



Cleveland University
KANSAS CITY

Chiropractic and Health Sciences

Your Complete Guide to an Occupational Therapy Assistant Career



Occupational Therapy Assistants: Help People Achieve Their Best Possible Future

Your personality is that of a helper, a problem-solver, and creative thinker. Some might say you're also a natural encourager and see you as a trusted counselor. In talking with family, friends, and co-workers, you are well aware of your strengths: integrity, adaptability, supportive. People can feel your positive energy and admire your capacity for compassion.

For many with a heart for people and a drive for success like yours, becoming an occupational therapy assistant – an OTA – is as personally satisfying as it is professionally rewarding.

Occupational therapy practitioners take a global, whole-person approach to health. Occupational Therapy Assistants help people navigate difficulties and challenges, so they can reach – or regain – their full potential.

As an OTA, just imagine:

- You're interacting one-on-one every day with young children, teens, and adults of all ages. By getting to know them, you're not only in sync with the goals they have; they trust your expertise in helping achieve those goals.
- You've earned professional status through certification by the American Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE). Employers are interested in you and what you can do for their clients.
- You're earning a highly competitive salary in as little as two years and finding the world needs – and wants – your compassion and therapeutic insights more than ever.

Welcome to what it's like to be an OTA.

This ebook provides what you need to understand the role of occupational therapy assistants in health care.



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SECTION I: THE PROFESSION



Who are Occupational Therapy Assistants?

When thinking about health care professions, many of us immediately think of nursing or physician-track professions like medical doctors (M.D.s), doctors of osteopathy (D.O.s), or doctors of chiropractic (D.C.s). Other familiar roles include home health aides, Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs), or medical assistants.

Less well-known are the uniquely trained individuals in the field of occupational therapy, which is played out in large part by occupational therapy assistants (OTAs). While OTAs do help people return to careers and jobs – the traditional definition of “occupational” – it’s much more likely occupational therapy assistants are helping people meet the challenges of everyday life.

OTAs help people

- Recover from injuries
- Restore diminished motor skills
- Navigate through developmental disabilities
- Overcome sensory processing challenges (visual, texture, auditory, etc.)
- Recuperate from the effects of a stroke or heart attack
- Adapt to chronic conditions like cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, or arthritis.

OTAs help individuals regain fine motor skills used to do simple everyday tasks.





What an OTA Does

An occupational therapy assistant (OTA) is a medical professional who contributes to and carries out the treatment plans developed by an occupational therapist (OT). Experienced OTAs are often consulted about the plan details, but their primary duty is to lead the treatment, report on the progress, and provide feedback. They use their creativity and knowledge to make adaptations to the activities within the plan as needed.

An Occupational Therapy Assistant really has no ordinary day, or work week, for that matter. Some examples from an OTA's day might include:

- Problem-solving with a 10-year-old boy who uses a wheelchair, thinking through his preferred way of moving through his school's hallways, accessing his locker, and how he wants to navigate the cafeteria.
- Helping a young adult with a traumatic brain injury to be independent in everyday activities: brushing teeth, getting dressed, or preparing a meal with minimal assistance.
- Working with a senior adult who has tremors from multiple sclerosis. By using adaptive tools and stabilizing her arms against the countertop, she can again prepare a meal by herself.

Many experienced OTAs find the diversity of individuals they work with stimulating, and the different challenges keep the job interesting. As an OTA, you may find yourself working in any number of settings: homes of individuals, rehabilitative centers, schools, and various levels of assisted living facilities.

Occupational is Not Physical Therapy

There are distinct differences between physical and occupational therapy, although they may appear to be similar.

Physical therapy focuses on improving mobility and physical function. Occupational therapy professionals find ways for individuals to work through issues or conditions that may be physical, mental, emotional, or even sensory. OTAs also have the knowledge and skills to help their clients adapt to cognitive difficulties such as thinking, perception, understanding, learning, and judgment.

How OTAs Use Innovation, Creativity

Activities of daily living, like putting on clothes, brushing teeth, reaching into a kitchen cabinet – even organizing one’s thoughts for the day’s priorities – can be a struggle for those with emotional, sensory, physical, or cognitive challenges.

OTAs are specialists who know how to meet individuals at their skill level, then find procedures, equipment, and activities that will lead to progress. Every situation is unique, so OTAs often use their natural creativity and knack for innovation to suggest new methods, modify standard techniques, and use or create adaptive tools.

Adaptive Equipment and Activities

What do adaptive solutions look like? It all depends on the goals of the individual.

- Feeding themselves? OTAs might create eating utensils that conform precisely to limited hand movement.
- Dressing without help? OTAs can show someone a proven, step-by-step procedure to put on a shirt or blouse with one hand.
- Making a meal? The right answer might be as simple as using an extendable reaching rod or using a tool or technique that makes it easier to open canned goods.

Examples of Adaptive Therapy

- For a child with a sensory processing issue involving certain textures, an OTA might introduce a play activity using a sensory bin full of different items. Exposure to this experience helps decrease sensitivity, and also helps with visual perception and fine-motor skills.
- For senior adults, counting, reading, and handling small objects by participating in familiar board or card games helps improve memory and increases physical dexterity. Interacting with family and friends is more enjoyable, and shirts with buttons are no longer as difficult.
- For someone recuperating from a significant hand injury, the OTA may first introduce a special glove to wear that makes accomplishing a daily routine less painful and easier. OTAs may follow that up by carrying out a series of personalized exercises and activities that allow for as full a recovery as possible.

OTAs help individuals adjust to challenges, associated with daily tasks.



Multiple Focus Areas

Among all health care support positions, the occupational therapy assistant may have the greatest number of work emphasis options, practically assuring them a focus area that fits their interests. In fact, the American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc. (AOTA) lists six practice areas for occupational therapy practitioners:



Children
and Youth



Health
and Wellness



Mental
Health



Rehabilitation
and Disability



Work
and Industry



Maintaining
Quality of Life

Advantages of the OTA Career

Becoming an OTA takes you to the center of the expanding world of allied health care. “Allied health” is a term that covers nearly any medical or health profession other than a physician or nurse. More than 60 percent of jobs available now, and in the near future, are in allied health care.

Allied health care jobs typically take a decidedly technical direction or depend on repetitive tasks and routine schedules. That does not hold true for occupational therapy assistants. Because OTAs spend so much time getting to know the individuals under their care, many clients think of their OTA as a compassionate counselor...a teammate who has highly focused skills and is eager to share them.

OTAs have a varied schedule, plus they get the satisfaction of seeing the impact of their efforts in the progress of their patients. No wonder a 2018 survey by *US News and World Report* puts OTAs in the top 10 of health care support jobs. The profession continues to score high for salary and job outlook, room for advancement, and the right work-life balance.



