

CONTINUING ACCREDITATION

IV. A. 2. a. THE VIRTUAL ON-SITE EVALUATION

COMPOSITION OF EVALUATION TEAM

A single location on-site evaluation is conducted by a team of 2 individuals who are members of the Roster of Accreditation Evaluators (RAE). In emergency situations when a suitable replacement evaluator cannot be located, a qualified and trained AOTA accreditation staff member may serve as one of the team members with the advance permission of the program director. For occupational therapy programs, both evaluators are typically occupational therapists. For occupational therapy assistant programs, one or both evaluators may be an occupational therapy assistant. One team member is an academic educator; the other team member is a practitioner. When an on-site evaluation includes additional locations, a 2-person team is assigned to the primary location and at least 1 individual is assigned to each additional location.

Prior to the selection of the team, the program director is provided with a list of potential evaluators. This is a list of individuals representing academic education and occupational therapy practice who have been trained as accreditation evaluators. The program director is instructed to strike names of individuals who are perceived to have a conflict of interest with the program.

The on-site evaluators are selected from those remaining on the list by the ACOTE Executive Committee in collaboration with the AOTA Accreditation staff. A sincere effort is made to “match” team members to the program and institution being evaluated. Factors affecting the selection include the type of expertise needed (e.g. distance education experience), the type of institution that houses the program, the need to avoid conflict of interest, and geographic proximity. The team’s responsibility is to study the information provided concerning the educational program and the requirements for accreditation, and to carry out an objective and impartial assessment of the quality of the occupational therapy program seeking accreditation.

One of the representatives is designated as the team chairperson and serves as the official spokesperson of the team during the evaluation process, assuming primary responsibility for checking the final arrangements before the on-site evaluation; reviewing the suggested schedule and recommending changes, if appropriate; and overseeing whatever follow-up activities are indicated. For on-site evaluations to programs with multiple locations, there will be one team chairperson assigned for the on-site visit encompassing all sites.

VIRTUAL ON-SITE EVALUATION SCHEDULE

The virtual on-site evaluations will follow the same requirements, policy and procedures as the on-site evaluation with modifications to accommodate the online platforms. Virtual on-sites can be scheduled for 2 days or carried out over 4 days depending on what is best for the team and the program.

Following the virtual on-site evaluation visit, a focused site visit to confirm the presence of facilities viewed during the virtual site visit and the opportunity to interview students will be scheduled within a reasonable amount of time.

The program director prepares a tentative schedule for the virtual on-site evaluation, using the sample schedule (following this section) and adjusting it to most appropriately represent the program.

The schedule should include video interviews with the following individuals:

- The program director, for the purpose of mutual orientation and discussion of administrative responsibilities.
- The program director and occupational therapy faculty as a group for discussion of mission, philosophy, strategic plan, curriculum design, program evaluation, and organization of the program.

- Occupational therapy faculty members to discuss their administrative, advisory, and teaching responsibilities as related to the occupational therapy program, the objectives and content of courses, the means of evaluating student performance, and relevant plans and activities of the faculty for the future. For these interviews, the faculty may be grouped as appropriate for discussion of the curriculum content areas.
- Key faculty from other disciplines to discuss their administrative, advisory, and teaching responsibilities as related to the occupational therapy program, the objectives and content of the courses, the means of evaluating student performance, and relevant plans and activities of the faculty for the future. For these interviews, the faculty may be grouped as appropriate for discussion of the curriculum content areas.
- The academic fieldwork coordinator to determine the selection process for fieldwork placements, the extent of collaboration with fieldwork educators, and how students are monitored and advised during fieldwork.
- The doctoral capstone coordinator (if applicable) to determine the process for ensuring compliance with the capstone requirements.
- A representative sample of fieldwork educators to give the team members an opportunity to learn firsthand the role of the fieldwork educators in the students' educational experiences and to discuss their role in student educational experiences as well as their observations of student performance.
- Employers of program graduates to determine whether the graduates were adequately prepared for entry-level practice.
- The college/university president and/or designated administrative officer to discuss the mission of the institution and compatibility with the program's mission.
- The administrator to whom the program director is directly responsible (e.g., dean of the school of allied health) for orientation of the team members to the university and school or college.
- Representatives from each class in the program to discuss their views of the program and courses. Each group should be scheduled separately if possible.
- Recent graduates and students in fieldwork experience settings to discuss their views of the program, courses, fieldwork experiences, and preparation for entry-level practice. Each group should be scheduled separately if possible.

