

Student Guide to Planning International Fieldwork

Purpose:

1. Provide information and resources to support U.S. and non-U.S. student efforts in preparing to do fieldwork placements in countries other than where they received their academic preparation.
2. Facilitate the process of preparing for an international fieldwork by introducing issues to consider.
3. Ensure students are prepared for and able to meet expectations of an international fieldwork experience.
4. Promote questions to consider about international fieldwork.

Introduction: Preparing for fieldwork can be a daunting task, especially when doing so for a placement outside of the country where one's academic preparation took place. This document is intended to be an introduction to topics and issues that should be addressed prior to embarking on an international fieldwork. Addressing the issues raised in this document is only one aspect of preparation for successful international fieldwork. It is recommended that the accompanying documents and guides be reviewed as well.

Items to consider: For OT students prepared in the U.S. and doing fieldwork in another country:

1. Meet ACOTE's Standard for international fieldwork educator: Identify method of documentation to address ACOTE B.10.22 that ensure that students attending Level II fieldwork outside the United States are supervised by an occupational therapist who graduated from a program approved by the World Federation of Occupational Therapists and has 1 year of experience in practice. Such fieldwork must not exceed 12 weeks for occupational therapy students and 8 weeks for occupational therapy assistant students (ACOTE, 2007 a,b,&c).
2. Identify the national model (if any) for OT fieldwork implementation that may influence the fieldwork experience (i.e. in Japan, fieldwork can be separated into different areas of focus, such as evaluation and intervention).
3. Increase student familiarity with the service system in the receiving country, potentially including the following: national health care policies, community practice norms, reimbursement policies, documentation expectations, and attitudes toward disability.
4. Identify the fieldwork site's requirements for student professional liability insurance, workers' compensation insurance, immunizations, criminal background checks, health requirements (i.e. blood work, medical exam, drug screening), etc.

5. Determine the fieldwork administration process, including student fieldwork objectives, student evaluation, student evaluation of fieldwork experience, system for communicating with and providing feedback to the student, and strategies to prevent problems.
6. Identify cultural and unique aspects of language (terminology, idioms) to become familiar with prior to fieldwork (i.e. in the UK, learning disability is a broad term that includes developmental disability).
7. Understand OT entry-level practice expectations and adequate preparation for taking the NBCOT certification exam. Consider whether the fieldwork experience at this potential fieldwork site will provide applicable/generalizable background in OT practice that supports knowledge, clinical reasoning, and judgment to be successful in taking the NBCOT certification exam.

Items to consider: For OT students prepared in another country and doing fieldwork in the U.S.:

1. Become familiar with common practice models and legislation reflecting the OT practice setting (i.e. IDEA public school laws related to provision of OT, Medicare guidelines for OT reimbursement).
2. Understand U.S. OT service reimbursement models (Medicare, Medicaid, workers' compensation).
3. Explore potential fieldwork site's requirements for student professional liability insurance, workers' compensation insurance, immunizations, criminal background checks, health requirements (i.e. blood work, medical exam, drug screening), etc.
4. Understand OT entry-level practice expectations and adequate preparation for meeting home country expectations for OT practice. Ensure that the fieldwork experience in the U.S. will provide applicable/generalizable background in OT practice that supports knowledge, clinical reasoning, and judgment to be successful as an OT in home country.
5. Explore cultural and unique aspects of language (terminology, idioms) to become familiar with prior to fieldwork (i.e. in the UK, learning disability is a broad term that includes developmental disability while in the U.S. it does not).
6. Provide support for the student's transition back to the home country, culture, and OT practice.

Student-centered issues:

1. Explore characteristics of the potential OT practice setting to ensure there is a good match between student, fieldwork site, supervisory style, and student learning needs.
2. Ensure there is a support system that fully endorses the placement academically, professionally, and personally.
3. Ensure the student is aware of cultural diversity issues that may have an impact on OT practice and personal life while abroad.

4. Ensure there is an emotional/social support system for the student.
5. Ensure student has the financial wherewithal to afford day-to-day expenses to live, eat, and for shelter.
6. Ensure the student has an appropriate passport and/or visa to enter and remain in the receiving country.
7. Ensure the student has the means for health insurance coverage in the receiving country and access to medical health services if needed.
8. Ensure the student has the necessary vaccinations and medications for the receiving country.
9. Ensure the student has access to emergency evacuation resources (i.e. International Student Travel Card).
10. Prepare an emergency plan including contact information and contingency plan for emergencies.
 - a. Specific contingency plan for emergencies
 - b. Register time abroad with the U.S. Department of State if the student is a U.S. citizen.
 - c. Identify if the student's country of origin requires registration with the country's embassy in the U.S..
 - d. Emergency contact information for the student and the academic OT/OTA program
 - e. Home country embassy contact information
 - f. State Department travel advisory information, which can be received via e-mail from the U.S. Department of State
 - g. Terrorist Attack contingency plan
 - h. Waiver of Liability for academic OT/OTA program

Student responsibilities to ensure shared/realistic expectations of international fieldwork:

1. Responsibility for clarifying the learning opportunities and ensuring quality OT practice should be shared between the Academic Fieldwork Coordinator (AFWC), student, and Fieldwork Educator.
2. The AFWC and student need to communicate about and advocate for their corresponding academic OT/OTA preparation and curriculum model (i.e., Is student adequately prepared to meet expectations for OT practice in this setting?).
3. Explore cultural differences (i.e., tea breaks in some cultures allow networking with team) and unique aspects of language (i.e. idioms) to become familiar with prior to fieldwork.
4. Identify whether the student possesses sufficient verbal and written fluency with potential clients' language.
5. Become familiar with customary etiquette in another country (i.e. cultural and social norms are often taken for granted until broken).

Considering international OT practice:

1. Explore certification and licensure procedures for practice within the receiving country in order to determine the required academic and fieldwork standards and requirements that must be complied with prior to completion of the academic OT/OTA program.

Resources:

1. U.S. Department of State, regarding international travel (http://travel.state.gov/travel/travel_1744.html)
2. Center for Disease Control, regarding international travel (<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/>)
3. International Student Identity Card (<http://www.isic.org/home.aspx>)
4. STA Travel (<http://www.statravel.com/>)
5. AOTA Web link with content related to fieldwork (<http://www.aota.org/Educate/EdRes/Fieldwork.aspx>)
6. WFOT Accredited OT programs (<http://www.wfot.org/schoolLinks.asp>)
7. WFOT country profiles (<http://www.wfot.org/countries.asp>)
8. NBCOT (<http://www.nbcot.org/>)
9. OT Connections (<http://otconnections.aota.org/>), a few groups currently exist about international OT, including “Global Initiatives” and “OTs in Developing Countries”
10. Embassies and Consulates Around the World (<http://www.embassiesabroad.com>)

References:

Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education. (2007a). Accreditation standards for a doctoral-degree-level educational program for the occupational therapist. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 61*, 641–651.

Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education. (2007b). Accreditation standards for a master’s-degree-level educational program for the occupational therapist. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 61*, 652–661.

Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education. (2007c). Accreditation standards for an educational program for the occupational therapy assistant. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 61*, 662–671.

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