Why OTAs Love What They Do

- **It fills a growing need**

Occupational therapy's whole-person approach is accepted as a vital strategy that makes a more fulfilling daily life possible. OTA expertise allows individuals representing the entire socio-economic spectrum to overcome sudden, devastating injuries, developmental conditions, and mental or emotional challenges.

OTAs are in high demand for young children and the expanding older population. For children, the earliest interventions and treatments have the best chance of success; for senior adults, the concept of aging-in-place has evolved from a good idea to a sought-after dream.

- **It's a teamwork approach**

Becoming an OTA means you're part of a health care team that's contributing to a treatment plan. This sense of community feeds your desire to achieve a purposeful life.

- **The impact is evident**

Nearly all OTAs say they value the ability to work one-on-one with their clients and help them accomplish the activities of daily living.

A story about an OTA student who changed jobs for the chance at a people-first career says it beautifully. Although she spent 15 years as an executive in the corporate world, she desired something more than a paycheck. "I wanted to come home at night and know I made a difference in someone's life," she said.

- **It's worthwhile**

Considering work conditions, salary range, and the ability to advance to administrative positions (if desired), the two-years needed for this Associate of Applied Science (A.A.S.) degree shows itself to be a sound investment.

- **The pay is competitive**

A comprehensive two-year OTA program can lead to a first-year salary of \$45,000, nearly double that of other health care support jobs such as CNAs and home health aides. An experienced OTA earns a median salary of \$59,000, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

“ I wanted to come home at night and know that I made a difference in someone's life... ”

—Judy Gnirrep
Midlife Career Change Reinvents
Businesswoman as Occupational Therapy
Assistant
Rutgers Today

Greater Hope Through Occupational Therapy

The public may not often be fully aware of the impact of occupational therapy, but the health care community has definitely taken notice. For example, an independent study in 2016 that looked at cases of heart failure, pneumonia, and heart attack, concluded that occupational therapy was the only one of 19 tracked categories that resulted in lower hospital admission rates when more money was devoted to it.

In a hospital setting, occupational therapy practitioners collaborate closely with other in-hospital staff to match the patient's needs to the next anticipated environment. If returning home is a reasonable next step, OT practitioners advise and instruct about home safety modifications, adaptive techniques, and recommendations for medical equipment that make daily living activities easier.

In homes, rehabilitation centers, and schools, OT practitioners discuss the activities the individual wants to accomplish, then tailor a plan that matches those expectations.



An individual may use an OTA adaptive tool to help them open a can of soup.

Occupational Therapy for Children

As the science and art of occupational therapy has advanced, the greatest hope for the benefits of occupational therapy may be with children and young adults.

Rapid brain growth in the first three years of life is critical to human development, and early OT involvement often advances the likelihood of increased quality of life. The OTA's goal is to promote development, minimize developmental delays, and show families ways to meet the special needs of their infants and toddlers. Children with unique needs can benefit from occupational therapy activities – often designed as play with a purpose.

OTAs are intricately connected to the goals of helping children facing physical, emotional, or mental difficulties succeed. Nowhere is this more important than in education.

Customized learning solutions are the goal, so OTAs not only work with students but also with parents and teachers. Since 1975, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) along with other legislation, guarantees that students with disabilities receive an education consistent with their individual needs.



Your Devotion Helps Their Dreams Come True

OTAs serve as a dedicated resource who works with individuals to fulfill a personalized treatment plan. That's why soft skills like communicating effectively, constructive problem-solving, adaptability, and collaboration are also important as a "hands-on" occupational therapy assistant.

You'll find yourself

- Applying highly tuned "therapeutic listening" skills
- Offering encouragement to accomplish goals
- Building trust in what you're asking the individual to do
- Showing patience and compassion.

Sometimes the intended treatment plan will fall short because of the individual's physical or emotional limitations. As an OTA, you'll know what's happening before a situation interferes with progress. When necessary, you'll break the task into smaller steps or approach the task from another perspective.

Your devotion to caring will encourage individuals while maintaining accountability to the treatment plan goals.



What You'll Do as an OTA: Encourage, Support, Inspire

One of the best ways to feel the impact of the work OTAs do is to hear what those who have already entered the profession say about their career.

"I work in a preschool setting as a COTA (Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant). My caseload is mainly working with developmentally delayed three-to five-year-olds. I really enjoy planning activities that help them grow and develop. It is very rewarding."

Shari
Indeed.com/forum

"Not all OTAs do the same thing. There are traveling OTAs that work around the country taking on different patients and tasks. Other OTAs are stationed at a hospital or nursing facility where they help patients that come and go. Another type of OTA works in home health care and spends their time at patient's homes, assisting them throughout their day."

Kelly Clark
Editor, *OTA Guide*
Quora.com

"I help them see the bright side. You help someone learn how to get dressed or bathe themselves after an injury, and you're giving them back part of their life. You do that, and then you make them see that, and then you've got them. Those frowns go away. They get excited. They want to get better."

The New Normal: Occupational Therapy Assistants Help Patients Return Day-to-Day Activities
Marco Buscaglia, writer
Chicago Tribune Content Agency
April 27, 2018

"Occupational therapy practitioners are proving to be an essential member of any interprofessional team successfully addressing the changing demands of the health care delivery system."

Fred Somers
Executive Director
American Occupational Therapy Association Inc. (AOTA)
September 2016

“I help them see the bright side. You help someone learn how to get dressed or bathe themselves after an injury, and you're giving them back part of their life.”

—Mary Thompson
“The New Normal: Occupational Therapy Assistants Help Patients Return Day-to-Day Activities”
(Sept. 2015)
Marco Buscaglia, writer
Chicago Tribune Content Agency



SECTION II: EVALUATING EDUCATION OPTIONS



How to Choose the Right School for an OTA Degree

In many ways, the university or college offering the OTA degree is more significant to potential students than the program itself. Because of the evolving nature and increased importance of occupational therapies and practices, no university-based OTA program can afford to be underfunded or under-equipped.

Here are four areas to consider when exploring your options:

- Financial Considerations
- Resources
- Student Life
- Location



Financial Considerations

When you decide to dive into an Occupational Therapy Assistant degree program, you'll feel good about moving quickly into a career that lets you see the progress your clients are making. Less clear to you – at least at the beginning – may be how to pay for the education that you know is right for you.

It's certainly true that financial costs need to be addressed, but those details don't have to derail your career plans before you get started. The good news: qualifying students have financial aid options. More than \$120 billion in educational aid was available in 2017, according to the Office of Federal Student Aid.

Don't let what you don't know hold you back – there are a variety of ways to fund your education.

Help and Guidance is Available

Focus on your goal to become an OTA and look to the right school and program to bridge the gap between where you are and where you need to be. The school you choose will have people and programs to assist you, and the profession you've chosen will reward you for the time and money you've invested.

Financial aid for an occupational therapy assistant education will often come from a mix of sources. Your financial aid team at your college or university will guide you in the best use of all available options:

- **Federal direct loans and private loans**

The U.S. Department of Education provides money for low-interest loans. The starting point is completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), which calculates eligible awards from various programs. Many area banks and credit unions also specialize in student loans.



