



* CORE INFORMATION

How many people apply to your program and how many do you accept?

The Division is committed to ensuring a high quality professional education with small classes, group work, and close faculty supervision for special projects. The resources for teaching and classroom space provided by the University determine the size of our program. Each year we process many more applications than we are able to accept; over the last 4 years we have averaged approximately 200 applications. The Division admits a cohort of 24 students in each class, and unfortunately we are not able to admit all qualified applicants due to lack of space. You should review the description of the accepted UNC student ("Profile of Accepted Students" on our website) to better understand the characteristics of the successful applicant. Applying to more than one entry-level program is recommended to improve your chances of reaching your career goals.

Will my application be reviewed if my GPA is below the program average of 3.6?

Yes, the Division of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy reviews all completed applications. We recognize individual differences and consider a range of factors including grades, work or volunteer and personal experiences, recommendations from supervisors, and knowledge about occupational therapy. Competitive applicants must demonstrate academic potential to be successful at a graduate level as well as to practice as an OT. Successful OT practice requires many types of knowledge and ability, so we examine each application carefully and individually to make our admission decisions.

If I am not a North Carolina resident should I even submit an application?

We encourage applications from all qualified individuals. We do not have limits or requirements related to our ratio of in-state to out-of-state students.

How would you define occupation and occupational therapy in your program?

Occupation has been defined in a number of different ways. At UNC we discuss and study the activities of everyday life that are valued by and given meaning by sociocultural groups of people. These activities can include what people do to look after themselves and others, things they do because doing the activity is interesting or enjoyable, or activities they find meaningful for other reasons. We also acknowledge that not all occupations, routines, and habits are health-promoting (e.g., substance abuse), but people do engage in these activities, so it is important to understand those occupations and their meanings as well. Our students learn to focus on the "occupation within occupational therapy," that is, the *therapeutic use* of everyday activities, habits, and routines for the purpose of enhancing people's functional capacities, health, development, and experiences of well-being and participation in life.

How can I learn more about the curriculum and the philosophy of UNC's program?

Read about both occupational therapy and Occupational Science. The *American Journal of Occupational Therapy* and the *Journal of Occupational Science* are available through direct access or inter-library loan at most academic libraries. We also recommend reading articles written by our faculty (see Faculty pages for names). We think that finding a graduate program that suits your needs is very important and we welcome conversation with interested applicants at our periodic information sessions. You can also arrange to visit a class (during the academic year); more information on class visits is available on the "Prospective Students" page of our website.

Can I choose a specialization area while I am a student at UNC?

UNC's program in occupational therapy is designed to prepare graduates for Occupational Therapy practice as a "generalist." That is, our graduates are prepared to work in a variety of settings such as day care centers, schools, hospitals, rehabilitation clinics, home health agencies, mental health practice, community settings, and nursing homes, to name a few. We expect our graduates will be called on to work with people of different ages and with varied social and cultural backgrounds. It is also important that graduates leave with clinical and analytical reasoning skills that an OT generalist can use to address new conditions and develop original programs for people who can benefit from occupational therapy. Part of this preparation for both current and future practice can include focused study and practice in a particular area. Therefore, opportunities are present for students to develop some additional knowledge and skills in area of interest while in the program, but these are not considered "specializations." Curriculum opportunities to create a special focus include:

- Class projects and papers
- Final research paper
- The second Level II (12 week) Fieldwork

- Training grants when available

* DEGREE LEVELS

What is the difference between your entry-level master's program and an entry level clinical doctorate degree (an OTD)?

All professional programs that offer entry into the practice of occupational therapy are accredited by the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE). Our current program is a 2-year entry-level program that prepares students to practice occupational therapy in both traditional and emerging settings. It includes research, clinical, and community experiences in addition to classroom academic preparation. The OTD is also an entry-level degree which, like a doctorate in clinical psychology, dentistry, physical therapy, or pharmacy, should take 3 to 4 years after the bachelor's degree to complete. Entry-level OTD programs are designed to include some additional (beyond 2 years) academic preparation in management and program development, and requires a focused individual capstone project. There currently is no outcome data that indicates that those with an entry-level OTD have greater job or salary opportunities than do those with an entry-level master's degree. For a more in-depth comparison of the master's and OTD degrees, please go to the MS Program page on our website and click on the document linked there. Also see our question and answer regarding the difference between an OTD and a Ph.D. provided in this FAQ document.

