

DISCUSSION ON THE PROFESSIONAL (CLINICAL) DOCTORATE IN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

AOTA Board of Directors

October 18, 2013

SUMMARY:

The Future of Education Ad Hoc Committee included the following recommendation to the AOTA Board of Directors:

“AOTA adopt a mandate that entry-level-degree for practice as an occupational therapist be a doctorate by 2017 with a requirement for all academic programs transition to the doctorate by 2020.”

This document provides background data on the professional doctorate in occupation therapy to provide a framework for the BOD discussion. The following information is included:

- I. Professional doctorates defined.
- II. Entry-level degree requirements for certification.
- III. Current programs and growth.
- IV. Program directors' discussion.

I. PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATES DEFINED:

Doctor's degree - entry level professional practice - A doctor's degree that is conferred upon completion of a program **providing the knowledge and skills for the recognition, credential, or license required for professional practice**. The degree is awarded after a period of study such that the total time to the degree, including both pre-professional and professional preparation, equals at least six full-time equivalent academic years. Some of these degrees were formerly classified as "first-professional" and may include: Chiropractic (D.C. or D.C.M.); Dentistry (D.D.S. or D.M.D.); Law (L.L.B. or J.D.); Medicine (M.D.); Optometry (O.D.); Osteopathic Medicine (D.O); Pharmacy (Pharm.D.); Podiatry (D.P.M., Pod.D., D.P.); or, Veterinary Medicine (D.V.M.), and others, as designated by the awarding institution

Retrieved from: http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/news_room/ana_Changes_to_1_29_2008.asp 9/16/13.

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) is data collection entity for the United States Department of Education (USDE).

Professions offering the professional doctorate as an entry level professional practice degree:

- Allopathic Medicine (MD)
- Audiology (AuD)
- Chiropractic (DC)
- Dentistry (DDS)
- Nurse Anesthetist
- **Occupational Therapy (OTD)**
- Osteopathic Medicine (DO)
- Pharmacy (Pharm. D.)
- Podiatry (DPM)
- Psychology (Psy. D.)
- Physical Therapy (DPT)
- Veterinary Medicine (DVM)

Doctor's degree – post-professional ("Bridge")- The postprofessional doctor's degree is conferred upon completion of a structured postprofessional educational experience that results in the **augmentation of knowledge, skills, and behaviors to a level consistent with current professional (entry-level) doctoral standards**. The postprofessional doctoral degree enables the US-licensed practitioner to attain degree parity with practitioners who hold the professional doctoral degree by "filling in " any gaps between their professional baccalaureate or master's degree education and current professional doctoral degree education. Adapted from the APTA Definition of the post-professional DPT. Retrieved www.apta.org 9/16/13

Professions with post-professional (transitional) doctorates:

- **Occupational Therapy (OTD)**
- Physical Therapy

Doctor's Degree- post-professional- advanced professional degree: Those doctoral level programs that are designed to **prepare already credentialed or licensed individuals to practice clinically with competencies above and beyond those expected of entry-level professionals.** They are distinguished from research doctorates (*e.g.*, Ph.Ds) in that they do not require dissertations and the original research upon which the dissertations are based. The advanced practice doctorate or advanced professional degree program shall incorporate into its curriculum advanced practice rotations or residencies and a capstone research project demonstrating the student's ability to conduct clinically relevant research appropriate to the advanced diagnostic or therapeutic practices taught in the program.

Descriptive differentiation of clinical doctorates: Position statement of the Association of Schools of Allied Health Professions. Retrieved from www.ASAHP.org, 9/16/13.

Professions with advanced practice professional doctorates:

- Clinical Laboratory Science
- Nursing:
- **Occupational Therapy**
- Social Work:

ISSUE(s):

- Unlike other professions, OT has not defined the role of the professional doctorate degree leading to confusion among internal and external stakeholders. Currently, the OTD programs include entry-level professional doctorates, post-professional "bridge" doctorates and post-advanced professional doctorates.
- A review underway by the Commission on Education (COE) has identified that, with few exceptions, the majority of the post-professional OTD degree programs are transitional degrees enabling practitioners to attain degree parity with practitioners who hold the professional doctoral degree by "filling in " any gaps between their professional baccalaureate or master's degree education and current professional doctoral degree education. A few of the programs may meet the criteria for an advanced professional degree.

