

ACCREDITATION PROCESS FOR NEW PROGRAMS

III. A. 1. STEP ONE: THE APPLICATION REVIEW

LETTER OF INTENT

To initiate the accreditation process, a Letter of Intent, Letter of Intent Data Form, and program director's curriculum vitae (if hired) must be submitted to ACOTE, c/o the AOTA Accreditation Department (accred@aota.org), prior to admission of the first class of students.

ACOTE will accept and review a maximum of 12 Candidacy Applications from new or transitioning programs during a given cycle. The assignment of due dates for Candidacy Applications will be based on the receipt date of the Letter of Intent. After the 12-program cap is reached, programs will be subject to the next available review cycle and planned student admission must be delayed accordingly. (See [New Program Slots.](#))

The Letter of Intent should be submitted well in advance of the planned start date to increase the chances of entering the desired review cycle and to allow adequate time to prepare the Candidacy Application.

The Letter of Intent must be signed by the chief executive officer of the sponsoring institution(s). The Letter of Intent must:

- Declare the intention of the institution(s) to develop and seek accreditation for the occupational therapy or occupational therapy assistant program and the degree level for which accreditation is sought.
- Request entry into the first step of the accreditation process for new programs (the Candidacy Review).
- State that the institution(s) agree not to admit students into the occupational therapy or occupational therapy assistant program until Candidacy Status has been obtained from the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE®).
- If offered by more than one institution (e.g., cooperative or consortium program), include information regarding the institutional accreditation status, the role of each institution in the cooperative or consortium arrangement, how the administration of the program will be managed, how the program will operate, and which institution(s) will grant the degree.

The Letter of Intent, Letter of Intent Data Form, and the program director's curriculum vitae (if hired) must be attached to an email addressed to accred@aota.org. Upon receipt, accreditation staff will follow up regarding payment options for the non-refundable deposit that will be applied toward the application fee. Information regarding current fees is located in [ACOTE Policy V.A. Fees](#) and appears in the ACOTE website (www.acoteonline.org).

Please note that the initial accreditation process takes approximately 1 to 2 years to complete and the first class schedule may need to be adjusted to allow completion of the initial accreditation process prior to graduation.

One (1) year prior to the submission of the Candidacy Application, a qualified* program director must be hired full-time and on-site. Six (6) months prior to the submission of the Candidacy Application, a qualified* academic fieldwork coordinator must be hired full-time and on-site. For doctoral programs that submitted a Letter of Intent on or after January 1, 2022, a qualified doctoral capstone coordinator must be hired full-time and on-site at least six (6) months prior to the submission of the Candidacy Application. At least 1 year prior to the submission date for the Candidacy Application, the program must notify the Accreditation Department (accred@aota.org) that a qualified* program director has been hired full-time in order to proceed with the initial accreditation process. Otherwise, the program will be moved to the next available review cycle and planned student admission must be delayed accordingly.

At least 6 months prior to the submission date for the Candidacy Application, the program must notify the Accreditation Department (accred@aota.org) that a qualified* academic fieldwork coordinator (and for doctoral programs that submitted a Letter of Intent on or after January 1, 2022, a qualified doctoral capstone coordinator) has been hired full-time in order to proceed with the initial accreditation process. Otherwise, the program will be moved to the next available review cycle and planned student admission must be delayed accordingly.

Should the director of an Applicant program resign after receiving a slot for submission of a Candidacy Application, the institution must notify the Accreditation Department (accred@aota.org) that another qualified* program director has been hired full-time in order to proceed with the initial accreditation process. Notification must be received within 30 days of the prior program director's resignation or the program will be moved to the next available review cycle and planned student admission must be delayed accordingly. If the institution elects to proceed with the initial accreditation process and submits notification that a qualified* program director has been hired full-time and is on-site, the institution will be advised of the timeline for submission of the Candidacy Application.