- **Scholarships (from outside organizations and through the school)**

Always ask about any school-based scholarships that fit your situation, but institutions aren't the only options. Want to get excited about available money for school? Go to a scholarship search site like fastweb.com and see what's out there. It's no time to be bashful. Every year, scores of scholarships go unclaimed.

- **Grants**

Grants don't have to be repaid. Unlike scholarships, grants are typically need-based, which considers family income and other factors. Find out more about grant opportunities by visiting the U.S. Department of Education website.

- **Federal Work-Study program**

This is a federal program that funds part-time work for students enrolled in an accredited university or college. The majority of positions are available within university departments, and work schedules are often varied.

- **Part-time employment**

Certain programs are more accommodating than others for part-time work outside of school. Talk with your intended school about combining class time with part-time work schedules.

- **Veteran's Benefits (various programs through GI Bill)**

The school's financial aid staff should be up-to-date on all of the latest educational assistance programs for those who've served in the U.S. armed forces.

As an example, colleges and universities participating in the Yellow Ribbon Program may allow the Veterans Administration to pay tuition and fee expenses that exceed the maximum amounts specified by the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

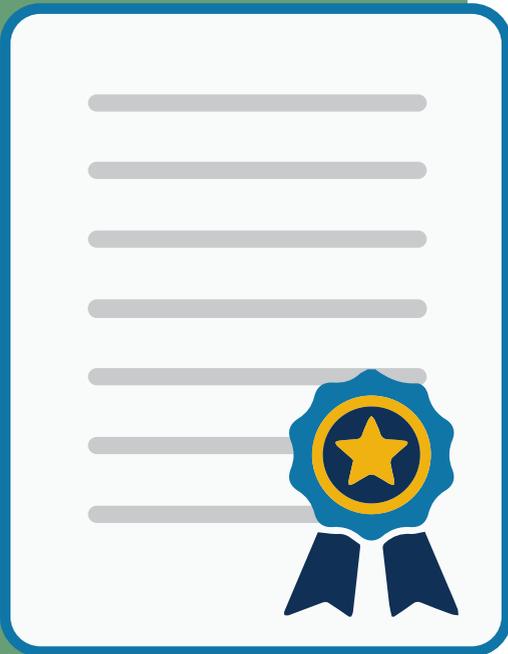
Veterans who are not quite sure they are ready for a college degree program can get academic readiness help and instruction through the Veterans Upward Bound Program.

- **Tutoring positions within your school**

These are terrific options when you have advanced knowledge in a subject area. Ask instructors about positions available.

- **Personal/family resources**

A college degree is an investment, so consider asking family for support or assistance. The right associate degree (two years) can increase your lifetime compensation by up to 70 percent.



Determine the Net Cost

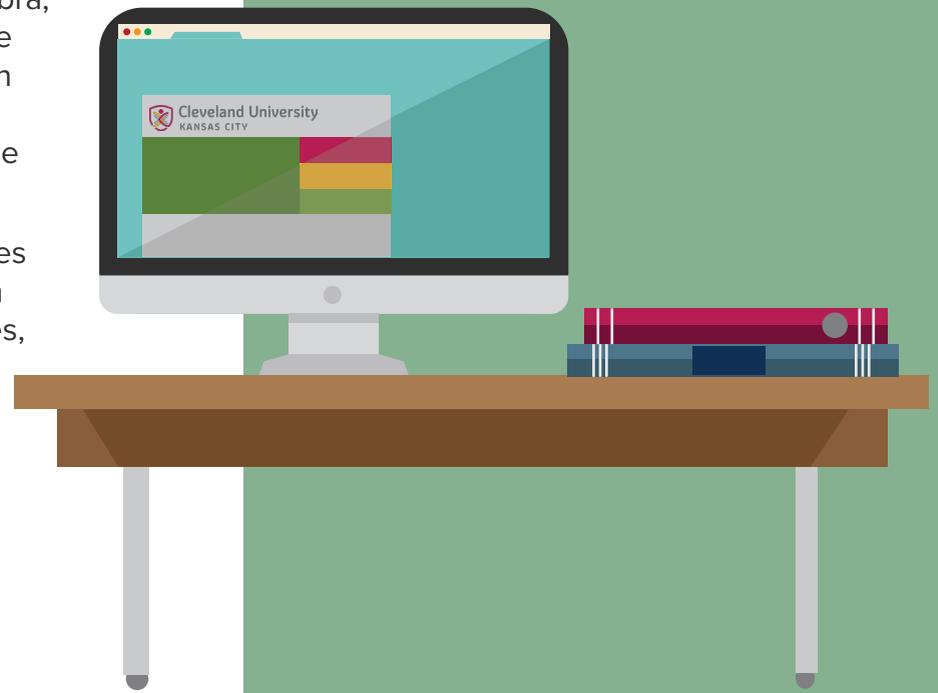
Sometimes the task ahead seems so big, that where to begin is a big mystery. So, break down the process of paying for occupational therapy assistant school you want into smaller steps. Of course, you'll want to understand the cost of the education you're considering, the time it will take to get there, and the salary potential earned after graduation.

You don't have to figure this out on your own. Ask the school about their tools for a net cost calculation, which lets you see the actual cost by factoring in eligible scholarships, grants, loans, etc. You can enter in different amounts until you find the combination that works for your situation.

Start Coursework Gradually

If you're not going to school full-time, it's possible to pay for the "prerequisite" courses for that degree as you go. Prerequisites are "general education" courses like algebra, communication, etc. to be completed before starting the professional OTA coursework. Gen ed courses are often offered online or in a hybrid online/on-campus mix that allows you to continue working while completing college courses.

Research where to take your gen ed courses. Sometimes these courses are less expensive at one institution than another. When you shop around for your gen ed courses, make sure that the credit you earn is transferable and accepted at the OTA school you've selected.



Resources

You need to find out if there are people in the school, and in the OTA program, who care about your entire “you.” Your best indication of a caring university is a department or division set up to provide an array of student services – not just those needed now, but in anticipation of future demand.

Each school and program will have a unique set of resources that are worth exploring. Depending on your individual needs and interests, some resources will appeal to you more than others.

Where your classes and education take place is a big part of your learning experience. Find out what facilities are on the campuses you’re exploring, but don’t stop there. The specialized nature of OTA education demands an OTA-only lab space, so students can practice techniques and understand how to use and create adaptive equipment or tools.

Student access to other resources also is important. For example, if the college offers robust online library tools, can you log in to use those tools outside of regular library hours?

The funding available from the school for your OTA education will influence the style, quantity, and condition of the equipment used for learning. Find out what recent additions and upgrades the OTA program received. Inquire about the school’s ongoing plan for future additions and enhancements.



