

Essential Skills and Attributes Required for the Study of Occupational Therapy

Introduction

This document provides information for applicants to Occupational Therapy programs, students, faculty, staff, accessibility service providers, health professionals, and the public about the essential skills and abilities expected of candidates in Occupational Therapy (OT) entry-to-practice programs. The purposes of the Essential Skills and Abilities document are to:

- provide information to prospective OT candidates so they can make an informed choice regarding applying to a program;
- help guide OT candidate, faculty and staff efforts toward student achievement of the essential skills and abilities;
- help prospective and current candidates decide if they should register with student accessibility services;
- help candidates, student accessibility advisors, faculty, staff and health professionals develop reasonable accommodations such that candidates may meet the ESA requirements;
- help ensure the safety of learners during the education program and
- help ensure the safety of patients/clients during student clinical encounters.

The Ontario graduate university programs in Occupational Therapy are responsible for providing their enrolled students with opportunities to develop the competencies (academic knowledge, professional behaviours, attitudes and clinical skills) to enter the profession of Occupational Therapy in Ontario. Students interested in pursuing a

graduate degree in occupational therapy must understand the skills and attributes required to undertake a Master's level degree program in occupational therapy.

An offer of admission to an occupational therapy graduate program should not be interpreted as evidence that the program has independently verified an applicant's skills and attributes in the domains described below. The applicant should self-assess these skills and attributes that are essential to acquire the competency standards of the profession.

The competency standards for occupational therapy are described in the *Profile of Occupational Therapy Practice in Canada* (the *Profile of Occupational Therapy Practice in Canada* was first published in 2007 and revised in 2012 by the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists [CAOT]). The document is available for download from the CAOT website at www.caot.ca/pdfs/2012otprofile.pdf) and in the *Essential Competencies of Practice for Occupational Therapists in Canada* (May 2011 [3rd edition] as published by ACOTRO and available on the ACOTRO website at http://www.acotro-core.org/sites/default/files/uploads/essentialcompetencies3rded_webversion.pdf).

These complementary documents describe the knowledge, skills and abilities that students admitted to the Occupational Therapy programs must develop to be eligible for practice as an entry-to-practice occupational therapist. Through the course of their program, students must, in addition to demonstrating competence in fundamental and applied knowledge and skills for occupational therapy practice, demonstrate sound clinical and professional judgment, and responsible decision-making in keeping with all relevant laws, 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 (CAOT) Certification Examination and be registered with the regulatory organization in the province in which the graduate will practice (in Ontario, the College of Occupational Therapy of Ontario), in order to practice as an occupational therapist. (For more complete information about the CAOT Certification Examination, consult the CAOT website at www.caot.ca.)

Description of the Skills and Attributes for Students in a Master-level Program in Occupational Therapy

This section elaborates on the skills and attributes expected of students entering programs of occupational therapy in Ontario. Note that while some specific examples are included, these are illustrative and not exhaustive.

Aptitude and Attitude

Individuals 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. They must have the cognitive abilities to understand and develop theoretical knowledge and technical expertise to work collaboratively with their peers, clients, colleagues, managers and payers. They must be respectful of individuality and diversity, build trusting relationships, demonstrate excellent interpersonal skills to educate and enable clients and families, demonstrate creative problem solving skills and conflict resolution skills, and manage multiple, potentially competing demands.

Individuals must have the capacity to manage the academic rigour of an intensive and highly integrated classroom and clinical curriculum, and must commit to continuous personal and professional development via reflection and feedback. Ethical and emotional maturity, and integrity are required.

Information Gathering Skills

Students must be able to gather information about a client's status that can be acquired through visual, auditory and tactile senses. Gathering information typically includes reviewing charts or other written documentation, communicating with clients, observing body language, palpating parts of the body, and using assessment tools. The ability to gather information from the literature and other sources to inform OT service delivery is required.

Communication Skills

Students must be able to listen, observe verbal and nonverbal information, and formulate verbal communications and text that are appropriate to the recipient and that facilitate the intended outcomes. Students must be able to give and receive feedback, communicate effectively and sensitively with clients, families and communities, as well as members of health care, social service or educational teams. Students must be able to coherently and succinctly summarize a client's condition, assessment and intervention plan both verbally and in text (handwriting and /or electronically) to maintain clear, accurate and appropriate records that comply with regulatory and organizational record-keeping standards.

