

# CONTINUING ACCREDITATION

## IV. A. 2. THE ON-SITE EVALUATION

### COMPOSITION OF EVALUATION TEAM

A single location on-site evaluation is conducted by a team of two 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 staff member from the Accreditation Department may serve as one of the team members with notice provided in advance to 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 or multiple learning sites, a two-person team is assigned to the primary location and at least one individual is assigned to each additional site.

The on-site evaluators are selected by the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE) Executive Committee in collaboration with the director of accreditation with efforts 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 review the information provided within the Report of Self-Study 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.

The program director will receive notice of the on-site evaluation team members four to six months in advance of the on-site evaluation. Programs are directed to review the assigned team for a potential conflict of interest as guided by ACOTE’s [Conflict of Interest Policy](#) and to notify the Accreditation department immediately if a conflict is identified.

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.

### ON-SITE EVALUATION SCHEDULE

On-site evaluations are usually scheduled for 2½ days, Monday to Wednesday, with evaluators generally arriving the evening before the visit begins and departing in the early afternoon on the third day. For weekend programs or programs located on more than one campus, adjustments to the schedule are made in collaboration with the program director. ***Any other request to alter the length of the on-site evaluation must be submitted in writing to ACOTE at least 9 months prior to the scheduled visit.***

The program director prepares a tentative schedule for the on-site evaluation, using the appropriate [Sample On-Site Visit Schedule](#) and adjusting it to represent the program. ***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.***

The schedule should include 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.
- A representative sample of fieldwork educators to give the accreditation 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 program's structure within and support from the university and school or college.
- Representatives from each cohort 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 efficient schedule with faculty interviews, allowing each instructor to be interviewed, and addressing all the *Standards*. The team may decide to have this session as a group, individual interviews with key instructors, or request for them to meet in smaller 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.

The completed schedule must include; 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.

When scheduling the interviews with fieldwork educators, 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, fieldwork educators should represent facilities or organizations 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. It is usually not advisable to schedule meetings in conjunction with meals; however, a lunchtime meal may be an alternative for fieldwork educators and employers who may travel great distances (i.e., schedule meetings for lunch and a block of time immediately following the meal).

In situations where time and distance preclude in-person interviews, virtual interviews or conference calls are acceptable.

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, time (at a minimum, 1 hour and 45 minutes) 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. Time should also be allotted on the second day for a tour of program space to include the laboratories, classrooms, student space, and the library. A short period should be left free for the team to review materials at the end of each day, and no meetings or activities of any nature should be scheduled for the evenings.

On the morning of the third day, the schedule should allow time for the team to meet with the program director to review their findings and complete the Report of the On-Site Evaluation (ROSE).

The tentative on-site schedule must 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 for the Team Chairperson's review. The Team Chairperson may suggest adjustments to the schedule and will communicate those changes to the program director. After the schedule is confirmed the program director must upload a final schedule to the ACOTE Online (<https://acote.aota.org/login>) Self-Study Home tab **2 weeks** prior to the on-site evaluation.

### **ADDITIONAL NOTES:**

- It is expected that the administration, program director, staff, and students will demonstrate professional and personal communication with the on-site team in a manner that is respectful and free from threats and personal attack. If at any time the on-site team is uncomfortable due to unprofessional conduct by the administration, program director, staff, or students and after consultation with the ACOTE reader and Accreditation staff, the team may terminate the visit. The visit will be rescheduled later and at the program's expense. If appropriate, the individual(s) may be reported to the AOTA Ethics Commission.
- The optimum number of individuals available for interview by the on-site team for each group meeting is 10 or more. If that number falls below 6, there is the potential that the on-site visit 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 Report of On-Site Evaluation (ROSE). 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

### Travel

The program director is asked to provide information regarding local transportation to the team (i.e., best method of reaching the institution, specific routes for those driving, recommendations regarding renting a car, taking a taxi, using public transportation, etc.). Team members will make their own travel arrangements and notify the program director of their plans and schedules.

### Accommodations

The program director is asked to make room reservations for the on-site team at least 3 months prior to the on-site visit at a convenient, moderately priced hotel. Programs should NOT PREPAY for the hotel rooms as the team members are required to transfer the form of payment upon check-in.

