

ACCREDITATION PROCESS FOR NEW PROGRAMS

III. A. OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS

DEVELOPING A NEW PROGRAM

Information and guidance regarding the accreditation process and accreditation standards are available from the staff of the AOTA Accreditation Department. Any questions regarding the accreditation standards or policies and procedures described in the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE®) Accreditation Manual should be referred to that office. Formal contact with the AOTA Accreditation Department would occur when the institution is ready to apply for accreditation for the new program (prior to the admission of the first class of students). **Note that 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.**

ACCREDITATION PROCESS FOR NEW PROGRAMS

To ensure commitment to the development of quality programs and to review the potential viability of an applicant occupational therapy educational program prior to the admission of the first class of students, all new programs seeking accreditation by ACOTE are required to apply for Developing Program Status as the first step in the three-step accreditation process for new programs.

The following are the three steps of the accreditation process for new programs.

- **STEP 1: APPLICATION REVIEW**

For new programs, the process begins with submission of the Application for Developing Program Status. Upon review of that Application, ACOTE grants, defers action on, or denies Developing Program Status. Although the designation “Developing Program Status” is not a guarantee of accreditation, it does indicate that the resource allocation and plan for development of the proposed program appear to demonstrate the ability to meet the ACOTE 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 Educational Program for the Occupational Therapy Assistant if fully implemented as planned. Developing Program Status **must** be granted before students may be admitted or notified of admission to the program and is required in order for the program to proceed to Step 2.

- **STEP 2: INITIAL REVIEW**

If Developing Program Status is granted, the program may admit its first class of students and proceed to the second step of the process, the initial review. In this step, the program assesses its compliance with the ACOTE Standards and submits an initial Report of Self-Study. Upon review of this report, ACOTE grants, defers action on, or denies a Letter of Review. The granting of a Letter of Review indicates that on the basis of the paper review of the submitted materials, ACOTE has determined that the program is likely to meet the applicable ACOTE Standards if fully implemented in accordance with its plans. The granting of a Letter of Review is **not** a guarantee of accreditation status.

- **STEP 3: THE INITIAL ON-SITE EVALUATION**

The third step of the process is an initial on-site evaluation conducted by a two-member team. The team prepares a Report of On-Site Evaluation, upon which ACOTE bases its decision to either grant or withhold accreditation.

OVERVIEW OF TIMELINE DEADLINES AND PROGRAM STARTING DATES
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Because graduation from an accredited educational program is a requirement of eligibility for certification by the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy and for licensure in most states, every effort is made to assure that the three-step accreditation process is complete prior to the graduation of the first class of students. The following information provides a general framework for the accreditation process for new occupational therapy educational programs in institutions that follow a September through May academic pattern. It is expected that the proposed curriculum will be approved by the appropriate state and institutional bodies before the application review is conducted by ACOTE.

Details regarding each step are provided below. Since the dates listed below may not apply universally, an individual schedule is prepared by AOTA Accreditation Department staff for each program entering the accreditation process.

The deadlines for receipt of the Letter of Intent and Application for Developing Program Status are determined by the planned student enrollment date. Official action by ACOTE is taken at its spring and summer meetings (generally in April and August). **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 Developing Program Status to ensure that the Application is properly signed, accompanied by the balance of the Application Fee, and received by AOTA no later than 5:00 p.m. on the due date, as there are no exceptions for late receipt of the Application and Application Fee. All dates refer to business days. Therefore, if a deadline falls on a weekend or national holiday, the next full work day becomes the effective due date for receipt of materials.

