

## IV. B. 4. TRANSITIONING EDUCATION LEVELS

### ACCREDITED PROGRAMS TRANSITIONING TO A HIGHER DEGREE LEVEL:

- OT MASTER'S TO AN OT DOCTORAL DEGREE LEVEL
- OTA ASSOCIATE TO AN OTA BACCALAUREATE DEGREE LEVEL

Accreditation status is awarded based on compliance with degree-specific accreditation Standards. As a result, the accreditation status of the accredited master's-degree-level occupational therapy program or associate-degree-level occupational therapy assistant program cannot automatically accrue to the proposed doctoral-degree-level program or proposed baccalaureate-degree-level program. Accredited master's-degree-level occupational therapy programs and associate-degree-level occupational therapy assistant programs transitioning to an entry-level doctoral program or entry-level baccalaureate level program must follow a separate accreditation procedure for the new degree-level program. ACOTE review and acceptance of the Candidacy Application is required prior to the admission of students into the curriculum. The accreditation status of the existing program does not accrue to the new degree-level program until the procedures for accreditation of the new program are successfully completed.

### LETTER OF INTENT

An occupational therapy program or occupational therapy assistant program seeking accreditation for a new entry-level degree program should first seek approval to offer the doctoral or baccalaureate degree from the institution, the educational licensing and/or governing board(s) of the state(s) in which the program is to be offered, and the institutional accrediting body. The program does not need to have degree-granting authority at the time of the Letter of Intent, but must have that authority at the time the Candidacy Application is submitted. To begin the accreditation process, the program should submit the following documentation:

A Letter of Intent that is signed by 1) the chief executive officer of the sponsoring institution(s) and 2) the occupational therapy or occupational therapy assistant program director of the proposed program.

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.
- 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 program until Candidacy Status has been obtained from the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE®). Provide evidence of all necessary approvals to offer the required degree from the institution, the educational licensing and/or governing board(s) of the state(s) in which the program is to be offered, and the institutional accrediting body. In cases where no approval is needed, a statement to that effect from the relevant body is required. If these approvals have not yet been received, the program should provide a timeline indicating when the approvals will be received.
- 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.
- Indicate:
  1. The desired submission date for the Candidacy Application (August 15<sup>th</sup> for a December Candidacy decision, December 15<sup>th</sup> for an April Candidacy decision, or April 15<sup>th</sup> for an August Candidacy Decision).
  2. The month and year the first class is projected to enter the new program (must be after Candidacy Status is awarded).
  3. The month and year the first class is projected to begin Level II fieldwork.
  4. The month and year the first class is projected to begin the doctoral-level capstone (for doctoral programs only).
  5. The month and year the first class is projected to graduate.

6. The year the first graduates are projected to sit for the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy (NBCOT) certification examination.

The program must also document in the Letter of Intent that it meets the following criteria:

1. The master's or associate degree program must be fully accredited by ACOTE and may not be on Probationary Accreditation. If the program is carrying areas of noncompliance, those areas must be corrected prior to submission of the Letter of Intent.
2. The program director must possess all of the experience and credentials required for a doctoral or baccalaureate-degree-level educational program.

Programs should submit a scanned copy of the Letter of Intent, completed Letter of Intent Data Form, the program director's CV, and evidence of all necessary approvals to offer the baccalaureate or doctoral degree to [accred@aota.org](mailto:accred@aota.org).

**NOTE:** No fees are required for currently accredited master's-degree-level programs transitioning to the doctoral degree level or currently accredited associate-degree-level programs transitioning to the baccalaureate degree level. Up to 6 transitioning programs may be added to a Candidacy Application submission cycle beyond the 12-program cap.

### STEP 1: THE CANDIDACY APPLICATION REVIEW

Upon receipt of the Letter of Intent, Letter of Intent Data Form, and accompanying documentation, the Accreditation Department staff will 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 deadline for submission of the Candidacy Application is determined by the planned student enrollment date as follows:

Candidacy Application must be received NO LATER THAN 5:00 PM EASTERN TIME on:

December 15 (prior to fall start)  
April 15 (prior to winter start)  
August 15 (prior to spring/summer start)

***The Candidacy Application must be signed by the occupational therapy or occupational therapy assistant program director, the dean or administrator overseeing the proposed program, and the chief executive officer of the sponsoring institution.*** Application materials received after the deadline will result in the materials being returned to the program. The program may resubmit on the next available Application due date.

Upon receipt, the Candidacy Application will be reviewed by a review team. 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.

If the 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 new program according to the approved timeline and move on to the second step, which is the preaccreditation review. AOTA will officially list the doctoral or baccalaureate program as having Candidacy Status.

If the information received from the applicant is incomplete and/or insufficient for evaluation, the program's application will be deferred. Supplementary information is requested for consideration at a subsequent ACOTE meeting.

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.