The program director should arrange an effective and efficient schedule with faculty interviews arranged so that each instructor is interviewed and each Standard is addressed. Previous experience demonstrates that it is helpful in some instances for the team to have individual interviews with key instructors, and in other instances, for them to meet in groups (e.g., when several teach together). The structure of these sessions depends on faculty size and grouping for teaching. ACOTE recognizes that each program uniquely integrates the requirements of the *Standards* into its curriculum design and that the design should affect the schedule.

When the schedule is complete, it should indicate the name, highest degree, and title for each interviewee; the name and catalog number of the course(s) taught; and the Standard(s) being covered.

In scheduling the interviews with fieldwork educators, the program director should keep in mind that it is not necessary to have all fieldwork educators from affiliating centers present at the interview. A representative sample of local fieldwork educators is suggested. If possible, at least one fieldwork educator from each major area of practice is desirable. In addition, the fieldwork educators should represent facilities that provide both Level I and Level II fieldwork experiences.

When planning and scheduling the meeting between the on-site team and fieldwork educators and employers of program graduates, the program director should plan for approximately 1 hour of discussion. Timing should be so that it is least disruptive to the work schedules of the participants.

Students, fieldwork educators, and employers may not be knowledgeable about the accreditation process. The program director should inform them of the purpose of the visit and the interviews and the types of questions

that the team might ask. Typical questions may include the following:

To the Students:

- How are the institutional services? Counseling? Financial aid? Health services?
- Are faculty members available on a regular basis outside of the classroom? Is there privacy for advising?
- How are the library resources and availability of materials and equipment?
- How have the liberal art courses been? Availability? Has the content prepared you for occupational therapy courses?
- How do you like the sequence of courses? Does it make sense?
- How do you like the evaluation process for the program? What do you do? Any changes that you have helped to facilitate?

To the Fieldwork Educators and Employers:

- How are fieldwork placements made? What is the selection process?
- How do you ensure a cross section of client and facility experiences?
- How do you ensure that fieldwork educators are familiar with the program's objectives for fieldwork experiences?
- Describe your due process system for a student failing a Level I or Level II fieldwork experience.
- Do you feel program graduates were adequately prepared for entry-level practice?

In addition to the interviews, 1 hour should be set aside on the first day for review of student records; evaluations of student performance (including examinations); fieldwork data; and published documents providing a description of the program, selection and retention information, rights and appeal mechanisms, institutional safety policies, and so on. The team will request that much of this material be provided 1 week prior to the virtual on-site to allow for sufficient review.

The tentative on-site schedule should be uploaded to the ACOTE Online (<https://acote.aota.org/login>) Self-Study Home tab at least one month prior to the on-site evaluation. Should there be suggestions for change of the tentative schedule, the team chairperson will submit them to the program director for consideration.

The program director should finalize the schedule with the on-site evaluation team chairperson prior to confirming appointments because the team chairperson may wish to make adjustments to the schedule. Please take into consideration the time zones that the team may be working from. After the team chairperson has been contacted and the schedule is confirmed, a final copy should be uploaded to the ACOTE Online (<https://acote.aota.org/login>) Self-Study Home tab prior to the on-site evaluation.

SAMPLE SCHEDULE FOR A VIRTUAL ON-SITE EVALUATION

Please note: This schedule is only a sample to facilitate planning for the on-site visit. Program directors, in consultation with the on-site team chairperson, may modify the schedule as institutional, faculty, and on-site team member needs dictate. Please see notes at the end of the schedule for other details.

Please be aware of the different time zones of the evaluators and the program when developing the schedule.

