

GUIDELINES AND POLICY STATEMENTS

VI. J. POLICY ON EMERGENCIES AND DISASTERS

DISASTER POLICY

The Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE®) recognizes that there are times of local, regional, or national emergency or disaster that may delay or in other ways compromise communications between occupational therapy educational programs, the AOTA Accreditation Department, and ACOTE members. It may also disrupt operation of programs and classes. For the purpose of this policy/procedure, such an emergency or disaster must impact, or be perceived as potentially impacting, operations and/or communications for at least a 1-month period.

REQUESTS FOR SPECIAL CONSIDERATION

In order to avoid unintentional injury to students, programs, or other stakeholders during times of emergency or disaster, the following policy will be followed.

1. The program director or administrator is requested to contact the Accreditation Department as soon as physically possible after the emergency/disaster to inform accreditation staff of any expected short- or long-term impact on the program and its ability to remain in compliance with the Standards. If there is no communication within 2 weeks, Accreditation Department staff will attempt to contact the program director and administrators of the impacted program by electronic means, telephone, and mail.
2. Once communication is established, the program director or administrator will be asked to consider a request for special consideration by ACOTE under the emergency/disaster policy.
3. Requests for special consideration must include the following information:
 - The nature of the impact on the program and students.
 - The tentative plan and timeline for resumption of classes and other services by the educational program.
 - Contact information for the program director and administrator.
 - Status of the students during the interim period, if any.
 - Length of time for special consideration. (Requests may be granted for a period of time up to 6 months.)
4. Upon receipt of the request, Accreditation Department staff will forward the request to the ACOTE reviewers assigned to the program.
5. Action to grant or deny emergency/disaster special consideration will occur within 2 weeks of receipt of required information and a written request from the program director or administrator based on the verbal and written information supplied by the program director or administrator.

If the two reviewers are unable to agree upon action, or length of the term, or believe that the entire ACOTE membership should be involved, a conference call or other rapid method of information sharing and decision making will be requested.

During the period of special consideration, submission by the program of any requested information (e.g., Plan of Correction, Progress Report, Annual Report, Interim Report, or Report of Self-Study) or other action by the program may be delayed without negative consequences. If an on-site evaluation is scheduled during the granted period, it may be rescheduled. ACOTE may also decide to conduct a virtual, rather than in-person on-site evaluation of the program as long as it can meet the requirements of USDE and CHEA.

6. One extension of the special consideration term may be granted for good cause, for up to 3 months with written information from the program director or administrator explaining the rationale for an extension. The

maximum period a program may be granted special consideration under this policy is 9 months (6 months initially, followed by a 3-month extension).

7. Information will be placed on the ACOTE website (www.acoteonline.org) indicating the period for which the program was granted special consideration status as a result of the emergency or disaster.
8. At the end of the special consideration period, the program director or administrator will be informed of the timeline for submission of any previously requested reports.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PROGRAM

1. If special consideration is granted by ACOTE reviewers, the program director or administrator must provide monthly written updates of progress toward resumption of classes and other services by the educational program.
2. During the granted period of special circumstances, the program director or administrator may request in writing, one extension of up to 3 months should it become evident that the program will not resume operations within the initially granted time period.
3. Should it be evident that the program will not be able to resume classes and other services by the end of the total period of special circumstances, the program director and administrator must request in writing that the program be placed on Inactive Status. (Refer to [ACOTE Policy VI.D. Inactive Status.](#))

RESPONSIBILITIES OF ACOTE

1. If Accreditation staff are unable to make contact with a program representative within 3 weeks of the emergency/disaster, the program's status will be changed to Accreditation-Inactive. Prospective students and others inquiring about the program will be informed that the program is not currently accepting new students. Subsequent actions will be guided by ACOTE's policy on Inactive Status.