

ACCREDITATION PROCESS FOR NEW PROGRAMS

III. A. 1. STEP ONE: THE APPLICATION REVIEW

LETTER OF INTENT

To initiate the accreditation process, a Letter of Intent and check payable to AOTA for a non-refundable deposit of \$500 (applied toward the application fee) must be submitted to the Director, Accreditation Department, AOTA, prior to admission of the first class of students. The deadline for receipt of the Letter of Intent and deposit is determined by the planned student enrollment date as follows:

Letter of Intent and deposit must be received NO LATER THAN 5:00 PM EASTERN TIME on:

December 1 (prior to fall start)
April 1 (prior to winter start)

ACOTE will accept and review a maximum of 17 Applications for Developing Program Status during a given cycle. The acceptance of Applications for Developing Program Status will be based on the receipt date of the Letter of Intent. Letters of Intent received after the 17-program cap is reached will be subject to the next available review cycle and planned student admission must be delayed accordingly.

It is suggested that the Letter of Intent be submitted well in advance of the deadline to increase the chances of entering the desired review cycle and to allow adequate time to prepare the Application for Developing Program Status. It is the responsibility of the program seeking Applicant Status to ensure that the Letter of Intent and deposit are received by AOTA prior to 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time of the deadline date. All dates refer to business days. Therefore, if a deadline falls on a weekend or national holiday, the next business day becomes the effective due date for receipt of materials.

The Letter of Intent must be signed by 1) the chief executive officer of the sponsoring institution and 2) the occupational therapy program director **AND/OR** dean overseeing the proposed program. (Although signature of the occupational therapy program director is not required on the Letter of Intent, it is **strongly** recommended that the program director be hired in sufficient time to be instrumental in preparing the Application for Developing Program Status.) The Letter of Intent must:

- Declare the intention of the institution to develop and seek accreditation for the occupational therapy or occupational therapy assistant educational program.
- Request entry into the first step of the accreditation process for new programs (the Application Review).
- State that the institution agrees not to admit students into the occupational therapy or occupational therapy assistant program until Developing Program Status has been obtained from the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE®).
- Indicate:
 - The level of the program (i.e., associate degree, professional master's degree, or professional doctoral degree).
 - The month and year the first class is projected to enter the program (must be after Developing Program Status is awarded).
 - The months and year the first class is projected to begin Level II fieldwork.

- The month and year the first class is projected to graduate.
- The year the first graduates are projected to sit for the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy (NBCOT) certification examination.
- Be accompanied by a Letter of Intent Data Form and a check payable to AOTA for a non-refundable deposit of \$500 (which is applied toward the Application Fee).

Please note that the initial accreditation process takes approximately 1 to 2 years to complete and the first class schedule may need to be adjusted to allow completion of the initial accreditation process prior to graduation.

The Letter of Intent should be addressed to:

Director, Accreditation Department
 American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc.
 4720 Montgomery Lane, Suite 200
 PO Box 31220
 Bethesda, Maryland 20824-1220

APPLICATION FOR DEVELOPING PROGRAM STATUS

Upon receipt of the Letter of Intent and deposit, AOTA Accreditation Department staff will provide the program with the Application for Developing Program Status and a preliminary timeline for the accreditation process. The deadline for submission of the Application for Developing Program Status is determined by the planned student enrollment date as follows:

Application for Developing Program Status and Application Fee must be received NO LATER THAN 5:00 PM EASTERN TIME on:

- January 15 (prior to fall start)
- May 15 (prior to winter start)

The Application for Developing Program Status must be signed by the occupational therapy program director, the dean overseeing the proposed program, and the chief executive officer of the sponsoring institution. It must be accompanied by a check in payment of the balance of the Application Fee. Application materials or fees received after the deadline will result in both the materials and payment being returned to the program. The program may resubmit on the next available Application due date.