Student Life

No matter how strong your drive for success is, you'll benefit from a school choice that has a supportive community environment.

You'll want to get an overall view of student life and student options. Common ways to measure this "sense of community" will be the perspectives of students already there, the availability of student clubs and activities, the school's support for housing options, the number and range of student services, and recognition of student achievement on the way to graduation.

Check on the diversity of options and how much of the student population gets involved. Schools that believe in supporting a sense of community will bring speakers to campus, provide on-campus common areas that encourage students to have fun or study together, and have campus traditions and events to mark special occasions and student milestones.



Location

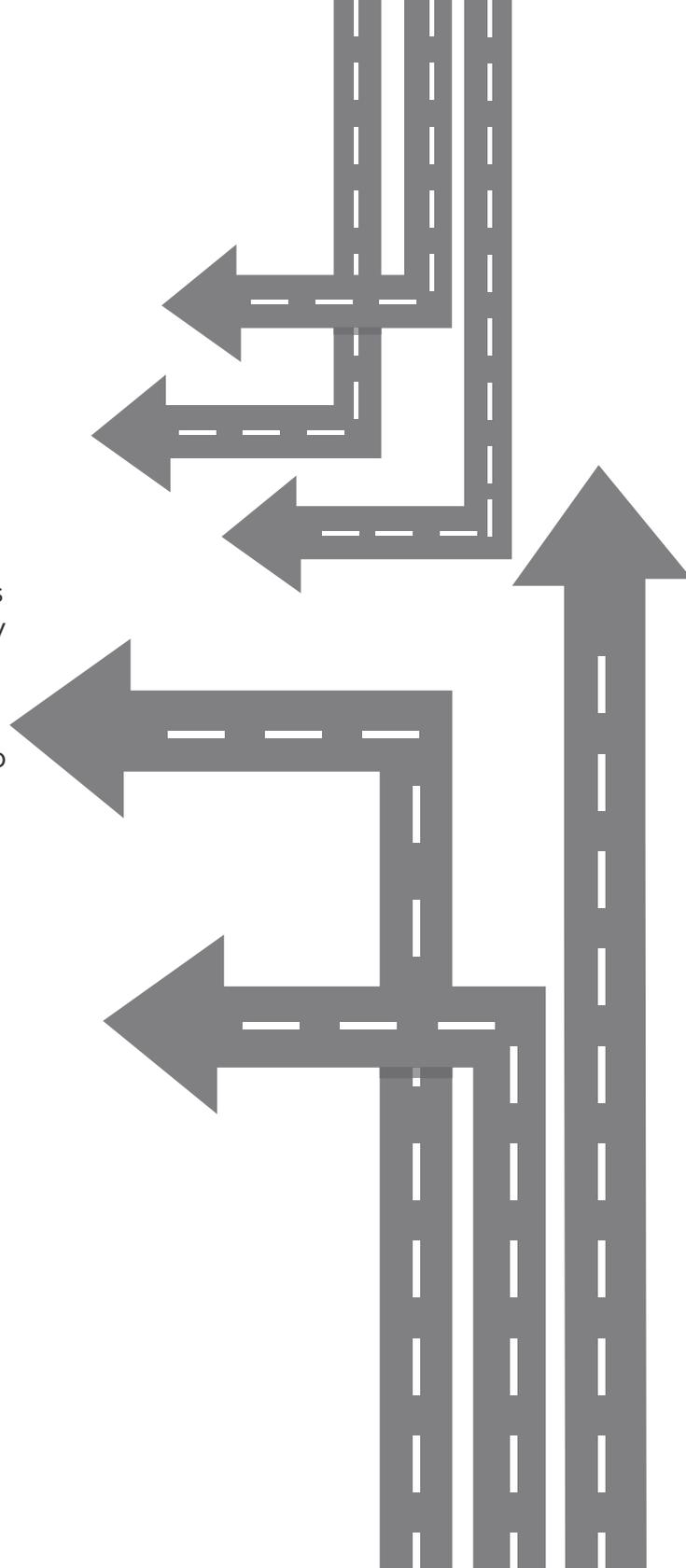
Where your school is located can have a big impact on your school schedule and daily routine.

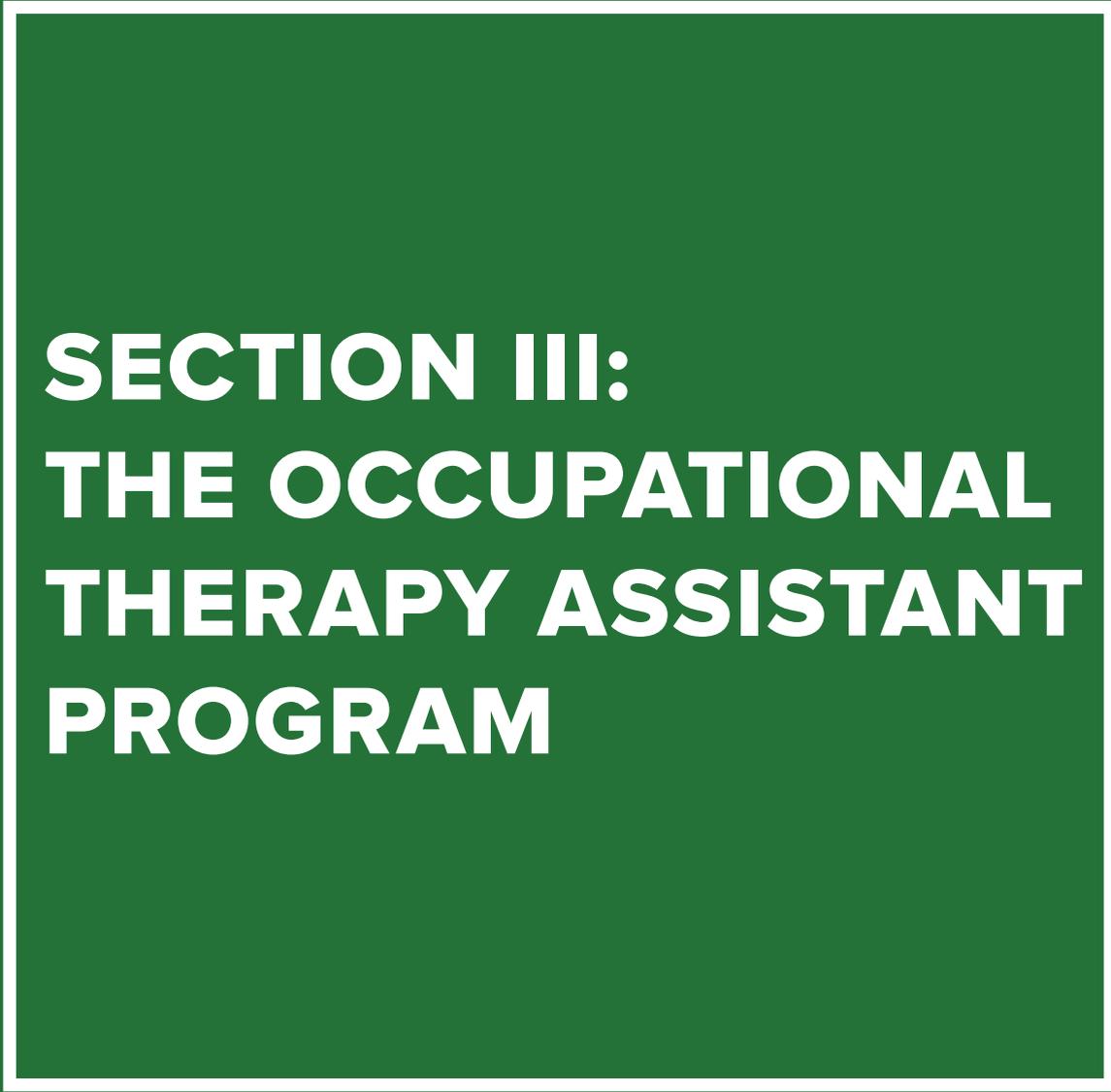
An urban location may not require a car or other private transportation, but it may come with a high cost of living and concerns about safety. A suburban location may offer relative safety but not have solid access to major road routes or public transportation.