**Qualified program director: For the purposes of this policy, program directors must meet all requirements of 2018 Standard A.2.1 one year prior to submission of the Candidacy Application with the exception of the required years of experience in a full-time academic appointment with teaching responsibilities. That requirement must be met prior to starting the first class of students in occupational therapy coursework.*

**Qualified academic fieldwork coordinator: For the purposes of this policy, academic fieldwork coordinators must meet all requirements of 2018 Standard A.2.4 six months prior to submission of the Candidacy Application with the exception of the required years of clinical experience as an occupational therapist or occupational therapy assistant. That requirement must be met prior to starting the first class of students in occupational therapy coursework.*

CANDIDACY APPLICATION

Upon receipt of the Letter of Intent, data form, program director's curriculum vitae, and deposit, AOTA Accreditation Department staff will conduct a preliminary review of the program director's credentials, and, if acceptable, provide the program with instructions for completing the Eligibility Application in ACOTE Online (<https://acote.aota.org>). Once that is submitted, staff will provide the Candidacy Application and a preliminary timeline for the accreditation process.

The Candidacy Application must be electronically signed by the occupational therapy program director, the dean or administrator overseeing the proposed program, and the chief executive officer of the sponsoring institution. Candidacy Applications or fees received after the deadline may result in loss of the Candidacy Application submission slot. The program may request review in the next available Candidacy Application review cycle.

REQUIREMENTS FOR CANDIDACY STATUS

The program must provide all the requested information and meet the requirements of the Candidacy Application. In addition, the occupational therapy educational program must:

1. Be a new program that has been granted authorization through the governance processes of the parent institution to offer the credential for which Candidacy Status is sought.
2. Be sponsored by an institution that is accredited by a recognized institutional accrediting agency in compliance with ACOTE Standard A.1.1. Institutional Accreditation. For programs in countries other than the United States, ACOTE will determine an equivalent external review process.
3. Agree, as stated in the Letter of Intent, not to admit students to the occupational therapy or occupational therapy assistant program until Candidacy Status has been obtained.
4. Agree to inform students who apply to or plan to enroll in the program that it is not yet accredited and convey the implications of nonaccreditation for program graduates. (The institution may advertise its occupational therapy or occupational therapy assistant program as an Applicant program, but it must be made clear that

there is no guarantee that the program will receive Candidacy Status or be allowed to admit students). (See [ACOTE Policy VI.E. Sample Statements Regarding Accreditation Status and Use of the ACOTE Logo](#)).

The program must describe the specific mechanisms it will use to ensure that prospective students and other relevant parties are fully and accurately informed of the program's accreditation status and its effect on graduates' eligibility for the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy certification examination and state licensure.

5. Ensure that the balance of the application fee and the Candidacy Application are received on or before the due date. The program will not be reviewed for Candidacy Status if payment is not received by the AOTA Accreditation Department by close of business (5:00 p.m. Eastern Time) on the due date.
6. Have a full-time, qualified* program director hired and on-site 1 year prior to submission of the Candidacy Application as well as a full-time, qualified* academic fieldwork coordinator hired and on-site 6 months prior to submission of the Candidacy Application. This must be maintained throughout candidacy and the initial accreditation process for new programs. The program must agree to delay the program's progression to the next step in the development process until program can meet the accreditation requirement of having a full-time, qualified* program director hired and on-site 1 year prior to submission of the Candidacy Application as well as a full-time academic fieldwork coordinator hired and on-site 6 months prior to submission of the Candidacy Application. Specifically, students may not begin occupational therapy coursework in a program having Candidacy Status unless there is a qualified full-time occupational therapy program director and a qualified* full-time academic fieldwork coordinator on-site.

*If the program director does not have the required years of experience in a full-time academic appointment with teaching responsibilities at the time the Candidacy Application is submitted, the institution must detail plans (e.g., additional time in a full-time academic appointment with teaching responsibilities, plan for mentoring, co-teaching, additional coursework, etc.) to ensure that the program director meets the requirements prior to starting the first class of students in occupational therapy coursework.

Similarly, if the academic fieldwork coordinator does not have the required years of clinical experience as an occupational therapist at the time the Candidacy Application is submitted, the institution must detail plans to ensure that the academic fieldwork coordinator meets the requirements prior to starting the first class of students in occupational therapy coursework.

7. Provide evidence of signed letters of intent or memorandums of understanding (MOUs) for two Level II fieldwork placements for each student in a variety of settings consistent with the curriculum design. (The signed letters of intent or MOUs are to be uploaded with the Candidacy Application for all anticipated students who will be admitted into the program during the first year. For example, if a program anticipates accepting 3 cohorts of 20 students (60 students) during the first year, the program must upload the letters of intent or MOUs for 120 student placements in the Candidacy Application.)

