

Pre-Occupational Therapy Preparation at UH Mānoa

Text compiled from the American Occupational Therapy Association website at www.aota.org,
NAAHP's *Medical Professions Admission Guide: Strategy for Success*,
the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics <http://www.bls.gov/>, and the UHM 2011-2012 Catalog.

Occupational Therapists (OTs) use purposeful, everyday activities as a means to help people who have physical, developmental, or emotional disabilities achieve independence. OTs work with other health care providers to evaluate patients and develop plans and goals to prevent or minimize disability and to help patients acquire skills necessary for productive and satisfying lives. OTs engage in a wide range of activities, including administering and interpreting diagnostic tests, teaching life skills, designing and making orthotic/prosthetic devices, inventing adaptive equipment, and adapting environments.

Occupational therapists work in a variety of settings, including outpatient rehabilitation centers, hospitals and clinics, sports facilities, skilled nursing facilities, community and government health agencies, and home health agencies; a very few work in private practice. Although most are involved in practice, some OTs conduct research or teach in higher education.

Although programs used to offer Bachelor degrees in occupational therapy, the high demand for graduate-trained OTs prompted the phasing out of the baccalaureate level in favor of Masters degrees. The minimum qualification for OTs is now either the Master of Occupational Therapy (M.O.T.) or the Master of Science in Occupational Therapy (M.S.O.T.). Increasing numbers of schools are now offering Doctor of Occupational Therapy (O.T.D.) programs as well.

Related Professions: Social Work, Counselors, and Human Services Assistants

Occupational Therapy Programs

Becoming a Master of Occupational Therapy, M.O.T., or Master of Science in Occupational Therapy, M.S.O.T., requires approximately 5 to 6.5 years of education; becoming a Doctor of Occupational Therapy, O.T.D., usually requires an additional 2 years:

Undergraduate course work (~3 years) or Bachelors degree (~4 years);
Master degree in Occupational Therapy (usually 2 to 2.5 years);
Doctoral degree (~ 2 years).

Although a Bachelors degree is not always required for admission to an OT program, it makes you more competitive for admission and provides more options for advancement and career opportunities. Combined Bachelors/Masters programs (those that accept undergraduates who have not yet received their Bachelors degree) often require students to complete their Bachelors before receiving their Masters. OT programs are generally two years of academic study followed by six months of supervised clinical experience.

Doctoral programs in Occupational Therapy are usually primarily clinical (practice-based) but often include topics such as management, theory, and research.

OTs who graduate from an accredited program are eligible to sit for the national certification exam by the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy (NBCOT) and the state licensing exam. Those who pass the exam are awarded the title Occupational Therapist Registered (OTR). *All OTs must be licensed in order to practice*

Prerequisites for Admission

Most importantly, remember that *requirements vary from school to school!* There is no standard list of prerequisite courses for occupational therapy; it is therefore imperative that you research the programs you are interested in attending. The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) website, www.aota.org, includes a list of and links to accredited programs.

Recommended or required courses often include the following:

PHYL 141+ Lab and 142 + Lab	Anatomy and physiology
PSY 230	Psychobiology
PSY 331	Behavioral neuroscience
PSY 371	Abnormal psychology
FAMR 230 or any PSY X4X or X7X course (240 or 476, for ex.)	Human development
SOCS or PSY 225	Statistics
HLTH 110 and 125 at KAP	Medical terminology
HLTH 160, 252, and 280 at KAP	Human disease

Although there is no “pre-occupational therapy” major, related fields include the natural sciences (e.g., biology, chemistry, physics), behavioral sciences (e.g., psychology, sociology, anthropology, ethnic studies, social work, family resources, kinesiology), and the liberal arts (e.g., theater, and philosophy as well as art). Pre-OT students at UHM should choose a major that reflects their interests and strengths and should choose elective courses from required or recommended courses, or related fields.

Direct contact with people with disabilities, illness, or other disadvantages may be required or recommended; requirements vary considerably from school to school. OT programs may request that one of your letters of recommendation come from a licensed occupational therapist.

Experience opportunities are available at hospitals, nursing homes, senior centers, shelters, rehabilitation facilities, etc.; see UHM’s Pre-Health/Pre-Law Advising Center for a list of possible contacts.

What makes a strong candidate?

Tuition for occupational therapy programs, as high as it is, covers only a fraction of the cost of educating an OT, which means that each new student represents an investment for the school. Schools need to be certain that the students they accept will be capable of completing the curriculum and are likely to become good occupational therapists.

Are you capable of completing the OT curriculum?

Admissions committees are looking for students who have

- Successfully completed undergraduate course work
- Earned a Bachelors degree
- A strong overall GPA
- Balanced their course load so it is challenging yet realistic

Are you likely to become a good occupational therapist?

Admissions committees look for students who have

- Experience in and detailed knowledge of the field
- Excellent communication and interpersonal skills
- Ingenuity and imagination in solving problems
- High adaptability, which is especially important in home health care services
- Maturity (judgment, responsibility, dependability) and especially patience
- Empathy, compassion, and an enduring commitment to helping people
- High ethical and moral standards and a conscientious work ethic

Researching Schools

There are many public and private O.T. programs in the U.S., each one unique in its mission, philosophy, criteria, and strengths.

Although there are resources that “rank” schools (The Gourman Report, U.S. News & World Report, The Princeton Review, etc.), *the rankings are rarely pertinent for individual applicant or specific programs*. More important is whether there is a good match between applicant and school.