With that in mind, look for a school with an OTA program that has the best of both worlds: a suburban area that is part of a close-by metro area.

The best way to judge these factors is to do a personal visit. Expect that the school you're considering will feel as good a fit to your needs as the academic quality is to career expectations.

Another contributor to the enjoyment of campus life is to have plentiful housing options. Ideally, the school itself is in a safe area that has a pleasant mix of green space and amenities, the housing possibilities can range from newer apartments of assorted sizes to rental homes, and there is good access to places for entertainment and recreation.





**SECTION III:
THE OCCUPATIONAL
THERAPY ASSISTANT
PROGRAM**



How to Choose the Right OTA Program

To choose well among available OTA programs, you must have in mind the benchmarks of a strong OTA education. Put these “must haves” at the top of your OTA program list:

- Prepares students for the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy (NBCOT) exam.
- Features multiple start dates during the year, typically spring, summer, and fall.
- Teaches and improves the soft skills OTA need, such as team work and communication.
- Develops patient interaction skills that are effective among various age groups, cultures, and socio-economic backgrounds.
- Accommodates student learning through simulated home or apartment setups where instructors demonstrate therapy techniques and best practices.
- Places accomplished OTA students into a “feeder” network of hospitals, rehabilitation centers, schools, and medical offices.

OTA students learn best practices and therapy techniques in a simulated kitchen.



Understanding Choices in OTA Education

Like any destination, there are multiple paths to get you there – it's up to you to find the one that makes the most sense for your situation. By thinking through costs vs. benefits and asking tough questions up front, you'll know which OTA educational program is the best match for the career outcome you want.

Associate of Applied Science Degree

All necessary education, training and fieldwork experiences are funneled into a concentrated two-year format. The entire curriculum is tied to achieving professional certification and state licensure requirements.

Better programs will tie classroom learning to “hands-on” application in lab times or guided instruction.

Included in the A.A.S. in Occupational Therapy Assistant degree:

- General education requirements
- 16 core courses
- The required four-to-five months of fieldwork education.

On completion, those who've met the program's educational requirements are eligible to become a Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant (COTA) by taking the certification examination administered by the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy (NBCOT).



OTA Program Accreditation

Since 1923 accreditation for OTA programs has been through the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA). The AOTA's Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE) is the accrediting agency for OT and OTA education by the U.S. Dept. of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).

The certification exam to become a Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant (COTA) covers the entire body of knowledge learned in an approved OTA program. A few examples:

- Learning elements that increase performance for a individual's daily routine
- Implementing activities, exercises, or steps that align with the treatment plan
- Assessing situations and choosing the best activities or adaptive tasks to accomplish stated goals
- How to respond to physiological, cognitive, and behavioral conditions
- Rehabilitative strategies for medical, neurological, and musculoskeletal conditions
- Demonstrating knowledge of professional standards.

Pass this test, and you're a Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant. These credentials are eagerly welcomed by employers throughout the country. All states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico require licenses for practicing occupational therapy, which can only be obtained after professional certification.



Academic Experience

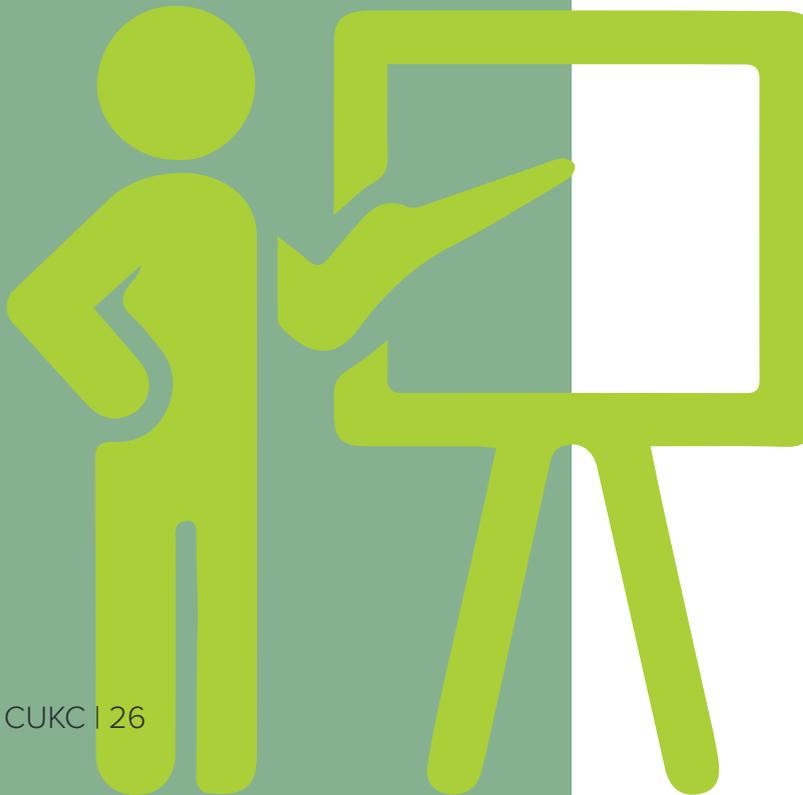
Knowledgeable and approachable faculty help you achieve your best, so of course, you should take the opportunity to meet with instructors before you select a program. Knowing first-hand how faculty relate to students is a good indication of a “student-first” point of view. Look for an accepting attitude toward questions. Ask about instructors’ office hours in case you need an explanation about an assignment.

While faculty offer a wealth of knowledge and instruction, they are not the only people who provide academic support. Academic services must also be part of the mix and can take the form of offering test-taking strategies, study habit seminars, and tutoring services.