II. DEGREE REQUIREMENTS FOR CERTIFICATION:

Doctorate	Masters	Bachelors
Allopathic Medicine (MD)		
	Athletic Training	Athletic Training*
Audiology (AuD)		
Chiropractic (DC)		
Dentistry (DDS)		
Nurse Anesthetist	Nurse Anesthetist*	
	Nursing**	Nursing**
Occupational Therapy (OTD)	Occupational Therapy	
Osteopathic Medicine (DO)		
Pharmacy (Pharm. D.)		
Physical Therapy	Physical Therapy *	
	Physician Assistant	Physician Assistant*
Podiatry (DPM)		
Psychology (Psy. D.)		
		Recreational Therapist
	Social Work	
	Speech pathology	
Vet. Medicine (D.V.M.)		

* Degree level being phased out.

The American Association of Nurse Anesthetists has mandated that schools must begin a process of transition to offering practice doctorates as the minimum qualification for nurse anesthetists by 2020

Physical Therapy- American Physical Therapy Association has mandated that all programs for physical therapy be at the doctoral level by 2020

** Requirements vary in each State. The AANC has advocated for the doctorate.

ISSUE(s):

- It is an exception to the rule to have two degree levels preparing graduates for the **SAME** entry-level certification exam. External stakeholders frequently ask for the rationale.
- The majority of the health professions have transitioned (or are in the process of transitioning) to the entry-level doctorate.

III. CURRENT PROGRAMS AND GROWTH

Occupational Therapy Entry-Level Professional Doctoral Programs:

All entry-level programs are accredited by ACOTE® and qualify graduates to sit for the national certification exam and apply for licensure.

Name:	State	Application	First Class	Accredited
Accredited:				
Creighton University	NE	n/a	1985	1998
Belmont University	TN	n/a	1996	2002
Washington University	MO	n/a	2001	2001
The University of Toledo	OH	n/a	1991	2004
University of the Sciences (DrOT)	PA	n/a	2011	2013
Candidate:				
Nova Southeastern University-Tampa	FL	n/a	2011	pending 2013
Salus University	PA	n/a	2011	pending 2013
Pacific University	OR	n/a	2011	pending 2014
MGH Institute of Health Professions	MA	n/a	2014	pending 2016
The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga	TN	n/a	2014	pending 2016
Applicant:				
Georgia State University	GA	1/15/14		
Mary Baldwin College	VA	9/16/2013		
Huntington University	IN	1/15/2014		
Indiana Wesleyan University	IN	1/15/2014		
Kettering College	OH	1/15/2014		
Northern Arizona University	AZ	1/15/2014		
Arkansas State University-Jonesboro	AR	9/15/2014		
Rocky Mountain University	UT	1/15/2015		

Post-Professional Professional Doctoral Programs:

Name	State	Degree
Boston University	MA	OTD
Chatham University	PA	OTD
Creighton University	NE	OTD
Duquesne University	PA	OTD
Eastern Kentucky University	KY	OTD
Governors State University	IL	OTD
Illinois at Chicago, The University of	IL	OTD
Kansas Medical Center, The University of	KS	OTD
Loma Linda University	CA	OTD
Misericordia University	PA	OTD
New York University	NY	DPS in OT
Nova Southeastern University	FL	DrOT
Pacific University	OR	OTD
Quinnipiac University	CT	OTD
Rocky Mountain University of Health Professions	UT	OTD
Saint Augustine for Health Sciences, The University of	FL / CA	OTD
Saint Catherine University	MN	OTD
Southern California, University of	CA	OTD
Temple University	PA	OTD
Thomas Jefferson University	PA	OTD
Tufts University-Boston School of Occupational Therapy	MA	OTD
Utah, The University of	UT	OTD
Virginia Commonwealth University	VA	OTD
Washington University	MO	OTD

ISSUE(s):

- Increase in the number of entry-level doctoral programs. Many other programs have indicated that they plan to transition within the next 2 years.
- Inconsistent titles for the degrees (OTD versus DrOT) adds to the confusion for stakeholders.

