those seeking admission that the program has been placed on probation*.**

The appropriate official is provided with a clear statement of each area of noncompliance contributing to the placement of the program on Probationary Accreditation. This official is also notified of the due date for the required Plan of Correction. ACOTE will assess the adequacy of the plan to return the program to substantial compliance with the Standards within the specified period of time and will require Progress Reports documenting how each area of noncompliance has been or is being resolved. Probationary status may be removed when the program has demonstrated that it is in ***substantial compliance*** with the Standards:

— Because the areas of noncompliance are resolved, or
— Because the program has documented significant progress toward compliance with the cited areas of noncompliance within the allowed time period.

Failure to come into substantial compliance with the Standards within the allowed time period will result in a change of status to Accreditation Withdrawn.

ADMINISTRATIVE REQUIREMENTS POLICY

The sponsoring institution and the accredited program must comply with the following administrative requirements for maintaining accreditation as required by ACOTE Standard A.1.5. The sponsoring institution or program must

1. Inform ACOTE of the transfer of program sponsorship or change of the institution's name within 30 days of the transfer or change.

2. Inform ACOTE within 30 days of the date of notification of any adverse accreditation action taken to change the sponsoring institution's accreditation status to probation or withdrawal of accreditation.

3. Submit a Letter of Intent to add or change a program degree level at least 1 year prior to the planned admission of students into that level.

4. Inform ACOTE within 30 days of the resignation of the program director or appointment of a new or interim program director.

5. Pay accreditation fees within 90 days of the invoice date.

6. Submit a Report of Self-Study and other required reports (e.g., Annual Report, Interim Report, Plan of Correction, Progress Report) within the period of time designated by ACOTE. All reports must be complete and contain all requested information.

7. Agree to a site visit date before the end of the period for which accreditation was previously awarded.

8. Demonstrate honesty and integrity in all interactions with ACOTE.

9. Comply with the current requirements of all ACOTE policies.

When an accredited program has failed to satisfy the requirements identified above, the program may be cited with an area of noncompliance pertaining to Standard A.1.5 and placed on Probationary Accreditation at the next ACOTE meeting.

Continued failure to meet the administrative requirements for maintaining accreditation may result in a recommendation for involuntary withdrawal of accreditation.

INACTIVE STATUS

Inactive status is a special status applied only to programs that are not currently enrolling new students and do not plan to enroll new students in the future. Programs that continue to enroll students, even when the frequency of admissions is reduced (e.g., from once a year to every other year), do not need to request that the program be placed on inactive status.

The status "inactive" does not replace any other current accreditation status. The designation follows the regular accreditation status (e.g., Accreditation—Inactive or Probationary Accreditation—Inactive). Students graduating from a program with Accreditation—Inactive or Probationary Accreditation—Inactive status are considered graduates of an accredited program. A program may remain on inactive status for a maximum of 3 years dependent upon the accreditation term remaining. During that time, programs with a status of Accreditation—Inactive or Probationary Accreditation—Inactive remain responsible for submission of Annual and Inactive Status Reports to the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE®) and must pay the annual accreditation fee. A program may request Inactive Status only once within the assigned accreditation term (e.g., 5, 7, or 10 years). (See ACOTE Policy VI.D. Inactive Status).

NON-ACCREDITATION CATEGORIES

The following non-accreditation categories are used by the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE®) when a program is not in substantial compliance with the *ACOTE Accreditation Standards for a Doctoral-Degree-Level Educational Program for the Occupational Therapist, a Master's-Degree-Level Educational Program for the Occupational Therapist, or an Associate-Degree-Level Educational Program for the Occupational Therapy Assistant.*

ACCREDITATION WITHHELD

A program seeking initial accreditation may have accreditation withheld if the accreditation review process confirms that the program is not in substantial compliance with the Standards that are vital to the educational program. The program is expected to assist any students who have not yet completed their degrees to find reasonable opportunities to complete their education.

The appropriate official is provided with a clear statement of each area of noncompliance and is informed that a new application for accreditation may be made whenever the program is believed to be in substantial compliance with the Standards. A Letter of Intent must be filed and the initial accreditation process repeated. Initial fees are reassessed.

Opportunity for Withdrawal of Application

The institution sponsoring a program may withdraw the Application for Initial Accreditation at any time prior to final action by ACOTE. Programs selecting this option relinquish the opportunity to appeal that is provided programs receiving a status of Accreditation Withheld.