FEES

An application fee must be submitted by the due date for the Candidacy Application. Information regarding current fees is located in [ACOTE Policy V.A. Fees](#) and appears in the ACOTE website (www.acoteonline.org). The Candidacy Application and balance of the application fee must be received by AOTA by the close of business (5:00 p.m. Eastern Time) on the due date (or next business day if the due date falls on a weekend or holiday).

APPLICATION REVIEW

Upon receipt, the Candidacy Application will be assessed by a review team comprised of a member of the Roster of Accreditation Evaluators and a member of ACOTE. The program director may be requested to provide additional written information to the review team to clarify or enhance submitted materials. The reviewers will submit a report at the next ACOTE meeting to recommend that ACOTE grant, defer action on, or deny Candidacy Status. ACOTE may also grant provisional Candidacy Status as noted below.

Provisional Candidacy Status Granted

ACOTE has an **exception clause** to include granting Provisional Candidacy Status for programs that wish to submit Candidacy Applications for a new occupational therapy or occupational therapy assistant program and **reside in a state that requires Candidacy Status from ACOTE prior to approving the new program**. This exception allows programs to move forward with the understanding that state approval must be received before the first class of students enter the program. All other rules apply.

Once ACOTE receives official notification of state approval, the status of the program will be changed from Provisional Candidacy Status to Candidacy Status and the program may proceed with admission of the first class of students into the program.

Candidacy Status Granted

If the Candidacy Application documents that the program meets the requirements for Candidacy Status and indicates the program's potential to achieve compliance with the Standards, the action will be to **grant Candidacy Status**. As soon as the institutional officials receive notification from ACOTE that the program has been granted Candidacy Status, they may admit students into the program according to the approved timeline and move to the second step, which is the preaccreditation review. AOTA will officially list the program as having Candidacy Status.

Programs that are granted Candidacy Status may request an earlier start date for their first class of students if the scheduled graduation date will occur AFTER initial accreditation action by ACOTE. Requests for an earlier start date should be addressed to the Director, AOTA Accreditation Department and sent to accred@aota.org.

Once Candidacy Status has been granted, requests to expand or significantly change the program (e.g., admit an additional student cohort, increase the number of students to be accepted each year by 25% or more from the number indicated in the program's Candidacy Application, offer the program at an additional location by distance education, add a weekend, evening, or part-time track, etc.) require advance approval from ACOTE. The request for a significant change must include all information designated under "Significant Program Changes or Additions" in [ACOTE Policy V.B.1. Additions or Changes](#).

If the **program director resigns** after the program has received Candidacy Status, the program **may not** admit a new cohort of students until a new, qualified* program director is hired and on site.

Action on Candidacy Status Deferred

The program's **application will be deferred** if the information received from the applicant is incomplete and/or insufficient for evaluation. Supplementary information is requested for consideration at a subsequent ACOTE meeting. The program receives, along with the notification of deferral, a list of concerns identified by ACOTE in reaching their decision and a due date for submission of supplementary information that addresses the concerns. The supplementary information is reviewed at the next meeting of ACOTE, at which time a decision will be made to either grant, defer, or deny the Candidacy Status. A program may have action on the Candidacy Application deferred a maximum of two times.

Candidacy Status Denied

The program will be **denied Candidacy Status** if 1) the program does **not** meet the requirements for Candidacy Status, or 2) the Application does not indicate the program's potential to achieve compliance with the Standards. If Candidacy Status is denied, the program will **not** be able to admit students and will **not** be eligible to proceed to the preaccreditation review step. The program may reapply for Candidacy Status by submitting a new Letter of Intent and starting the initial accreditation process again. The deadline for receipt of the Letter of Intent is determined by the new planned student enrollment date. Applicable fees would be assessed. [ACOTE Policy IV.D. Appeals Process](#) clearly delineates procedures for programs wishing to appeal an action to Deny Candidacy Status.

TERM OF CANDIDACY STATUS

A program receiving Candidacy Status must admit students to the program within 2 years of the enrollment date indicated in the Letter of Intent or reapply for Candidacy Status. Candidacy Status cannot be renewed or extended; however, programs may reapply for Candidacy Status. Applicable initial accreditation fees will be assessed. A change in the timeline for initial accreditation must be requested in writing to accred@aota.org.