REQUIREMENTS FOR DEVELOPING PROGRAM STATUS

The program must provide all the requested information and meet the requirements of the Application for Developing Program Status. In addition, the occupational therapy educational program must:

1. Be a new program that has been granted authorization through the governance processes of the parent institution to offer the credential for which Developing Program Status is sought.
2. Agree, as stated in the Letter of Intent, not to admit students to the occupational therapy or occupational therapy assistant program until Developing Program Status has been obtained.
3. Agree to inform students who apply to or plan to enroll in the program that it is not yet accredited and convey the implications of nonaccreditation for program graduates.

The program must describe the specific mechanisms it will use to ensure that prospective students and other relevant parties are fully and accurately informed of the program's accreditation status and its effect on

graduates' eligibility for the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy certification examination and state licensure.

4. Ensure that the balance of the application fee accompanies the Application for Developing Program Status and is received on or before the due date. The program will not be reviewed for Developing Program Status if payment is not received by the AOTA Accreditation Department by close of business (5:00 p.m. Eastern Time) on the due date.
5. Have a qualified program director hired and on staff throughout the initial accreditation process for new programs. The program must agree to delay the program's progression to the next step in the development process until the accreditation requirement of having a qualified program director hired and on staff is met. Specifically, students may not begin occupational therapy coursework in a program having Developing Program Status unless there is a qualified occupational therapy program director on staff.

FEES

An application fee must accompany the Application for Developing Program Status. Information regarding current fees is located in ACOTE Accreditation Manual Section V.A. and appears in the ACOTE Accreditation section of AOTA's Web site (www.acoteonline.org). The Application for Developing Program Status and balance of the application fee must be received by AOTA by the close of business (5:00 p.m. Eastern Time) on the due date (or next business day if the due date falls on a weekend or holiday).

APPLICATION REVIEW

Upon receipt, the Application for Developing Program Status will be reviewed by a review team. The program director may be requested to provide additional written information to the review team to clarify or enhance submitted materials. The reviewers will submit a report at the next ACOTE meeting to recommend that ACOTE grant, defer action on, or deny Developing Program Status.

If the Application documents that the program meets the requirements for Developing Program Status and indicates the program's potential to achieve compliance with the Standards, the action will be to grant Developing Program Status. As soon as the institutional officials receive written notification from ACOTE that the program has been granted Developing Program Status, they may admit students into the program according to the approved timeline and move on to the second step, which is the initial review. AOTA will officially list the program as having Developing Program Status.

The program will be denied Developing Program Status if 1) the program does not meet the requirements for Developing Program Status, or 2) the Application does not indicate the program's potential to achieve compliance with the Standards. If Developing Program Status is denied, the program will not be able to admit students and will not be eligible to proceed to the initial review step. The program may reapply for Developing Program Status by submitting a new Letter of Intent and starting the initial accreditation process again. The deadline for receipt of the Letter of Intent is determined by the new planned student enrollment date. Applicable fees would be assessed. Clearly delineated procedures for programs wishing to appeal an action of Denial of Developing Program Status are described in ACOTE Accreditation Manual Section IV.D.

The program's application will be deferred if the information received from the applicant is incomplete and/or insufficient for evaluation. Supplementary information is requested for consideration at a subsequent ACOTE meeting. The program receives, along with the notification of deferral, a list of concerns identified by ACOTE in reaching their decision and a due date for submission of supplementary information that addresses the concerns. The supplementary information is reviewed at the next meeting of ACOTE, at which time a decision will be made to either grant or deny the Developing Program Status. A program may have action on the Application for Developing Program Status deferred only once.

TERM OF DEVELOPING PROGRAM STATUS

A program receiving Developing Program Status must admit students to the program within 2 years of the enrollment date indicated in the Letter of Intent or reapply for Developing Program Status. Developing Program Status cannot be renewed or extended; however, programs may reapply for Developing Program Status. Applicable fees would be assessed. A change in the timeline for initial accreditation must be requested in writing to the AOTA Accreditation Department.