Knowing the types of academic services offered and how to access them before you need them can help you feel confident, calm, and prepared as you navigate your educational experience.

“The most important responsibility of individual faculty members is to enhance the student learning experience.”

—Education Advisory Board
The Evolving Role of Faculty in Student Success,
Dec. 2016



Smaller Classes, Better Learning

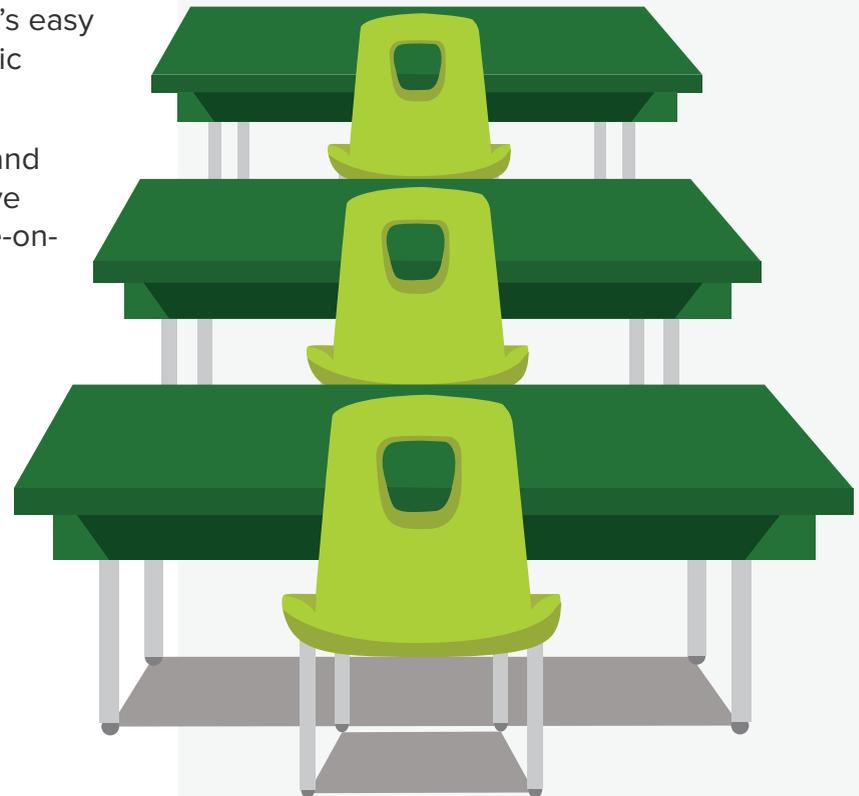
A vast amount of your learning experience as an OTA student will come in the classroom and in labs. Here are some factors that can influence your academic progress:

- Class size
- Student/teacher ratio
- Faculty/staff relationships
- Teaching methods
- Learning and practice opportunities.

The harder the coursework, the more important it is to be in smaller classes. The pace of learning in a professional training education – especially one that depends on so many types of clients – will be faster than you’ve experienced so far, and the amount of material covered will also be greater.

Large, auditorium-style classes may seem exciting, but it’s easy to lose focus in such environments. Constructive, on-topic discussions also occur less frequently in large classes.

The value of smaller class sizes is especially true in lab and other “hands-on” environments because you can observe more closely, hear instructions more clearly, and get one-on-one help when you need it.



The term “occupational therapy” is a narrow term for a broad profession. Occupational therapy is not only about getting others back to a work life; it’s about helping people do life better.

Depth of Faculty Experience

Quality of instruction is another crucial measurement. You should expect most coursework to be taught by instructors with five years or more experience as an OTA and in close contact with the needs of OTA staffing expectations.

Assessing the relationships faculty and staff have with students is also important. One way to gauge this is by asking about services and programs that contribute to student success beyond the classroom. You will find yourself devoting a considerable amount of time in class, and even more time understanding how to work effectively with people from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and ages.

OTA Fieldwork Experiences

No education is complete without guidance in applying the knowledge gained. With that in mind, pay attention to how well your university has set up a network that fulfills the strict requirements for Level I and Level II Fieldwork. In both Level I and Level II experiences, students are evaluated on their performance by qualified fieldwork educators.

Level I Fieldwork

This is an introduction to fieldwork that helps OTA students observe and understand the needs of clients and the different environments in which therapy occurs. These experiences generally do not involve direct patient interaction.

Level II Fieldwork

Here, students apply the theories and principles gained during class and labs to actual client needs. Through these guided experiences OTA students go from a student perspective to that of a confident occupational therapy practitioner.

Contributing as part of a team, demonstrating accountability, practicing patient interaction skills, and meeting deadlines offer great proof of competence. The closer these experiences are to emulating situations encountered on the job, the better the prospect of employment.

Difference Makers in an OTA Education

In a career that will demand so much of yourself, you want an OTA program that offers distinctive advantages over others. To discover the right program for you – and one that will set you apart from other graduates – look for OTA programs with:

- **Communications and empathy skills training**

In today's health care world, "patient care interaction skills" are essential because the relationship between the individual and OTA determines the effectiveness of the activities and the person's desire to participate in them.

Each skills-based classwork should integrate how soft skills, like active listening, increase the effectiveness of that skill. Look for special courses in subjects like therapeutic interventions and mental health factors.

- **Small classes, OTA labs**

It's best to consider OTA programs in which class sizes are 15 or less. This allows time for instructors to work one-on-one with students. On-site, fully equipped lab spaces allow students to immediately apply their knowledge in near-real life scenarios with the actual equipment available in work environments.

- **Comprehensive coursework**

Expect a coursework plan totaling 75 credit hours, including:

- 24 hours of prerequisites: English composition, psychology, anatomy/physiology
- Special-topic courses such as "Occupations Across the Lifespan," "Understanding Rehabilitation and Disabilities," and "Healthcare Management in Occupational Therapy."

- **Multiple start dates during the year**

Many OTA programs only launch an OTA class once per year, usually in the fall. A better choice is a program that offers small classes as many as three times per year. This is a great advantage for those who graduate high school early, career changes, or those who may need to move their start date to later in the year.

- **Health care is a primary emphasis**

Universities with well-funded programs and an emphasis in health care professions will make sure classroom and laboratory resources are fully maximized for degrees like OTA. Knowing those programs are a top-tier priority is especially important in the allied health professions, as regulations and best practices are evolving quickly.

