

ACOTUP position statement on the Development of Occupational Therapy Education Programs in
Canada

By the Association of Canadian Occupational Therapy University Programs

Purpose statement:

As new occupational therapy (OT) education programs are developed and instituted in Canada, they enter a vibrant and constantly evolving educational and political environment. New programs have the potential for a wide range of impacts on OT education and research across the country. Similarly, the context that new programs enter is increasingly complex, and multiple factors affect operations, the quality of programs, and ultimately the student experience. The mission of the Association of Canadian Occupational Therapy University Programs (ACOTUP) is to provide leadership on strategic issues that contribute to OT and occupational science research that is university and university-practitioner based as well as the education of future OTs and researchers. As leaders in OT education, we believe a document outlining topics that require critical examination during program development and implementation will enhance the success of new programs.

Factors to consider:

- 1) *Fieldwork Education*: Providing excellent fieldwork experiences is an essential part of a high quality OT educational program. Although all Canadian OT programs recognize this and strive towards it, this is one of the most challenging components for many Canadian OT programs to achieve and maintain. Currently in Canada, the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists accreditation standards require a minimum of 1000 supervised hours as defined by WFOT in “Minimum Standards for the Education of Occupational Therapists 2002” p. 24-25 and the current Canadian practice profile. Ideally, Canadian OT Programs would have a large and varied selection of high quality fieldwork opportunities that meets students’ specific learning needs. Currently the number of fieldwork offers that many programs receive is suboptimal and does not provide the ideal diversity of practical experience to prepare graduates for the array of settings in which occupational therapists are needed. Thus, proposed programs should: 1) objectively evaluate the number of potential fieldwork learning opportunities available to them within their region of operation, 2) consult with other programs to understand how fieldwork capacity is currently developed and shared, and potential implications of a new program on supply, 4) determine the infrastructure, resources and personnel that will be required to develop and expand the fieldwork learning opportunities in their region, and 5) develop a collaborative working relationship with the ACOTUP committee dedicated to fieldwork administration and quality (Canadian University Fieldwork Education Committee) once their program is approved.
- 2) *Faculty Recruitment*: Newly proposed programs will need to recruit PhD level occupational therapists as faculty members for their programs. Establishing successful research programs is increasingly requiring post-doctoral training for new faculty members. Proposed programs need to determine the number of faculty and the areas of expertise required to maintain a robust research profile for the program while considering optimal workload assignments to effectively meet program goals. Proposed programs will want to advocate for adequate post-doctoral training opportunities, and the resources to support them, so that their pool of potential PhD-level OT recruits are adequately prepared to establish an independent research program.
- 3) *Workforce Demand*: Presently, the Canadian universities producing occupational therapists are supported by public funds and tuition. Canadian OT Programs contribute to the health,

productivity and wellbeing of Canadians by generating an adequate number of graduates to meet the growing needs of the Canadian public. Objective evaluation of the number of new graduates required in different regions to meet the current and future needs of the population should be undertaken. New program planners should work with governments, provincial OT regulatory bodies and existing programs to estimate the current vacancy rate, attrition rate, growth rate, etc. to optimize the projected need for future OT graduates and support optimal employment rates for graduates.

- 4) *Responsiveness to Health System Context*: In order to promote excellence in OT in Canada, proposed programs need to include Canadian OT theory, focus on Canadian models of OT practice and teach core information about rehabilitation, health and social service delivery in Canada. Because health care delivery is a provincial responsibility in Canada, provincial legislation as it relates to issues such as regulation of practice, service reimbursement systems, privacy, record keeping and ethical practice is also essential content for preparation of professionals in the Canadian context. The key documents guiding the education of occupational therapists are the *Profile of Occupational Therapy Practice in Canada, 2012*, the *Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT) Academic Standards and Self-Study Guide 2011* (both published by CAOT), the *Essential Competencies of Practice for Occupational Therapists in Canada, 3rd edition, 2011* (published by and informing the provincial regulatory organizations in fulfilling their mandates) or in Quebec the *Référentiel de compétences lié à l'exercice de la profession d'ergothérapeute au Québec 2013* (published by the OEQ), other relevant provincial documentation, and Canadian textbooks core to OT and the provision of health, social, and educational services.
- 5) *Interprofessional Education (IPE)*: Interprofessionalism is a priority of health systems nationally, and supported by such organizations as the Canadian Interprofessional Health Collaborative (www.cihc.ca). Thus, all existing programs provide learning opportunities for interprofessional skill development within the learning environment to prepare graduates to work with other professions in multiple service sectors. Partnerships take time to develop and many practical considerations exist in delivery of IPE. New programs should explore partnerships with other health, social and educational professional programs early, both within and outside the home institution to ensure IPE learning opportunities for OT students.
- 6) *Accreditation Standards*: Occupational therapy programs in Canada are accredited by the Academic Credentialing Council (ACC) of the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists. Accreditation is a quality assurance process through which is granted to a program of study once it has met certain standards of education established by the responsible authorities. Academic accreditation serves to maintain consistent national standards and quality professional education, supports the growth and development of educational programs and the occupational therapy profession, and monitors educational standards worldwide so as to assess trends and ensure graduate mobility. The ACC is responsible for establishing standards, evaluating programs, recommending accreditation awards to the CAOT Board of Directors, and monitoring quality of Canadian programs. It is critical that new program developers consult the CAOT standards, and consider the process requirement for achieving accredited status.

ACOTUP is incorporated as a learned society of educational programs, dedicated to advancing education and research in OT and occupational science. ACOTUP's voluntary members work collaboratively to generate and exchange ideas and philosophies in OT education with the aim of contributing to the

health, productivity and wellbeing of Canadians and others around the world. All accredited university OT programs in Canada are member organizations of ACOTUP, and the organization welcomes new members that fulfill the requirements of membership.