

Master of Science in Occupational Therapy
Division of Occupational Science & Occupational Therapy
Department of Health Sciences

Information Session Fall 2024



Welcome to this presentation about the Master of Science in Occupational Therapy at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Agenda

- Handouts
- Introductions
- MS Program Curriculum
- Application Timelines and Requirements
- Additional Resources
- Suggestions



There is a handout document that may be useful as you listen to this video recording and that is linked on the same page with the video. Included in the handout are documents about the UNC OT curriculum, such as curriculum themes and courses, as well as the mission and philosophy statements of the Division of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy. The handout also includes information about the application process and requirements. All of the handouts as well as other information are also provided on our website under the Prospective Students/MS Program menu selections.

Following a brief “big picture” introduction to the Division of OS and OT, I will do a short overview of the MS OT program, and then talk about application timelines and what is required in order to apply. I’ll then point out where additional resources are provided on our website, and offer some suggestions for those interested in occupational therapy as a career and/or applying to the UNC OT program.

Introduction

UNC Master of Science in Occupational Therapy founded 1978

MSOT program is designed for people with an undergraduate degree in any field.

9 full-time faculty, adjunct instructors, and PhD students

PhD in Occupational Science founded in 2006

Part of the UNC School of Medicine's partnership with Novant Health.

MSOT program is designed for full-time, in-person study over 2 calendar years.

Core commitments to broadening understanding of occupation and humans as occupational beings, to occupation-based practice, to ethics, justice, & care, and to community partnerships and practice.

MS Student Organizations:
UNC SOTA and student chapter of COTAD

The UNC Master of Science in Occupational Therapy started in 1978, with the first class graduating in 1980. The program was one of the first entry-level master's programs in the United States. Over the years the curriculum has been updated multiple times to stay ahead of anticipated changes in the profession, in healthcare, and in higher education, but it has continued to be a two-year, full-time, in-person program designed for people with an undergraduate degree in any field. The Student Occupational Therapy Association, or "SOTA" is a long-standing student group, and in 2017 students formed their own chapter of COTAD (the Coalition of Occupational Therapists Advocating for Diversity), a national professional organization.

Currently the program has 9 full-time faculty, as well as several adjunct instructors and multiple fieldwork educators. In 2006, the Division started the PhD in Occupational Science, further expanding our capacity for teaching, research, and preparing new scholars in the field. The Division also continues to expand its capacity for community engagement and partnering with other programs both within and outside of the University. One example of this is our partnership with Novant Health, the purpose of which is to increase the number of OTs practicing in southeastern North Carolina, helping to reduce the health inequities experienced by people living in those areas. Faculty also are connected with the NC Department of Public Instruction, Community Partnerships in Aging, the UNC Accessibility & Resource Office, the Carolina Institute of Developmental Disabilities, the HEELS-UP transition program for young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and the Department of Endocrinology in the School of Medicine.

Within our teaching, research, and service activities, faculty in the Division maintain core commitments to the concepts of occupation, humans as occupational beings, occupation-based practice, ethics, justice and care, and to community partnerships and practices.

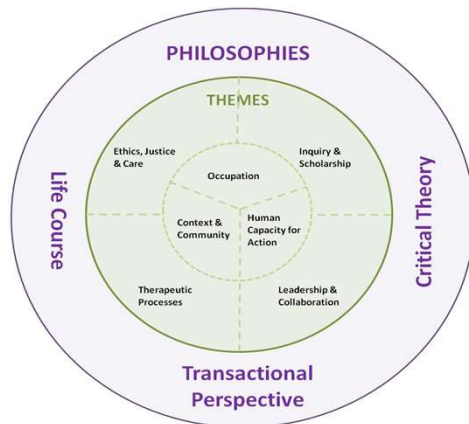


MS Program Curriculum



Next I'll provide a short overview of the OT curriculum and direct you to handouts that provide more information.