To find schools that are good a fit for you (PAC peer advisors can help with this process):

1. Assess your individual strengths and weaknesses, your professional interests, learning style, and personality;
2. Start with a list of all schools you would consider attending, which usually includes all 200+ schools;
3. Using the AOTA website, create your “Long List” by omitting the schools that do not match your professional interests, learning style, and personality (*PAC offers a list of 7 factors to consider, found here: <http://www.manoa.hawaii.edu/pac/Choosing%20a%20School%20Handout.pdf>*);
4. Once you have your GRE scores, create your “Short List” by categorizing the schools into ‘Reach’, ‘Match’, and ‘Safety’, ranking the schools by preference, and finally choosing how many schools to apply to.

Entrance Exam

GRE Overview: Most accredited OT programs require applicants to take a standardized test called the Graduate Record Examination (GRE). The revised GRE was introduced in August of 2011 and includes new types of questions featuring real life scenarios. The format allows you to edit, change your answers, and skip around within a section.

The GRE can be scheduled for almost any day of the year and is available only in computer-based format. The test requires approximately 4 hours to complete and assesses your skills in Verbal Reasoning, Quantitative Reasoning, and Analytical Writing.

Appointments are scheduled first-come, first served basis. You can register three ways: 1) via telephone, at 1-800-473-2255 or 1-443-751-4820 or by calling the test center directly; 2) via online at www.gre.org; or 3) via mail, by sending a completed *Authorization Voucher Request Form* (found in the *GRE Registration Bulletin*) and registration fee payment to ETS-CBT/GRE Box 371859 Pittsburgh, PA 15250-7859.

Payment:

Registration fee: \$160

Payment for Computer-based Tests

- Credit/Debit Card (American Express®, Discover®, JCB®, MasterCard® or VISA®).
- Money Order/Certified Check/Voucher
- Personal check, payable to ETS-GRE. If paying by check, please comply with the following:
 - Bank name and address must be preprinted on the face of the check.
 - Check must have a preprinted check number.
 - Candidate/ payee name and address must be preprinted on the check
 - Check date CANNOT be over 90 days old.
 - New bank account starter checks missing the preprinted name and address are not acceptable.

Scoring: Scores for the Verbal and Quantitative sections range from 130 to 170 in one-point increments, with 170 being highest and 150 being the average. Scores for the Writing section range from 0 to 6 in half-point increments, with 6 being highest and 3 being the average. Your score report will be mailed to you, and will include not only your scores but also your percentile ranking. Starting November 29, 2011, you will receive your scores within 10-15 days.

Preparation: Your most important preparation for the GRE is your undergraduate courses, many of which sharpen your writing and verbal reasoning skills.

Official Test Preparation Material:

- *The Official Guide to the GRE revised General Test* from ETS
- Practice Questions on GRE website
- Free diagnostic exam on GRE website

The Application Process

The application process for OT programs begins one year before students plan to matriculate into an OT program or school. Many schools use the Occupational Therapist Centralized Application Service (OTCAS), which allows OT applicants to use a single web-based application and one set of materials to apply to multiple programs.

Most, but not all schools participate in OTCAS; to apply to those that do not, request applications directly from the individual schools.

There are three general steps in applying to occupational therapy schools: the initial or primary application through the Occupational Therapist Centralized Application Service (OTCAS); supplemental materials for individual schools; and possibly an interview.

In general, applications request:

- An application form asking for basic information, including
 - Volunteer or paid experience in the field;
- A personal statement;
- Official transcripts from every institution attended;
- Scores from the GRE; and
- Letters of recommendation.

Note: It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that the school has received all materials and to verify that the application is complete!

Not all OT programs require an interview as part of the admissions process. If you would like to find out which schools require an interview, or if you have questions about the interview process, contact the individual programs directly. *Applicants are responsible for all costs incurred while interviewing, including airfare, lodging, ground transportation, meals and professional attire.*

Financial Aid

WICHE: Hawai'i residents are eligible to participate in the Professional School Exchange Program (PSEP), a service of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE). In a competitive process, PSEP selects applicants to receive financial support from state funds; the students who are selected pay in-state tuition if they attend a participating program, all of which are on the west coast. WICHE applications become available in July and have a mid-October deadline.

Note: To be considered for this scholarship, you must apply one full year in advance of matriculation, so in the summer before your senior year.

Tips:

- The more you know about the school, the better your chances of being accepted.
- Contact individual schools' Admissions Offices to find out how they handle:
 - Advanced placement (AP) credits
 - College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) credits
 - Courses taken at a community college

- Courses taken for credit/no credit instead of a grade
- Military credits
- Residency issues
- Time limits on acceptable science courses
- Time limits on GRE scores
- Course work taken outside the U.S.

Additional Information

UH Mānoa's Pre-Health/Pre-Law Advising Center (PAC) has reference books, lists of volunteer opportunities, academic planning worksheets, and one-on-one advising by peers who can help you prepare for and apply to occupational therapy schools.

UHM's Pre-Medical Association	www.hawaii.edu/premed pre-med@hawaii.edu
American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA)	www.aota.org
Occupational Therapist Centralized Application Service	https://portal.otcas.org/
Graduate Record Examination (GRE)	www.gre.org
Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) & Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP)	www.wiche.edu
Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE) located on the AOTA website:	www.aota.org
National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy, Inc. (NBCOT)	www.nbcot.org