IV. ENTRY LEVEL OTD EDUCATION - FAQ'S – DEVELOPED AND PRESENTED BY THE PRODEC TASK GROUP AT THE AOTA PRODEC MEETING, APRIL 23-24, 2013

1. Does the level of competence to practice OT really require a doctoral degree?

Clearly our master's level programs are producing competent and skilled practitioners; however the OTD degree is a sign of evolution in OT education and practice. Reasons to expect that more advanced practice skills will be needed include (1) the complexity of client diagnoses / conditions, (2) the rate of technology expansion (3) the mandate for evidence-based practice and ongoing data analysis of client outcomes, (4) the need for program development, particularly in health promotion, and (5) the emphasis on interprofessional and primary care across continuums and delivery systems.

2. Is the focus of the OTD to create researchers?

The OTD is a clinical / professional doctorate. ACOTE standards for doctoral programs require that students implement a scholarly study. Students can complete evidence-based reviews, develop clinical guidelines, or measure systems outcomes to reach this goal. The outcome should be an occupational therapy practitioner who rigorously implements evidence-based practice, understands care delivery models, and is prepared to meet the future occupational needs of society.

3. Won't offering an OTD increase the faculty workload?

Because doctoral programs emphasize mentorship and scholarly projects, the OTD faculty workload will be greater than current MSOT programs. Because OTD programs will bring in more tuition revenue, university programs should be allowed to hire additional faculty to support entry-level OTD programs.

4. How does the OTD impact fieldwork?

OTD level education requires an additional 16-week (640 hours) experiential component. The goal of the doctoral experiential component is to develop advanced skills through an in-depth experience in a designated area of interest. The student must be mentored by an individual with expertise in the area of focus; however this does not need to be an occupational therapist, which presents opportunities for interprofessional collaboration, research, innovation, and practice.

5. Will the OTD require extensive new coursework?

Programs can meet the OTD standards by re-evaluating current curricula and creating only a handful of new courses. Opportunities exist for designing more integrative curricula and a greater cadre of electives.

6. Won't an Entry Level OTD be cost prohibitive for students?

Most Occupational Therapy Master's programs are 2 ½ years in length; OTD programs are likely to be 3 years in length. The cost/benefit of two additional semesters for a doctoral degree appears to be worthwhile investment for most students.

7. Are we moving to the entry level OTD to level the playing field with PT?

Leveling the playing field with physical therapy is not a goal. It is important that occupational therapy be viewed as a powerful, science-driven, evidence-based profession; entry-level training at the doctoral degree is consistent with that vision for the profession.

8. Won't transitioning to an OTD create a wider gap between the OTR and the OTA?

Advancing the degree level for occupational therapists will create a wider educational gap between OT's and OTA's; however both MSOT and OTD graduates are required to demonstrate skills in OTA supervision and collaboration. OT's and OTA's will continue to work in teams to provide quality services and optimize patient outcomes.

9. How will the OTD impact teaching level and curriculum?

Unlike other professions that moved from master's to doctoral level without changing accreditation standards, ACOTE standards clearly differentiate between master's and doctoral programs. The emphasis of the doctoral standards is more advanced practice skills, scholarship in practice, program development, leadership, and in-depth experience in a specialized area of practice. Developing programs should evaluate coursework to include additional competencies and integration at more advanced levels (e.g., more specialized, clearly based on evidence, more complex client / systems problems).

10. My provost will never go for it – won't University administration question the clinical doctorate?

Universities appear to be fully prepared for the development of occupational therapy doctoral programs. The precedence for professional doctoral programs has been established with the transition of physical therapy, pharmacy, audiology, and nurse practitioner programs. State and regional accrediting bodies have become familiar with professional doctoral degree programs. Although the pathways for program approval will vary university to university and state to state, the concept is not novel and in some universities, this transition is anticipated.

11. Impact on number of students and diversity?

The data from professions that have transition indicates little impact on student numbers or diversity within the student population. For example in physical therapy:

	2004-5	2005-6	2006-7	2007-8	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
DPT programs	111	135	167	185	213	222	226
Masters programs	98	74	43	25	9	5	2
Graduates	5537	5516	5809	6373	6458	6673	7824
% White	80.9	79.4	81.2	81.5	81.4	81.7	81.3

ISSUE(s):

- With the current post-baccalaureate mandate many programs are moving forward with the transition to an entry-level doctorate.