THEMES AND PHILOSOPHY



COURSES

Foundations of Practice
Human Capacities for Action
Practice Environments
Occupational Science
Life Course I-III
Perspectives on Disability
& Health I-III

Therapeutic Processes/Labs I-III
Research Methods
Applied Research Seminars I and II
Environments & Technology
Community Level Practice
Professional Development &
Transition to Practice

FIELDWORK

- Level I: Integrated into specific courses across all academic semesters (1-5 days at a time)
- Level II: Full-time for 12 weeks



On this slide there is an overview diagram of the themes and philosophies for the MSOT curriculum. There is a document in the handout that provides more information about each of the curriculum themes, and that document is also available on our website. Briefly, our curriculum themes include occupation; context and community; human capacities for action; ethics, justice, and care; leadership and collaboration; inquiry and scholarship; and therapeutic processes. These themes are woven into coursework and fieldwork experiences over the two year program, although for each individual course, some themes show up more than others. The philosophies, or perspectives, that provide a foundation for the curriculum include life course theory, critical theory, and a transactional perspective.

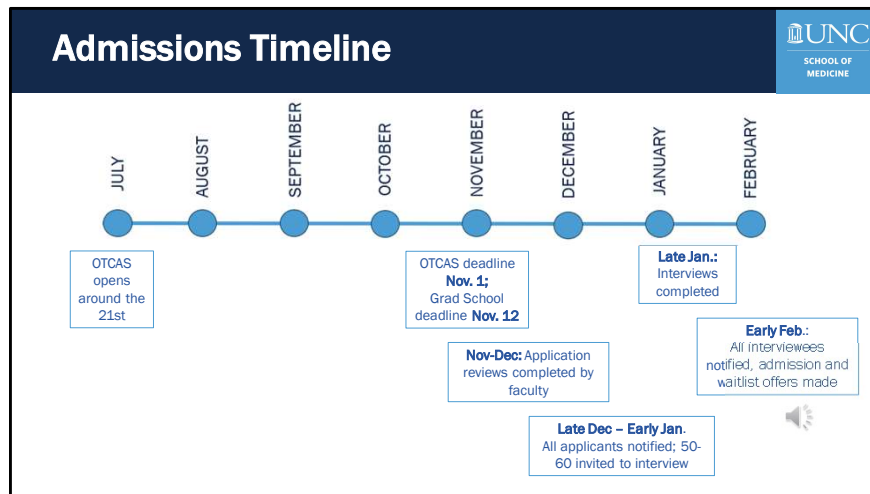
Also listed on this slide are the courses offered within the curriculum and a very brief explanation of Level I and Level II fieldwork. In the handout, there is a document that has courses listed by semester as well as a course description, and there is a fieldwork overview handout as well.



Application Timelines and Requirements



The next section of this session is about the timelines for the admissions process and application requirements.



This slide reflects the timeline of the admissions process, which essentially runs from July of each year, when the application software opens, through February, when admissions offers are finalized. We only have one admissions cycle per year, and don't have an early decision option.

In order to apply to the UNC OT program, prospective students must complete an application in OTCAS, the OT Common Application System, which includes all of the materials required by the OT program itself, and then complete an additional application to the Graduate School at UNC. The Graduate School application includes only a few items, but applicants must pay the application fee to OTCAS and to the UNC Graduate School in order to apply and must be accepted by both the OT program and the Graduate School. This actually sounds more complicated than it is, because once a prospective student has completed and submitted their application in OTCAS, that application is uploaded to the Graduate School application software and an email is sent to the applicant explaining how to complete the Graduate School application.

The deadline for applications to be complete and submitted in OTCAS is November 1st, and the deadline for Graduate School application to be completed is November 12th. Applicants should wait for the email from the Graduate School to begin the Graduate School application.

Faculty will complete application reviews in late November and early December so that applicants can be notified prior to the 1st of January. 50-60 applicants will be invited to interview, and those interviews will occur in late January so that admission and waitlist offers can be made at the beginning of February. We offer admission to 24 students per year, and typically have 10-12 people on the waiting list.