## STEP 2: THE PREACCREDITATION REVIEW

Programs that have been granted Candidacy Status may proceed into Step 2 of the Initial Accreditation process, the Preaccreditation Review. The program will be required to submit a Report of Self-Study that addresses compliance with all of the *ACOTE Accreditation Standards for a Doctoral-Degree-Level Educational Program for the Occupational Therapist* or *ACOTE Accreditation Standards for a Baccalaureate-Degree-Level Educational Program for the Occupational Therapy Assistant*. No Preaccreditation Review fee will be charged.

Assigned reviewers will conduct a comprehensive assessment of the program's compliance with the applicable ACOTE Accreditation Standards and will make a recommendation to ACOTE regarding the status of the program. There are a number possible scenarios based on the review:

1. If ACOTE determines that the proposed program appears to be in substantial compliance with the ACOTE Accreditation Standards, ACOTE may:
  - a. Grant a status of preaccreditation and proceed with an initial on-site evaluation, or
  - b. Grant a status of accreditation without conducting an initial on-site evaluation. Factors that ACOTE will consider when making this decision include the history of the program, the date of the last on-site evaluation, the date of the next scheduled on-site evaluation, and the ACOTE Standards that were in effect when the program had its last on-site evaluation.
2. If ACOTE determines that the proposed program does NOT appear to be in substantial compliance with the ACOTE Accreditation Standards, the program will be denied preaccreditation status (see [ACOTE Manual Policy III.A.2. Step 2: Preaccreditation Review](#)).

## STEP 3: THE INITIAL ON-SITE EVALUATION

If ACOTE determines that an initial on-site evaluation must be conducted prior to making an accreditation decision, the process will follow the steps outlined in [ACOTE Manual Policy III.A.3. The Initial On-Site Evaluation](#). Since the accredited program has been paying Annual Accreditation Fees that are designed to cover the cost of the on-site visit, no initial on-site fee will be charged.

## STATUS OF THE PROGRAM AND TRANSITION RULE\*

**\*Letters of Intent received after January 1, 2021 are not eligible for the Transition Rule.**

During the transition period, the accreditation status of the program must be maintained until at least the time that the new program is granted accreditation and the last student has graduated from the current program. During this period, there will be special transition rules implemented related to the review of the program.

**NOTE:** There are requirements that must be met to remain compliant with recognition agencies (e.g., U.S. Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation). For example, federal regulations require that ACOTE conduct an on-site evaluation at regularly scheduled intervals in order for a program to maintain accreditation.

If a program has submitted a Letter of Intent with a proposed timeline to seek accreditation for a doctoral-degree-level program for the occupational therapist or baccalaureate-degree-level for the occupational therapy assistant, the program's existing accredited master's-degree-level or associate-degree-level program must comply with the following reporting requirements:

1. Annual Reports:
  - Must be submitted until the master's or associate-degree-level program has withdrawn from accreditation.
2. \*Interim Reports:
  - If the master's or associate-degree-level program is scheduled to graduate its last class and voluntarily withdraw from the accreditation process 4 or more years after the reaccreditation on-site year, a full Interim Report will be required.

- If the master's or associate-degree-level program is scheduled to graduate its last class and voluntarily withdraw from the accreditation process 3 or less years after the reaccreditation on-site year, an abbreviated Interim Report will be required.

An abbreviated Interim Report will address:

- a. Any current areas of noncompliance, and
- b. Standards related to Strategic Plan, Professional Development Plans, Program Evaluation, and Certification Exam Pass Rate. (2018 Standards A.6.1-A.6.4.)

3. \*Reaccreditation and Self-Study Review:

- If the master's or associate-degree-level program is scheduled to graduate its last class and voluntarily withdraw from the accreditation process 4 or more years after the reaccreditation on-site year, a full self-study and on-site will be required.
- If the master's or associate-degree-level program is scheduled to graduate its last class and voluntarily withdraw from the accreditation process 3 or less years after the reaccreditation on-site year, an abbreviated report of self-study and on-site evaluation will be required.
  - a. The abbreviated report of self-study will address:
    - (1) Any current areas of noncompliance, and
    - (2) Standards related to Strategic Plan, Professional Development Plans, Program Evaluation, and Certification Exam Pass Rate. (2018 Standards A.6.1-A.6.4.)
  - b. An abbreviated one day on-site visit will include interviews with faculty, students, administrators, and recent graduates.
  - c. The accreditation term awarded by ACOTE subsequent to an abbreviated on-site visit will be established based on the scheduled graduation date of the last class of master's or associate-degree-level students.

4. Change in Transition Plan:

- For programs whose accreditation term is about to expire, a full Report of Self-Study and on-site is required prior to term expiration. If ACOTE is unable to reach a final decision prior to term expiration, the program's accreditation status will automatically remain in place until ACOTE makes its final decision.