Is there a clinical doctorate beyond the entry level?

Yes, the post-professional OTD is designed for individuals who already have an OT degree and have passed the registration exam. These individuals typically are practicing in an area in which they would like to develop additional expertise and leadership skills. Post-professional programs are usually part-time to allow the OT to continue working in that setting and to use that clinical work in their academic experiences in the program.

Will the UNC MSOT program convert to an OTD program?

In September of 2017, ACOTE issued a mandate that all entry-level programs for occupational therapists be offered at the clinical doctorate level (OTD) by the year 2027. That mandate was rescinded in 2019, although some Master's programs who had started to convert to OTD continued that process. Acknowledging the potential effects of converting to an OTD program on student financial resources and the diversity of our program, the faculty at UNC made an intentional and unanimous decision to remain at the Master's level. There currently are no plans to develop an entry-level OTD program.

What will happen to people who get a Master's degree now, if the profession decides later to move to the clinical doctorate for entry-level?

Occupational therapists who receive an MSOT or MOT degree and who pass the National Certification exam will be able to practice as an OT even if the profession changes the entry-level degree. There is historical precedent in this, as practitioners with a bachelor's degree in OT who passed the certification exam continued to practice when the profession moved from bachelor's entry level to master's entry level in 2007.

What is the difference between a clinical doctorate in OT (an OTD) and a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree?

As the title suggests, an OTD offers preparation for clinical practice with additional emphasis on becoming a consumer of research evidence and program development. Like becoming a pharmacist (PharmD) or dentist (DDS), an OTD is a clinical degree. A person who wishes to have an academic or research career in occupational therapy or occupational science should pursue a PhD, which is a research doctorate. Research degrees that prepare an individual for academic and research leadership positions take 6 to 7 years to complete after a baccalaureate degree (approximately 5 years post-master's degree).

* FIELDWORK

What types of fieldwork experiences will I have and when will they occur?

Fieldwork (FW) experiences are developmentally sequenced and integrated throughout the program. There are 2 levels of experience. FW I is for direct observation and participation in occupational therapy services with occupational therapists as well as participation in community service projects without occupational therapists on site. These range from half day to weeklong experiences. FW II offers an in-depth experience over 12 consecutive weeks. FW II experiences are designed to promote competence and independence in clinical reasoning, therapeutic practices, and professionalism at the level of a therapist entering the profession. Students complete all FW I and FW II requirements within the timeframe established by the program. For more information, see "MS Curriculum" under the "MS Program" links on the Division website.

How are students assigned to FW experiences?

The FW coordinator screens and selects fieldwork sites to ensure students have opportunities for experiences that develop clinical skills consistent with the philosophy of the program. Currently, the Occupational Therapy program has affiliations with over 150 sites across the country. The FW coordinator is responsible for securing reservations at these sites and for assigning students to the sites.

When possible, the FW coordinator considers the student's input on assignments, but the primary consideration is given to the quality of the educational experience during FW. The FW coordinator has the final authority to assign a student to a FW placement.

Can I stay in the Triangle area during my fieldwork experiences?

There is no guarantee that any student will be assigned to a local site for FW. Students may have to relocate for some FW I and FW II experiences. Priority for local sites is given to students who are primary caregivers for others.

Are there opportunities to do fieldwork outside of the U.S.?

There are opportunities to do all or a part of Level II Fieldwork in international settings, but these are limited, and change somewhat from year to year, depending on a variety of factors. Once in the OT program, students can explore the possibility of international fieldwork with the Fieldwork Coordinator, but students should not assume such opportunities will be available every year.

Is there financial assistance for FW experiences if I have to relocate?