FIRST DAY

8:00-8:20 am	Team meets with program director to discuss meeting process and identify areas of concern.
8:30-9:20 am	Team meets with program director and faculty: Overview of mission, philosophy, strategic plan, curriculum design, and program evaluation system of the occupational therapy/therapy assistant program
9:30-10:50 am	Team reviews student records* and evaluations of student performance, including classroom assignments, examinations, fieldwork data, graduate and employer survey data, and certification examination results. Program director should have available student outcome data, program materials, meeting minutes, curricular files, selection and retention information, rights and appeals mechanisms, institutional safety policies, and so on. (Team may divide for this session). This may be completed before the on-site. <i>*To comply with HIPAA regulations, please ensure that no identifiable patient health information is included in student files.</i>
11:00 am-12:20 pm	Team meets with individual faculty/groups of faculty in the order courses occur in the curriculum. The team should experience the content and sequence as would the students in the program.
12:30-1:30 pm	Lunch
1:30-2:05 pm	Team meets with academic fieldwork coordinator.
2:15-2:50 pm	Team meets with doctoral capstone coordinator (if applicable).
3:00-3:35 pm	Team meets with recent graduates and Level II fieldwork students.
3:45-4:20 pm	Team meets with Level I and II fieldwork educators and employers of program graduates (6-10 of each). Academic fieldwork coordinators are not expected to be present.
4:30-4:50 pm	Team collaboration
5:00-5:30 pm	Team meets with the program director to summarize day and discuss any remaining areas of concern.

SECOND DAY

9:00-9:20 am	Team meets with program director.
9:30-10:15 am	Team meets with students, 6-10 representatives from each level.
10:30-10:50 am	Team meets with college/university president and/or designated administrative official, e.g., vice president for academic affairs, dean of medical school.
11:00-11:30 am	Team meets with administrator to whom the program director is directly responsible (e.g., dean of the school of allied health).

- 11:30 am-3:00 pm Working lunch; individual faculty conferences as requested by team chairperson and further record review as necessary, additional interviews, work on ROSE.
- 3:00-3:30 pm Wrap up with program director.

THIRD DAY

- 9:00-9:20 am Team meets with program director.
- 9:30-10:15 am Team meets with Faculty/ program director consultation time
- 10:30-11:00 am **Exit Conference:** Team presents final report to the president (or designated representative), dean, program director, and faculty. Students and others interested may attend at the invitation of the program director.

ADDITIONAL NOTES TO CONSIDER:

- Please allow time to log into the separate video meetings and have a call with the co-evaluator if needed between meetings
- The optimum number of individuals available for interview by the on-site team for each meeting is 10 or more. Please note that if the number falls below 6, there is potential that the on-site may need to be rescheduled.
- Please prepare a tentative list of individuals (in a Word document) who will be interviewed as a part of the schedule. Full names, credentials, and titles are helpful since these names will be included on the Evaluators' Report of On-Site Evaluation. Although changes may occur, having a tentative list facilitates the process for the team. The list of fieldwork educators should include the facility in which they work. It would also expedite the preparation of the final report if this list was made electronically available to the on-site team chairperson on the morning of the first day of the site visit.
- To assure reasonable representation of participants from key constituent groups, consider alternatives to the above schedule if necessary. Consult with the team chairperson regarding scheduling alternatives.

ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE ON-SITE TEAM

Telephone Contacts

Team members and AOTA Accreditation staff should be sent the office and home telephone numbers of the program director, or another number for weekends and evenings, in the case of an emergency prior to the on-site visit.

In addition, the program director is asked to furnish team members and AOTA Accreditation staff with telephone numbers at which the team members may be reached in case of emergency during the visit.

Virtual Meeting Room

Arrangements should be made for all interviews and conferences to be via videoconference (Zoom, GoTo Meeting etc.). A separate meeting room (code) should be set up for each meeting.

THE ON-SITE EVALUATION

The well-planned on-site evaluation visit usually proceeds smoothly. The team generally meets with the program director briefly at the beginning and end of each day for a brief report on their progress, needs, and concerns, and so on. The team chairperson keeps the program director apprised of any additional information that the team determines it needs or any changes desired in the schedule (e.g., to pursue a particular area of concern).

The team chairperson will note any special situations in the “Unusual Circumstances” section of the Report of On-Site Evaluation (ROSE) such as the following:

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the on-site evaluation visit was conducted virtually. There was no impact on the outcome of the on-site visit as a result of this change. The rigor of the review was comparable to a traditional on-site visit with required document review taking place electronically prior to the site visit. Interviews were conducted via teleconference/virtual platform with all of the same participants (administrators, faculty, students, graduates, fieldwork educators, and employers) that the team would have met with at an in-person on-site visit, as well as a virtual tour of facilities. An in-person follow up visit will be scheduled within a reasonable time frame as conditions allow.