Application Requirements



- 7 academic prerequisite courses (do not all have to be completed at the time of application).
- 1 prerequisite “Occupation” learning experience (does not have to be taken for a grade)
- Submission of a resume or CV
- Submission of a reflective essay (400-word limit) related to the “Occupation” prerequisite
- Response to 4 short answer questions.
- 3 letters of recommendation (1 must be from an OT or OTA practitioner)
- Record of Experience with OT (this also is in the “Documents” section of Program Materials in OTCAS.)

The required materials are listed here, and all of these are submitted in the OTCAS application. There is a handout in the packet that details the content for the OTCAS application, and a second handout that provides information about the prerequisites.

There are eight prerequisites, 7 of which are academic courses. These do not all have to be completed when a student applies, but the most competitive candidates only have 1 or 2 courses left to complete if they haven’t finished them all, and generally it is advantageous to have all of the fixed prerequisite courses completed. The next slide will provide more details about these 7 prerequisites.

The 8th prerequisite course does not have to be taken for credit or for a grade, but must be a typical teacher-multiple learners type of class. I’ll provide more information about the Occupation prerequisite a little later in this presentation.

Applicants are asked to submit a current resume, 3 letters of recommendation, 1 of which must be from an OT or OT assistant, and documentation of their experiences with OT, such as shadowing or observation.

There are two essays that are required in the application – one is a statement of purpose essay that is a part of OTCAS and the same for all OT programs, and the second is specific to the UNC program and is related to the occupation prerequisite.

The application also includes 4 short answer questions, which I’ll talk about a bit more with another slide.

Application Requirements: Prerequisites



FIXED PREREQUISITES

- **Human Anatomy & Physiology** (2 courses + 1 lab; may be A&P I and II and a lab or one semester anatomy and one semester physiology, and a lab)
- **Statistics** (covers descriptive and inferential statistics)
- **Psychopathology** (or Abnormal Psychology; must cover a range of psychological and behavioral conditions)

FLEXIBLE PREREQUISITES

- **Human Development & Behavior** (individual level)
- **Social Institutions & Systems** (content at the societal, cultural, institutional, political, or economic level)
- **Modes of Reasoning** (content is related to reasoning, problem-solving, and/or analysis)



This slide gives an overview of the prerequisite courses, 4 of which are “fixed,” meaning that only courses with that specific content are accepted for the prerequisite. The other 3 prerequisites are essentially categories of content, rather than specific courses, and so there are a number of courses that are acceptable for those prerequisites. All of these prerequisites must have been taken within the 5 years prior to applying to the OT program.

Fixed prerequisites include 2 courses in human anatomy and physiology, and one of those courses must include a lab experience. Depending on where the courses are taken, they may be organized as Anatomy & Physiology 1 and 2, or they may be split so that anatomy is one semester and physiology is covered in a different semester. Either course combination is fine.

The fixed prerequisites also include a basic statistics course that covers descriptive and inferential, or probability, statistical methods. Usually courses called “Introduction to Statistics” or Statistics 1 are good for this prerequisite, but sometimes courses called research methods or something similar will work.

The last fixed prerequisite is in psychopathology (or abnormal psychology), and this needs to be a basic course that covers a range of psychological and behavioral conditions across much of the life span.

Flexible prerequisites include a course related to individual human behavior or development, a course related to how social, cultural, political, etc. systems influence behavior, and a course related to the process of reasoning, analyzing, problem-solving, or comparing – basically a course that makes use of flexible thinking and multiple perspectives on a topic. There are examples of these provided in the “Prerequisites” handout that is in the packet that goes with this video, and also on our website on the “Prerequisites” page.

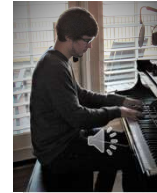
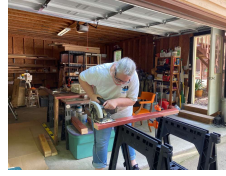
If an applicant isn’t sure that the course they have taken or plan to take will meet the prerequisite requirements, there is a form they can complete that is linked on the Prerequisites page of our website – that form then gets submitted to our osinfo email and we can review that course and let the student know if the course satisfies the prerequisite criteria.