Students should budget for the extra cost of travel and living arrangements for fieldwork. Historically, Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) have provided some housing and transportation financial assistance for FW students at North Carolina clinical sites. The support includes partial reimbursement for mileage and a housing stipend for students who relocate within the state for their FW experiences.

*** FINANCIAL**

Is it possible to work while I am in graduate school?

We anticipate that students are making a full-time commitment to their graduate work. At the same time, many of our students have been able to find the right job and balance their studies with part-time employment. During the academic year, you will take up to 15 credits a semester and will meet at various times during the day, five days a week. Some of the courses will require extra hours for lab work, group meetings, and community activities. In addition, some courses have full day clinical and community assignments (See our question and answer about fieldwork experiences). Thus if you have to work a few hours a week, you will want to look for a job with flexible hours. During the summer, when you are doing FW II, you will be "on the job" 40 hours a week. In addition, because everything is so new, many people find that they have to prepare the night before for the next day of FW II, or work some on weekends to keep their progress notes and clinical reports up to date. As a result, you should not plan on working during the summer.

What is the Professional School Tuition?

The Professional School Tuition is a supplemental tuition that has been instituted for the graduate professional degree programs in the Department of Allied Health Sciences, including the MS program in Occupational Therapy. The supplemental tuition is in addition to the UNC tuition and fees. Over the past several years, our costs for delivering the occupational therapy program have increased significantly, as a factor of both general cost-of-living increases and specific costs associated with new requirements for graduate level professional education. 25% of these tuition revenues will be used to fund Division administered financial aid for North Carolina residents and students from under-represented minority groups, who are qualified for admission, but who are unable to afford the costs of the program. In addition, the revenues will allow us to enhance instructional resources including state of the art equipment in our teaching labs and funding teaching assistants. The supplemental tuition will be included as part of the coat of attendance for calculating financial aid packages by the UNC Office of Student Aid.

*** REQUIREMENTS FOR GRADUATION AND CERTIFICATION**

What are your requirements for a research/special project as a part of my graduate studies at UNC?

We believe that graduates who possess the attitudes and abilities for inquiry will adopt clinical methods that are based on evidence (i.e., engage in evidence-based practices) and be positioned to develop innovations in practice. Activities that support learning to read and synthesize the occupational therapy literature are embedded in all courses. In addition to a course on research methods, all students complete a research project under the guidance of a faculty member, in a group-based mentoring context. A master thesis is not required but remains an option for strong students who wish to further their skills in research.

What else is required in order to graduate?

Successful completion of all coursework and fieldwork are required for graduation. Courses must be taken in the sequence in which they are offered in the curriculum, and students must pass all courses in each semester in order to move on to the next semester. Students who are unable to participate in or complete the first Level II fieldwork may be allowed to proceed to the next semester, but will be required to complete all FW requirements successfully before being cleared for graduation. Students also must complete a Master's Comprehensive Self-Assessment (MCSA) after all coursework is finished. The MCSA takes the form of a portfolio of student work during the span of the entire program and includes work that represents student learning in each of the curriculum themes. It also includes an essay in which the student reflects on their learning over the course of the program.

Are there any restrictions on who will qualify to take the certification exam?

The student is eligible to apply to take the National Certification Examination once all program requirements have been met. Students will have to prove eligibility for graduation (all curriculum requirements including FW are completed) before sitting for the certification exam. When you apply to take the certification examination with the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy (NBCOT), you will be asked to answer questions related to the topic of felony convictions. *Applicants should be aware that a felony conviction may affect a graduate's eligibility to sit for the NBCOT certification examination or to attain state licensure. We suggest that applicants contact the NBCOT with any questions about their background that could impact eligibility for professional credentialing.* For a fee the Qualification Review Committee can be asked to review the background of a potential program applicant or student prior to their eligibility to apply for the certification examination. For further information on potential limitations, or early determination, you can contact the NBCOT at:

National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy
800 S. Frederick Avenue, Suite 200
Gaithersburg, Maryland 20877-4150
Telephone: (301) 990-7979
<http://www.nbcot.org/>