

# 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 check payable to AOTA for a non-refundable deposit of \$500 (applied toward the application fee) must be submitted to ACOTE, c/o the AOTA Accreditation Department, prior to admission of the first class of students. The deadline for receipt of the Letter of Intent and deposit is determined by the planned student enrollment date as follows:

Letter of Intent, data form, and deposit must be received NO LATER THAN 5:00 PM EASTERN TIME on:

November 1	(prior to fall start)
March 1	(prior to winter start)
July 1	(prior to spring/summer start)

***ACOTE will accept and review a maximum of 6 Candidacy Applications during a given cycle. The acceptance of Candidacy Applications will be based on the receipt date of the Letter of Intent (if signed by the program director) or date of notification that a program director has been hired. After the 6-program cap is reached, programs will be subject to the next available review cycle and planned student admission must be delayed accordingly.***

It is suggested that the Letter of Intent be submitted and program director hired well in advance of the deadline to increase the chances of entering the desired review cycle and to allow adequate time to prepare the Candidacy Application. It is the responsibility of the program seeking Candidacy Status to ensure that the Letter of Intent and deposit are received by AOTA prior to 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time of the deadline date. All dates refer to business days. Therefore, if a deadline falls on a weekend or national holiday, the next business day becomes the effective due date for receipt of materials.

The Letter of Intent must be signed by 1) the chief executive officer of the sponsoring institution(s) and 2) the occupational therapy program director **AND/OR** dean overseeing the proposed program. (Although signature of the occupational therapy program director is not required on the Letter of Intent, it is **strongly** recommended that the program director be hired in sufficient time to be instrumental in preparing the Candidacy Application). 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 educational program.
- Request entry into the first step of the accreditation process for new programs (the Application 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.
- Indicate:
  - The level of the program (i.e., associate degree, professional master's degree, or professional doctoral degree).

- The month and year the first class is projected to enter the program (must be after Candidacy Status is awarded).
  - The month and year the first class is projected to begin Level II fieldwork, and for doctoral-level programs, the month and year the first class is projected to begin the doctoral-level experiential component.
  - The month and year the first class is projected to graduate.
  - The year the first graduates are projected to sit for the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy (NBCOT) certification examination.
- Be accompanied by a Letter of Intent Data Form and a check payable to AOTA for a non-refundable deposit of \$500 (which is applied toward the Application Fee).

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.

The Letter of Intent must be addressed to:

ACOTE  
 c/o the AOTA Accreditation Department  
 4720 Montgomery Lane, Suite 200  
 Bethesda, Maryland 20814-3449

In an effort to keep state occupational therapy associations informed of new applicant educational programs in their state, ACOTE forwards a copy of all Letters of Intent and Letter of Intent Data Forms to the appropriate state association president.

## CANDIDACY APPLICATION

Upon receipt of the Letter of Intent, data form, and deposit, AOTA 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 and Application Fee 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 program director, the dean or administrator overseeing the proposed program, and the chief executive officer of the sponsoring institution.***  
 Application materials or fees received after the deadline will result in both the materials and payment being returned to the program. The program may resubmit on the next available Application due date.

## 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. 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.

3. 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 very 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.*

4. 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.
5. Have a full-time program director hired and on staff at the time the Candidacy Application is submitted and throughout 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 the accreditation requirement of having a full-time program director hired and on staff is met. 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 on staff.

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.

6. Provide evidence of signed letters of intent from two Level II fieldwork sites for each student in a variety of settings consistent with the curriculum design.

## 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 Accreditation section of AOTA's Web site ([www.acoteonline.org](http://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 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.

### Candidacy Status Granted

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 program according to the approved timeline and move on 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 as long as 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](mailto: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](#).

#### 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. Clearly delineated procedures for programs wishing to appeal an action of Denial of Candidacy Status are described in [ACOTE Policy IV.D. Appeals Process](#)

#### 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 or deny the Candidacy Status. A program may have action on the Candidacy Application deferred a maximum of two times.

### **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 fees would be assessed. A change in the timeline for initial accreditation must be requested in writing to the AOTA Accreditation Department.