



## OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ASSISTANT Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

The following are the most frequently asked questions about the Cabarrus College of Health Sciences Occupational Therapy Assistant Program.

### 1. What is Occupational Therapy?

Occupational Therapy, OT is concerned with prevention of disabling conditions and with rehabilitation of clients who have physical disabilities, mental illness, developmental delay, and problems resulting from aging. You might find OT personnel working with:

- A child in the public school
- A stroke patient in the hospital
- A schizophrenic client at the veterans' hospital
- An elderly resident in a nursing home
- An injured seamstress trying to return to work
- A mother with developmental disabilities
- A homemaker with severe arthritis, requiring special equipment in her home

The role of the Occupational Therapy clinician is to help clients improve abilities to perform despite physical and mental impairments and activity restrictions. Occupational therapy practitioners are trained to select specific activities and use them therapeutically to meet the goals of each individual. Treatment goals could include: cognitive retraining using a computer, fabricating a splint for a repetitive work injury, adapting a spoon for an individual with arthritis, teaching someone how to dress themselves with the use of one hand, adapting a switch so a child can operate a battery-operated toy and teaching a leisure activity to a client with depression.

"Occupation" is the task that has meaning and purpose for the client. Successfully engaging in occupation is the end product of occupational therapy.

### 2. Who practices Occupational Therapy? Should I be a COTA or an OTR?

There are two levels of Occupational therapy practitioners: the Registered Occupational Therapist (OTR), and the Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant (COTA). An OTR will have six years of education and a master's degree. People who choose to be OTR's like working with people, but also enjoy attending meetings, developing programs, making administrative decisions and conducting research. A COTA has a two-year degree and is most likely to work directly with patients and will have a supervising therapist.



## OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ASSISTANT FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **3. What is a COTA?**

A COTA is a Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant who has studied for two years and works under the supervision of an OTR. The COTA must complete a formal classroom education, fieldwork training and have a passing score on the National Certification Examination. A COTA is licensed by the state of North Carolina.

### **4. What qualities should an OTA student have?**

An OTA student should be a person who likes to work with people. The students need to blend compassion with steadfast determination and demonstrate the ability to handle their own personal problems and feelings before they try to help others. A flexible individual is most suited for this field because it requires both the ability to teach and adapt. Communication both verbally and written are essential. Occupational Therapy is a lifelong profession, so commitment and dedication are important.

### **5. How long is the program?**

It takes two full years, five semesters. The courses must be taken in sequence.

### **6. What is the employment outlook?**

The Cabarrus College of Health Sciences has an excellent reputation in our region and our graduates who have wanted to work have been 100% successful in finding employment within six months of graduation. Beginning salaries range from \$18,000 to \$32,000. Yearly pay increases are typically provided for good performance and additional experience. The educational experience includes training in interviewing, how to apply for your license and complete a job search.

### **7. How do I know if Occupational Therapy is the right field for me?**

Visit the [American Therapy Association web site](#) and observe COTA's and OTR's while they are on the job. Prior to being accepted in the OTA program you will have to complete 25 hours of observing a COTA or OTR while they are working. Completion of these volunteer hours will help you know if occupational therapy assisting is right for you.

### **8. Where will I do fieldwork?**

Students are assigned to do fieldwork throughout the state of North Carolina. There are five fieldwork experiences within our curriculum. Three experiences are called Fieldwork Level I and are primarily observational in nature. The Fieldwork Level I experiences are three hours a week for a total of eight weeks. There are two Fieldwork Level II experiences and they are eight weeks in length for forty hours per week. The majority of our fieldwork placements are within one hour of the college and we try to match students to locations in which they live if at all possible. There are fieldwork sites available outside the state of North Carolina for the Level II experience.

### **9. What are the courses required for the OTA program?**

The OTA classes are made up of lecture and lab and are highly experiential with lots of hands on learning experiences. The general education classes have high standards and the course work is varied and challenging. We work together as a team to help all students succeed.



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### **10. Can I keep working while I am in the COTA program?**

If you need to work it is best if you do so on weekends or at night. There will be times during the semester that you will want to have a flexible work schedule so you can study more right before exams. It is not recommended that you work over 16 hours a week so that you have adequate time to study.

### **11. What do I need to do to be a successful COTA student?**

Meet with your advisor, which is the occupational therapy assistant program or fieldwork coordinator if you are having difficulty with any class either in the OTA program or general education. Meet as soon as possible with the instructor that you are having problems with and include your advisor so a plan can be developed to help you succeed. Take the time to organize and be prepared. Attend all classes and be on time. Attend the classes offered by Student Services that focus on test taking skills, organization and stress management. These classes are free and are very helpful.

### **12. Are there weekend or evening classes?**

The majority of the OTA classes are during the day. There may be classes that are scheduled for early evening hours and on Saturdays to meet the general educational requirements.

### **13. Does the Cabarrus College of Health Sciences have a Physical Therapy program?**

No, we do not have a physical therapy program. We do have a Medical Assisting, Nursing, Surgical Technology, and an Associate of Science program.

### **14. How difficult is the certification exam and how have students done in the past?**

Please see the [Student Graduate and Certification Data](#) link on the top of the OTA program page for specific information regarding student pass rates.

### **15. Can I sit for the certification examination if I have a criminal record?**

According to North Carolina statutes, having a previous conviction of certain misdemeanors or felonies may make an applicant ineligible for licensure and/or certification.

### **16. What is the cost of a uniform or lab coat?**

The cost of a uniform is equivalent to the cost of scrubs that you can purchase at any uniform shop. The color of scrubs is determined by the fieldwork facility site. A lab coat is also easily obtained from a local uniform shop and prices vary.