Reservations should be made for a minimum of three (3) nights, commencing the day before the on-site evaluation is scheduled to begin. The on-site team may request an additional night depending on travel arrangements. When selecting a hotel for the on-site team, program directors are asked to select one that is moderately priced, but safe, clean, and comfortable.

Confirmation of reservations with the name, address, and telephone number of the hotel should be sent to each team member using the [Accreditation Hotel Form](#) copying accreditation staff (accred@aota.org). ACOTE and on-site evaluators are responsible for all the team's expenses (i.e., travel, hotel, and meals). Reimbursement of any expenses incurred by the team is handled directly through the Accreditation department. ***The host school does not pay for any of the team's expenses as those costs are incorporated into the annual accreditation fee.***

### Telephone Contacts

The program director should send the team members and Accreditation staff direct phone numbers for the program director, or another number for weekends and evenings, in case of an emergency prior to the on-site visit.

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

### Meeting Room

The team **must** have a secure room equipped with a large table, chairs and water. Programs must not provide meals for the evaluation teams; however, they must have accessible food options. Arrangements should be made for all interviews and conferences to be held in the secure meeting room, except for those with the president and/or dean to maximize the team's time. If virtual or remote interviews are scheduled as part of the on-site evaluation, please ensure that supportive technology equipment and instructions are provided to the team.

## THE ON-SITE EVALUATION

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

### 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
  - 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)
  - 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
  - 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 occupational therapists or occupational therapy 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
  - support from the administration

## THE EXIT CONFERENCE

On the third morning, prior to the exit (final) conference, the team meets in executive session to review its findings and draft the evaluating team's ROSE. Following this, generally 10:00-11:00 a.m., 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 exit report is based on the evaluating team's Report of On-Site Evaluation (ROSE) and includes:

- major strengths of the program
- suggestions for enriching or broadening the program
- areas of concern (initial programs only)
- areas of noncompliance with the Standards

Subsequent procedures leading to final action on the program are described. The ROSE is subject to modification by the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE) during the next scheduled meeting.

Following the exit conference, an electronic copy of the ROSE is available to the program director. To expedite preparation of the report for ACOTE review and action, the program director must review and submit any factual corrections or comments regarding the report to the Accreditation department within one week after the on-site evaluation. If no corrections are made, the program director must indicate this within the system and submit the ROSE to ACOTE. Additionally, a written response regarding the on-site visit may be uploaded if there are special considerations or circumstances the program director wants to communicate to ACOTE. However, additional material or documents will not be considered by ACOTE. 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.

## 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 Accreditation staff. Such circumstances should be documented in the 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 ACOTE taking final action on the program.

## ACOTE ACCREDITATION ACTION

Unless deferred, accreditation action on the ROSE is taken by ACOTE at the next scheduled meeting. Following ACOTE's review of the ROSE and any comments submitted by the program director, action is taken to grant an accreditation status (descriptions of each accreditation status are provided in [ACOTE Policy IV.C. Classification of Accreditation Categories](#)). Within 4 to 6 weeks of the ACOTE meeting, notification of final action by ACOTE and the link to the Report of Accreditation Council (RAC) are emailed to the chief executive officer, dean, and the program director. The Report of ACOTE may differ from the on-site evaluator's ROSE presented at the conclusion of the visit. For example, ACOTE may change one or more "Suggestion" to an "Area of Noncompliance" or vice versa based on its analysis of the findings. For additional information regarding request for appeal of an ACOTE decision to deny accreditation see [ACOTE Policy IV.D. Appeals Process](#).

If ACOTE determines that further information related to the program's compliance with the *Standards* is required to enable a fair decision to be made regarding the accreditation of the program, it may defer action until the information is received. ACOTE may request additional materials or schedule a second on-site evaluation or fact-finding visit.

If areas of noncompliance or concern were identified in the Report of ACOTE, the program will be required to submit a Plan of Correction to ACOTE by a specified date. Subsequent Progress Reports will be required until all areas of noncompliance or areas of concern are corrected (see [ACOTE Policy IV.E.1. Plans of Correction](#) and [ACOTE Policy IV.E.2. Progress Reports](#)).