

Essential skills and attributes required for the study of Occupational Therapy

Ontario Council of University Programs in Rehabilitation Sciences (OCUPRS) Policy Document, July 2009

Introduction

The Ontario university programs in Occupational Therapy are responsible to society for providing their enrolled students with opportunities to develop the qualifications (academic knowledge, professional behaviours, attitudes and clinical skills) to enter the profession of Occupational Therapy in Ontario. The purpose of this document is to describe the skills and attributes required for success in completing a university program in Occupational Therapy. Students interested in pursuing a graduate degree in Occupational Therapy are encouraged to review the following document that outlines the requisite attributes to undertake a master's program in occupational therapy.

An offer of admission to an Occupational Therapy program should not be interpreted as evidence that the Occupational Therapy program has independently verified an applicant's skills and attributes in the domains described below. These skills and attributes are required if students are to be successful in achieving the competency standards of the profession.

The competency standards for Occupational Therapy are described in the *Profile of Occupational Therapy Practice in Canada*.¹ For this reason, students admitted to the Occupational Therapy programs must possess the attributes described below in order to be able to develop the competencies required of an entry-to-practice Occupational Therapist. Students must be able to demonstrate sound clinical and professional judgment and demonstrate responsible decision making to become graduates who are cognizant of practice accountability issues, laws, and regulations, professional codes of ethics and standards of evidence – based practice.

In addition to obtaining a degree in Occupational Therapy, an individual must pass the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists Certification Examination² and be registered with the provincial regulatory organization, College

of Occupational Therapy of Ontario (COTO) in order to practice as an Occupational Therapist.

It is anticipated that reasonable accommodation may be provided to individuals who demonstrate such requirement on the basis of a prohibited ground of discrimination. The following description of required skills and attributes is not intended to preclude individuals who may require reasonable accommodation. Students who anticipate that reasonable accommodation will enable them to meet the required standards for these skills and abilities are responsible for articulating their requirements. Requests for accommodation are considered on a case-by-case basis according to the applicable policies, regulations and procedures. Applicants are strongly encouraged to seek out and review the policies, regulations and procedures regarding accommodation at the university(ies) and program(s) to which they are applying. If admitted to a program, students will be required to follow the policies and procedures of the university and faculty/school within which the program is located.

Description of the Skills and Attributes for Students in a Master's-level program in Occupational Therapy

Aptitude and attitude

Students seeking to enter an Occupational Therapy program must have an interest in promoting health and well-being through occupation. They must demonstrate sensitivity, compassion, integrity, and concern for others. Students must have the cognitive abilities to understand and develop the theoretical knowledge and technical expertise to work collaboratively with their peers, clients, and colleagues. They must be respectful of individuality and diversity, build trusting relationships, demonstrate excellent interpersonal skills to engage and motivate clients and families, demonstrate creative problem solving skills and be able to manage multiple, potentially competing demands.

Information gathering skills

Students must be able to gather information about a client's status that is typically acquired through visual, auditory and tactile senses. Gathering information typically includes reading charts or other written documentation, listening to clients, observing body language and use of assessment tools.

Communication skills

Students must be able to speak, hear and observe in order to efficiently elicit information, describe mood, activity, posture and perceive non-verbal communication. Students must be able to communicate effectively and sensitively with clients and families and all members of the health care team. They must be able to summarize coherently a client's condition, assessment and intervention plan verbally and in text (handwriting and /or electronically) to maintain clear, accurate and appropriate records of client encounters and action plans that comply with regulatory and organizational record keeping standards.

¹ The *Profile of Occupational Therapy Practice in Canada* was published in October 2007 by the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists. The document is available for download from the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists website, specifically at <http://www.caot.ca/pdfs/otprofile.pdf>.

² For more complete information about the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists Certification Examination, consult the CAOT at <http://www.caot.ca/default.asp?pageid=424>.

Some programs may have specific language requirements to meet the needs of the clinical settings in a geographical area. Students should note that the level of communication fluency required is often higher than is generally assessed in standard testing of language fluency; students are responsible for achieving the high level of communication that may be required.

Critical thinking skills

Students must demonstrate the skills necessary to analyze, integrate and synthesize information. Students use relevant models, frameworks and theories of occupational therapy to apply relevant and current scientific knowledge. Effective problem solving, conceptual thinking and judgment are necessary to address client needs, and to engage the client through occupation in a safe and efficient manner. In addition, the student must be able to comprehend spatial relationships. Students must demonstrate these critical thinking skills in all learning environments, including the classroom and in clinical and community settings in order to build a foundation for evidence-based practice. Students must also demonstrate a capacity to accurately assess their own performance to further direct their learning.

Psychomotor/Physical skills

Students must consistently demonstrate the physical health/skills required to provide safe, effective and efficient service (assessment and intervention) for their clients, subject to any reasonable accommodation that may be required. Students must be able to use common assessment and intervention tools/instruments either directly or in an adaptive form. In addition, students are expected to participate in all learning experiences of the educational program (*e.g.*, for clinical skills laboratory work) on a full time basis.

Emotional Health

Students must consistently demonstrate the emotional health required for full utilization of their intellectual abilities. Students must also be able to tolerate the physical, emotional and mental demands of the program and perform effectively under stress. It is critical that students be able to adapt to changing environments and function well in the face of uncertainties that are inherent in the care of clients. Students must consistently demonstrate the emotional resilience and balance to manage a myriad of emotionally charged or ethically challenging scenarios that frequently arise in all OT practice settings.