The Interviews

The evaluators will conduct interviews throughout the on-site visit and will use their observations on the following points to contribute to their final decisions relative to compliance with the *Standards*:

1. The degree of support from the administration for the occupational therapy program.
2. The degree of support from the institutional teaching faculty for the occupational therapy program.
3. The level of responsibility afforded the program director
 - for faculty selection, development, and retention;
 - for budget development and control; and
 - for program development, general effectiveness, and evaluation.
4. The program director's and faculty's understanding and ability to articulate the
 - program's mission (goals, strategic plan), and
 - institution's mission (goals, strategic plan).
5. The faculty's understanding and ability to articulate the program's
 - philosophy,
 - strategic plan,
 - curriculum design,
 - course objectives, and
 - integration of fieldwork into the curriculum.
6. The faculty's understanding and ability to articulate program evaluation emphasizing student outcomes.
7. The students' ability to express their perception of their roles as therapists or assistants and their values and attitudes toward the profession.
8. Appropriate opportunities for fieldwork experience during and following the didactic program.
9. Future plans for the occupational therapy program:
 - systematic and periodic program evaluation,
 - continuing professional development, and
 - support from the administration.

THE EXIT CONFERENCE

The team meets in executive session to review its findings and draft the Evaluators' Report of On-Site Evaluation. Following this a summation conference is held with the chief executive officer of the institution (or designated representative) and the program director. At this time, the on-site team presents its findings. Other administrative officers, faculty, fieldwork educators, employers, and students may be present at the invitation of the program director or designee.

The team's exit report is based on the Evaluators' Report of On-Site Evaluation and includes

- major strengths of the program,

- suggestions for enriching or broadening the program, and
- areas of noncompliance with the *Standards*.

Subsequent procedures leading to final action on the program are described. It should be noted that the Evaluators' Report of On-Site Evaluation is subject to modification by ACOTE.

Following the exit conference, an electronic copy of the Evaluators' Report of On-Site Evaluation (ROSE) is left with the program director with a request that any factual errors in the report be indicated. A written response to the on-site visit may be submitted if there are special considerations or circumstances the program director wishes to be brought to the attention of ACOTE. Additional material or documents will not be considered by ACOTE, however. ACOTE will only consider action on the program based on those materials the on-site team had the opportunity to review and discuss during the on-site visit.

To expedite preparation of the report for ACOTE review and action, the program director is requested to submit any corrections or comments regarding the report to the AOTA Accreditation Department within 1 week after the on-site evaluation. (Additional response time is available if needed). This information is shared with ACOTE prior to action. If no corrections are to be made, the AOTA Accreditation staff should be notified of this fact so that the review process may proceed.

PROCEDURES FOR EMERGENCIES DURING ON-SITE EVALUATIONS

In the event that an emergency situation arises during the on-site evaluation or an on-site evaluator is for any reason unable to complete his or her team responsibility, the team chairperson will meet with the program director and appropriate administrators to determine if the on-site evaluation should continue or be terminated and rescheduled.

- If the evaluation team chairperson determines that the evaluation process could satisfactorily continue and be completed and institutional personnel agree, the on-site evaluation will be continued.
- If the evaluation team chairperson determines that the evaluation process has been too seriously affected to continue and institutional personnel agree, the on-site evaluation will be terminated and rescheduled.

If circumstances call for additional consultation before reaching a final decision, the team chairperson will contact the ACOTE Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, and/or senior AOTA Accreditation staff. Such circumstances should be documented in the Report of On-Site Evaluation (ROSE).

PROGRAM SITE VISIT QUESTIONNAIRE

Following the on-site evaluation visit, the program director, dean, and chief executive officer are asked to complete an online Program Site Visit Questionnaire (PSQ) regarding the accreditation process. This questionnaire is the primary mechanism for ongoing monitoring of the perceptions of the academic community regarding the ACOTE accreditation process and its value to the program and the institution. Information from these questionnaires is compiled and used in modifying accreditation procedures. A candid response is therefore appreciated. The completed questionnaires are not seen by ACOTE prior to its taking final action on the program.