Opportunity for Appeal

The letter from ACOTE notifying the appropriate official that the program has had accreditation withheld for failure to be in substantial compliance with the Standards indicates that the institution may appeal the decision. (See ACOTE Policy IV.D. Appeals Process).

ACCREDITATION WITHDRAWN

1. **ACCREDITATION WITHDRAWN—VOLUNTARY**
(At the request of the sponsoring institution.)

The appropriate official of a program may at any time inform ACOTE in writing that the program is or will be discontinued by a given date or wishes to have accreditation withdrawn. If there are any remaining students in the program, this notification must include a teach-out plan that ensures equitable treatment of the remaining students. The plan must specify:

- the number of students remaining in the program and their status in the program;
- a provision for notification to the students of any additional costs;
- resources, including faculty, for ensuring a quality education for the remaining students in the program; and
- how the planned closure will be disclosed to students in the program as well as to prospective applicants.

The official is informed that the sponsoring institution must apply for accreditation as a new applicant should it wish to resume sponsorship of an accredited program.

2. **ACCREDITATION WITHDRAWN—INVOLUNTARY**
(For failure to be in substantial compliance with the Standards or with administrative requirements.)

Accreditation may be involuntarily withdrawn from a program with Probationary Accreditation if the accreditation review process confirms that the program has not come into substantial compliance with the Standards within the period of time mandated by USDE.

Accreditation may also be involuntarily withdrawn if the program has not complied with the administrative requirements for maintaining accreditation within a reasonable period of time, usually no longer than 1 year.

The appropriate official is provided with a clear statement of each area of noncompliance and is informed that the sponsoring institution may apply for accreditation as a new applicant whenever the program is believed to be in compliance with the Standards and with the administrative requirements for maintaining accreditation.

The program is expected to assist any students who have not yet completed their degrees to find reasonable opportunities to complete their education.

Opportunity for Withdrawal of Application

The institution sponsoring a program may withdraw the Application for Continuing Accreditation at any time prior to ACOTE action. Programs selecting this option relinquish the opportunity to appeal that is provided programs receiving a status of Accreditation Withdrawn—Involuntary.

Opportunity for Appeal

The letter from ACOTE notifying the appropriate officials that the program has received Accreditation Withdrawn—Involuntary status indicates that the institution may appeal the decision. (See ACOTE Policy IV.D. Appeals Process).

MOVING FROM ONE ACCREDITATION CATEGORY TO ANOTHER

FROM INITIAL OR CONTINUING ACCREDITATION

If the accreditation review process confirms that a program is in substantial compliance with the Standards and with administrative requirements, the program is awarded continuing accreditation. If the program is not in compliance with the Standards and requirements, ACOTE may grant Probationary Accreditation or Accreditation Withdrawn.

In unusual circumstances, such as evidence of critical areas of noncompliance that appear to be irremediable within a reasonable length of time, or a documented threat to the welfare of current and potential students, ACOTE may withdraw accreditation without first providing a period of probation.

Programs from which accreditation is involuntarily withdrawn without a probationary period are ensured due process, as described in ACOTE Policy IV.D. Appeals Process.

FROM PROBATIONARY ACCREDITATION

If the accreditation review process confirms that a program has corrected the identified areas of noncompliance leading to probation within a reasonable period of time and is in substantial compliance with the Standards and with administrative requirements, the program is awarded continuing accreditation. If the identified areas of noncompliance are not corrected within a reasonable period of time (usually no more than 1 year), ACOTE may grant an extension of Probationary Accreditation or change the program's status to Accreditation Withdrawn.

PUBLIC DISCLOSURE OF PROBATIONARY ACCREDITATION OR FINAL ADVERSE ACTIONS

Final decisions to place a program on Probationary Accreditation, withhold accreditation, or withdraw accreditation will be publicly disclosed via a summary of ACOTE actions on the AOTA Web site, in an *OT Practice* article, and in response to written or verbal inquiries. This summary will include the following information

1. The award of accreditation or reaccreditation of a program.
2. Final decisions to withhold or withdraw accreditation of a program and any findings made in connection with the action taken, together with the official comments of the affected institution.
3. Any other adverse action taken with respect to a program or placement of a program on Probationary Accreditation.

(See ACOTE Policy VI.B. Policy on Confidentiality and Disclosure).