Occupational Therapy (OTR or OTD)

Career Description

- Occupational Therapists help people of all ages learn or regain the skills they need to function and live independently.
- For example, OTs may work with:
  - Children who have autism or developmental or learning disabilities
  - People recovering the ability to do their own personal care after a stroke or accident
  - Clients with mental illness in coping with the demands of daily living
- OTs work in hospitals, mental health facilities, rehabilitation hospitals, public schools, community centers, nursing homes, and private practice.
- OTs develop customized treatment plans; analyze homes and job sites to make recommendations about adaptive needs; train people in using adaptive equipment; and provide support and guidance to family members and caregivers.

Becoming an Occupational Therapist

- To attend an accredited OT program, a bachelor’s degree in any major and the appropriate prerequisite coursework is required. A master's degree leads to an O.T.R. (Occupational Therapist Registered). A doctoral program leads to an O.T.D. (Doctor of Occupational Therapy).
- Graduate programs in OT are available at the masters and doctoral levels. Programs are shifting to the doctoral degree by 2025. The doctoral program will place a greater emphasis on management, theory, research, and critical thinking and will generally require 3 years to complete.
- Graduation from an accredited educational program and passing a national certification examination is required to become an occupational therapist.

Preparation

- Clinical experience is generally required (either paid or volunteer) and ideally will include a number of clinical practice settings.
- Some schools require a minimum of 40 hours of clinical observation time split between at least two clinical settings.
- Research experience is a plus and ideally includes learning about human subjects review boards.
- OT programs do not have a standard set of requirements, although many similarities do exist.
- The initial courses are similar to other professional health care fields such as Physical Therapy programs, yet some further courses are required.
- Individual programs vary in the courses they require; a broad academic background is encouraged including completion of the following courses with grades of C or better.

Common Prerequisite Courses (pre-reqs determined by each OT program but similar to this list)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirements</th>
<th>Purdue Equivalents (specific courses may vary by major)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anatomy &amp; Physiology</td>
<td>BIOL 20300-20400, in addition BIOL 11000-11100 highly recommended and may be required at some schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>General Chemistry</td>
<td>(some programs require chemistry) CHM 11100-11200 or CHM 11500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>(some programs require physics) PHYS 22000 or PHYS 11800</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social/Behavioral Science</td>
<td>PSY 12000 &amp; PSY 35000 &amp; HDFS 21000 (psychology courses should cover both theory and methodology), additional anthropology/sociology also helpful</td>
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<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>ENGL 10600 or 10800 (Several courses including composition &amp;/or a literature course)</td>
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<td>Communication</td>
<td>COM 11400</td>
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<td>Statistics</td>
<td>STAT 30100 or STAT 50300 or SOC 38200 some schools would accept PSY 20100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Requirements</td>
<td>HSCI 13100 (medical terminology) &amp; PHIL 20100 (ethics) or equivalent; some programs require college-level algebra</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-Med Planning Seminar</td>
<td>BIOL 39600-0 credit 10 week class covering how to apply to medical school and other health professions programs</td>
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Student Organization: Pre-OT/PT Club

Research Programs

- AOTA Find a School https://www.aota.org/Education-Careers/Find-School.aspx

Applying

- An aptitude test, the GRE (Graduate Record Exam—general test) is required at many programs.
- If English is not your first language, a TOEFL exam may also be required.
- Application is through an online system called OTCAS and/or directly with the schools you would like to attend if they do not participate in OTCAS.
- Competitive applicants have:
  - Strong academic performance including a grade point average (GPA) of 3.6 or better
  - High scores on the MCAT
  - Leadership, teamwork, and communication skills
  - Undergraduate research experience
  - Volunteer and shadowing/observation experiences
  - Strong positive letters of recommendation (mostly from faculty and OTs)
- Early application is key as many programs take only a small number of students. Apply by mid-August of your senior year if possible (assuming a 4-year graduation timeline).

Fee Assistance

- Visit specific school websites to learn if fee assistance is available.
- AOTA Financial Aid and Scholarship Information: https://www.aota.org/Education-Careers/Find-School/Aid.aspx
- GRE Fee Reduction Program: https://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/about/fees/reductions/

Employment Outlook

- The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects a faster than average increase in demand for Occupational Therapists (a 24% increase through 2026).
- To contain costs, OTs are increasingly supervising occupational therapy assistants and aides.
- The median annual earnings of occupational therapists in 2017 was $83,200.

Programs in Indiana

- University of Indianapolis Indianapolis, IN -- Doctoral & Master’s degrees -- http://ot.uindy.edu
- IUPUI Indianapolis, IN -- Doctoral degree -- https://shrs.iupui.edu/academics/occupational-therapy/index.html
- Indiana State University Terre Haute, IN -- Master’s degree -- http://www.indstate.edu/health/program/ot
- University of Southern Indiana Evansville, IN -- Master’s degree -- http://www.usi.edu/health/occupational-therapy
- Indiana Wesleyan University Marion, IN -- Doctoral degree -- https://www.indwes.edu/adult-graduate/programs/doctorate-of-occupational-therapy/
- Huntington University Huntington, IN -- Doctoral degree -- https://www.huntington.edu/graduate/occupational-therapy

More Information

- American Occupational Therapy Association http://www.aota.org/
- American Occupational Therapy Foundation http://www.aotf.org
- OTCAS (application service) https://otcas.liaisoncas.com/applicant-ux/#/login

Other Careers You Might Want to Consider

- Physical Therapy
- Orthotics & Prosthetics
- Occupational Therapy Assistant