

Dear Prospective Applicant:

This is to provide information regarding the accreditation process for developing occupational therapy educational programs and its impact on students enrolled in these programs. Universities and colleges generally contact the Accreditation Department at AOTA headquarters early in their consideration of initiating an OT or OTA educational program. The accreditation process, which takes approximately two years, is designed to start before the first class of students enters the program and completed before the first class graduates from the program.

An occupational therapy or occupational therapy assistant program must be accredited by the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE®) prior to students' graduation in order for those graduates to be eligible to sit for the national certification examination offered by the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy (NBCOT®). Therefore, students who enter developing programs are taking a risk that the program **will not** obtain accreditation and therefore, they **will not** be eligible to sit for the NBCOT® certification exam.

Any program submitting a Letter of Intent to seek ACOTE accreditation must obtain "Candidacy Status" by submitting a Candidacy Application describing how the program plans to demonstrate compliance with the [ACOTE Accreditation Standards](#) prior to the admission of the first class of students into the program. (See [ACOTE Policy III.A.1. Step One: The Application Review](#)). If the program obtains Candidacy Status, the next step is to enter into the "Preaccreditation Review Process" and continue through the accreditation process.

It is suggested that you speak with the director of any new program that you are interested in attending regarding the accreditation status of the program. If the program has applied to seek accreditation, the program director will receive a tentative schedule of the accreditation process which delineates a sequence of required steps the program must complete before accreditation is granted.

You may ask the program director where the program is in the initial accreditation process and specifically whether the program has received Candidacy Status (if it is early in the process) or whether the program has received Preaccreditation Status (if it is midway through the process). Preaccreditation Status is used by ACOTE to provide feedback to a developing program prior to the initial on-site evaluation. The granting of Preaccreditation Status indicates that, on the basis of examination of the Initial Report of Self-Study and supplementary information available to the review team, ACOTE has determined that the program is likely to meet the ACOTE Standards if fully implemented in accordance with its plans. This is intended to provide an indication that program planning appears to be proceeding in a direction that will lead toward ACOTE accreditation. (See [ACOTE Policy III.A.2. Step Two: Preaccreditation Review](#)).

If you are uncomfortable with the risk involved in entering a developing entry-level doctoral program in an institution where the accredited master's-level program is in the process of transitioning to a higher degree level, it may be better for you to consider other programs. However, the accreditation process is designed to facilitate development, and substantial support is provided to the program during the process.

Please feel free to contact the AOTA Accreditation Department at accred@aota.org if you have additional questions. Best wishes in your pursuit of an occupational therapy or occupational therapy assistant degree!