Occupational Therapy Information

Career Description
Occupational therapists (OTs) assist clients in performing activities of all types, ranging from using a computer to caring for daily needs such as dressing, cooking, eating, and driving. Services typically include customized treatment programs to improve ability to perform daily activities; comprehensive home and job site evaluations with adaptation recommendations; adaptive equipment recommendations and usage training; and guidance to family members and caregivers.

Occupational therapists assess clients with physical and mental challenges in order to develop activities of daily living (ADL) that work best for those clients. For a client with a physical disability, the first focus is on performing critical daily routines, such as dressing, grooming, bathing, and eating. Once these skills are mastered, a program is then built around the skills needed to perform tasks such as participating in education, caring for a home and family, or seeking and maintaining employment.

For a client with mental illness, the goals are also based on the ability to function independently. In treating mental or emotional challenges, the occupational therapy program focuses on areas such as managing time, working productively with others, and enjoying leisure.

Occupational therapists need patience, understanding, and compassion when dealing with clients facing health problems. Patience is important because many clients may not progress rapidly and practitioners must be prepared for that challenge. Being understanding and having compassion is also vital when working with clients who have disabilities that require them to undergo extensive and sometimes painful treatment in order to improve their function. And finally, occupational therapy is a field that calls for a certain amount of passion for the beneficial and life-changing work that therapists perform.

Occupational therapists make an average salary of $72,320 per year (www.bls.gov). They work in hospitals and other health care and community settings and usually work a 40-hour week. Those in schools may also participate in meetings and other activities, during and after the school day. More than one-third of occupational therapists work part time.

Admission Requirements
A bachelor’s degree is required for all OT programs, although many schools offer transfer and accelerated MS/MS programs in Occupational Therapy which are promising options for students. Schools don’t have specific requirements for your major—but they do require specific coursework. Choosing a major that you excel in and enjoy will probably help you to get better grades and have a more pleasant undergraduate experience. Also, choose a major that can be your contingency plan if you don’t get into OT school or choose not to go. Most schools require a minimum GPA of around 3.0, although higher average GPAs are not uncommon.

Clinical experience with an OT is vital when applying to an OT program. You should become acquainted with a few OTs and shadow to gain some firsthand experience in what OTs do on a daily basis. Most schools require this type of experience for interviews and for admission. To be competitive, try to obtain at least 100 shadowing hours, preferably from at least two OTs.

You must take the GRE in order to be admitted to many OT programs. Information on the GRE can be found online at www.ets.org or through testprep.byu.edu.

Since each OT program may have different admissions criteria, we strongly recommended that you investigate all the programs you are interested in applying to. Each school provides information on specific application deadlines, additional policies and procedures, class size, GPA, GRE averages, international requirements, and tuition and fees considerations.
Prerequisite Classes (common prerequisites, although not necessarily for every school)

- Developmental Psychology & Abnormal Psychology
  Psych 220  Human Development: Life Span
  Psych 342  Abnormal Psychology

- Statistics
  Stat 121  Principles of Statistics

- Anthropology
  Anthr 101  Social/Cultural Anthropology

- Studio Arts (examples—check with schools for recommended options)
  VaStu 104  Introduction to Sculpture
  VaStu 105  Introduction to Ceramics

- Anatomy & Physiology
  PDBio 220  Human Anatomy with Lab
  PDBio 305  Human Physiology with Lab

- Advanced First Aid (some schools)
  Hlth 320  Advanced First Aid and Safety

- Physics
  Phscs 105/107  Introduction to Physics and Lab
  Phscs 106/108  Introduction to Physics and Lab
  or Phscs 121/123  (calculus-based)

Application Process

There are more than 300 accredited occupational therapy and occupational therapy assistant programs offered by colleges and universities in the U.S. You must apply to each school individually, as there is currently not an application service that allows students to apply to several schools at once. A comprehensive list of schools can be obtained at the Preprofessional Advisement Center at BYU or at www.aota.org/Students/Schools.aspx.

Most schools require a fee, a copy of all transcripts, a personal statement, and a completed form specific to that school. Deadlines also vary greatly between schools. We recommend that you research individual schools to ensure applications are submitted on time. Schools that have rolling admissions give preference to earlier applications.

Other Resources

- www.aota.org – The American Occupational Therapy Association
- https://portal.otcas.org

Recommended Activities

- OT Shadowing or experience – 100 hours recommended, which must include two different settings.
- Volunteering – 50 hours per year
- Leadership – 2 positions