There also is a document linked on the Prerequisites page for potential applicants who wish to have the 5-year rule waived for one or more of the prerequisites. Waiver requests are designed to give credit to applicants who may have taken a course more than 5 years ago but have consistently been using that knowledge since that time, so that they are essentially “up to speed” in that area. Waiver requests are not granted easily, as we want all students to enter the program prepared and ready with prerequisite knowledge so that no one is having to “catch up” on any content from the beginning. However, there are times when re-taking a particular course would be redundant for an applicant, such as a practicing massage therapist who took their anatomy and physiology courses more than 5 years ago, but must use that content consistently in their practice and take continuing education in that area to keep their massage therapy license.

Application Requirements: Occupation

The occupation prerequisite must have the following characteristics:

1. new learning/challenge (not something you already do or know how to do)
2. formal (structured) learning context, but does not have to be a "for credit" course
3. at least once a week for a minimum of 6 weeks
4. social context (other learners present)
5. results in a product or performance (something toward which you are working)
6. learners must be active (learning to DO something not just recipients of information)
7. course content is not designed to be used to benefit, teach or communicate with others



See also video linked on <https://www.med.unc.edu/healthsciences/ocsci/prospectivestudents/programs/prerequisites/>

The occupation prerequisite gives applicants a unique opportunity to experience the learning of a new occupation in a way that has some similarities to how OT clients may experience learning a new occupation or learning to do an old occupation in a new way. For this reason, we want you to choose something that is new to you and perhaps pushes you a bit out of your comfort zone. The learning of this new occupation should be structured and intentional, with an instructor who has expertise in the occupation and other people who are learning at the same time. While this “class” format must be present, it does not have to be a class taken for credit or a grade, so can be taken in a non-academic setting. The class should meet at least weekly for at least 6 weeks, giving students a sense of the rhythm of direct instruction and “practice on your own in-between” time. There should be a goal or product or specific outcome from the class – something that represents accomplishment, and you must be learning to DO something, not just think about or learn about it. Lastly, occupation you learn should be something that is just for you – something you personally choose to learn for yourself – rather than something that is targeted toward others. For that reason, any classes that are associated with a therapy (like recreation therapy, art therapy, music therapy, creating adapted materials, etc.), classes that are related to language learning (sign language, Spanish, etc.), or classes that are related to teaching, training, or communication with others do not meet the criteria for the occupation prerequisite.

If you have a question about whether the occupation you are considering does meet the criteria, please feel free to use the “Prerequisite Check” form mentioned earlier that is linked to the Prerequisites page of our website. Also, the video linked on that page will give you an idea of what some former students have taken to satisfy this requirement, and what they learned from it.

- OTCAS Essay Prompt:

Explain why you selected occupational therapy as a career and how an Occupational Therapy degree relates to your immediate and long-term professional goals. Describe how your personal, educational, and professional background will help you achieve your goals.

- Occupation Essay

Reflect on 1) the challenges of learning a new occupation, 2) how the method of instruction helped or hindered learning, 3) the influence of other learners, 4) how you felt about the outcome you created, and 5) how this experience expanded your understanding of occupation, humans as occupational beings, and/or occupation as a key to wellness.

For the sake of full transparency, and to give applicants the best chance possible to submit a strong application, we do post a handout on our website that outlines the content of the essay and short answer question prompts. The first question here is the one that is a part of the OTCAS application for all programs:

Explain why you selected occupational therapy as a career and how an Occupational Therapy degree relates to your immediate and long-term professional goals. Describe how your personal, educational, and professional background will help you achieve your goals.

The second question is a short essay that is just on the UNC part of the OTCAS application, and it's designed to have you reflect on and write about your experience in the occupation prerequisite. Please note that there are essentially 5 parts to this prompt, so be sure that you address all of them in your essay.

Reflect on 1) the challenges of learning a new occupation, 2) how the method of instruction helped or hindered learning, 3) the influence of other learners, 4) how you felt about the outcome you created, and 5) how this experience expanded your understanding of occupation, humans as occupational beings, and/or occupation as a key to wellness.