Letter of Intent and Deposit Due NO LATER THAN 5:00 P.M. ON:	December 1 (prior to fall start)	April 1 (prior to winter start)
Completed Application for Developing Program Status and Application Fee Due NO LATER THAN 5:00 P.M. ON:	January 15	May 15
Application Review and ACOTE Action on Developing Program Status (ACOTE meeting)	April	August
<u>IF DEVELOPING PROGRAM STATUS IS AWARDED, THE SCHEDULE WOULD CONTINUE APPROXIMATELY AS FOLLOWS:</u>		
Students May be Notified of Acceptance Into the Program	April	August
First Class May be Enrolled	Fall	Winter (January)
Initial Report of Self-Study Due	December	April
Initial Review (ACOTE Meeting)	April	August
On-Site Evaluation	Fall	Late Winter/Early Spring
Accreditation Action (ACOTE Meeting)	December	April

SAMPLE TIMELINE FOR FALL CLASS ENROLLMENT

The following example is a minimal timeline in anticipation of a fall class enrollment.

- **ON OR BEFORE DECEMBER 1**

A Letter of Intent and check for a non-refundable deposit of \$500 (applied toward the Application Fee) must be submitted to the Director, Accreditation Department, AOTA. The deadline for receipt of this letter and deposit is 5:00 p.m. on December 1 for an anticipated fall class start. Programs are strongly encouraged to submit the Letter of Intent before the deadline to allow adequate time to complete preparation of the Application for Developing Program Status due January 15. This letter must be signed by (1) the chief executive officer of the sponsoring institution and (2) the program director **AND/OR** the dean overseeing the proposed program. The Letter of Intent: (1) declares the intention of the institution to develop and seek accreditation for the occupational therapy or occupational therapy assistant program; (2) requests entry into the first step of the accreditation process for new programs; (3) provides information regarding the type and timelines of the proposed program; and (4) states that the institution agrees not to admit students until Developing Program Status has been obtained. (See “Step One: The Application Review” for specific requirements for the Letter of Intent).

Note that the program must allow sufficient time in its timeline for development to permit submission of the initial Report of Self-Study to occur after students have completed some coursework in the occupational therapy or occupational therapy assistant curriculum component.

- **JANUARY**

The Application for Developing Program Status and check for the balance of the Application Fee must be received no later than 5:00 p.m. on January 15. The Application must be signed by the chief executive officer of the sponsoring institution, the dean overseeing the proposed program, **and the occupational therapy program director**.

Note: A program director meeting ACOTE requirements must be hired by the institution at the time the Application for Developing Program Status is submitted and must be present throughout the time the program is engaged in the initial accreditation process, including the start of the first class of students, the initial review, and the initial on-site evaluation. If the program does not have a qualified program director during the initial accreditation process for new programs, the program must agree to delay the program progression to the next step in the program development process until the accreditation requirement of having a qualified program director hired and on staff can be 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. The accreditation process shall not proceed to the initial on-site evaluation unless there is a qualified occupational therapy program director on staff.

The Application for Developing Program Status is received by AOTA Accreditation Department staff and forwarded to the designated reviewers. The reviewers assess all materials submitted and present recommendations to ACOTE for consideration at its next scheduled meeting.

- **APRIL**

At the ACOTE meeting, a subcommittee examines the findings of the application review team and prepares a motion regarding action on Developing Program Status and a Report of Application Review. After discussion, ACOTE takes action to grant, defer action on, or deny Developing Program Status.

A statement of the action taken by ACOTE is forwarded to the chief executive officer of the sponsoring institution, with a copy to the dean and program director. A Report of Application Review that lists the strengths of the program and details the concerns of ACOTE accompanies the letter. If Developing Program Status has been granted, AOTA Accreditation Department staff confirm the timeline for the initial review process including a submission date for the initial Report of Self-Study. If action on a Developing Program Status is deferred, 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.

- **DECEMBER**

The program director forwards copies of the initial Report of Self-Study to the assigned reviewers and to AOTA Accreditation Department staff. The initial review team reviews all materials submitted and presents recommendations to ACOTE for consideration at its next scheduled meeting.

- **APRIL**

At the ACOTE meeting, a subcommittee examines the findings of the initial review team and prepares a motion regarding action on a Letter of Review and a Report of Initial Review. ACOTE then takes action to grant, defer action on, or deny a Letter of Review.

