ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY STUDENTS

Applicants to the Occupational Therapy Program at the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) must possess the following general qualities: critical thinking, sound judgment, emotional stability and maturity, empathy, physical and mental stamina, and the ability to function in a wide variety of didactic and clinical settings.

Graduates must have the minimal skills, essential functions and knowledge to function in a broad variety of clinical and community settings.

The Occupational Therapy Program educates students as generalist practitioners, in accordance with the requirements of the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE). Occupational Therapy is a profession that includes a number of domains of practice, e.g. hospital-based, school system, and mental health. The various domains encompass skill sets that differ according to setting and job. For this reason, occupational therapy students must have knowledge and entry-level competencies that span all domains, so that they are prepared for employment in all areas of practice.

Upon completing the academic and fieldwork components of this accredited Program, students are prepared to perform as entry-level practitioners and certification examination in order to practice occupational therapy.

The Occupational Therapy Program at MUSC is committed to the education of all qualified individuals, including persons with disabilities who, with or without reasonable accommodation, are capable of performing the essential functions of the Program. It is the policy of the Occupational Therapy Program to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). In accordance with federal regulations established by the ADA, Section 504 of the Civil Rights Act of 1973, and state and local requirements regarding students and applicants with disabilities, the following standards are described to assist each candidate/student in evaluating his/her prospect for academic and clinical success.

When a student’s ability to perform is compromised, the student must demonstrate alternative means and/or abilities to perform the essential functions of the occupational therapy student described below.

A. OBSERVATION SKILLS

1. Students must be able to acquire a defined level of necessary information as presented through educational experiences relating to both basic arts and sciences, as well as in graduate courses.

2. To achieve the required competencies in the classroom setting, students must perceive, assimilate, and integrate information from a variety of sources. These sources include lectures, printed materials, visual and auditory media, laboratory experiences, and hands-on demonstrations.
3. Consequently, students must demonstrate adequate functional use of visual, tactile, auditory and other sensory and perceptual abilities, to enable such observations and information acquisition necessary for academic and clinical performance.

B. INTELLECTUAL/CONCEPTUAL ABILITIES

1. Students must demonstrate critical thinking skills so that they can problem-solve creatively, master abstract ideas, and synthesize information present in academic, laboratory and fieldwork/clinical settings which may present gray areas and ethical dilemmas.

2. Students must be able to measure, calculate, reason, analyze, process, integrate, synthesize, apply and retain facts, concepts, and data related to the art and science of health care.

3. In addition, students must be able to comprehend three-dimensional relationships and understand the spatial relationships of anatomic structures.

4. Students must be able to apply theoretical knowledge and current research evidence to specific client populations and diagnoses, and justify the rationale for medical and therapeutic interventions.

5. Students must also develop a sense of socio-medical ethics, and recognize and apply pertinent legal and ethical standards.

C. COGNITIVE DEMANDS

1. The successful occupational therapy student maintains a high level of alertness and responsiveness during classroom and fieldwork situations.

2. The student must possess the ability to focus on a task for a prolonged period of time to allow for successful learning to take place.

3. In addition, the student must be able to recall information and organize information in an efficient and useful manner. This includes the ability to acquire, retain, and prioritize informational data, conceptualize and integrate abstract information, apply theoretical knowledge to specific client populations and justify a rationale for therapeutic interventions, and problem-solve to create innovative and practical solutions.

D. COMMUNICATION SKILLS

1. Effective communication is critical for students to build relationships with faculty, advisors, fellow students, clients, clinical supervisors, other professionals, and care givers, in his/her various roles of learner, peer, student, and college/program representative.

2. Students must be able to gather, comprehend, utilize and disseminate information effectively, efficiently, and in accordance with professional standards. Students are required to communicate in the English language both verbally and in writing, at a level consistent with competent professional practice.

3. Students are expected to use grammar and vocabulary proficiently. They must be able to elicit information, gather information, and describe findings verbally and in writing (e.g. evaluation reports, treatment plans, progress notes, and discharge summaries), that are comprehensible by clients, care-givers, professionals and non-professionals.
4. Students must have the ability to use keyboards and accessories and computers for searching, recording, storing, and retrieving information.

E. CULTURAL COMPETENCY

1. Students must be able to communicate accurately, sensitively and effectively with clients and professionals from different cultural and social backgrounds. They should be able to observe, recognize and understand non-verbal behavior. They must be able to establish rapport with clients and communicate evaluation and treatment information effectively, while adhering to principles of confidentiality.

F. BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL SKILLS

1. Students must demonstrate emotional stability and be capable of developing mature and effective interpersonal relationships with other students, faculty, clinical supervisors, and other professionals.

2. Students must be able to tolerate physically and emotionally taxing workloads and to function effectively under stress.

3. They must be able to adapt to changing environments, display flexibility and function in the face of real-world ambiguities.

4. Students must exhibit the ability and commitment to work with individuals in fast-paced, demanding settings. Students must acknowledge and manage personal biases in order to meet the needs of people from diverse cultures, age groups, and socioeconomic levels.

5. Students must be prepared to work with individuals who are severely medically involved, injured or disabled; be limited by cognitive, emotional and functional impairments; and exhibit extreme behavior that may elicit an aversive reaction. The ability to successfully interact with such individuals without being judgmental or prejudicial, is critical to establishing a therapeutic relationship and maintaining one’s professionalism as indicated in a profession’s code of ethics.

6. Students must demonstrate attributes of empathy, integrity, concern for others, interpersonal skills, interest, and motivation, as such qualities are assessed not only during the admissions process but throughout occupational therapy education.

7. Students must possess the emotional well being required for use of their intellectual abilities, the exercise of care of patients, and the development of mature, sensitive, and effective relationships with patients.

8. Candidates must be able to adapt to ever-changing environments, display flexibility, and learn to function in the face of uncertainties and stresses which are inherent in the educational process, as well as the clinical problems of many patients.

G. PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

1. Students must exhibit the ability to unpredictable challenges of health/medical situations that require a high level of alertness and readiness for immediate and appropriate response without interference of personal or medical problems. This includes training for emergencies (e.g. CPR and infection control).
2. Students must adhere to policies of the college, the Program, and fieldwork/clinical sites. This may include, but is not limited to, professional dress and demeanor, conforming to the academic calendar, and meeting start dates for fieldwork/clinical assignments.

3. Students are responsible for travel to and from classes and fieldwork/clinical sites; attendance at classes and fieldwork/clinical assignments; and maintaining organizational skills and stamina for meeting performance criteria within assigned time frames.

4. Students must take the initiative to self-assess their own academic progress and direct their own learning.

5. They must work cooperatively and collaboratively with other students on assigned projects, and participate willingly in a supervisory process involving external evaluation of their abilities and reasoning skills.

6. The faculty of the MUSC Division of Occupational Therapy is committed to comply with the letter and spirit of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

7. The faculty acknowledges its responsibility to our students and for the welfare of the clients treated or otherwise affected by students. MUSC is committed to promoting the educational welfare of its students relative to the educational programs of the university.

Adapted from Essential Function Statements by Brenau University, the University of South Dakota, American International College, and the University of Tennessee

Amended 4/30/14:pjb