Application Requirements: Short Answer



1. Occupational therapy is a field in which practitioners often work with people who have backgrounds and identities different from themselves. Please reflect on your experiences with people different from yourself in one or more ways. Give a brief overview of these experiences, and then describe at least one important thing you have learned, giving a specific example of how you learned it.
2. Think about your experiences working as a part of a group or team to get something done. Reflect on your strengths and challenges working with that group or team. Include at least one clear example of a strength and a challenge.
3. Think about your work, school, home, and community experiences over the past 5 years. Describe a challenge or problem you encountered and how you solved it. Include people and/or factors that supported you and that created barriers for you. Give at least one clear example of a support and of a barrier.
4. Please talk briefly about why you have chosen to apply to the Master of Science in Occupational Therapy program at UNC-Chapel Hill and why you feel it is a good “match” for you and your career goals.

These are the short answer questions. Please note that several of them have more than one part, asking you to reflect on and write about something and then also give an example. For instance, the first question asks you first to give an overview of your experiences with people different from yourself, AND identify something you learned from those experiences, AND give an example of how you learned.

The second question is focused on your experiences, strengths, and challenges in working as part of a group or team, and the third question is focused on how you manage challenges and generate solutions to problems you encounter. Both of these questions ask for an example.

The final question is about why you have chosen to apply to the UNC MSOT program and what about the program attracts you or seems to “fit” who you are or who you want to be as an OT.

Application Requirements: Experiences with OT



- **Intent:**
 - Developing a good beginning understanding of the work of an OT
 - Breadth and depth
- **Methods:**
 - Shadowing, observation, volunteer work, paid work:
 - **Delivering OT services**, meetings, creating or preparing intervention materials, documentation, treatment planning, finding resources, developing client education materials, etc.
 - Attending webinars, workshops, or conference sessions that are specific to the practice of occupational therapy

Rather than identifying this requirement as “OT observation hours” or something similar, we are calling it “Experiences with OT.” In part this is because while observation or shadowing is a great way to learn more about OT and come to have a basic understanding of the profession, it is difficult for some prospective applicants to get a lot of observation hours. This happens for many reasons, but there ARE other ways to learn about OT, so we want to allow those as well as observation or shadowing hours. Other activities that we accept as OT experiences include webinars, workshops, or conference sessions that are specific to the practice of OT.

Please note that we appreciate observation of or learning about health professions other than OT, and you may list those on your resume, but they do not count as experiences with OT.