Following ACOTE action, a letter is forwarded to the chief executive officer of the sponsoring institution, with a copy to the dean and program director, indicating action taken on the Letter of Review. A Report of Initial Review that lists the strengths of the program and details the concerns of ACOTE accompanies the letter. If a Letter of Review is granted, AOTA Accreditation Department staff arrange with the program director an appropriate date for the required on-site evaluation. If action on a Letter of Review is deferred, 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. If action on a Letter of Review is denied, no further action is taken by ACOTE unless the appropriate institutional official and the program director send a Letter of Intent to proceed with the accreditation process within 30 days of receipt of notification of denial. (If a Letter of Review is deferred or denied, the procedures outlined in ACOTE Accreditation Manual, Section III.A.2., are followed).

- **AUGUST**

In preparation for the on-site evaluation, the program director supplies an update of any information previously provided for initial review. (Details regarding additional materials needed to supplement the initial Report of Self-Study are included in the Report of Initial Review). The program director will be requested to submit updated materials directly to the evaluation team and to the AOTA Accreditation Department at least 2 months prior to the date of the on-site evaluation.

- **OCTOBER**

Two evaluators (members of ACOTE and/or the Roster of Accreditation Evaluators) conduct the 2½-day on-site evaluation. A summary report of the visit is made by the evaluators at the final on-site conference, and institution officials are given a copy of the Evaluators' Report of On-Site Evaluation at that time. To expedite preparation of the report for ACOTE review and action, the program director is requested to submit a copy of the report with any corrections or comments to the AOTA Accreditation Department within 1 week after the on-site evaluation. (Additional response time is available if needed).

- **DECEMBER**

At its meeting, ACOTE reviews the Report of On-Site Evaluation, makes any amendments, and votes on an accreditation status for the program. If accreditation is granted and areas of noncompliance are cited in the official Report of the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education, a due date for the required Plan of Correction is established. The program will receive the letter of notification regarding the action of ACOTE within 4 weeks after the meeting.

INITIAL ACCREDITATION FEES

Fees will be charged for each step of the three-step accreditation process. The Application Fee for review of the Application for Developing Program Status is due as follows:

- A non-refundable deposit of \$500 must be submitted with the Letter of Intent. This deposit is applied toward the application fee.

- The balance of the application fee must be submitted with the Application for Developing Program Status. The initial review fee is due at the time the initial Report of Self-Study is submitted, and the initial on-site evaluation fee is due upon receipt of invoice after the initial on-site evaluation. An annual fee will not be billed until the first full academic year that the program has accreditation status. Information regarding current fees is located in the ACOTE Accreditation Manual, Section V.A., and appears in the ACOTE Accreditation section of AOTA's Web site (www.acoteonline.org).

WITHDRAWAL OF REQUEST FOR INITIAL ACCREDITATION

An institution may withdraw its request for initial accreditation of an occupational therapy educational program at any time prior to final action by ACOTE. The request for withdrawal should be in writing and signed by the program director or dean overseeing the program and the chief executive officer of the sponsoring institution and submitted to ACOTE c/o the AOTA Accreditation Department. If the program wishes to reapply for initial accreditation, applicable fees will be assessed.

INSTITUTIONAL REQUEST FOR A CHANGE IN THE INITIAL ACCREDITATION SCHEDULE

If the institution requires a revision of the schedule developed by the AOTA Accreditation Department based on the Letter of Intent, it is the responsibility of the institution to notify the AOTA Accreditation Department in writing of the request to change the schedule. For example, if the institution needs to place the program development on hold until a program director is hired, a letter notifying the AOTA Accreditation Department must be sent. Later, when the institution has hired a qualified program director and is ready to continue the initial accreditation process, written notification is required (including the proposed new start date and graduation date for the first class of students). A new schedule will be generated.

The previously submitted \$500 application fee deposit will be applied toward the application fee as long as the balance of the application fee is scheduled to be paid within the next fiscal year. For example, a \$500 application fee deposit paid in December 2009 (FY 2009/2010) may be applied toward an application fee due on May 15, 2011 (FY 2010/2011). Otherwise, a new \$500 application fee deposit must be submitted with the written request for a revision to the initial accreditation schedule.