ACOTE ACCREDITATION ACTION

Unless deferred, accreditation action on the Report of On-Site Evaluation is taken by the ACOTE at the next scheduled meeting following the visit. Within 4 weeks of the ACOTE meeting, the chief executive officer, dean, and program director are sent an electronic copy of the action letter which includes notification of the accreditation status accorded to the program, a Certificate of Accreditation (if awarded), and the final Report of the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education. It should be noted that the Report of the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education may differ from the Evaluators' Report of On-Site Evaluation presented at the conclusion of the visit. For example, the ACOTE may act to change one or more "Suggestions" to "Areas of Noncompliance" or vice versa based on its analysis of the findings. If areas of noncompliance were identified in the final report, the program will be required by ACOTE to submit a Plan of Correction by a specified date, usually 2½ months after the ACOTE meeting. (See [ACOTE Policy IV.E.1. Plans of Correction](#)).

VIRTUAL SITE VISIT GUIDELINES

Item	Tasks/Considerations
Platform responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program will host the platform for the virtual visit meetings. The team will set up their own platforms for discussion between the teams (i.e. zoom, go to meeting or telephone) • Programs and site visit teams must ensure all participants have the technology requirements and facility to use the selected platform(s): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ internet connection – broadband wired or wireless (3G or 4G/LTE) ○ audio device that may include speakers, microphone, phone or similar device ○ webcam built-in or USB plug-in • The team chair must ensure testing of all platforms prior to the actual virtual visit to ensure sufficient bandwidth and familiarity with the platform(s). • Team to work with program to ensure a contingency plan is in place. • Team should have an alternate device if problems arise • The accreditation staff is available to set up meeting if necessary
Platform format	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The platform should allow for all program participants to be seen as well as heard by the site visit team, and vice versa. • Bandwidth can be minimized by following the agenda closely and only having pertinent individuals logged on for respective interview sessions.
Confidentiality of interviews and meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private conversations between site visit team members during the virtual visit, document review or before/after scheduled meetings can occur via telephone. If the team prefers a video and voice connection, it can set up its own separate virtual meeting. • A comprehensive list of participants should be provided by the program to ensure that only the appropriate individuals are online for their respective interviews/meetings. • Confidential interviews with students, faculty, employers, etc. can be accomplished with separate webinars controlled by the accreditor, or individual telephone calls. • <u>Do not</u> use the private chat function of the platform during the virtual visit – texting or private calls during breaks are possible options.
Recording virtual visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>No component of the site-visit can be audio or video recorded.</u>
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Materials that would be available for review onsite will be available virtually through Dropbox that the accreditation staff will set up. Please coordinate with accreditation staff • The program must remove access to these materials at the conclusion of the virtual visit.
Confidential documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidential documents (student, faculty files), can be shared virtually with the secure document sharing application or during virtual interviews through screen sharing.
Interviews and meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All participants should have a quiet space with minimal distractions and a reliable internet connection. • Site visit team members should comport themselves in the same manner as for an onsite visit by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ dressing professionally (top and bottom) ○ not multi-tasking ○ keeping their eyes on the camera and focusing on the conversations ○ speaking clearly and keeping in mind voice and video delays • Request that the program have an IT person dedicated to the visit. • Start the first meeting 15 minutes ahead of schedule to work out any possible technical issues. Do this as well if meetings are spread out. • Make sure all participants have audio and video functioning properly.
Facility tour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program can play a pre-recorded video of the areas to be toured (e.g. university resources: library, classrooms, department offices, practice sites, etc.). If the team has questions, the video can be paused to allow the program to answer. • Alternately the tour may be done virtually with someone from the program using the camera on a device logged in to the webinar. • If the videos do not provide adequate information, questions about satisfaction with the spaces can be posed to students and faculty.
Follow up in-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The virtual site visit will be followed by an in-person visit as soon as reasonably possible.

Item	Tasks/Considerations
person visit	
Standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All accreditation standards are expected to be reviewed and met, regardless of the format of the site visit.

This is a temporary policy and will expire June 2021.