Students must be able to collaborate effectively with health care, social service and educational team members, communicating verbally, non-verbally, and in text. Respect for team mates with a focus on ethical practice is important for interprofessional collaboration.

Some programs may have specific language requirements to meet the needs of the clinical settings in a geographical area. Students should note requirements for comprehension and fluency are often higher than is generally assessed in standard testing of language fluency, due to the need for sensitive and nuanced communications with diverse client groups. In particular, students must facilitate client safety, informed decision-making and fully independent and ethical interactions with clients. Students are responsible for achieving the required high level of communication skills.

Critical Thinking Skills

Students must demonstrate the cognitive skills and memory necessary to retain, analyze, integrate and synthesize complex and diverse bodies of knowledge and particular information. Applicants must demonstrate open-mindedness and insight to be able to integrate and apply models, frameworks and theories in occupational therapy. 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. 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 reflect on their performance in order to self-direct their learning.

Psychomotor/Physical Skills

Students must consistently demonstrate the physical health and skills required to provide safe, effective and efficient service (assessment, consultation and intervention) for clients. Students must be able to apply assessment and intervention tools and instruments using required procedures to maintain standardization in assessments or interventions. Most programs require that students have the capacity to participate in all learning experiences of the educational program on a full time basis (approximately 8 hours of classroom or clinical instruction per day). Examples of physical activities include using mechanical lifts and performing or directing transfers, positioning clients in bed or wheelchairs, enabling client mobility, maneuvering in confined spaces, manipulating small parts of assessment tools, and supporting clients in reaching, handling, manipulating, lifting and moving objects.

Coping and Resilience

Students must consistently demonstrate the coping skills and resilience required for full utilization of intellectual, physical and emotional abilities in academic and clinical learning.

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 are able to adapt to changing environments and expectations across courses and clinical assignments, and function well in the face of challenges that are inherent in working with clients. Students must consistently demonstrate the resilience and coping skills to manage difficult or ethically challenging scenarios that frequently arise in occupational

therapy practice settings.

Students must be capable and demonstrate accurate and consistent self-assessment in all program requirements, identify challenges, seek guidance when indicated and implement strategies to manage challenges that may impact any of these essential skills and attribute requirement.

Students with Disabilities

Ontario Occupational Therapy programs are committed to ensuring that students are afforded an academic environment that is dedicated to the advancement of learning and that is based on the principles of equitable access and individual dignity; as such, they are committed to facilitating the integration of students with disabilities into the University community. Their Faculties/Schools also strive to preserve the academic integrity of the University and the program by affirming that all students satisfy the essential requirements of the program and program courses.

Each student with a disability is entitled to reasonable accommodation that will assist her/him to meet the program standards and academic requirements. Reasonable accommodation cannot compromise the essential requirements of a program or client/patient safety and well-being. The purpose of a reasonable accommodation is to ensure the student with a disability has the same opportunity as his/her student peers to attain the required operational level, but is not meant to guarantee success in the program.

Exploring reasonable accommodation options may involve the exercise of flexibility by both the University and the student with a disability, while maintaining the academic and technical standards and requirements of the program. The student with a disability must be able to demonstrate the requisite knowledge and behaviours, and perform the necessary skills independently and safely. In rare circumstances an intermediary may be appropriate. Instances when an intermediary may not be appropriate include, for example, where the intermediary has to provide cognitive support; or is a substitute for

cognitive skills; or is solely conducting an assessment or treatment; or supplements clinical reasoning or judgment. The appropriateness of an intermediary will be assessed on a case by case basis.

Before accepting an offer of admission, students who may require disability related accommodations are strongly advised to review the policies, procedures, and regulations regarding accommodations and consult with the University's student accommodation services and the Faculty/School making the offer. Please note that certain accommodations obtained in previous educational settings may not be appropriate, particularly with respect to clinical requirements. If admitted, students will be required to follow the policies and procedures of the University and Faculty/School within which the program is located.

Note: Specific programs in Ontario may have additional program specific essential requirements.

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