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Key Questions for Your Program Choice

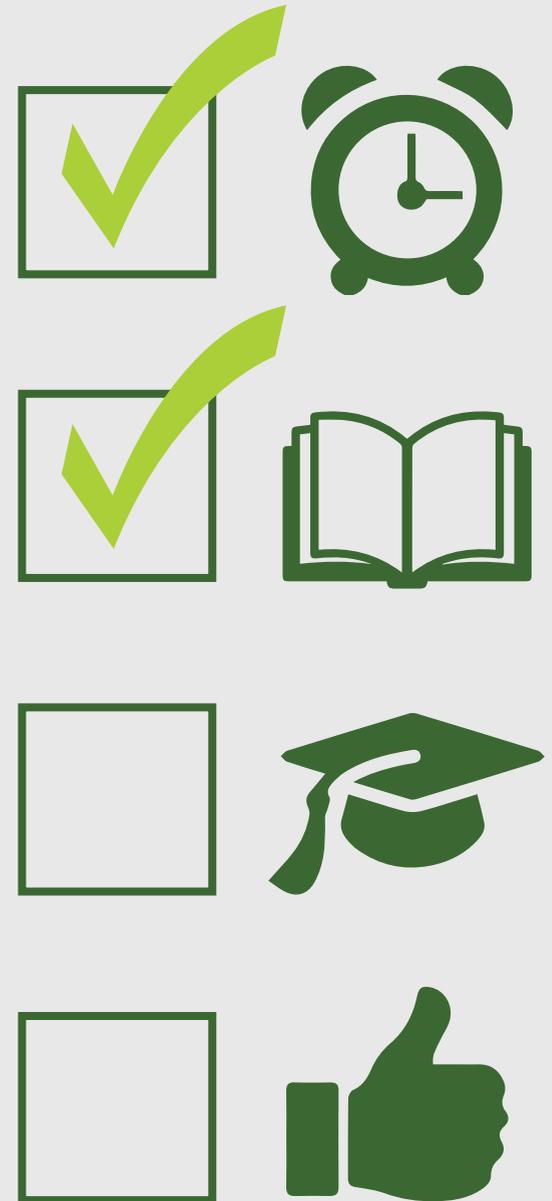
In digging into the options for an in-demand health care career with a well-above average income, one of those you'll see will be an Occupational Therapy Assistant. Before deciding on an OTA program, write down your assessments to these four questions:

How long will it take to complete the program?

In its most efficient format, an OTA degree takes no more than 75 credit hours – two years of coursework – resulting in an Associate of Applied Science (A.A.S.) degree. An OTA education includes four-to-five months of Level I and Level II fieldwork, which will be integrated into your in-class or laboratory time.

Are prerequisite courses available?

Prerequisite courses that are part of an occupational therapy assistant degree program are often available in online or hybrid online/class formats. Find out if there is guaranteed admission to the OTA program you have in mind when you take your prerequisite courses at the same school.



Will I be ready for the workforce after graduation?

According to the AOTA, you will. The AOTA says 83.9 percent of graduates from accredited programs are employed in the profession within 90 days.

A university that has institutional accreditation and program accreditation from the appropriate organizations will assure you of completing a curriculum of knowledge, training, and skills that can lead to successful passing of the NBCOTE certification exam. As a Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant (COTA), you're eligible for state licensing, opening the door to professional employment.

Will I receive help with job placement?

Recommendations are essential in any job situation, so ask about the school's established relationships with area employers. Such relationships make it easy for instructors to recommend you.

Because of the wide variety of practice options OTAs have, the fieldwork experiences should be as varied as possible. Often, this means finding an OTA degree program offered by a school in a metro area and with a high concentration of health care and rehab facilities. You'll also want to know that the fieldwork settings are within a reasonable driving distance.





**SECTION IV:
THE PATH
TO SUCCESS**



The CUKC Story

Cleveland University-Kansas City (CUKC) has the career answers you want.

When you have a sincere desire to master unique skills, help people live a healthy life, and continually challenge yourself in a job you can do well in each day, becoming a health care professional is a smart career choice. You can live that dream at CUKC.

Cleveland University-Kansas City is made up of people who all want the same thing – to make a real difference in health care and in the lives of others. CUKC cultivates a community of students, faculty, staff, and alumni who are bonded by a shared passion for wellness and to help each other succeed.

Many people know the Cleveland name because of our success as a chiropractic college, which extends back to 1922. The College of Chiropractic continues its strong tradition today – more than one out of every 10 doctors of chiropractic is a CUKC graduate.

Just as CUKC foresaw how chiropractic care would become essential to today's emphasis on integrative health care, CUKC realized its focus on chiropractic and health sciences translated naturally into applied science degrees. This resulted in the addition of Associate of Applied Science (A.A.S.) degrees in Occupational Therapy Assistant and the Associate of Applied Science (A.A.S.) in Radiologic Technology.

Recognizing quality and thoroughness were essential, CUKC decided to build its OTA degree program using the feedback provided by practitioners in the field and benchmarks expected by those responsible for OTA staffing in a wide variety of work settings.



CUKC OTA Program: Points of Distinction

- Focused 8-week courses immerse you into your class subjects and allow for completion of an A.A.S. in Occupational Therapy Assistant degree in as little as two years.
- Students who complete all required prerequisite coursework at CUKC will be granted guaranteed admission to the CUKC occupational therapy assistant program provided all criteria for admission are met and other considerations are satisfied.
- The theories, principles, and skills taught on-campus are in alignment with those used by certified OTAs. This includes how to use and update electronic health records and do medical coding for accurate reimbursement.
- In addition to a dedicated simulated living space laboratory, for OTA students CUKC features a library, cafeteria and dining hall, a fitness center, multiple student lounges, and computer stations throughout.
- Classes in the OTA program at CUKC start three times each year: spring, summer, and fall.
- CUKC continues to build its network for fieldwork experience, which is enhanced by the Kansas City area's extensive health care presence. Allhealthcare.com rates the Kansas City area as one of its top 25 areas to begin a health care career.

8 weeks

3 starts



Recognizing Student Needs

Cleveland University-Kansas City is a nonprofit, private, health care-focused university that works to integrate a healthy approach to all aspects of life at CUKC. Yes, we'll challenge your mind and prepare you for the world, but we believe in giving you the tools to make it happen.

Student services at CUKC are fully developed and fully supported. From free tutoring to the finest lab facilities to a full-service café: we offer what our students need to succeed.

Child Care

At CUKC, our students with children have several childcare options available nearby, including a childcare facility located on campus. Since 2008, CUKC has had a Special Beginnings Early Learning Center on site. The Special Beginnings program accommodates infants, toddlers, pre-school, pre-kindergarten, and school-age children.

Fitness Center

In line with our commitment to wellness and health promotion, the on-campus Cleveland Fitness Center is available for use by students and employees. The fitness center includes free weights, weight machines, treadmills, ellipticals, and cardio-related machines.



On-campus Library

Our library houses research tools for conducting online literature searches and retrieving full-text articles. Library staff provide training on using PubMed and other databases and instructs users on conducting search strategies and evaluating search results.

Through the library's ebook collection, students have online access to textbooks, including some that are required for coursework. Ebooks are available to enrolled students for use on desktop computers and iPads.

The library recently received the "Excellence in Library Technology Innovation" award from the Health Sciences Library Network of Kansas City.