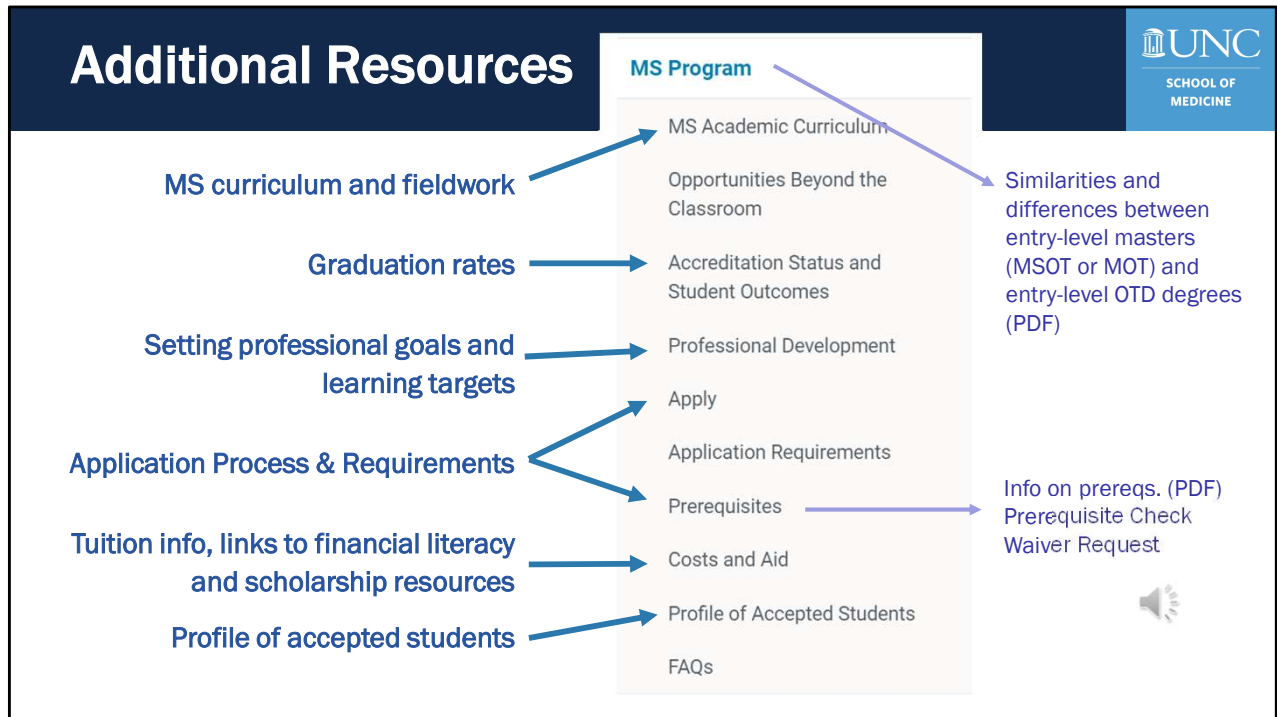
The intent of your experience with OT should be to get a good beginning understanding of both the breadth and the depth of OT practice. This means seeing OT practiced in various settings, as well as seeing more than just direct client services. OTs engage in many activities that serve their clients that are not directly with their clients. This includes creating adapted materials, finding resources, writing letters of medical necessity so that insurance will pay for equipment they need, attending meetings, calling and conferring with other care providers, etc. It’s very helpful for a prospective OT student to see some variety of things that OTs do besides just direct intervention. Because what we want to see is that there is some depth AND some breadth in an applicant’s experiences with OT, we do not require a certain number of hours, but rather are looking for variety in those experiences. Remember that the main reason for this requirement is so that you have enough experience and knowledge to know whether OT is the right career choice for you – we don’t want you to commit to a graduate program for a profession that you aren’t sure is where you want to be!



Additional Resources



The final portions of this presentation are about additional resources and suggestions.



This slide shows a screen shot of the menu on the left side of the page on our website when you are in the MS Program portion of the site. On that main MS Program page, there is a document linked there that gives some information about the similarities and differences between an entry-level master’s program and an entry-level doctorate. Other information that you may find helpful is pointed out here in terms of where you will find it on our web page. Some of these items are included in the handout that goes with this presentation.

Suggestions...

- Seek experiences related to a variety of OT settings and different populations.
- Ask OTs for things to read or websites to visit that they think would be helpful or interesting.
- Ask OTs how they got interested in OT and/or why they enjoy working as an OT.
- Attend a regional or state conference.
- Review all the information you find on the websites of OT schools you think you might want to attend.
- Make a visit to those OT programs, go to a class, and talk with current students.
 - UNC: <https://www.med.unc.edu/healthsciences/ocsci/prospectivestudents/> (Scroll down to “Class Visits”)
- Check out websites:
 - American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA): www.aota.org
 - North Carolina Occupational Therapy Association (NCOTA): www.ncota.org
 - World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT): www.wfot.org



These suggestions are offered mainly so that prospective applicants can learn more about both OT and about the schools they may want to attend. Every OT school has different things to offer and a different feel, and even though all of them have to meet the same educational standards, the curriculum for each program is unique to that program. Take your time and figure out where is the best fit for you in multiple ways, including how much you will pay for education, what philosophies or ideas about OT practice are most similar to yours, and where you are likely to feel a sense of belonging and potential for success.

THANK YOU!



UNC

SCHOOL OF
MEDICINE

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SCIENCES
DIVISION OF OCCUPATIONAL SCIENCE &
OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

<https://www.med.unc.edu/healthsciences/ocsci>
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Thank you for your attention. After reviewing this presentation and the other information from our website, if you have questions, please feel free to email them to osinfo@med.unc.edu and we will respond as quickly as possible!