

PRE-OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

Pathway Information

Preparation for a career as an occupational therapist (OT) should involve building your credentials in scholarship, leadership, and community involvement, as well as gaining internship/shadowing experience in various settings.

There is no single required major for pre-OT students, however some majors will better align with the prerequisites for OT schools than others. Recommended GSW majors include Psychology, Exercise Science, Biology, and Education.

ADMISSIONS: GPA, EXAMS, & REQUIRED COURSES

Typical OT Pre-Requisites:

- 2 semesters of anatomy and physiology
- 1 semester of statistics
- 2 semesters of psychology
- 1 semester medical terminology
- 1 semester sociology/anthropology
- 1 semester of physics

Note: This is not a definitive list of the classes you will need for every school. Prerequisites across OT programs have significant variation; always check with the individual schools for their specific requirements.

You will need strong science and overall GPAs, as admission is competitive. Admissions committees look not only at raw numbers, but also at grade trends on your transcript. All is not lost if you stumble in your first semester or two, but then show substantial improvement each subsequent year. However, they will also notice negative trends such as if you are consistently withdrawing from or performing poorly in hard sciences or are completing courses away from your home institution.

Most OT schools require that you take the Graduate Record Examination (GRE). The GRE consists of three sections: Quantitative, Verbal, and Essay. While there are no specific courses that you need to take prior to the GRE, you should plan to spend a couple months working on exam preparation. Students usually sit for the exam in January-May as they head into the application cycle in June.

AVERAGE MATRICULANT NUMBERS

- Overall GPA: 3.6
- Sciences GPA: 3.4
- GRE: 300 combined and 4.0 writing (50th percentile or higher)

GENERAL INFORMATION

Master's or Doctoral degree
(trending towards doctoral level)

2-3 years

Institutions in Georgia:

- Augusta University
- Brenau University
- Georgia State University

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION/EVALUATION

Though requirements will vary between schools, most will require three letters of evaluation. Typically, programs expect students to provide one letter from an OT, one from a faculty member, and one other of the student's choosing. This last letter could come from another OT, a research mentor, volunteer coordinator, employer, etc.

SHADOWING

Most OT programs require that you have experience observing or shadowing therapists in the field. The hours requirements vary between schools, but it is recommended to gain at least 100 hours total of shadowing hours (though some schools may require more). It is also suggested that you shadow in multiple environments - e.g. both inpatient and outpatient experiences - and no less than 20 hours per setting. The diversity of shadowing experiences is important and may consist of different types of therapies or of different populations. You must record your hours in a log and have the OT that you are shadowing sign off on those hours. GSW programs such as Psychology and Exercise Science have these requirements built into the curriculum.

CAMPUS INVOLVEMENT, VOLUNTEERING, AND RESEARCH

Extracurricular activities, such as club affiliations and volunteering, are a large portion of the application that should not be neglected. OT schools are looking for students who not only demonstrate that they can manage rigorous courses while staying busy, but also those who are compassionate, enjoy working with people, and are dedicated to serving the community. Depth of commitment and leadership experience are also considered. As a result, it is best to focus on strong engagement in few activities rather than to spread oneself too thin. Participation in extracurricular activities should not come at the expense of academic work.

In addition, OTs regularly work with individuals who are living with disabilities, so it is important that you demonstrate an active interest in working with this population either through sustained volunteering or life experiences.

Research, although it is not required by most OT schools, is the hallmark of a curious mind and may benefit you in many ways. If you have an interest in research, it can be a helpful avenue to pursue.

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST CENTRALIZED APPLICATION SERVICE (OTCAS)

To apply to most OT programs, you will utilize the Occupational Therapist Centralized Application Service (OTCAS). Official transcripts, GRE scores, personal statements, and letters of recommendation are all submitted to OTCAS. Two out of the three OT programs in Georgia use this application service; only Augusta University requires students apply directly through their institution.

OTCAS opens each year in July, but application deadlines differ by program. Most deadlines are in the fall for a summer start; however, students are generally encouraged to apply early since many institutions participate in rolling admissions.