Café Cleveland

During daytime hours, CUKC operates Café Cleveland, a combination of a full-service food operation and a mini-market. The University's students often stop in for a meal or snack before or after classes and find the cashless payment kiosks convenient.



A Location for Your Life and Work

A wise choice in where to attend school should also be a comfortable place to live. CUKC is in Overland Park, Kansas, one of the largest and best-recognized suburbs in the Kansas City metro area.

- The CUKC campus is in suburban Overland Park, Kansas, a city of 190,000 residents within a 20-minute drive from Kansas City's downtown areas. The campus is known for its contemporary facilities, abundant green space, free campus parking, and convenient access to residential areas, eateries, restaurants, shopping, and interstate highways.
- Overland Park is an award-winning city: In 2017, WalletHub named Overland Park No. 1 in its Best Place to Raise a Family in the U.S. It also ranked among the Best Cities in the U.S. to Find a Job in 2018, and Healthiest Cities in the U.S., and made the Niche list of its Safest Cities in America.
- The 15-county Kansas City metropolitan area is not only home to 2.3 million people; it's home to dozens of Fortune 500 employers and has a health care presence that includes regional and national hospital systems.





**SECTION V:
YOUR CAREER
STARTS HERE**



Ready When You Are

Selecting health care as your career path and the A.A.S. degree in Occupational Therapy Assistant as an expression of your passion for people and service to the community requires careful thought and consideration. As you've seen, with a two-year OTA degree you will deliver help and hope to many throughout your career. At the same time, it's a profession that will challenge you daily and reward you for your talents.

We encourage you to check out the resources below that will give you the confidence to join the field of occupational therapy as an OTA.

Discovery Day Open House

This is the perfect opportunity to uncover CUKC's advantages while exploring a career as an occupational therapy assistant. Enjoy a tour of our facilities, check out the OTA simulated living space lab, learn about financial aid and scholarships, and visit with members of the CUKC community.

Visit cleveland.edu/openhouse for dates, details, and to register for an upcoming open house.

CUKC Campus Tours

If you can't wait to attend an open house event, we understand. Please let us welcome you to a private campus visit and tour.



“We give hope that makes the impossible possible again through the improvement of daily life skills. Working with people who are going through tough times is very motivational and inspiring. You are always looking for new and creative ways to help clients address their day-to-day challenges. It is a lifelong profession.”



Those are the words used to describe the OTA career by Jennifer Ford, an experienced OTA professional who's also an adjunct professor in the A.A.S in Occupational Therapy program at Cleveland University-Kansas City.

Get Started on Your OTA Journey Now with CUKC



[Connect with an Advisor](#)

Career Growth for OTAs

[>>https://www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/2014/article/education-level-and-jobs.htm](https://www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/2014/article/education-level-and-jobs.htm)

Characteristics of an OTA

<http://www.owlguru.com/career/occupational-therapy-assistants/quiz/>

Cleveland University-Kansas City Accreditation

http://www.chea.org/4dcgi/chea/search/detail.html?action=chea&chea_activity=inst_details&inst_cid=725

College Education Linked to Higher Pay, Job Security, Healthier Behaviors and More Civic Involvement

<https://www.collegeboard.org/releases/2016/college-education-linked-to-higher-pay-job-security-healthier-behaviors-and-more-civic-involvement/>

High-paying Jobs for Those Who Hate Math

<http://www.businessinsider.com/high-paying-jobs-for-people-who-hate-math-2014-11/>

How Occupational Therapy Assistants Reduce Costs, Inpatient Admissions

<https://www.hospitalrecruiting.com/blog/4249/career-trends-in-allied-health-spotlight-on-fast-growing-healthcare-jobs/>

How Occupational Therapy is Different from Physical Therapy

<http://physicaltherapyweb.com/differences-occupational-therapy-physical-therapy/>

Midlife Career Change Reinvents Businesswoman as Occupational Therapy Assistant

<https://news.rutgers.edu/feature/midlife-career-change-reinvents-businesswoman-occupational-therapy-assistant/20150428#.WsaRi0sh1ns>

National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy

<https://www.nbcot.org/>

Occupational Therapy Reduces Hospital Re-admissions

<https://www.aota.org/Publications-News/AOTANews/2016/Occupational-Therapy-Reduces-Hospital-Readmissions.aspx/>

Occupational Therapy Assistant: A One-minute Summary

<http://www.owlguru.com/career/occupational-therapy-assistants/>

OTA Education Requirements

<http://www.owlguru.com/career/occupational-therapy-assistants/requirements/>

OTA Job Description

<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/occupational-therapy-assistants-and-aides.htm#tab-5>

OTA in U.S. News Top Health Care Support Jobs

<https://money.usnews.com/careers/best-jobs/occupational-therapy-assistant>

OTA Job Satisfaction

<http://www.owlguru.com/career/occupational-therapy-assistants/>

Ranking of the 19 Best Jobs for Community College Graduates

<https://money.usnews.com/careers/slideshows/19-best-jobs-for-community-college-graduates?slide=20>

Rising Rate of Health Care Costs

<https://blogs.wsj.com/dailyshot/2017/04/04/wsjs-daily-shot-health-costs-soar-180-in-15-years/>

Salary Report of Currently Employed OTAs

<https://www.indeed.com/salaries/Occupational+Therapy+Assistant-Salaries,-united+states>

Scholarship Search

<https://www.unigo.com/scholarships#/fromscholarshipexperts>

Soft Skills: What Employers Are Expecting

<https://www.thebalancecareers.com/list-of-soft-skills-2063770>

Specialty Areas Within Occupational Therapy

<https://www.aota.org/Practice.aspx>

10 Best Jobs With an Associate Degree

<http://allhealthcare.monster.com/careers/articles/1892-the-10-best-jobs-with-an-associate-degree?page=6/>

The Central Role of University Student Services

<http://www.contemplativemind.org/archives/1817>

The Different Roles of an OT and an OTA

<https://www.topoccupationaltherapyschool.com/ot-vs-ota-difference/>

The OTA Job Market

<https://www.aota.org/Education-Careers/Advance-Career/Salary-Workforce-Survey/future-ot-occupational-therapy-look-like.aspx>

These 12 Jobs Will Grow 30% by 2024

<http://time.com/money/4169373/fast-growing-jobs-2024/>

What OTAs do

<http://occupational-therapy-assistant.org/what-are-occupational-therapy-assistant-duties/>

What's it like to be an OTA?

<https://www.quora.com/search?q=What%27s+it+like+to+be+an+occupational+therapy+assistant%3F/>

Why Choose an A.A.S. (2-year) Degree?

<https://www.collegeatlas.org/associate-of-applied-science.html/>

Why Health Care is Growing

<https://money.usnews.com/careers/articles/2018-01-10/health-care-jobs-abound-heres-how-to-tap-into-the-hot-job-market?int=careers-rec/>

